

Buddhist Imagery

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As with the founders of other major world religions, so far as we know, no Buddhist disciple ever sat down during the lifetime of the Teacher and produced a likeness of Siddārtha Gautama, as the historical Buddha was called. Thus in proposing to discuss Buddhist imagery there is no possibility of describing, in the sense of portraiture, what he and his followers "looked like." All this, to follow out Buddhist notions of escape from attachment to the phenomenal world, has long since passed into Nirvana. If the light of attachment has gone out, then there is no longer anything to see.

It is well known that India, the land of the origin of Buddhism, was long reluctant to change this concept. Carvings associated from the last part of the second and into the first century B.C. designate only what happens when the *presence* of the Buddha is known. There is joy, there is worship, there is the necessity to guard (the door guardian), there is music; all things that live and grow—plants, animals, even people—are stirred to a special kind of life. Specific reliefs, as from Barhut of the first century B.C., indicate that the Buddha is present through such a device as a wheel. But more than these special scenes is the fact that these carvings as a whole partake of a more significant, larger Buddhist imagery. They are grouped around a central form. They make up the outer decor—railings, gates, slabs of stone—enclosing a circular stupa mound. The shape is nothing more than a tomb—or by extension, the place for burial of a relic—the relic mound. The earliest clear major image of the Buddha is then a symbol of death.

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It is, however, also a fact of great religions—certainly with Christianity—that the religion was great because it overcame death—Paul’s “O death where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (I Corinthians 15:55.) The theme of salvation is characteristically one of the most important themes in the early catacombs, as with the prefiguration of the resurrection in the Jonah story. These have their analogy in early Buddhism in the stupa.

The stupa is not the burial mound of any prince or any mere man. The stupa is itself the Buddha. It is a sign to be associated with death, but it is in fact ultimate triumph and indeed, in Christian terminology, everlasting life.

Its symbolism is well known. Its shape is above all to be associated with the earth and its four directions (the gateways), the sky or the great dome of heaven), and the universe itself. The square at the top denotes the Heaven of the thirty-three Gods; the umbrellas above that perhaps indicate different levels in that heaven. The plan with its gates facing the four cardinal directions may recall the ancient swastika, or sun-symbol. The act of worship itself seals the fact of cosmic meaning; for as the sun swings round the great arc of the sky and in its passage controls (is the moving force in) both heaven and earth, so, too, the worshipper enters the gate and in the ritual act of circumambulation moves in a sunwise direction around the stupa, the stupa always to his right.

The Buddhist site of Sānchī is the most complete extant example of an early Buddhist shrine. It stands on a hill. The approach is along a low grade of steps. There are several stupas on the hill at Sānchī, but it is the main one that most concerns us. From at least one approach one sees it before one reaches it, its domelike crest and the mast that rises above it growing out of the trees and shrubbery in the hot Indian sun. And then one reaches the area where the stupa stands—complete in its symmetry, its exact sense of geometry. (Fig. 1.)

We may approach it from the east gate, as the rising sun approaches the world—perhaps drawn by the incredible richness of its carving: the tree goddess, elephants, peacocks—past the guardian of the gate. Now within the sacred precincts you may move around the base of the stupa on the ground level. You may also climb the stairs to a second level. There

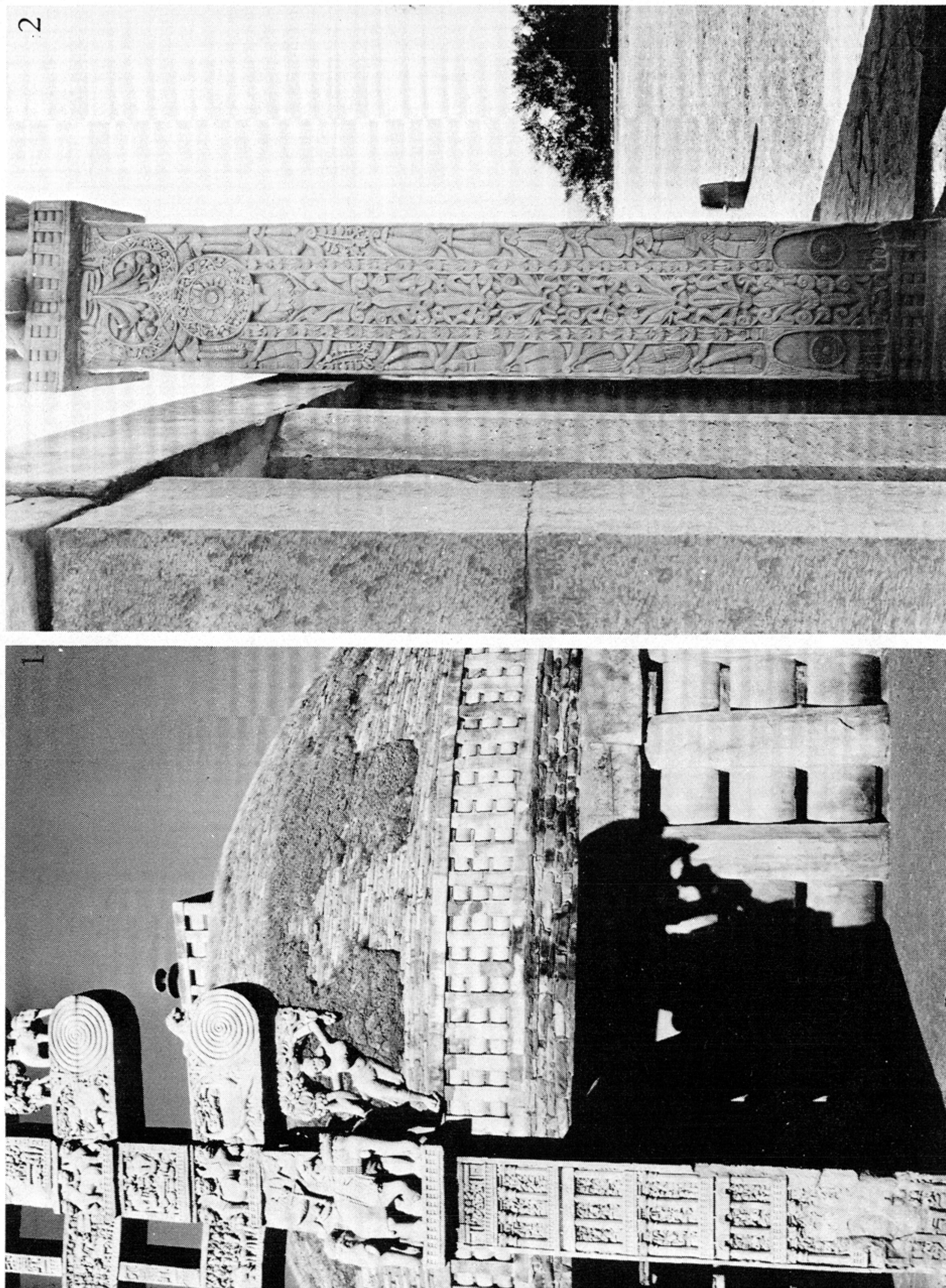


Figure 1. Sānchī. The Great Stupa. Detail showing central mound and part of east gate. Note both outer railing at ground level and upper-level railing.

Figure 2. Sānchī. North Gate. Buddha footprints and ornament symbolizing Buddha.

you are above the world. You may look back on where you have come, at the tree goddess who with a ritual kick, as in a dance, sends the sap of life coursing through the mango tree and makes it rich in fruit. But perhaps more than the knowledge of the richness of the world is the sense of its extension. You are not only at the top of the hill but close to the top of the stupa.

From here the world stretches out before you as far as the eye can see—here across the great flat plain toward the site of the ancient city of Vidisā, which certainly supplied the patronage that made possible the monastic and temple complex at Sānchī.

What we have been describing at Sānchī is a most significant act of worship—the act of circumambulation. By this the worshipper allies himself physically and psychically with the core of Buddhist experience. One becomes, quite literally, joined with the stupa—its circularity, its centrality, its commanding position in relation to the world that lies calm around it. Like the sun, whose path one has been imitating, one is a part of all one surveys. But one rules not by virtue of the fact of domination but because by a sympathetic act one has become magically joined to the forces that move through the earth and sky. One is a part of the universe. The notion of separation has been shattered. As the Buddha is reported to have said when he himself attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the tree of Enlightenment at Bodhgaya:

Seeking the builder of the house
I have run my course
Never again shalt thou build me a house
All of thy rigging is broken,
The peak of the roof is shattered:
Its aggregations passed away,
Mind has reached the destruction of cravings.¹

At Sānchī one is reminded of the presence of the Buddha only by symbol, for example, a triune form standing for the Buddha, his law, his church. One may also find a lotus-ornamented circle, a wheellike shape, and the wheel may remind him of the Buddha's teaching or the "turning of the wheel of the law." Again he may be indicated by footprints,

¹A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism* (New York, n.d.), p. 54.

on which a wheel may be carved. Above the footprints rises a stylized tree with the same circle, the same triune form. (Fig. 2.) This turns the Buddha into a kind of hymn of ornament, from feet to the triple head.

But of course the greatest statement of the Buddha is the stupa itself. It says what is always true about Buddhist imagery in India. It draws us into the nature of the universe. Our triumph is the triumph of being joined to the forces of life—not just human life, but all life.

Rollo May, the contemporary psychiatrist, notes how modern man has repressed death: "The ways we repress death and its symbolism are amazingly like the ways the Victorians repressed sex. Death is obscene, unmentionable, pornographic . . . death is a nasty mistake."² The opposite could be said of the early Buddhists. The symbol of death, the tomb, has become the vehicle for telling us that we are part of a far wider life. To know this is to pass beyond mortality, untruth, the separation that appears to be death.

For some reason in the history of Buddhism, symbol was not enough. This I will not attempt to explain but only state the fact. Sometime (the exact time is not yet clear) about the first or early second century A.D., a Buddhist image in human form was, so to speak, "invented." We see this change at the site of Amarāvati where one can find reliefs that indicate the Buddha only as a symbol, while other similar reliefs show him in human form. We see the form of the Buddha even more clearly in the art of central and northwestern India during the early centuries A.D. in images associated with territory controlled by the great Kushan Empire. Thus at Muttra, or Mathurā, the Buddha is carved in characteristic red sandstone. In any one of a number of sites in the Northwest, at least as far as what is now Afghanistan, are Buddhas generally given the style name of Gandhāra. They are characterized by the brittle, dark grey stone or schist out of which they are carved or, alternatively, by a clean white stucco which was used for countless other images from this same wide region. Sometimes these stucco images carry the type-site name of Hadda in Afghanistan.

But to return to India proper, by the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., a mature, certain and, by all standards, *ideal*

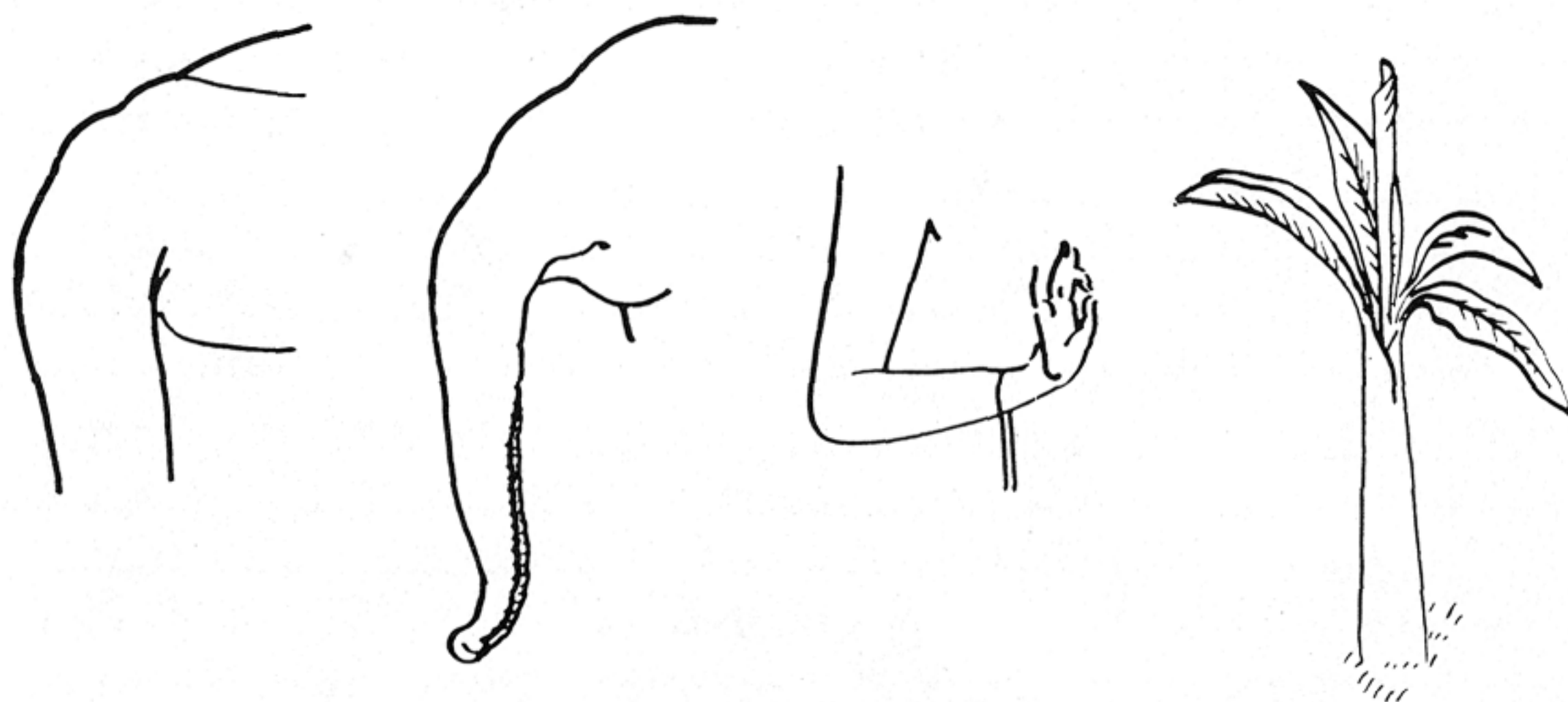
²Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York, 1969), p. 106.

type of Buddha had evolved. This brings us to the time in history when much of India was under the control of the Gupta dynasty. Some of the most beautiful of these Gupta images come from the Buddhist holy shrine of Sārnāth, the place where the historical Buddha first began to preach—or, as it was said, turn the wheel of the law. A famous image showing the first preaching may be found in the Sārnāth Museum. (Fig. 3.)

What marks such a Buddha—again from the fourth to fifth centuries—is the sense of perfection it conveys: perfection of shape, perfection of proportion, and above all perfection of surface, smooth resilient areas of curving stone only occasionally, and very subtly, interrupted by lines, as the fall of drapery from the Buddha's left hand. These perfections make us wonder if we are looking at a man at all. Indeed the Gupta Buddha is a far cry from what we normally think of as specific human form, as a startling comparison with the van Eyck's exact Adam and Eve from the Ghent Altarpiece in fifteenth century Flanders might remind us.

Indian perfections would seem to carry the image beyond human possibilities. Specific human form is just not made this way. On examining it closer we are able to understand what ideas went into the carving of such a Buddha, and we can affirm that the artist was not directly concerned with human anatomy at all. Rather he created his forms from an understanding of the beauty of certain shapes observed in nature. Thus the shoulder may be likened to the strength found in the trunk of an elephant, the arm compared to a plantain. (Fig. 4.) The torso is seen to be as powerful as that of the lion. Rings of flesh on the neck are like the curves of a conch shell. The chin suggests a bean. Eyes are like a leaf, a flower bud, or the shifting contour of a bird.

The Gupta statue from Sārnāth actually shows the Buddha in the act of preaching. But we can be sure from what we have suggested that it is no man. He is of superhuman scale (as witness the small size of the listening disciples below), but more than that, since this kind of form (as we have seen in the last examples) has been created from a series of shapes drawn out of nature, what we had thought a kind of man becomes in essence something related to all living things—by extension the very universe itself. His form may be embellish-



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Figure 3. Buddha preaching the First Sermon, Gupta Period. Archaeological Museum, Sarnath.

Figure 4. Natural shapes suggestive of the ideal Buddha-form. The elephant trunk, the plantain (after a drawing by Tagore).

ed by ornament, as in the halo above his head or the throne on which he sits, but basically the richness of the world is in his own being. Like the stupa of three, four, or five hundred years earlier, his form is a form which transcends mortality through the strength of its connections with the perfect continuities of nature. To be at one with the universe is to leave behind the ephemeral nature of specific flesh. A more real power has been found.

This affirmation of where true strength lies clings to the nature of Buddhist imagery wherever it is found. But Buddha images are by no means exact repetitions of each other.

One of the most fascinating areas for the study of Buddhist imagery takes us into northwest India and on to Pakistan and Afghanistan—that area I have already mentioned in connection with such style-type names as Gandhāra and Hadda. What has most intrigued Westerners about the early art of this region has been its apparent connections with styles of western Mediterranean art—both Greek and Roman. Thus one can find countless suggestive carvings that recall classical parallels: a nude, an Athena-like goddess, a winged god, the arrangement of figures in a relief (not unlike that of first- or second-century Rome). Efforts have thus been made to see the Buddha from this area as a kind of classical philosopher-god—a simple human figure having ideal human capabilities.

One of the problems, however, in analyzing Gandhāran art from a classical point of view is that it does not quite come off as a truly classical Western art. There are other ingredients that went into forming it. So much so that the French archeologist, Daniel Schlumberger, in a brilliant analysis of this type of expression, has given it the broad term, "Non-Mediterranean Greek Art."³ It is the non-Mediterranean aspects which I think should most concern us and in this sense non-Mediterranean might be translated into Asian, or even more specifically "central Asian."

An image which may indicate what I mean comes from a site in Afghanistan, not too far north of the capital, Kabul, which goes under the modern name of Shotorak. (Fig. 5.) The monastery of Shotorak was on an impressive site at a rocky outcropping overlooking the Panjir River and the moun-

³Daniel Schlumberger, "Descendants non-Méditerranéens de l'art Grec," *Syria* 37 (1960), 131-166, 253-318.



Figure 5. Dipankara Buddha. From Shotorak, Kabul Museum.

tain range that leads to the Hindu Kush. It was located outside of the famous early capital city of Kāpisa-Begrām, a center of Kushan rule in this part of Asia. It was possibly a monastery that received royal patronage. This then is an image that must reflect the height of taste and achievement at a time probably close to the third century A.D.

The image itself is about three feet high ($32\frac{7}{8}$ inches). Its qualities are perhaps not immediately apparent. Expecting a more graceful, supple form, particularly after having seen Gupta India, one is perhaps misled. But consider what must have been the artist's purposes.

We are made aware of the superhuman scale of the Buddha by the lesser scale of the figures around it, like the seated, preaching Buddha from Sārnāth. Actually, the Buddha is being worshipped. Lotus flowers are being offered, and they hang over him in a ring of glory above his head. A figure is bowing down at his feet (at the lower left). In fact the Buddha is treading on his hair which is spread out like a carpet upon the ground. We can further identify the Buddha as being a Buddha of the past with the name, Dipankara, the last of twenty-four previous Buddhas; and the principle figure who is worshipping him and whom we see in several different poses is none other than the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, in a previous incarnation. Thus we are taken back in time and shown a Buddha not only majestic in size but one whose power is representative of a series of Buddhas who transcend time. The power of Buddhism is not tied just to a specific historical personality. We are to see this stocky, strong Buddha as a kind of insistent vision. As partial affirmation of this, fire springs from the shoulders. At the same time, it is an image of reassurance. The great webbed hand, with its wheellike symbol, is raised in the gesture denoting freedom from fear.

But most of all, the power of the Shotorak image rests in its formal qualities. The stocky proportions, the heavy limbs and torso, the exact firm ridges that denote the drapery—all combine to create a notion of unshakable majesty. Although it is stylistically and geographically part of Gandhāran art as a whole, there is little here to suggest the classical Mediterranean world so often related to that style. Any flavor of a Greek or Roman philosopher is far away. Dipankara Buddha

is a transcendent being having little to do with the ordinary human world. Its nonhuman (godlike) qualities, however, have been attained in a manner rather different from that which brought about the smoothly harmonious transcendence of the images of Gupta India. This can all be summed up in a comparison—on the one hand the head of the Shotorak Buddha, on the other the head of the Sārnāth Preaching Buddha of the Gupta period.

As sculpture, two basic factors contribute to the difference. Quite simply, one is the three-dimensional treatment of form; the other is the way line is related to that form. The Shotorak head—as you can recall of the whole figure—is distinctive because of its solid, blocky nature. Whether it be the hair, the face, the neck, or the chest, there is an undeniable sense of rigid mass—a special powerful insistent force. On the other hand, the Gupta head, while clearly a part of the same notion of what the Buddha should be like, is in many ways its opposite. Three-dimensional form is very much there, but it is infinitely softer, smoother, more gentle in its subtle variations of surface. The contrast is confirmed when we consider the other basic factor I have mentioned—line. Consistent with the smoothness of surface, line on the Gupta head is treated with the utmost subtlety. On hair, face, neck, and chest, it gently defines detail and seems to melt into the form so as at times to be scarcely perceptible. For the Shortorak head the opposite would seem to be true. Line stands out as firm drapery ridges on the chest. The hair is a series of deep and distinct waves. Lines such as at the neck and eyebrows reinforce by their sureness marked breaks in the continuity of planes—planes which in the Gupta head flow one into the other to create a sense of easy transitions. As a total image, as well, the rigidity of the Shortorak example—royal Kushan art—stands in clear opposition to the flowing suppleness of Gupta examples—imperial Indian art.

Moving further into the mountain vastness of central Afghanistan, one reaches the valley of Bāmiyān. High in the mountains, it was a resting place in the trade routes that led north and south, east and west. It was visited, for example, by the great Chinese Buddhist pilgrims who in the heyday of Buddhist glory trekked the long miles across central Asia to visit the holy spots of India. Most famous of these was the

Chinese monk, Hsüan-tsang. He was in Bāmiyān in 632. In commenting on the religious devotion of the inhabitants of the valley, he also has given us a brief description of the imagery that was there:

To the northeast of the royal city is a mountain, on the declivity of which is placed a stone figure of Buddha, erect, in height 140 or 150 feet. Its golden hues sparkle on every side, and its precious ornaments dazzle the eyes by their brightness To the east . . . there is a standing figure of Sakyamuni Buddha . . . in height 100 feet.⁴

Now no longer dazzling the eye with gold, but in noble and majestic ruin, the two great Buddhas still stand a quarter of a mile apart, the cliff around them pockmarked with the remains of countless caves—shrines, chapels, retreats for the Buddhist community that once flourished here.

The image of Shakyamuni (that is the historical Buddha) is the image that is to the east. Now measured as being 120 feet high, it seems to have been consciously placed in its niche (actually carved out of the living rock) so as to be at the center of the now-eroded mountain that rises around it. (Fig. 6.) Although carved out of the living rock, it was finished with a layer of stucco and originally at least embellished with paint.

As you come closer you realize the nature of the carving—or perhaps one should more accurately say the modelling—how the stucco forms the ridges that suggest the drapery clinging to the massive body. From close up they stand out rather sharply. Yet still the ridges melt somewhat gradually into the hollows of the drapery.

From the point of view of style (direction in which style moves), it is appropriate here to shift to the surface of the far larger Buddha a quarter of a mile to the west. This is the Buddha that towers not a mere 120 feet but all of 175 feet in its similarly cut niche. Here, however, you can detect how much more sharply the ridges are formed as they lie like carefully looped strings (on this scale, great ropes) swinging across the core of the Buddha's form. The 175-foot Buddha is generally thought to have been carved some two hundred years after the smaller 120-foot image—possibly in the fifth

⁴Samuel Beal, *Chinese Accounts of India*, translated from the Chinese of Hsuen Tsiang, 3rd ed. (Calcutta, 1963), p. 114.

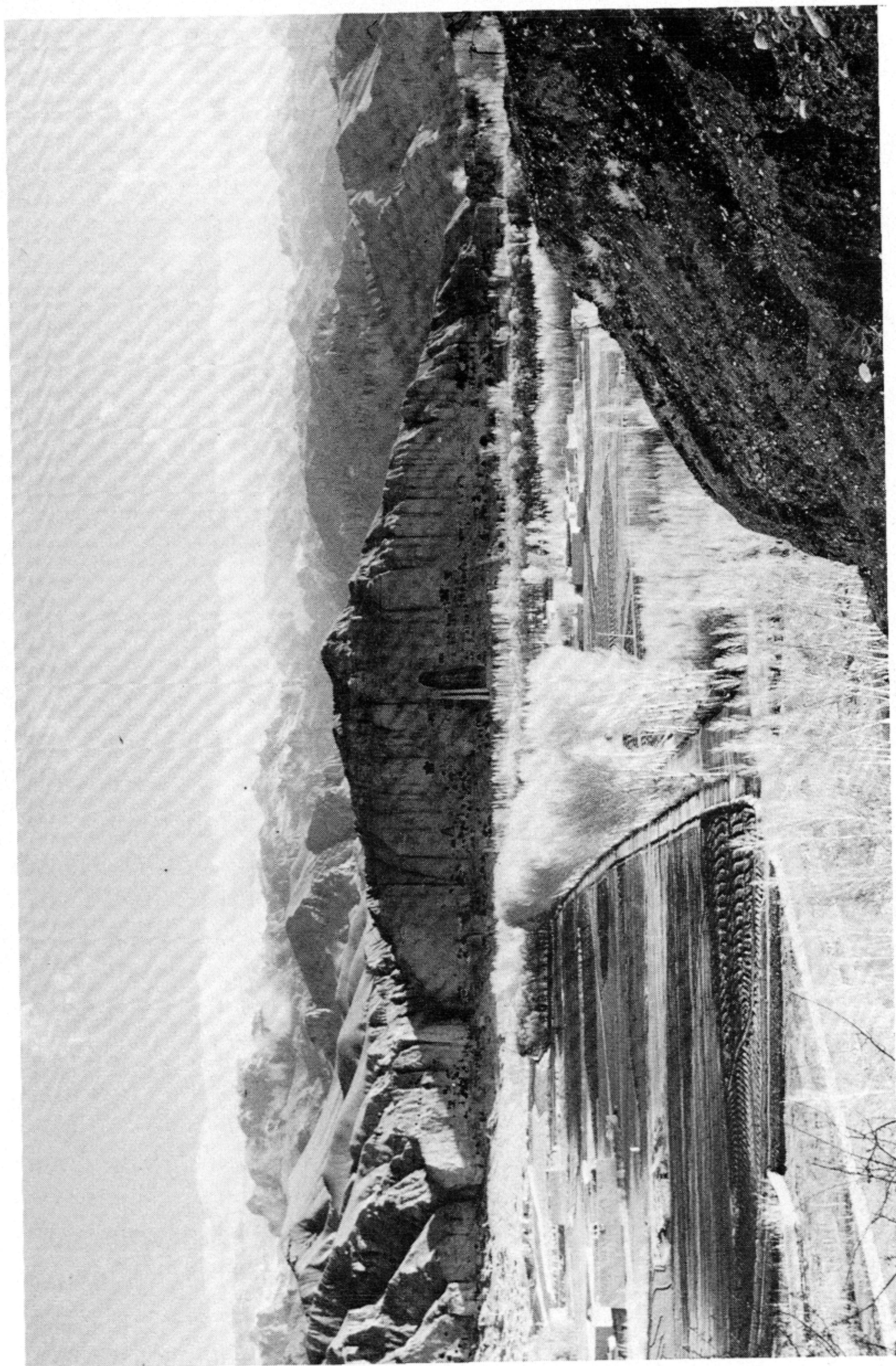


Figure 6. Bāmiyān. Cliff-mountain containing the 120-foot Buddha, Shakyamuni. Distant view from the south suggesting the central position of the Buddha.

century A.D. Differences may thus be said to rest on the fact of historical change, a change of attitude, a development of style. But for our purposes it indicates a desire in a famous central Asian site to create a Buddha, enormously expanded in size, with much the same impact as what we have seen in the Dipankara Buddha from Shotorak. The realization of solid three-dimensioned form creates a rigid, immobile image upon which plays a pattern of line standing out as a separate vital element in the definition of that image.

What is the significance? It is quite simply this: from the point of view of sculptural style, I am suggesting that there are two distinct Buddha types. One we have associated with Gupta India. The other grows out of the milieu that we often connect with the name Gandhāra, and it develops into an expression most justly associated with central Asia. Thus we find it at Shotorak and at Bāmiyān. As one follows the spread of Buddhism into the Far East, there continue to be only these two basic style-types—one type of imagery in which line and form are harmoniously blended and never separate themselves from the whole, the other image where line and form seem to operate as individually distinct elements, creating perhaps rigidities but also a very special type of expressiveness.

On the one hand is an image which in its harmony and use of nonexaggerated proportions is a formally unified figure where line and three-dimensional shapes blend beautifully together. These are images of harmonious reason. The other type is a more broken, interrupted image where, formally, line stands out as line. Three dimensionality is often exaggerated, heavy. There may also be exaggeration of certain parts, such as the hands, or a head. This stylistic type does not stress so much unified harmony as expressive possibilities, which may lead to images that are both authoritarian—positive in their absolute strength—and more emotionally charged. These are the images of faith as opposed to the images of reason.

Art historians generally agree that the art of Buddhist central Asia had a major impact on early Buddhist art in the Far East. We also find art in the Far East that offers stylistic parallels to—and may have been strongly influenced by—the art of Gupta India. Thus the strong aesthetic dichotomy that exists between imagery from the heart of India and imagery from the wide spaces traversed by the trade routes of central

Asia continues in China and Japan. One can check this imagery from reproductions in almost any book on the history of art—more particularly, sculpture—of the Far East.⁵

In the fifth and sixth centuries, art in China was particularly in the north, dominated by a central Asian aesthetic. The T'ang dynasty generally created a marked change and an imagery close to the harmonies of Gupta India. In later times, as in the Sung period, one finds far more detail but at the same time overriding harmonies that lead to a marvelous integrated sense of repose. Still there are reversions to contrary rigidities of form and exaggerated play of line. This is particularly true of archaizing images, as with attempts to revive the legendary original Buddha image, the image made for King Udayana from what is now the Pakistan territory of Swat. A famous Sung example of this type is at Seiryōji in Kyōto.

In Japan is a similar historical pattern: the separate expressiveness of form and line being most evident in the seventh century, harmonies in the eighth. The ninth century continues them, but in a subtle way reverts. One is aware particularly of a massiveness of form that is a special characteristic of early Heian (Jōgan) sculpture. On rather over-massive figures, line may play its part as a contrasting pattern. A clear example of this is to be found in a well-known seated Shaka (Shakyamuni) figure from Murōji. As one moves into later Heian and on to Kamakura Japan, whatever the notion of harmony (which is not lacking), the image has in fact become so stylized as to become again *formal* in a sense not unlike that we first applied to central Asia.

But other than the notion of harmonious unity of form and line, on the one hand, and conscious separate manipulation of form and line on the other, a third factor is at work upon the imagery of later Buddhism. Later Buddhist imagery may be looked upon from another dimension. In the sense of conveying powerful and transcendent feeling, I think it is not

⁵I would suggest, for example, consulting plates in Sherman E. Lee, *A History of Far Eastern Art* (New York, 1964); Robert T. Paine and Alexander C. Soper, *The Art and Architecture of Japan* (Baltimore, 1955, 1960); Laurence Sickman and Alexander C. Soper, *The Art and Architecture of China* (Baltimore, 1956, 1960); Oswald Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture*, 4 vols. (London, 1925); Michael Sullivan, *An Introduction to Chinese Art* (London, 1961); William Watson, *Sculpture of Japan, from the fifth to the fifteenth century* (London, 1959); Wilbur Willets, *Foundations of Chinese Art* (London, 1965).

unfair to suggest that this Buddhist imagery of the Far East (of course there is none in India where it disappeared entirely) loses a great deal. I am speaking, somewhat arbitrarily, of icons from about the eleventh and twelfth centuries, on even to the present day. They tend to be more detailed; as such they are closer to a more specific earthly experience; they often tend to be more relaxed; they are less grand. If they are archaistic, they are over rigid and dry. Similarly, they lose power.

The general trend in this later, more detailed realization of the Buddha is to bring Buddha back to earth, to see him again in the specific guise of a mortal. Thus to see the Buddha wrapped in the frailty of human flesh is one of the most important elements in his imagery. A beautiful small statue of wood, lacquer, and gold in the Detroit Museum is a clear case of the Buddha represented thus as an ascetic. (Fig. 7.) If the Buddha fasts, he grows thin and emaciated as we would grow thin and emaciated. This statue was made sometime in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The same kind of Buddha may be seen in a painting by the famous Chinese artist, Liang K'ai, of the thirteenth century. It is now in the Tōkyō National Museum and shows the Buddha, that is Shakyamuni, coming out of the mountain after a period of such ascetic contemplation. Again the frailty of human flesh is apparent.

The effect of this effort to see Buddha as a specific man is of course to bring him closer to us. He is no longer the perfect reflection of the universe. He no longer has the power of massive physical form. He is no longer an other-worldly vision whom we approach through a transcendent act of faith. He is an intensified version of us.

No longer an image of perfection, has he indeed lost his power? I would suggest that the power has not gone, that the essential Buddhism has not gone, but that the message has shifted its focus. Becoming more specific, becoming more human, whatever power there may be has to do with the existence of a particular psychological force. Like a Rembrandt portrait, the power of the Buddha now rests in what we can sense from the particular personalized image.

Another aspect of this trend is that the nature of Buddhism may spread to other images that exemplify the Buddha-idea.

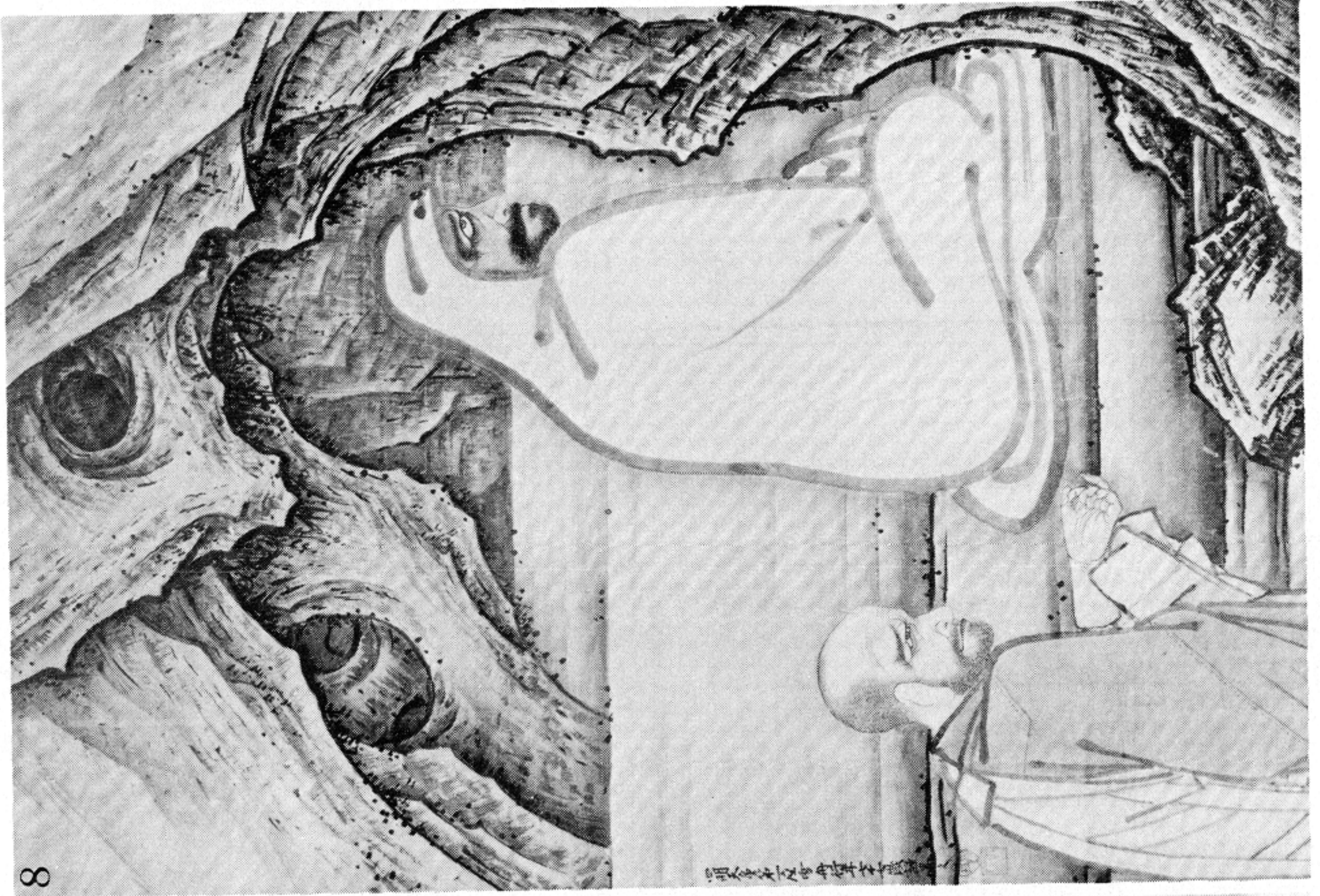


Figure 7. Shakyamuni as an Ascetic. Lacquered Wood. Yüan Dynasty. The Detroit Institute of Arts.
Figure 8. Daruma and Eka. By Sesshū. Dated 1496. Saienji.

Heroes other than Shakyamuni take on a similar significance. Liang K'ai painted not only Shakyamuni but also other sages, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, with much the same general intent. Thus still surviving by his hand are masterful images of the Chinese T'ang poet, Li Po, and the Buddhist sage, Hui-neng. This type of imagery may lead to a particular scene involving the confrontation of great images, or perhaps more accurately images now in the guise of particular people. Perhaps the most powerful example of this is found in a great Japanese painting by Sesshū of the late fifteenth century owned by Sainenji in Japan. (Fig. 8.) (It was shown in 1970 in an exhibition of Buddhist Zen art at the Boston Museum.) Here are painted not Buddhas in the strictest sense but heroes from the Zen sect of Buddhism who embody (as they saw it) the complete spirit of the Buddha—Daruma (to use the Japanese term for Bodhidharma), and Eka (or Hui-k'o), a Chinese monk.

The story is that Daruma, having arrived in China in the sixth century, told the emperor and his Buddhist followers that they were wasting their time in ordinary Buddhist worship such as their devotion to ordinary images. He went off and sat facing a cliff for nine years—the almost ritual act of “wall-gazing” said to have taken place at the Shao-lin Temple on sacred Mount Sung, a mountain traditionally placed in the center of China. (Is this not to be compared to the centrality of Shakyamuni in the mountain cliff at Bāmiyān?) Nothing would stir the great sage from the pure isolation of his retreat. A would-be disciple, Eka, could not convince him of his sincerity and hence his worthiness to be instructed in this new wisdom until he proved it by cutting off his arm. This is the somewhat incomprehensible and grisly scene that is visible in the scroll—Eka in the corner offering his arm to the great motionless sage.

The artist, Sesshu, has caught the psychological struggle—the contrast between the undisturbed certainty of Bodhidharma (Daruma), the sage who has attained wisdom, and the angular sense of struggle that is in the would-be disciple who seeks to attain that wisdom. It is the same essential concentrated contrast down to the very face or eye of each figure. Strictly, no Buddha is shown here, but the enigma of a strange kind of Buddhist wisdom is revealed.

One wonders if we have not returned to where we began, for a clear notion of what the Buddha looked like once more eludes us. Buddha no longer has the imposing objective authority of Bāmiyān or Shotorak. He no longer is seen in that harmonious combination of ideal shapes, the beautiful blending of form and line that we first saw in Gupta India. He has seemingly left the temple. As an eighteenth century Chinese poet lamented:

No monk lives at the old temple, the Buddha has toppled
to the floor;
One Bell hangs high, bright with evening sun.
Sad that when only a tap is needed, no one now dares
To rouse the notes of solemn music that cram its
ancient frame.⁶

In becoming particularized, secularized, does Buddha not once again lose his objective form? We are at a point not far from the earliest beginnings. There is no objective god. There is only a way, which each individual, as with the original Buddha whose likeness we cannot know, must discover for himself.

⁶Quoted by Arthur F. Wright (from Waley, *Yüan Mei*), *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford, London, 1959), p. 95.