

Towards Investigating the Representation of Gandhāran Female Donors

Résumé

Au Gandhāra, région qui se superpose peu ou prou au nord-ouest du Pakistan et au nord-est de l'Afghanistan actuels, le bouddhisme a eu pour appui tant des donateurs laïcs que religieux, à partir du 1^{er} siècle avant notre ère jusqu'à son déclin vers le VII^e siècle de notre ère. Au cours de son développement, des sites sacrés bouddhiques ont été construits et dotés par de riches donateurs, notamment les Apracarāja et les Oḍirāja, des lignées locales, dont les inscriptions dédicatoires en gāndhārī et les images conservent le souvenir. Cet article interroge plus précisément la catégorie des donatrices, à la lumière de données épigraphiques et artistiques. Aucune correspondance directe entre les donatrices dans les inscriptions et celles incarnées dans les images ne peut être établie, mais cet article engage un premier pas vers l'étude de leur représentation, différente selon les sources. Si les inscriptions mettent en évidence l'identité et les liens sociaux des donatrices dans la sphère rituelle, les sculptures en schiste suivent leurs propres conventions, visuelles, pour ancrer la présence de ces femmes à l'aide de représentations génériques.

Mots-clés : donatrices ; bouddhisme ; Gandhāra ; femme ; portrait.

概要

犍陀羅地區主要包括如今的巴基斯坦西北部和阿富汗東北部，自公元前一世紀起，佛教一直受到世俗和宗教供養人的支持，直到公元七世紀左右佛教衰落。在佛教發展過程中，佛教聖地由富有的供養人建造或捐贈，例如當地的阿普拉卡拉賈家族和奧迪拉賈家族。犍陀羅語的捐贈銘文和圖像記載了該地區供養人的供養情況。本文依據銘文和藝術史資料，側重於探究女性供養人情況。雖然無法確立銘文中和圖像中的女性供養人的直接關係，但本文開創性地對女性供養人在資料中的不同形象展開了研究。文章表明，銘文側重於女性供養人在儀式背景下的身份和社會聯繫，而片岩雕像和浮雕則遵循其自身的視覺習慣，借助通用圖像來表現她們的存在。

關鍵詞： 供養人；佛教；犍陀羅；女性；肖像。

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Abstract

Buddhism in Gandhāra, broadly covering present-day northwestern Pakistan and northeastern Afghanistan, was supported by both lay and renunciate donors during the first century BCE until its decline around the seventh century CE. During its development, Buddhist sacred sites were built and funded by affluent donors including the local Apracarāja and Oḍirāja families. Gāndhārī donative inscriptions and images record the participation of these donors in the region. This article seeks to elaborate on the category of female donors based on epigraphic and art historical evidence. A direct relationship between female donors in inscriptions and images cannot be established, but this article makes a first step towards studying how they are represented differently in our sources. It demonstrates that while inscriptions highlight the identity and social nexus of female donors in the ritual sphere, schist statues and reliefs also follow their own visual conventions to embed their presence using generic images.

Keywords: donors; Buddhism; Gandhāra; female; portraiture.

要約

ガンダーラは、こんにちのパキスタン北西部とアフガニスタン北東部にまたがる地域で、そこで栄えた仏教は、紀元前1世紀から後7世紀ごろの衰退期に至るまで、俗人からも僧侶からも喜捨を受け、支持されてきた。それが発展していた時期に、いくつかの仏教遺跡が、富豪の施主、とくに Apracarāja 家や Oḍirāja 家の支援を得て建設されていた。これらの施主たちは、地方の豪族で、彼らによる奉納を記す碑文がガンダーラ語で残されており、また彼らの姿が石像に刻まれている。本論は、それらの中で、とくに女性の奉納者が碑文と図像でどのように表わされるかについて検討する。碑文で記された奉納者の名前と、石に刻まれた図像の間に、明確な対応関係を示すようなものは何もない。本論では、これらの表象から、それぞれの史料の種類によって何が導き出されるか、研究のはじめの一步を踏み出すことを試みる。碑文では、奉納者を個人として特定し、儀礼世界における彼女たちの社会的な関係が明らかにされるが、結晶片岩に刻まれた彼女たちの像では、独自の伝統的な視覚的手法で、一般化された女性奉納者の姿が表現されている。このようにして、彼女たちの存在が歴史に根を下ろしているのである。

キーワード： 女性奉納者、仏教、ガンダーラ、女性、肖像。

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Introduction

Gandhāran art flourished between the first century BCE and the fourth century CE in present-day northwest Pakistan and northeast Afghanistan (fig. 1). The area in which it developed, called Gandhāra in current scholarship, roughly corresponds to the northwestern part of the Indic subcontinent. Portraying the Buddha's biography, ritual practices, and decorative themes, Gandhāran art decorated Buddhist monuments such as *stūpas* and *vihāras* that were also used for communal and individual veneration practices. As such, Gandhāran reliefs rendered in local schist provide crucial information regarding Gandhāran Buddhism and normative ritual practices that were distinct to the region.

Until recent decades, Gandhāran art remained a unique source of information for understanding Gandhāran Buddhism. This has slowly changed with the discovery of texts from the region, notably manuscripts and inscriptions written in Gāndhārī language (early Middle Indo-Aryan Prakrit written in Kharoṣṭhī script).¹ Amongst the texts, inscriptions mainly consisting of Buddhist donative records provide important information on the donations made by individual donors and familial networks that were crucial for the development of Buddhism in the region.

In light of the available evidence, it has become more and more clear that the combination of Gandhāran art and Gāndhārī texts can provide nuanced understandings of the religious, political, and social sphere during the early first centuries CE. Since they are two fundamentally different types of sources, they do not always provide the same information. They can, however, be used as complementary datasets that enhance our understanding of Gandhāran Buddhist practices. Using this interdisciplinary perspective, this article analyses the two sources—donative inscriptions and donor images—to examine how female donors are represented differently in our sources. The first section discusses the patterns related to the presence of female donors and their family nexus using the epigraphic corpus. In the second section, female donor images, particularly from the Swāt Valley, are examined to demonstrate the artistic conventions of this category in Gandhāran art. While allusions to the relationship between the two corpora have been made, the distinct media-specific patterns in the representation of the same elements have not yet received adequate scholarly attention. Examining the two corpora side by side, this article elaborates on these patterns to show how female donors are represented differently in inscriptions and images. In doing so, this essay demonstrates that the specificity and individuality related to female donors in the epigraphic corpus are largely absent in the visual medium.

1. Manuscripts are not part of this study as they do not contain information regarding female donors. For the analysis of female characters in Gāndhārī manuscript fragments see LENZ 2014.

Female Donors in Gāndhārī Inscriptions

Women appear as active donors within the corpus of Gāndhārī inscriptions. Their presence, similar to that of male donors, falls within three roles: principal donor(s), co-donor(s), and beneficiary(ies). Principal donors established donations. As a result, they accrued merit and transferred these merits to their friends and family members.² Co-donors likely accompanied the principal donor and may have had some influence on the donation. Beneficiaries were members who were selected by the principal donor to share the spiritual merits accrued from the donation. While it is not possible to discuss every inscription related to these three roles within the corpus, some overarching patterns related to the representation of principal donors are given prominence in the following discussion. Since this approach necessitates a selection, the first section of this article focuses on inscriptions which provide ample detail about the female donor and does not consider inscriptions where minimal information is provided. However, it should be noted that female principal donors are lower in number than males. The corpus consists of around twenty-eight women in contrast to more than two hundred and fifty men. As the primary focus is the information presented in the inscriptions rather than a linguistic analysis, I have chosen not to provide the complete texts in this article, but I mention their Corpus of Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions or CKI numbers. The texts associated with the CKI numbers are readily available online.³ Moreover, a comprehensive list of all the female principal donors alongside pertinent information regarding their donations is provided at the end of this work (table 1).

Some women occur repeatedly in the epigraphic corpus, and so, their activities and familial nexus can be observed in all three different roles. This seems to be the case for Rukhuṇa, the mother of the Apracarāja Vijayamitra (II) who is present in four donative inscriptions (CKI 242, 257, 265, 405). In these inscriptions, her identity is carefully connected with other members of her family, leaving no doubt as to her important role within the donative sphere. Her family, the Apracas, along with the Oḍis, were local dynasties that ruled the area around the Bajaur region and the Swāt Valley respectively. Vijayamitra was the founder of the Apraca kingdom and the names of his successors, and their associated members have been preserved in over fifteen Buddhist donative inscriptions. Based on the available data, we can conclude that the Apracarājas were closely allied with the Indo-Scythian Azes and became semi-independent local potentates around the first century BCE.⁴ In their royal hierarchy, the

2. GOMBRICH 1971.

3. The Corpus of Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions numbers can be used to search for the edited inscriptions on the database <https://gandhari.org/> created by Andrew Glass and Stefan Baums. Translations for some of the inscriptions can also be found in BAUMS 2012.

4. This is based on the calendric norms of the Apracarājas which uses the Azes era and refers to Azes as *atīta* 'gone beyond' and *kālagata* 'whose time has passed' in: CKI 331:

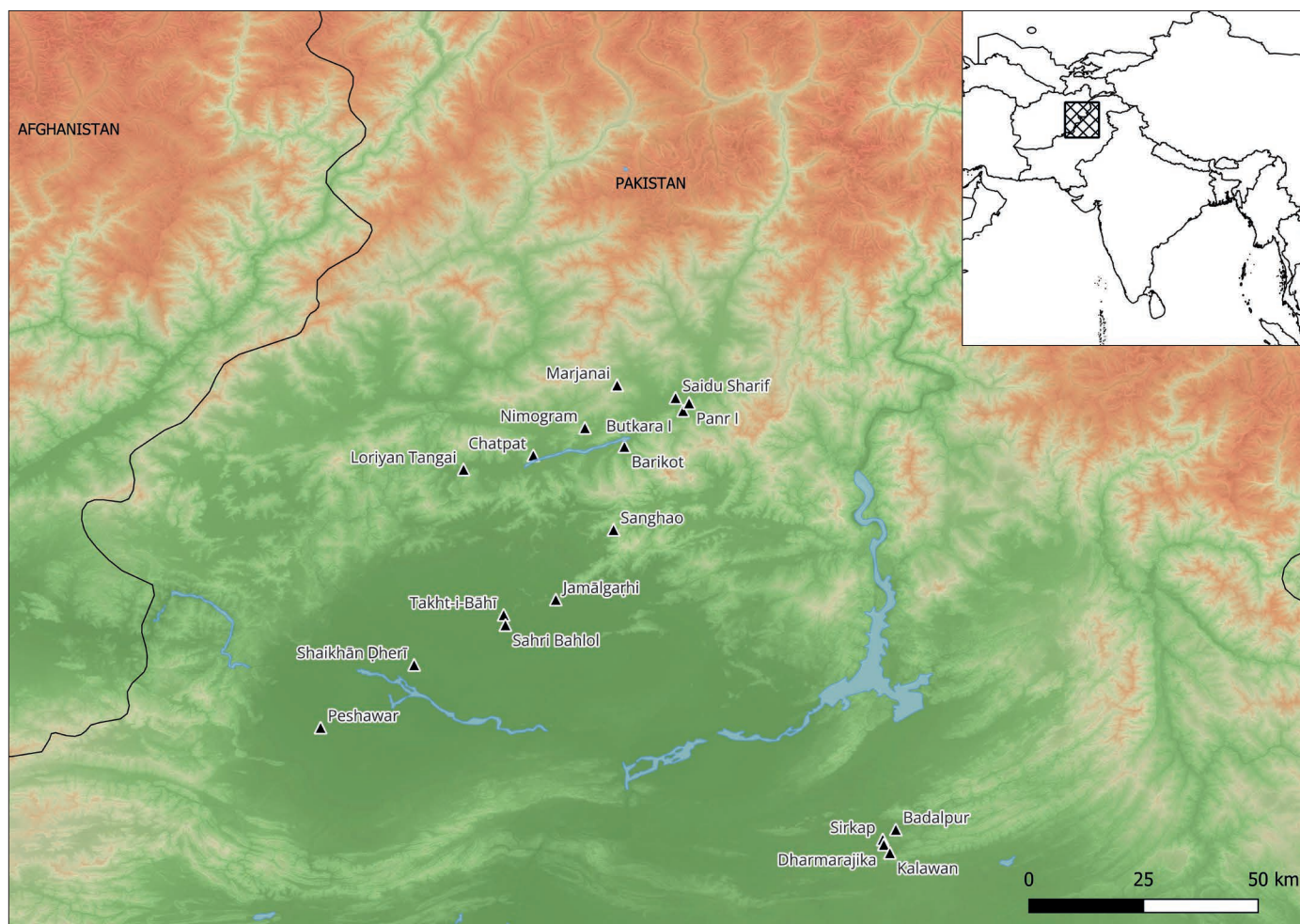


Figure 1. — Important Buddhist sites in Gandhāra. Map created by A. Lakshminarayanan.

highest office was held by the *rāja* (king) which was followed by the *stratega* or the heir (deriving from the Greek *strategos*).⁵ The other male members of the family were known as *kumāras* (princes). Their wives, sisters, mothers, and harem women and bureaucratic officers formed part of the Apraca court.

The earliest inscription referring to Rukhuṇa is the Iṃdravarma (I) inscription dating from around 5/6 CE (CKI 242). Iṃdravarma, the son of Rukhuṇa and the Apracarāja Viṣuvarma, was one of the *kumāras* of the Apraca kingdom. He is the

principal donor who established some relics of the Buddha and named Rukhuṇa as one of his co-donors. He refers to Rukhuṇa as *jīvaṇḍrā* (the one who has a living son). The title of *jīvaṇḍrā* was reserved for the wife of the king who provided an heir to the throne. When Rukhuṇa's son Vijayamitra (II) became the Apracarāja, she successfully secured the Apracarāja lineage and was likely accorded this title. This association offers significant information regarding Rukhuṇa's family. As her son was the Apracarāja, we can infer that Rukhuṇa was the wife of the former king. Her brother Ramaka, her sister-in-law Daṣaka and her daughters and daughter-in-law Vasavadata, Mahaveda, Nika and Utara participate as co-donors alongside her. The latter, Utara, is also present multiple times in our record and is discussed later on in this section. Here, it is sufficient to note that some of Rukhuṇa's female family members were also active in the donative sphere.

maharajasa mahatasa ayasa kalagada; CKI 251: *mahatasa ayasa vurtakalasa āspai[a]sa*; CKI 257: *maharajasa ayasa vurtakalasa*; CKI 266: *maharajasa ayasa vurtakalasa āsa*; CKI 564: *maharajasa mahatasa ayasa vurtakalasa*. For a chronological analysis of dating formulas, see ALBERY 2020, pp. 65–70 and for a comprehensive analysis of the Aze era and its use in the subsequent periods without posthumous references see FALK & BENNETT 1970.

5. An analysis of Greek titles in Gāndhārī inscriptions can be found in LAKSHMINARAYANAN 2023.

Rukhuṇa is the principal donor in another inscription dating around 15/16 CE (CKI 405). As a principal donor, she established a *stūpa*, but she did not establish her donation alone. She was also accompanied by other donors such as her sons.⁶ However, the text of the inscription does not make it clear if they were her co-donors or if they were all principal donors on an equal basis. If they were all principal donors, the only co-donors in the donation were their unnamed family members, the wives, and the sons.⁷ In this inscription, Rukhuṇa is identified as the wife of the former Apracarāja Viṣuvarma and at the time of this donation, we know that she is also the mother of the current Apracarāja, King Vijayamitra. Based on other inscriptions, we know that her husband had already passed away during a significant period and that her son Vijayamitra (II) has been Apracarāja since the early part of the first century CE. However, Rukhuṇa remained *apracarājabhāryā* (wife of the Apracarāja) over a long period despite her widowed status. This suggests the possibility that multiple women may have used the identity marker *apracarājabhāryā* simultaneously, the wife of the former Apracarāja and the wife of the current Apracarāja.

In comparing the details with those of the previous inscription, we get a glimpse of the political changes occurring in the first quarter of the first century CE. In between the years that passed, the *strategos* Vaga likely passed away as the former *kumāra* Iṃdravarma became the new *strategos*.⁸ However, this did not affect Rukhuṇa's position, as after all her son Vijayamitra (II) continued to remain the Apracarāja. Nevertheless, she is not referred to as *jīvaputrā* in CKI 405. Based on the other inscription, it is possible to suggest that she did not represent herself as *jīvaputrā*. This distinction was given to her only by the principal donors named in other inscriptions.⁹ We will see how this suggestion also aligns well with the Śātruleka and Utara inscriptions in which Rukhuṇa occurs.

In the Śātruleka inscription dating around 19/20 CE, Rukhuṇa appears as a beneficiary (CKI 257). Śātruleka, the principal donor, was a nephew of the Apracarāja Vijayamitra (II) and a *kṣatrava* (Skt. *kṣatrapa*) likely a governor of the kingdom. He donated relics with his co-donors, his wife Davili and his sons Iṃdrasena and Menandros. With the resulting spiritual

merit, he chose to honour important members of his family and kingdom such as the *strategos* Iṃdravarma (I), the Apracarāja Vijayamitra (II) and Rukhuṇa. Once again, Rukhuṇa is referred to as the *jīvaputrā* as her son Vijayamitra (II) was still reigning. Her personal identity and network in this record seem to be defined by the principal donor Śātruleka. While she herself may have constructed her identity in relation to the former Apracarāja, she is also connected to the current king in the inscriptions in which she appears as a beneficiary or a co-donor.

The Utara inscription mentions Rukhuṇa as a beneficiary (CKI 265). Utara, Rukhuṇa's daughter-in-law, was a principal donor who established a *śilastambho* (stone pillar) with her husband and co-donor, *kumāra* Iṃdravarma (I). In the aforementioned Rukhuṇa inscription, Iṃdravarma (I) is already identified as a *strategos*. Using this terminus, we can place the Utara inscription sometime between 5–16 CE. Utara shared the merit of her donation with several members but her relationship with her beneficiaries is not always explicitly stated in the text.¹⁰ Amongst others, she shares the merit of her donation with her father-in-law, the former Apracarāja Viṣuvarma, Rukhuṇa and the *strategos* Vaga. Here, Rukhuṇa is once again given the distinction of being the *jīvaputrā* confirming that this title was used to construct her identity and social position by other principal donors.

Rukhuṇa's appearance within the corpus in all three roles—principal donor, co-donor, and beneficiary—demonstrates her importance within the donative sphere. In all the inscriptions in which she occurs, her identity and activities are strongly connected to her membership within the local royal family. Notably, her identity is related to the male members who were simultaneously the most powerful individuals within the kingdom. However, not all women within the royal sphere were obliged to establish donations with their male relatives. Some of them, we will see, established their donations independently. In these cases, their identities and personal networks continued to be tied to their male counterparts.

We have already seen in the above discussion that Rukhuṇa's female family members such as Utara participated in the donative sphere. Utara also appears in two inscriptions as the principal donor. We have come across her in the Utara inscription which states that she donated a *śilastambho* (CKI 265). In another inscription, she appears as a principal donor of a *stūpa* without any co-donors including her husband (CKI 255). We have already seen that Utara's husband Iṃdravarma (I) was a *kumāra* who later became the *strategos*, or the heir to the kingdom. Due to the change in his status, Utara who was once a *kumārabhāryā* (wife of the prince) became the *stretēgabhāryā* (wife of the *strategos*). As a result, Utara became the wife of the Apraca heir and likely

6. Why exactly there are some unnamed sons and wives in the inscription is not clear. We do not know if this is the result of their presence (or absence) during the ritual donation. For example, in CKI 358, there seems to be no logic as to why the donor chose to mention some names and not others. Such occurrences pose several questions regarding the temporality of the ritual and more specifically the relationship between the moment when the inscription was carved and the actual donation. Within Gandhāra, whether these moments occurred concurrently cannot be established based on the current corpus.

7. This is because the text does not use the *sa* or *sadha* (along with) + names formula which can possibly be understood as relating to the co-donors.

8. For the expected succession within the Apraca kingdom, see SALOMON 1988.

9. This is the case for other female donors. See CKI 241: *vasumitra ya jīvaputrā*; CKI 249: *uzamda jīvaputra*. The same title is used in two inscriptions outside of Gandhāra from the second century BCE and refers to Yaśamatā as *jīvaputrā* and *rājābhāryā* (wife of the king); and Kuraṅgi as *jīvaputrā* (VISVANATHAN 2011).

10. Utaraūta, Pupidria, Uṣamvea are mentioned with no further information along with the name of Śreṭha who is said to have been a mother of a *meridarkha* (this office is discussed below).

had access to more wealth. This change may have allowed her to establish donations using her own financial capacity without requiring co-donors.

Similarly, other women of the Apracarāja court also established their donations as principal donors, but without any co-donors. Inscriptions related to two women—Nagaṇaḍa and Prahodi—with varying status within the Apracarāja court provide a glimpse of women's independent donative capacities. Both inscriptions are short and reveal little but specific information regarding the donor's familial and social nexus.

In the case of Nagaṇaḍa, her donative inscription was written on the inside of a reliquary lid and is dated around 2/3 CE (CKI 454). Nagaṇaḍa as a principal donor established her *stūpa* donation independently without co-donors. At the time of the donation, she was the *meridakhabhāryā* (wife of the *meridarch*) and may have been related to the local administration in Gandhāra. As the wife of an official, Nagaṇaḍa may have had access to the surplus income necessary to establish Buddhist monuments independently.

In the case of Prahodi, a short inscription preserves her actions and dates around 30/31 CE (CKI 359). Prahodi established relics without mentioning any co-donors or even beneficiaries. At the time of the donation, she was part of King Vijayamitra (II)'s female quarters (*ateuria*).¹¹ She is often understood as a consort¹² or a minor wife of Vijayamitra (II),¹³ but the inscription does not explicitly state this information. Regardless of her exact role within the court, her appearance without co-donors suggests that women belonging to different levels within the Apracarāja court had the financial capacity to independently establish donations. Such social distinctions and kinship ties, as we will see in the second section, can hardly be gleaned from the affluent female donor images in Gandhāran art.

Such independent female donors likely contributed to the development of Gandhāran Buddhism for a long time. The epigraphic corpus also provides information regarding these donors by representing them within their family units which comprise other female donors. The donations made by them and their female relatives can be understood based on two inscriptions: the Utaraya inscription and the related Khaṃdadatta inscription. Dating around 99/100 CE, the first inscription states that a *bhikṣuṇī* (nun) named Utaraya established the Buddha's relics (CKI 226). Within the corpus, Utara seems to have been a common name. Notwithstanding the chronological gap between the inscriptions of the Apraca Utara and the nun Utaraya, there is no reason to believe that they refer to the same person. The

inscription, despite the relatively little information it provides, is important as it is one of four inscriptions that refers to a *bhikṣuṇī* as a principal donor.¹⁴ The *bhikṣuṇī* Utaraya established her donation in the *Mahavana* (Great Forest) of Kharavala, presumably the name of the place in which the Buddhist site was located. She also did so independently without any co-donors. As a *bhikṣuṇī*, did she establish the donation with her own wealth? If so, how did she acquire and maintain her personal wealth? The answer to these questions differs based on the different *vinayas* that set out rules on whether renunciates were morally obliged to renounce their wealth.¹⁵ In some instances, monks and nuns either chose to retain their personal fortune or renounce it based on their individual resolve. Once individuals were admitted into the order, different Buddhist sects' rule books detail how the personal wealth of these monks and nuns was distinct from the communal property. The rule books provide careful details on how their personal wealth may be used for paying previously incurred debts, taxes, and for buying back stolen property. While we do not know Utaraya's situation, her inscription suggests that she was by no means a poor nun begging for her day-to-day survival. She was likely a well-off *bhikṣuṇī* who dispensed her wealth. We can say based on this inscription that she decided to use her wealth to showcase her religiosity by establishing a relic. Her actions in the Gandhāran donative sphere, along with the other donor *bhikṣuṇīs* align with the trend noted within the rest of the subcontinent where renunciates were actively concerned with making merit through donations.

Further information regarding Utaraya can be determined through the Khaṃdadatta inscription dating to 99/100 CE (CKI 225). Khaṃdadatta as a principal donor established a *stūpa* in the *Mahavana*. More importantly, she is presented as *utaradhītā* (daughter of Utara), and her identity is formed based on a female relative. Along with the consistent language seen in other inscriptions related to honouring mother and father, she also mentions her mother Utara separately once more at the end of the text. Khaṃdadatta likely demonstrated her piety where her mother's *stūpa* was housed.¹⁶ Her donation occurs in the same location, on the same year and month (*Mahavana*, year 157, in the month Proṣṭhapada) as the *bhikṣuṇī* Utaraya's donation, but on different dates (1 and 27). If the two inscriptions referred to the same Utara, it is more likely that Khaṃdadatta associated herself with her mother, a well-known *bhikṣuṇī* who

11. The Sanskrit equivalent of the Gāndhārī *ateuria* is *antahpurika*, meaning belonging to the *antahpura* or women's apartments.

12. BAUMS 2018, p. 63.

13. SADAKATA 1996, p. 305; FALK 1998, p. 92.

14. The three other inscriptions of *bhikṣuṇīs* (CKI 1183, 1184, 1186) and fig. 4 in this article are part of a forthcoming book chapter on nuns in Gandhāra (in preparation). The three inscriptions do not provide much more information on this type of donors and so, are not discussed here. A reference to a *bhikṣuṇī* as a beneficiary occurs in one of the five water pot inscriptions from Haḍḍa. The text on Pot E states that it was donated by Hastadatta, *Teyavarmabhāryā* (wife of Teyavarman). She shared the merit with several people including an unnamed monastery attendant, Teyavarman, Sudarśana, Guhadatta and a *bhikṣuṇī*. The fragmentary nature of the inscription does not permit us to understand the relationship between all the beneficiaries (CKI 373).

15. SCHOPEN 2004, pp. 170–192.

16. BAUMS 2018, p. 59.

had previously established a donation within the *Mahavana* sanctuary. If this is the case, the Khamdadata inscription also shows that Utaraya was a married woman with at least one child, a daughter named Khamdadata, before becoming a nun. Moreover, both Khamdadata and Utaraya made their donations independently without co-donors. Both women were likely part of an affluent family that possessed sufficient surplus income to establish multiple donations within the same site.

Inscriptions found in Wardak, Afghanistan also confirm that other important families such as the Maregas made multiple donations within the same Buddhist site. Each time, they likely made references to their previous ties to the recipient *saṃgha* (Buddhist institutions). This was the case in the inscriptions recording the donations of Vagamarega and his daughter. The first inscription dating around 177/178 CE states that Vagamarega, son of Kamagulya, established a *stūpa* in the *kadalyaga* Vagamarega Monastery (CKI 159).¹⁷ The donation occurred on the 51st year, on the 15th day of the Macedonian intercalary month of Artemisios and was made to the Mahāsāṃghikas sect. In another inscription, the daughter of Vagamarega whose name is not preserved in the text also established a *stūpa* in a monastery where her family previously established donations (CKI 509).¹⁸ According to this second inscription, the daughter of Vagamarega established a *stūpa* at Khadava at the *stūpa* of the Vagamarega Monastery.¹⁹ The donation was also made to the Mahāsāṃghika monks on the 51st year and the 15th day of the month of Artemisios.²⁰ The two inscriptions show that both father and daughter established different *stūpas* in a monastery that was already connected to their family and did so on the same day. In the second inscription, the daughter mentioned her father's *stūpa* and specifically connected her donation to her father ones. This pattern of establishing donations connected to previous donations made by family members is also apparent in the Oḍirāja Śeṇavarma inscription. In the Śeṇavarma inscription, we are informed that the *stūpa* repaired by the king was established by his father and

his grandfather (CKI 249). This practice served to publicise the continuous donations made by the donor and their lineage. The Marega family likely emulated this royal model of funding buildings in places where their family was already prominent and increased their goodwill by mentioning other donations.

In the aforementioned inscriptions of Khamdadata and the daughter of Vagamarega, the daughters presented themselves in relation to their father or mother depending on the latter's activities in the donative context. They represented themselves based on the member of their family who had previously established a donation. In these cases, the gender of the family member did not play a decisive role.

The flexibility in recording donor's social identities allowed women like Balanandī in the Sui Vihar inscription to represent themselves in relation to their daughters (CKI 147). Balanandī as a principal donor established an enclosure for the staff of a *bhikṣu* (monk) named Nagadatta around 238/239 CE. Similar to the forementioned female donors, Balanandī makes a deliberate connection with her daughter by representing herself as Balajaya's mother (*Balajaya mata*). We do not know why Balajaya was mentioned. Based on the Khamdadata and Vagamarega inscriptions, it is possible to suggest that Balajaya played an important enough role in the donative sphere to have been deliberately referenced by Balanandī. In this case, the Sui Vihar inscription shows that age did not play a defining role in selecting the associations that the donor wanted to evoke through their identity. In the same way that daughters evoked their relationship with their parents, mothers could also present themselves in relation to their children.

In the same Sui Vihar inscription, Balanandī is also referred to as a *kuṭumbinī* (one who has a family) who is not just any donor but is also an *upāsikā*. The title *kuṭumbinī*, like the male *grhapati* (householder), can be related to a wealthy and influential woman at the head of a household unit. *Upāsikā* (masc. *upāsakā*) was a formal title for members of the community who could be placed between two extremes: the lay worshippers and the fully ordained. They took special vows and served the *saṃgha* closely.²¹ As a *kuṭumbinī*, Balanandī likely had sufficient personal wealth to perform her service to the *saṃgha* as an *upāsikā*. We cannot know the exact duties of Balanandī as an *upāsikā* or further still, the *upāsikā*'s duties as a whole. If the *upāsikās* were supposed to serve the *saṃgha* closely, we can infer that they possessed sufficient wealth to do so.

An individual's personal wealth and the title of *upāsikā* may have gone hand in hand as rich donors were more likely to serve the *saṃgha* closely and continuously. The Caṃdrabhi inscription provides further information on the relationship between wealthy women and the status of *upāsikā*. One of the few inscriptions coming from an excavated context in Sirkap, Taxila, the relic

17. The globular pot with a concave neck on which this inscription was written was found by Masson in Wardak about 48 km west of Kabul (MASSON 1841, pp. 117–118; ERRINGTON 1998, p. 83; FALK 2008).

18. This inscription was also written on a pot. The pot contained a relic box with sealings, Kuṣāṇa copper coins described as being Huviṣka and dating between 152–187 CE, and two Nezak Hun coins minted in Ghazni and roughly dated between 515–650 CE. It also contained fourteen finger rings, small green beads, ornaments, and a bronze bracelet as dedications. According to Falk, the burnt state of the offerings suggests that they were used in a fire ritual (FALK 2008, pp. 65–67).

19. Other Maregas were also active in the region as evidenced by a stele inscription from Peshawar recording the donation of Miramarega (CKI 325). A fragmentary graffito from Hunza also preserves the contributions of Budhamarega (CKI 502). At Chang'an, the ancient capital of China, a Kharoṣṭhī inscription was carved on a bronze seated Buddha figurine dating between the second and fourth century CE. The inscription states that the statuette was presented by a man named Cittaka Sattva in honour of the Marega scion, Pustaka Vidyarama. Lin Meicun remarked that "it will be a miracle of coincidence if these Maregas belonged to the same family. However, it seems that this possibility cannot be excluded according to the ordinal of their dates" (LIN 1991, p. 126).

20. It corresponds to the Indian month Vaiśākha or April/May in the Gregorian Calendar. The relationship between the Macedonian months and the Indian months have already been discussed in FALK & BENNETT 1970; BAUMS 2018, p. 66.

21. NATTIER 2003, p. 25.

donation made by Caṃdrabhi around 76/77 CE is preserved on a copper sheet (CKI 172). The inscription states that the principal donor was *upāsikā* Caṃdrabhi, daughter of *gr̥hapati* Dhaṃma and the wife of Bhadravala. Caṃdrabhi set up the relics with her co-donors, who were her brother (Naṃdivadhana), her sons (Śama and Saīta), daughter (Dhaṃmā), daughters-in-law (Raja and Iṃdra), and grandson (Jivaṇadi, son of Śama). The rest of the inscription provides information on the recipients and beneficiaries of her donation. It states that she established her donation in the possession of the Sarvāstivāda monks and honoured her kingdom, town, and all beings.²²

As the daughter of a wealthy man, Caṃdrabhi presented herself in association with her father, the *gr̥hapati* Dhaṃma. Her brother Naṃdivadhana is also presented as a *gr̥hapati*. From other Sanskrit texts and inscriptions in India, we know that family units only possessed one *gr̥hapati* at a time who controlled the resources and the property.²³ The presence of Naṃdivadhana as *gr̥hapati* within the same household suggests that Dhaṃma was the former *gr̥hapati*. After his father passed away, Naṃdivadhana may have inherited his father's wealth. If so, this inscription points to a case of intergenerational transfer of wealth and status from the father to the son. It is possible that Caṃdrabhi, our principal donor, may have also inherited some of the wealth of her father. This may explain one way by which she gained her personal wealth which allowed her to make her donation in Taxila.

While it has not been explicitly stated, we have so far come across a handful of inscriptions in which women took part in the donative ritual activities of their husband's household. In the case of Caṃdrabhi, her daughters-in-law Raja and Iṃdra also join her as co-donors along with their husbands. However, female donor's representations need not be confined to their marital household. In some inscriptions, the context of women's participation was not decided by marriage. Daughters, after their marriage, could join their husband's households and simultaneously continue to be part of the ritual activities of their parental household. Women's capacity to participate in the rituals of multiple households is also demonstrated by the Ariśrava inscription dating around 50/51 CE (CKI 358). Ariśrava, the principal donor, established her donation with her sons and daughters. Ariśrava's daughter Aruprava is presented as *Labubhāryā* (wife of Labu). Aruprava participated as a co-donor in the ritual activities of her mother's household even after her marriage to Labu. The inscription reveals that despite marriage posing as a change for both men and women, it was not disruptive. Women moved from one family to another, seamlessly adopting their new status as wives and simultaneously retaining their status as daughters. Their ritual duties and participation lay within their parents' and their in-laws' households.

22. Caṃdrabhi does not share her merit with her husband and it has been suggested that it could be because of her widowed status (FUSSMAN 2004, p. 243).

23. CHAKRAVARTI 1987, p. 80.

Without being an exhaustive review, the aforementioned examples of female donors already provide a vast overview of how women were represented in the donative inscriptions. Their identities, titles, and networks are carefully recorded by the inscriptions in order to correctly attribute the resulting merit to specific individuals and their beneficiaries. They demonstrate that several women had the economic potential to set up donations independently. Similar to male donors, they provide a variety of objects as donations and participate alongside other members of the family. Similar to male donors, they used their agency to connect their donations to other donations made by male and female donors within their social nexus.

In comparison, the images of female donors hardly come with the contextual information related to the represented figures. The fragmentary images consisting at times of a puzzle of heads and bodies do not allow us to deduce whether they refer to royal figures, mercantile elites, or even family units. The explicit familial connections and identity markers provided by the inscriptions cannot be directly connected to the visual corpus, which consists of conventional types with figures that look nearly identical. This is because images and inscriptions, due to their nature and function, provide different types of information. Thus, studying donor images within the background of our knowledge regarding female donors in inscriptions allows us to note the different ways in which female donors are represented in our sources. Notably, such an analysis allows us to recognise that the historic specificity associated with female donors in inscriptions is largely absent in donor images. This is the focus of the second section.

Female Donors in Gandhāran Art

In this section, I have opted to focus the discussion on female donors from Swāt Valley sites for two key reasons: provenance and chronology. Firstly, sites in the Swāt Valley are more extensively excavated and published compared to sites in other parts of Gandhāra. The sites of Butkara I, III, Panr I and Saidu Sharif I, in particular, provide a large amount of data for studying the stylistic and iconographic aspects of donor images and of Gandhāran art, more generally. Secondly, the images from these sites originate in the same chronological period covered by the inscriptions. The majority of inscriptions discussed in the first section of this article can be dated broadly between the first and third century CE, while the donor images from the Swāt Valley belonging to Domenico Faccenna's Group I (called drawing style) date to the first century CE.²⁴ This period coincides

24. FACCENNA *et al.* 2003, p. 289. The style of Group I likely depended on Indian models such as those from the Śuṅga period, further supporting the argument made in this section regarding the generic visual conventions of donor portraits. For Gandhāra's substantial Indian connection despite the presence of multicultural elements, see FUSSMAN 1994.

with the involvement of local royal donors such as the Oḍirāja Senavarma in the donative sphere. The reuse of these images in subsequent periods, particularly on *stūpa* bases, suggests their continued importance within Buddhist sites. This chronological alignment is especially important considering most fragments of Gandhāran art are dated to broad periods covering nearly three centuries. Keeping this issue in mind, focussing on the Swāt Valley allows us to define a visual corpus that can be compared to some key elements of the epigraphic corpus. This, in turn, allows us to engage in a historical and locally rooted approach to study differences in the representation of female donors within the two corpora.

However, it is important to note that the Swāt images and the aforementioned inscriptions do not have a direct geographical correspondence. Female donor inscriptions stem from the valleys of Bajaur, Peshawar and Haḍḍa, the former belonging to the area ruled by the Apracarājas and not the Oḍirājas.²⁵ The Swāt Valley is underrepresented in comparison to the other regions even though the most detailed Gāndhārī inscription of Senavarma comes from this area. Nevertheless, the same iconographic conventions of the donor statues found in the Swāt Valley can also be identified at other sites, such as Ranigat in Buner Valley and Sahri-Bahlol in Peshawar Valley during later periods.²⁶

Before discussing the female donor images found in the Swāt Valley, it is important to clarify what exactly we are referring to in the visual corpus when we speak of 'donor'.²⁷ This category, as identified within the secondary literature,²⁸ consists of both male and female donors and certainly devotees, generally holding offerings such as relics, lamps, flowers, and garlands in their hands. The most elaborate donor images are statues, usually measuring around 50–80 cm, which were joined to buildings with tenons at the top and under the base. These statues decorated niches, chapels, and architectural structures including staircases in Buddhist sites. Besides statues, other smaller donor images occur as part of the body and capitals of columns

and pilasters, false brackets, and arched niches (fig. 2).²⁹ A variety of donor figures appear holding garlands and reliquaries under *caitya* arches or gateways in bas-reliefs (fig. 3).³⁰ The different functions of these fragments reveal that donor images were ubiquitously integrated in all areas as decorations and as structurally important architectural elements during the first century CE. The original context of the donor images has been lost due to the large-scale destruction of sites in Swāt (likely by earthquakes) and entailed modifications in the ancient periods. However, some of them have been found *in situ* as reused material during successive reconstruction phases in Butkara I demonstrating their continued importance.

Donor images in Gandhāran art consist of conventional types using repetitive iconographic motifs with limited variation.³¹ When the figures are grouped together in types, they largely resemble each other, and the only way to associate them with historical individuals is through accompanying inscriptions.³² One such case is an image of a renunciate figure with a lamp that is currently preserved in the National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi (fig. 4). The inscription on the pedestal states the name of the figure as Dhammadeva.³³ However, provenanced images from the Swāt Valley belonging to our category and dating to the first century CE do not bear inscriptions, and so they cannot be connected to specific individuals. For now, we can only hypothesise that the donor images were part of an indefinite visual performance of pious activities aimed at encouraging other donors to replicate their actions.³⁴

The statistical analysis of donor images from Swāt supports the pattern emerging from the epigraphic corpus. Within the corpus of donor images, males greatly outnumber female figures. For example, of the fifteen donor statues unearthed at Butkara III, none are female. At Butkara I, more than forty

25. It should be noted that the inscribed seal of Imḍravarma, an Apracarāja, contains an image which resembles some of the donor portraits from the Swāt Valley and may be interpreted as an image of Imḍravarma himself. This raises the possibility that similar visual conventions were used in Swāt and elsewhere to depict donors. For a detailed study of the inscription and image, see SALOMON *et al.* 1999. The regional aspects of portraiture related to Haḍḍa in Afghanistan are the focus of TARZI 2009. Moreover, the Apracas and Oḍis may have been allied powers, which could explain some of the similarities (SALOMON 2007, p. 277).

26. These donor images of later date are usually male figures wearing long tunics and elaborate belts. They hold a variety of offerings in their hands, see QUAGLIOTTI 2000. Only one of them is a standing female figure holding a reliquary of the trefoil arch type and attests to the presence of a female donor image in this site. However, chronological and contextual information for this image is missing. In contrast, the availability and state of preservation of images from Swāt lends itself to establish the iconographic conventions related to donors compared to these fragmentary and poorly excavated images.

27. Similar to Kim, I use the term donor as an analytical category to study unnamed figures with contemporary qualities in Gandhāran art. Whether all the figures are donors or just devotees can be debated (KIM 2016, p. 203). However, the use of this blanket term allows us to talk about a category of figures in art in comparison to inscriptions.

28. FACCENNA *et al.* 2003, pp. 299–300.

29. For capitals, see FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. DXLVII–DLXVI, and for false brackets, see Pl. DLXVII–DLXXXV.

30. For other figures under *caitya* arches, see examples in FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. CXLI, CXLII, CCCLXV.

31. In the Gandhāran, and indeed in the wider Indic context, donor images are largely representations of individuals as generic conventional types that do not reflect their visual appearance. For the characteristics of portraiture in early India within different geographical and temporal zones see LEFÈVRE 2011. A lengthy analysis of portraiture in Gandhāran art is part of LAKSHMINARAYANAN 2024.

32. For example, in the Pāla period sculptures dating between the eighth and the twelfth centuries, the donor portraits are so generic that individual members can only be identified based on the accompanying inscription (BAUTZE-PICRON 1995). This is also the case in Buddhist art in Sārnāth (KIM 2020).

33. CKI 736. According to Falk, the image and inscription should be read as “dhamadevasa, ‘of Dharmadeva,’ on the socle below a kneeling shaven monk” (FALK 2010, p. 93). However, the inscription can also be read as Dhammadevā and could refer to a female donor. The name Dhammadevā also occurs in an inscription from Sāñci (COLLETT 2015, p. 32). I suspect that the image also supports this reading as the figure wears an inner garment that can be associated with the *bhikṣuṇī*’s *saṃkaksikā* covering the breast and its rounding (VON HINÜBER & ANĀLAYO 2016). Moreover, the head of the figure does not seem to be fully shaven and can be compared to *bhikṣuṇī* Utpalavarpā on a Butkara I relief in which her hairline is visible (FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. CCXXIIIb).

34. In the wider Indic context too, the production of donor images was a strategy to influence devotees to perform similar actions (KIM 2020).



Figure 2. — Donor figure on a figured bracket or *nāgadanta*. Civico Museo Archeologico, Milan, Inv. no. 996.01.3. Photo: A. Lakshminarayanan.



Figure 3. — Donor figures standing under arches from Swāt Valley. Museum of Oriental Art, Turin, Inv. no. 27. Photo: A. Lakshminarayanan.



Figure 4. — Image of a renunciate figure with a lamp. National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi. Gandhara Heritage along the Silk Road: A Pakistan-China Joint Exhibition. Photo: Z. Zong.



Figure 5. — Figure holding a reliquary from Panr I. Swāt Museum, Mingora, Acc. no. 1231. Gandhara Heritage along the Silk Road: A Pakistan-China Joint Exhibition. Photo: Z. Zong.



Figure 6. — Green schist reliquary from Swāt Valley. Civico Museo Archeologico, Milan, Acc. no. 2005.1.1. Photo: A. Lakshminarayanan.

male donor statues have been found in comparison to around ten female ones.³⁵ Among these statues, the most commonly occurring male donors are figures wearing pleated *uttariyas* and *paridhānas* (upper and lower robes respectively), diadems and jewellery (see, for instance, the statue from Panr I in **fig. 5**). They are depicted using similar iconographic conventions that are mostly rooted in Indic artistic traditions, and which are also used to represent most of the male figures occurring in Buddhist biographical narratives.³⁶ The distinction between the two is made evident by the context in which they occur, as donor images cannot be associated with the life story of the Buddha. Some of the male donor figures also hold reliquaries whose general form resembles the reliquaries found at *stūpa* sites in the region.³⁷ For example, a greenschist reliquary from an unknown site in the Swāt Valley closely resembles the general morphology of the reliquary held by the Panr I statue (**fig. 6**).

Unlike males, female donor images from the Swāt Valley are only partly preserved and are missing either their head or their body.³⁸ These fragmentary donor images tell us little about the deeds of these female figures. For example, one female figure from Butkara I is preserved only down to the upper torso and is identified as a donor statue based on the tenon attached to the back of her head (**fig. 7**). The most outstanding element of the image is her hairstyle, which can be related to contemporary practices as it does not occur in the narrative images.³⁹ The coiffure and jewellery communicate the figure's wealthy status, but her pious activities cannot be discerned based on the existing portion of the fragment.

A fragmentary head from the same site is another female donor image (**fig. 8**). A comparison between **fig. 7** and **fig. 8** shows that the attire and accessories to be distinct, but the facial form and physiognomy are identical. Studied in relation to other

35. The ones definitively identified as statues are FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. CDXXX (Inv. no. 26), CDXXXI (Inv. no. 2486), CDXXXIV (Inv. no. 4275, 2686), CDXXXV (Inv. no. 2693, 2004), CDXLII (Inv. no. 1702, 1845), CDXLVI (Inv. no. 1716), CXLVII (Inv. no. 194).

36. The similarities have led to some confusion. For example, FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. CXLVII depicts two male figures carrying reliquaries in their hands. Both males wear turbans with a frontal zone, dangling earrings, necklaces, pleated *uttariyas* and *paridhānas*, resembling the general model of donor statues. However, it is also possible that these figures could have been part of a narrative relief depicting the division of the Buddha's relics due to the presence of a table on the corner of the image.

37. The coherence between the relic containers in images and reliquaries has already been noted, most recently in JONGEWARD *et al.* 2012 which presents a typology of these objects (pp. 39–110), including many which are not depicted in art. Some of these containers also have donative inscriptions written on their surface, including those discussed in the first section. A list of reliquary inscriptions with pictures of the objects can be found in BAUMS 2012.

38. Such as FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. CDXLII (damaged torso and head), CCCXVII (only a body carrying a musical instrument), CCCXVIII (only a body carrying a flower), CDXXXIV (only a body carrying a pot), CDXXXV (only lower limbs), CLXXXVII (two heads with heavy surface damage). When compared to FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. CLII which depicts a biographical scene with several female figures, the iconographic conventions for donor images and female figures in narrative scenes can be seen to possess similar generic characteristics based on set types. In Pl. CLII, they can only be distinguished based on their location within the relief, i.e., standing or seated figures.

39. Other contemporary elements such as earrings, necklaces and belts are also noteworthy. A comparison between earplugs found in excavations and the same ornaments in art is made in MICHELI 2007.

female donor images from Swāt (for instance, **figs. 9 and 11**) we can see that the physical appearance of the fragmentary head in **fig. 8** corresponds to conventional types rather than alluding to specific historical persons.

When fully preserved, it is possible to identify the different attributes carried by the figures. For example, a female figure emerging from the capital of a composite Gandhāran-Corinthian column holds a relic casket in her hands (**fig. 10**). Her facial features and jewellery, although simplified on account of contextual and spatial constraints, largely resemble several female donor statues from Butkara I, for instance the fragment illustrated in **fig. 7**. However, her attribute confirms that female figures could also hold reliquaries.⁴⁰ This, in turn, supports the evidence of numerous Gāndhārī inscriptions that we have already come across, in which female donors make relic donations.



Figure 7. — Female donor statue from Butkara I. Swāt Museum, Mingora, Acc. no. 1079. Photo: A. Martin.

40. Another female figure with a reliquary is on a frame of a niche in FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. DCIV.

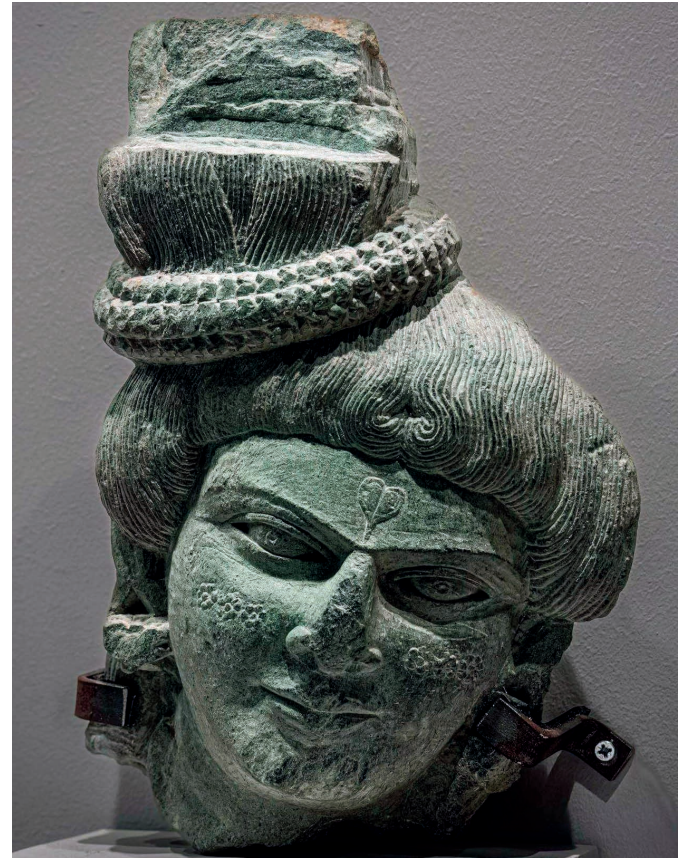


Figure 8. — Head of a female figure from Butkara I. Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome. Photo: I. Saiko.



Figure 9. — Head of a female donor statue from Swāt Valley. Museo d'Arte Orientale, Turin, Inv. no. 13. Photo: A. Lakshminarayanan.



Figure 10. — Female donor image from Butkara I. Swāt Museum, Mingora, Acc. no. 1090. Photo: A. Martin.

Other female donor figures carry attributes that are not mentioned in the surviving inscriptions, such as lamps, flowers, globular waterpots and garlands. One such case is a female statue from Butkara I carrying a lotus (**fig. 11**).⁴¹ The subject of a detailed analysis by Faccenna, this standing female figure is elaborately dressed, holding a flower in her left hand and making an open-palm gesture with her right. We have already come across this gesture in **fig. 10**. If we consider that this gesture can be used to indicate an offer of protection, it may be viewed as the donor ensuring the protection of the relics long after the donation ritual is complete. This type of connection between the donor and the relic, stressing the donor's responsibility towards it, can also be seen in the *Seṇavarma* inscription in which the *Oḍirāja* protects the relic by issuing a warning to those who would dare to harm it.

The hair in **fig. 11** is elaborately coiffed with a fringe that is decorated with flowers. Her full cheeks, padded chin, broad flaring nose and fully curved lips are common to all female donor images belonging to Butkara I (**fig. 12**). Unlike the other donor figures with relics, this statue may represent a pious devotee whose donative capacity is not clearly expressed by the image.⁴² As we will see, the reuse of donor images on *stūpa* bases in subsequent periods at Butkara I demonstrates that images need

41. FACCENNA 2006, pp. 185–188. FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. CDXXXI carries an identical lotus. Notably, the clothing and hairstyle of the figure are different, but the facial features and jewellery are the same. If we compare **fig. 11** with Pl. CDXXXI, only the attribute differs likely being a waterpot.

42. While this image makes reference to an object, possibly suggesting a donation of flowers, other donor statues reveal nothing about the nature of the donation, being depicted in *añjalimudrā* (palms together in reverence). For example, FACCENNA 1962–1964, Pl. CXLVI, CLXXX and KHAN 2015, Pl. 140, 141, 146 present standing donors dressed nearly identically and in *añjalimudrā*.



Figure 11. — Female donor with a lotus from Butkara I. Swāt Museum, Mingora, Acc. no. 1042. Photo: A. Martin.

not only have been used to communicate a specific instance of donation but were also part of a broader strategy to encourage contemporary devotees.⁴³

When we compare these images with the female donors recorded in inscriptions, the different natures of the two corpora become evident. In our epigraphic corpus, we find a range of female donors. We know their names (where those have been preserved), their social connections, their marital status and, in some cases, further information conveyed by their titles, ranging from *jīvaṇṇa* to *kuṭumbinī* and *upāsikā*. On the other hand, the visual record provides little information regarding the individual characteristics of the donor. Donor images were created using generic visual conventions with limited combinations that situate the represented figures amongst their fellow donors. Rather than their social connections and kinship nexus, images lay emphasis on contemporary indicators of wealth and piety that can also be corroborated by small finds. In this way, images speak of rich female donors who readily participate in the ritual landscape by becoming physically part of it.

But what do these female donor images do in a Buddhist site? To answer this question, we may turn to the broader historical practices related to donors in Indian Buddhism. In his work 'What's in a Name,' Schopen has convincingly argued the importance of 'presence' in the Buddhist site.⁴⁴ Recording inscriptions, even in places which were not visible to contemporary devotees, was an efficient way for donors to leave a lasting trace of themselves and their contribution to the sacred landscape.⁴⁵ By writing their name in the proximity of the Buddha and his relics, donors left their 'presence,' a part of themselves that engaged in veneration and cultivated merit continuously. This infinite performance, which lasted long after the initial donation, was believed to have assured their rebirth in heaven. At the same time, donors created new foci for veneration, either by funding new construction or renovating existing ones, and facilitated ritual activities within the sacred area. This, in turn, led to further donations inspiring contemporary devotees to perform their own pious deeds. In the same manner, donor images provide yet another dimension to this phenomenon. Images were publicly displayed in the sacred area and played a performative role within the Buddhist site. Donor figures perform acts of piety

43. Taddei has astutely remarked that this reuse of images shows "no apparent consistency" and that "it appears rather to have been a gesture of piety towards old sacred material and perhaps an easy way to decorate a votive stūpa without being compelled to spend money on having new images made." For a lengthy discussion on reuse, style, and related problems, see TADDEI 2006.

44. SCHOPEN 2004, pp. 382–394.

45. Schopen argued that the names of donors in Sāñcī inscriptions were meant to place the donor in the proximity of something powerful, such as relics or the *saṃgha* (SCHOPEN 2004, p. 392). Similarly, the images of donors in Gandhāra and elsewhere may have served to embed the donor within the ritual landscape. While these practices are not part of the canonical texts, there is no reason to doubt that some donors with sufficient financial capacity may have left their presence in the sacred area via the written and visual records.



Figure 12. — Detail of fig. 11, Swāt Museum, Mingora, Acc. no. 1042. Photo: A. Martin.

and donation and infinitely extend their protection and reverence in proximity to Buddhist relics. They testify to the visual presence of donors who perpetually perform their adoration in front of all devotees who visit Buddhist shrines and *stūpas*. As an integral part of the ritual landscape, donor images embody the physical engagement of donors in donative and veneration practices. Their embodied material form can be viewed as a powerful visual stand-in for pious deeds, much in the same way as their written counterparts.⁴⁶

It is worth considering further the possibility that the visual presence of the donor, albeit being conventional types, resonated in a way that texts did not and could reach a wider, non-literate audience. Based on the current state of the evidence, the notion that donor images were set up as a discursive strategy remains a hypothesis. Their role in influencing contemporary practices

46. This is often understood as the 'unseen presence' as some donative inscriptions were likely not visible, particularly on reliquaries that were interred.



Figure 13. — Subsidiary *stūpa* decorated with a mix of donor statues from Butkara I. Photo: A. Martin.

and appealing to their viewers can be better understood in the light of Buddhist *avadānas*. The latter, a group of early Buddhist texts dating around the first century CE and closely related to the Indic northwest, frequently lays emphasis on the efficacy of certain Buddhist objects to communicate with their viewers and move them to perform pious deeds. These objects, referred to as ‘agents of *prasāda*’ and discussed in detail by Rotman,⁴⁷ were *stūpas*, shrines and images that were an integral part of the Buddhist ritual landscape. Seeing them enabled devotees to cultivate *prasāda* within their mind, a particular mental state evoking a compulsion to practice *dāna*.⁴⁸ Such agents operated

in the visual domain and encouraged those who viewed them to make *prasāda*-inspired offerings.

Rich, serene, and pious representations of female donors can also be analysed within the framework of *prasāda*. As powerful visual tools or agents, female donor images may have been deliberately used by the *saṃgha* to instil *prasāda*, notably in the minds of royal and mercantile women with access to surplus wealth. Seeing the figures may have evoked in the minds of rich female devotees the fervour to perform pious deeds. When successfully encouraged by images, female donors established donations including images that continuously shaped Buddhist rituals. Considered as agents of *prasāda*, female donor images seem to have performed a dual role. They were simultaneously the result of donations and prompts for further donation. This

47. ROTMAN 2003.

48. ROTMAN 2009, p. 69.

may explain why the emphasis on the visual language is on the action made by the figures rather than their individuality and historicity. This may also be the reason why at least in the subsequent periods, some of these donor images continued to maintain their significance and were used to decorate subsidiary *stūpas* within the Buddhist sites (**fig. 13**). Their function, at Butkara I, extended beyond their initial use and particular care and attention was paid to provide a new space for them. While their original context is lost, some of these donor images nevertheless remain *in situ* during the reuse phase at Butkara I. This reuse of donor images may have been motivated by the *saṃgha*'s need to ubiquitously set up representations of the acts of *dāna* or donation.⁴⁹ Despite the high level of consistency among the donor images, the representation of female donors, although on a smaller scale than males, was likely part of a broader visual strategy to embed embodied acts of *dāna* and persuade Buddhist devotees to perform similar deeds. As such, female donor images served as a constant visual echo of normative practices associated with pious donors and devotees, whose actions endowed them with enduring merit.

Preliminary Conclusions and Further Research Directions

A direct comparison between the inscriptions and images is a difficult task, more so when they preserve different types of information. This article makes a tentative endeavour, not without significant doubts, to address the overarching patterns related to the representation of female donors in Gāndhārī inscriptions and images. The detailed epigraphic records demonstrate women's roles and the flexibility of their social identities within the donative sphere. Some female donors in Gandhāra participated alongside their male relatives such as their husbands, brothers, and fathers when making donations. Based on their economic capacity, they could also donate independently to the *saṃgha*. As a result, they had some agency in forming their social networks based on their existing relationships with the recipient Buddhist institution. Using their agency, some female donors connected their donations to previously established donations by both their male and female family members.

Are these female donors from Gāndhārī inscriptions also present in Gandhāran art? Simply put, no. Since the available female donor images in Gandhāran art do not possess inscriptions, it is not possible to know if they were associated with individuals present in the epigraphic corpus. However, the relative completeness of the visual corpus coming from excavated sites

within Swāt lends itself to conducting a comparative analysis when considering the representation of donors in the two corpora. Studying the two corpora together allows us to identify distinct patterns that emerge in different mediums such as texts and images. Unlike the specific individuals with particular social and kinship links presented in the inscriptions, female donor images are highly conventional and use a limited combination of iconographic motifs to communicate the wealth and social status of the figures.

In comparison to inscriptions, female donor images preserve generic features that lay emphasis on their status and function within the Buddhist site. For this reason, the female donor figures resemble each other and only a few distinctions can be made between them and other male figures. Their relationship with historical figures, if intended, could only be confirmed by the presence of accompanying inscriptions. Since there are no inscriptions, the common generic iconographic conventions situate the female donor figures within the network of their fellow donors and devotees. Broadly speaking, this may also explain why these donor images continued to find a place within the sacred area beyond the first century CE. Donor statues in Butkara I were used to decorate smaller monuments without any coherent visual composition in the subsequent phases until the fourth century CE. They were assembled together, without regard for their types and sizes, as decoration for new monuments in the ever-expanding sacred area. The meaning and function of these images by this time may have very well changed. The acts of donation, rather than the donor's identity, seem to have been evoked by the *saṃgha* to encourage more devotees to participate in the donative sphere. These strategies were likely aided by the already generic quality of the donor images which highlight wealth and piety rather than individuals.

These preliminary conclusions could be embraced to launch further studies into the representation of female donors in Gandhāran art during a broad historical period covering four centuries. The continued interest in embedding donors' presence after the second century CE is supported by a large number of bas-reliefs decorating subsidiary *stūpas* and pedestal images of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues. The female figure inconspicuously occurring under the Bodhisattva's throne is an example of donor images which appear even in the peripheral zones of the figural space (**fig. 14**). The representation of Gandhāran donors in art, still governed by conventional types, go beyond the limited variety that we have seen in Swāt. The female donor images, particularly on pedestals, do not occur in isolation and appear alongside groups of other female figures or male monastic and lay figures. These characteristics bring to mind the representations of small human figures attending to divinities in Indian Buddhist art in the Gupta and Pāla periods. These later developments have been interpreted as visually collapsing time and distance between the human and divine

49. Besides the economic advantages, the reuse of these images may have also ensured that the donors continued to gain merit for their actions (BRANCACCIO 2022, p. 355).

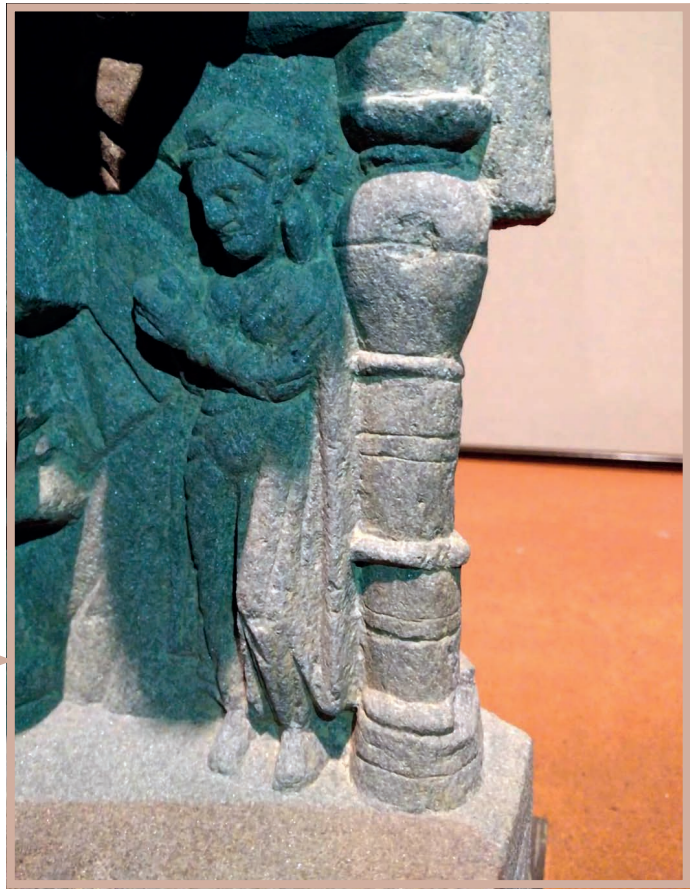


Figure 14. — Female figure standing under the throne of a seated Bodhisattva statue. Museo d'Arte Orientale, Turin Inv. no. 8. Photo: A. Lakshminarayanan.

realms.⁵⁰ While it is problematic to extrapolate these interpretations to the Gandhāran context, the insertion of human figures in religious imagery and subtle manipulation of space into multiple registers point to a complex visual strategy at play.

Do these miniature human figures represent a shift in how donor images were integrated in the third and fourth centuries CE? How do they present aspects of the historical present? Do donor figures perpetuate patterns of behaviour based on contemporary practices? Do they convey social and divine hierarchies through space and size, i.e., are they scale-oriented? To answer these questions, a systematic search for donor figures and a methodology that pays attention to the visual content and

50. In Sārnāth, "introduction and placement of donor images can be understood as visual interventions that convey a present- and human-oriented sense of time" (KIM 2020, p. 192). With regards to Pāla art "the religious image becomes a place of exchange between two spheres, divine and human: with the humans 'thinking' or 'visualizing' their gods and goddesses, it is their creativity which is enhanced; with their mere presence in a religious image which they financed, it is their social existence which is acknowledged as a fundamental part to the existence of the religious community" (BAUTZE-PICRON 2014, p. 1).

broader historical context could provide a basis for discerning any new patterns in the representation of female donors. This is one of the objectives of my forthcoming Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions European Fellowship-funded project entitled Gandhāran Relic rituals And Veneration Explored at Cardiff University (with Max Deeg) in collaboration with the *Digitization of Gandharan Artefacts*. For now, I have a more modest goal and so I turn to a bas-relief with donor figures belonging to this later period. This example aims to underscore the complex nature of our corpora. Its brief discussion seeks to demonstrate how a comparative study of literary and visual records can help us appreciate the different artistic strategies used to integrate and represent female donors.

On a relief decorating a subsidiary *stūpa* presumed to be from the Buner region, an image and inscription occur together and present very different types of information on a female donor.⁵¹ Based on the stylistic features, the relief can only be

51. BOPEARACHCHI 2020, p. 258.



Figure 15. — *Stūpa* presumed to be from Buner. Photo: O. Bopearachchi.



Figure 16. — Relief depicting figures venerating in front of a *vihāra* (detail from fig. 15). Photo: O. Bopearachchi.

dated broadly after the second and before the fourth century CE. The *stūpa* in which this relief was incorporated does not come from an excavated context, but it is one of the few well-preserved and complete monuments from Gandhāra (fig. 15). Its relief decorations consist of five registers with a central complex false niche presenting both devotional and biographical scenes. The uppermost register contains scenes of the Buddha seated under the bodhi tree. The register below depicts monks and lay donors in forest and cave-like structures. This is followed by two registers of scenes from the Buddha's life. The lowermost register shows a group of donors with an inscription.

The lowermost relief with the donors depicts five figures venerating a *vihāra*-type monument (fig. 16). The identification of the building as a *vihāra* is based on the architectural components rather than an interpretation of its function.⁵² It

could also be interpreted as a shrine in this context. The *vihāra*, comprising a podium with a double roof covering, has a frontal niche containing a seated meditating Buddha. Next to it, a *bhikṣu* kneels in front of the half-opened door and worships it in *añjalimudrā*. He is accompanied by four lay figures, three male and one female, surrounding the building in pious attitudes and carrying offerings. The male figures are dressed similarly, wearing pleated chitons and thick mantles. They have almond-shaped eyes, short beards and short-cropped hair. To the right, the female figure stands wearing a long tunic and a mantle. She is elaborately adorned with a necklace, earrings, anklets and bracelets. She holds an undulating garland in her hand, which the male figure to her right unfurls. The other two male figures carry a bouquet of flowers. We have already seen how figures from the Swāt Valley carrying flowers and other objects express their piety even if the donated object cannot be corroborated by the epigraphic corpus.

52. This identification is based on FACCENNA & FILIGENZI 2007, p. 55.

Some of the figure's identities can be discerned by the short inscription located at the base of the relief (CKI 507). The placement of the inscription directly below the *vihāra* scene suggests a choice was made to establish a relationship between the two. The inscription records the donation made by three men—Zadila, Budhiya and Ayapata. The quality and variety of the relief decorations suggests that these three male donors were economically well-to-do devotees. The relief, however, depicts an unnamed monk and a woman alongside the three male figures. The frontal depiction of the figures suggests that they could have been donors, but the object of their donation is unclear. Did they donate the *vihāra*-type building depicted in the relief, or did they donate the *stūpa* in which the relief was incorporated? Or perhaps both? This type of information and the relationship between the *stūpa* and *vihāra* are clarified neither by the inscription nor by the image. We can tentatively advance the hypothesis that this *stūpa* was placed inside a *vihāra* connected to the monastic figure represented on the relief. This could explain why the *bhikṣu*, if interpreted as a recipient of the donation, kneels on the ground in front of the *vihāra* in *añjalimudra*.

Even if the *bhikṣu* is taken to be the recipient of the gift, though, this does not explain the incongruence between image and text as regards the female figure. No female name is mentioned in the inscription. However, the effort made to carve her image conferring the same level of details associated with the male figures suggests that she may be more than a mere observer of the donation. Her economic and social privilege is communicated by her clothing and jewellery. Her actions, extending a garland, are identical to the acts of the lay male figures. These details suggest that she may be a contemporary devotee whose visual presence speaks of her permanent involvement in the ritual sphere even if the inscription does not explicitly mention it. Looking carefully at such visual articulations of female donors from various vantage points could lead to more fruitful analyses on what the figures do and how they do it.

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Table 1.— List of inscriptions with female principal donors

No.	Object	Title	Provenance	Date	Donation	Period	Sect	Name	Ties	CKI
1	Schist container	Inscription of Nagaṇaḍa	Dir, Pakistan	8/7 BCE	<i>Thobo (stūpa)</i>		—	Nagaṇaḍa	<i>meriakha[sa bha]ya</i> Wife of the Meridarch	454
2	Schist container	Inscription of Rukhuṇa	Bajaur, Pakistan	15/16 CE	<i>Thuve (stūpa)</i>		—	Rukhuṇa	<i>Apacarajabharyae</i> Wife of the Apracarāja	405
3	Schist container	Inscription of Prahodi	Bajaur, Pakistan	30/31 CE	<i>Śarira</i> (relics)	Apracarāja	—	Prahodi	<i>Avacarajasa amtevura</i> Lady of the Apracarāja harem	359
4	Goblet	Inscription of a <i>bhikṣuṇī</i>	—	—	Goblet	Indo-Parthian	Sarvāstivāda	Avhemitra	<i>bhikhuṇi</i> nun	1183
5	Goblet	Inscription of a <i>bhikṣuṇī</i>	—	—	Goblet	Indo-Parthian	Sarvāstivāda	—	<i>bhikhuṇi</i> nun	1184
6	Bowl	Inscription of a <i>bhikṣuṇī</i>	—	—	Bowl	Indo-Parthian	Sarvāstivāda	Budharakṣida	<i>bhikhuṇi</i> nun	1186
7	Silver sheet	Inscription of Utara	—	—	<i>Dhātu</i> (relics) <i>Śīlastambha</i> (pillar)	Apracarāja	—	Utara	<i>(*kuma)[ra]bhaya</i> Wife of the Kumāra	265
8	Schist container	Inscription of Utara	Bajaur, Pakistan	—	<i>Thubu (stūpa)</i>		—	Utara	<i>stretegabharya</i> Wife of the Strategos	255
9	Schist container	Inscription of Ariaśrava	Dir, Pakistan	40/41 CE	<i>Dhātu</i> (relics)	Apracarāja	Dharma-guptaka		<i>siasēṇa[vha]ya</i> Wife of Simhasena	358
10	Copper sheet	Inscription of Caṃdrabhi	Kalawan, Pakistan	76/77 CE	<i>Śarira</i> (relics)		Sarvāstivāda	Caṃdrabhi	<i>dhraṃmasa grahavatisa dhita bhadravalasa bhaya</i> Daughter of Householder Dharma and Wife of Bhadrāpala	172
11	Schist lid	Inscription of Lona	Charsadda, Pakistan	Late 1st CE	<i>Śarira</i> (relics)	Apracarāja	—	Loṇa	<i>kumarsa viśuvarmasa [a]teuria</i> Lady of the harem	247
12	Halo of a Buddha	Aśoraya inscribed Buddha	Bajaur? Pakistan		<i>Dānamukha</i> donation	Apracarāja	—	Momadatta	<i>Balasomabhayae Suanakarahayae</i> Wife of Balasoma, Wife of a goldsmith	256
13	Schist container	Inscription of Khaṃdadatta	—	99/100 CE	<i>Thopo (stūpa)</i>	—	—	Khaṃdadatta	<i>Utaradhita</i> Daughter of Utara	225
14	Schist miniature <i>stūpa</i>	Inscription of Utaraya	—	99/100 CE	<i>Dhātu</i> (relics)	—	—	Utara	<i>bhikhuṇi</i> nun	226

No.	Object	Title	Provenance	Date	Donation	Period	Sect	Name	Ties	CKI
15	Bronze pot	Inscription of the Daughter of Vagamarega	Wardak, Afghanistan	177/178 CE	<i>Śarira</i> (relics)	—	Mahā-sāṃghika	Unknown	<i>dhida</i> daughter	509
16	Pedestal	Jamalgarihi pedestal inscription	Mardan, Pakistan	—	<i>Dānamukha</i> donation	—	—	Ambā	<i>Savasethabhariae</i> Wife of Savasreṭha	117
17	Halo of a Bodhisattva	Inscribed Bodhisattva	—	—	<i>Dānamukha</i> donation	—	—	Hari(?)	<i>Budhasaasya bhariyae</i> Wife of Budhasa	252
18	Pedestal	Dharmarajika inscription 3	Dharmarajika, Pakistan	—	—	—	—	—	<i>Imdra(sena) bhar[ya]</i> Wife of Imdrasena	70
19	Schist miniature stūpa	Reliquary inscription	—	—	—	—	—	—	<i>Priavaśabhayae</i> Wife of Priyavaṃśa	240
20	Gold sheet	Reliquary inscription of Śira	Taxila, Pakistan	—	<i>Dhātu</i> (relics)	—	—	Śira	—	64
21	Halo of a Buddha	Jamālgaṛhī halo inscription	Mardan, Pakistan	—	<i>Dānamukha</i> donation	—	—	S[a]phae	—	118
22	Pedestal	Naugram inscription	—	—	—	—	—	Takhala	—	136
23	Copper plate	Sui Vihar copper plate	—	238/239 CE	—	—	—	Balanandī	<i>kuṭumbinī</i> (householder) <i>Balajaya mata</i> (mother of Balajaya)	147
24	Oil lamp	Oil lamp	—	—	—	—	—	—	<i>[bharyae]</i> wife	550
25	Pot	British Library Pot E	Haḍḍa, Afghanistan	c. 2nd CE	<i>Dheyadharmā</i> gift	—	—	Hastadatta	<i>Teyavarmabharyae</i> Wife of Teyavarma	373
26	Pot	British Library Pot C	Haḍḍa, Afghanistan	c. 2nd CE	<i>Dānamukha</i> donation	—	—	Virata	<i>[Srva] hiamabharyae</i> Wife of Sravahama	371
27	Pot	British Library Pot A	Haḍḍa, Afghanistan	c. 2nd CE	<i>Dheyadharmā</i> gift	—	—	Vasavadatta	<i>Su(ha) somabharyae</i> Wife of Suhasoma	369
28	Pot	Haḍḍa Pot	Haḍḍa, Afghanistan	c. 2nd CE	<i>Dheyadharmā</i> gift	—	—	Sihasuda	—	223

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