BUDDHISM IN GANDHĀRA

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1. Introduction: Gandhāra and Its Sphere of Influence

Gandhāra is the ancient Sanskrit name of the region surrounding Peshawar (Skt. Puruṣapura) which is now the northwestern frontier province of Pakistan. Gandhāri1 as the name of a people in Northwest India living near the river Kabul is first mentioned in the Rgveda (Hymn Veda), the most ancient work of Indian literature.2 Whereas according to Greek and Chinese sources the river Indus constituted the eastern frontier of Gandhāra, it stretched up to Rawalpindi according to Indian sources. In the old Indian epic Rāmāyana, which relates the adventures of Rāma and Sīta, the eastern border of Gandhāra was located near Rawalpindi. According to this epic, Gandhāra was conquered by Bharata, a brother of Rāma, who founded two major towns for his sons: Puṣkalāvatī (or Puṣkarāvatī, Greek Peukelaotis, now Charāsada) for Puṣkala and Takṣāsilā (now Taxila) for Takṣa. Buddhist sources have Taxila as the capital of Gandhāra.3 During the Persian dynasty of the Achaemenids, in the time of Dareios I. (6th/5th century BC) and his successors (559–336 BC), Gandhāra had to pay taxes to these Persian kings. The Greek historians Herodot (5th century BC) and Strabon (1st century BC) as well as the geographer Ptolemaios (2nd century AD) knew its inhabitants as Gandarites and Gandaraī. This province was surrendered to the Indian king Candragupta Maurya (ca. 320–300 BC) in 305 BC in a treaty with Seleukos I.4 At that time, it comprised not only the region around Peshawar (Puruṣapura), but also the Western Punjab (Panjab). Its capital was Takṣāsilā.

From earliest times on, the Khyber Pass situated between Kabul and Peshawar was the main communication with India and the passageway

1 See Mayrhofer 1992, s.v. gāṇḍhāri- m.; Malalasekera 1937–1938, s.vv. Gandhāra, Takkasilā.
2 The earliest hymns date back to ca. 1500 BC.
3 Brandtner 2001, pp. 35f.
4 Lamotte 1958, pp. 327, 364.
for all major migrations and invasions into India.\textsuperscript{5} Already in the middle of the second millennium BC Indo-Aryan tribes migrated into India on this route. These Indo-Aryan tribes influenced the Indian culture for many centuries through their Vedic Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{6} The Khyber Pass also served as the starting point for the Buddhist missions to the east along the so-called Silk Road. Whereas the Sogdian and Parthian missionaries took the northern branch along the Tarim Basin, the Indians and Indo-Scythians travelled on the southern route from Yarkand over Khotan and Miran to Dunhuang 敦煌.\textsuperscript{7}

Between the last centuries BC and the first centuries AD, the time we are here concerned with, Gandhāra’s sphere of influence covered the territories along and around the Indus, Swat and Kabul river valleys. Therefore, Richard Salomon differentiates between Gandhāra proper and Greater Gandhāra.\textsuperscript{8} The latter comprises, apart from Peshawar valley and the just mentioned neighbouring regions, also the “triangular” area stretching from Bamiyan in Afghanistan’s west over Kabul and Haḍḍa to Taxila in Pakistan’s southeastern corner and Gilgit in its northeastern corner.

According to Pāli sources,\textsuperscript{9} Gandhāra was one of India’s sixteen “great regions” (mahājanapada).\textsuperscript{10} In the Buddha’s own time it was part of the “Northern Region” (Uttarāpatha),\textsuperscript{11} and was thus considered as belonging to India. The Aśoka (ca. 268–233 BC) inscriptions testify to this as well as the fact that when in the second century BC the Bactrian Greeks integrated this region into their empire, they minted coins with

\textsuperscript{5} Salomon 1999, p. 4; Brinkhaus 2001, p. 64, n. 4.
\textsuperscript{6} The Bactrian Greeks, Scythians and Kuśānas who invaded India in the centuries around the beginning of the Christian era were apparently quickly Indianised and left only faint marks of their language, religion and culture in the course of their progress into India. See also Fussman 1994, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{7} Zürcher 1990, pp. 172ff.
\textsuperscript{8} Salomon 1999, p. 3 and map 1 on p. 2; see also Fussman 1987, p. 67; Fussman 2004, pp. 237ff.
\textsuperscript{9} AV I 262.35–213.5; AV IV 251.3–8; 256.15–20; 260.25–261.1.
\textsuperscript{10} Cf. Lamotte 1958, pp. 8–10. Fourteen regions were situated in the “Middle country” (madhyadeśa) and two of them in the “Border region” (pratyantajanapada) where the Buddhist monastic rules were less rigorously applied.
\textsuperscript{11} Lamotte 1958, p. 109; the original meaning of uttarāpatha is “the northern road” or “the northern direction”. Uttarāpatha became the name of the whole of Northern India which according to Pāli sources included Kashmir (Skt. Kaśmīra), Gandhāra and Kamboja (i.e., Northern Kashmir) as main divisions. Cf. Malalasekera 1937–1938, s.v. Uttarāpatha.