

“A Study on the Integration of Persian God and Images of Buddha” Sources of the Early Buddha Image and Its Spread to East Asia*

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SYNCRETISM OF RELIGIONS

Syncretism of Buddhism and Persian Religions emerged at the time of the Kushan empire (50BC-250AD). The actual statues of Buddha images first appeared at Gandhāra (Peshawar, Pakistan) and Mathurā in India 500 years after Śākyamuni Buddha's Nirvāṇa. In the beginning, making images of Buddha was prohibited. In the mean time, Buddha was symbolized as a Bodhi tree or a Dharma Cakra marked on the feet of Buddha. However, at the time of King Kaniṣka, people of Kushan wanted to realize the actual images of Buddha for worship instead of symbols of Buddha. In fact, Buddha never came to Gandhāra but the Kushans created the *Dīpaṃkara Jātaka*, one of the life stories of Buddha on the relief and statue at Gandhāra. At that time, Gandhāra was the center of the silk road for exchanging silk from China and gold from Rome. The Kushans obtained a great fortune as a result of such trade, because the Kushan empire was located in the center of such trade road. When they got rich, they started wishing to be born in heaven after their death. In the case of Zoroaster, hell was the destiny for anyone who did bad deeds, not heaven. When they met with the Buddhist sūtras, they might have been healed by Buddhism, believing that they would be assured birth in heaven by performing Bodhisattva's ideals like Six Perfections. So they offered stūpas, built temples, drew the images of Buddha or donated the statues of Buddha. We can see the syncretism of religions of both Zoroaster and Buddhism in those images at the time of Kushan.

1. The first meditation image of Siddhārtha.

Let us examine the leading Gandhāra arts of Buddha. First I would like to show the image of the seated Śākyabodhisattva of Gandhāra.

Plate 1 & 2



The upper image (2-3rd AD Peshawar Museum) is the seated Śākyabodhisattva before he got enlightenment. The lower one is the enlarged pedestal where we can see Śuddhodana, the father of Gotama Siddhārtha in the left corner and the symbolic fire of Zoroaster in the center. This is one of

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the examples of syncretism of both religions: Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. This statue was said to be made around the 2-3rd century by the Greco Gandhāra which originated from Greco Bactria, the descendants of the Greeks.

In 1964, Dr. Paul Bernal, a French archeologist, found the left foot of Zeus at Ai-Khanum in Afghanistan. Last year, Japanese Broadcasting NHK published computer graphic of Zeus based on the image of the coin at that time. The Greek god has a halo of light at the back of the head. Greek Bactrians worshipped the god as their Zeus while the Persians worshipped as Ahura-Mazda, the praising god Ahura. When Alexander the Great conquered Central Asia in 331 B.C., he never rejected the Persian culture because he had the sense of Hellenistic culture of the Greeks. According to Paul Bernal, there were about sixty thousand Greeks residing at Ai-Khanum. The old Greek city was there at least until 168 B.C. before the Kushan conquered the city. Since then, the Kushan inherited the Hellenistic culture.

2. King Kaniṣka's Gold Coin and Emitting Flame Buddha.

Zoroaster had a theory of good and bad deities. Hence, only God can decide the destiny of human life after death. King Kaniṣka was not only a ruler but he also admired the Buddha. He might have encountered a passage of the *Aṅguttara nikāya*¹: "Although sentient beings might have evil karma through his body, speech, and mind, they would be reborn in heaven while being free from greed, hatred, and stupidity just by being mindful of the virtue of Tathāgata at his death bed."

He should have been delighted to know such a passage, saying that he would be reborn in heaven after his death. He asked the Greek Gandhāra sculptor to make Emitting Flame Buddha image, beside issuing the gold Kaniṣka coin. You will see the clear flames emitting from the King's shoulder as well as Buddha's shoulder.

Plate
3 & 4



The halo of the Blazing Shoulder Buddha has a double circle fire like saw fangs, i.e. the sun. This image of Emitting Flame Buddha clearly shows the syncretism of Zoroaster and Buddhism. The great translator Kumārajīva (344-413)² translated the *Amitābha Sūtra*. He mentioned the name of the above Blazing Shoulder Buddha three times in the sūtra. The section of praising Buddhas in the six directions, especially at the South, North, and Upper directions is as follows:

“Śāriputra, in the **Southern World** there are Sun Moon Lamp Buddha, Renowned Light Buddha, **Great Blazing Shoulder Buddha**, Sumeru Lamp Buddha, Measureless Exertion Buddha, and many other buddhas of

¹ *Aṅguttara nikāya* 32 T2, p.725b

² T12,p347b25, p347c6, p348a1

equal greatness, their number as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River...

Śāriputra, in the **Northern World** there are **Blazing Shoulders Buddha**, Most Excellent Sound Buddha, Difficult to Injure Buddha, Sun Birth Buddha, Net Brightness Buddha, and many other Buddhas of equal greatness, their number as numerous as the sands of the Ganges river..."

Śāriputra, in the **Zenith World**, there are Brahma Voice Buddha, Star King Buddha, Fragrant Summit Buddha, Fragrant Light Buddha, **Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha**, Various Colored Jewel Flower Garland Body Buddha, Śāla Tree King Buddha, Precious Flower Virtue Buddha, Discernment of All Meaning Buddha, Like Mount Sumeru Buddha and many other Buddhas of equal greatness, their number as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River..."

Professor Hikata Ryusho³ says in his essay :

"Xuan Zang translated the term Mahā arci-skandha into "Great Light Aggregate" in the Chinese text *Shosan Jodobutsu shoujukyo Sūtra*. That is flaming aggregate. Why did Kumārajīva translate the Sanskrit word arci-skandha into Chinese as Blazing Shoulder Buddha? Most probably he had seen the actual statues or paintings of emitting frame Buddha from its shoulder in his residing area around Kuccha even though 'skandha' has a meaning of shoulder, too."

3. Bamiyan Buddhas and the recent discovery of Kharoṣṭhī fragments.

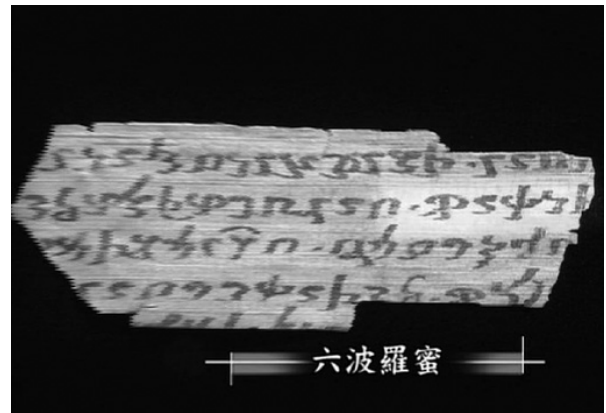
Several years ago, we heard terrible news that some of the Taliban destroyed the great Bamiyan Buddhas on March 11, 2001. Ironically, the above mentioned Blazing Shoulders Buddha image and

ten thousands of Kharoṣṭhī fragments were found in the Bamiyan caves. Professor Richard Solomon found the Kharoṣṭhī words 'Śaṭ-pāramitā' or six perfections among them dated around 2nd century at a joint research at Oslo. The script was written on birch tree bark or sheepskin. The following is the article that appeared in the Japanese Newspaper Asahi on September 5th 2003. You can see the Kharoṣṭhī letters on the sheepskin in this article.

Plates 5 & 6



Śaṭ-pāramitā



4. Dīpaṃkara Jātaka and seated Maitreya Bodhi-sattva from Gandhāra around 2-3rd century.

This relief shows Megha (future Buddha) purchasing flowers from the lady Prakṛti (future Yaśodharā), and offering flowers to Dīpaṃkara. Kneeling, Megha extends his long hair to the earth so that Dīpaṃkara does not get in the mud. Megha

³ Hikata Ryusho, 'Blazing Shoulder Buddha in the Amitābha Sūtra,' (Memorial Edition for celebrating Yamaguchi's 60th birthday, the collection of essays of the Indian and Buddhist Studies, 1955), p.127

in the air worships Buddha, joining his palms together. As a result, Dīpaṃkara predicted Megha to be a Buddha in the future. The right relief is the seated Maitreya Bodhisattva extending his right palm (getting rid of fear sign) and holding a water jar with his left hand. Again, we see the fireplace of Zoroaster under his seat.



Plate 7

5. *Dīpaṃkara Jātaka* with the Brāhmaṇa boy (the future Śākyamuni) Sumegha, Gandhāra style 3rd-4th A.D. from Shotorak.

You will notice the emitting flames from Dīpaṃkara's shoulders. The fusion of the flame, which was regarded by the Kushans as the symbol of the regal power, into Buddhist iconography took place nowhere else but in the Kapisi or Begram region. This is the birthplace of King Milinda who debated on the Buddhist issues against Rev. Nāgasena in the 2nd century B.C. According to the *Ajātaśatru*⁴ *Sūtra*, it is said that Śākyamuni in his previous life spread his hair for the sake of Dīpaṃkara, and Dīpaṃkara admired his behavior assuring him

with his prediction. And the *Lotus*⁵ *Sūtra* quotes the Dīpaṃkara twice as follows:

After making offerings to various Buddhas, they shall follow them in treading the Great path. In succession they shall be able to achieve Buddhahood, receiving prophecies in turns. The last of them, a god among gods, shall be called the Buddha Torch-Burner (Dīpaṃkara), Guide of seers, Savior of incalculable multitudes.

I have been guiding and benefiting the beings. Good men! In this interval, I preached of the Buddha Torch-Burner and others (Dīpaṃkara Tathāgata- prabhṛthayaḥ).⁶



Plate 8

Dr. Nakamura Hajime⁷ presumed that the expression “prodigal son” in the *Lotus Sūtra* and the descriptions of *Gokuraku* (extremely joyful world) in the *Amitābha Sūtra*, such as “The floors of the pools are covered with sands of gold, silver, lapis-lazuli and crystal,” speak of a social background where much Roman gold circulated in the North East of India at that time.

⁴ T15, 405a18, 22

城の東方二里のところ卒塔婆の三百余尺のものがある。無憂王（アショーカ王）が建てたものである。石を畳んで非常に高く、彫刻をりっぱに作ってある。[むかし] 釈迦菩薩が燃燈佛にお会いしたとき、鹿皮の布を地に敷き、髪を敷きひろげて燃燈佛の通路の泥を覆い、受記（未来に仏となるという予言）を得たところである。・・・城の西南十余里に卒塔婆がある。[むかし] 如来が中インドから虚空を凌いで遊行教化し、この国に遺跡をのこした。人々はそのあとを慕ってこのありがたい塔を建てたのである。その東、遠からざるところに卒塔婆がある。釈迦菩薩がむかし燃燈佛にお会いし、ここで花を買って燃燈佛に供養したところである。」水谷真成『大唐西域記1』東洋文庫653（平凡社、2000）pp. 206-7

⁵ 妙法蓮華經序 (T09, 5a29~b3: Leon Hurvitz, Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (Lotus Sūtra) (NY: Columbia Univ., 1976), p. 20

⁶ 妙法蓮華經如來壽量品第十六 (T09, 42b28~42c01) Leon Hurvitz, p. 238

⁷ 中村元「浄土教の世界思想史的意義」大谷学報44号第一号昭和39年], pp. 66-7

Most probably, such Mahāyāna sūtras like the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Amitābha Sūtra* emerged around Gandhāra, as we read such expressions in those sūtras translated by Kumārajīva from Kharoṣṭhī.

6. Greek Zeus and Persian Aframazda

The philosophy of the Parsi Religion is based on the teachings of the prophet of the Parsis, Zoroaster, who follows the wise sayings of Mazda, the praises of Ahura. He contemplated the beams of fire with a most pious mind nearly 3,500 years ago. The current area of Afghanistan and Pakistan was dominated by the worship of Greek gods and Persian gods before the Christian Period. In a recent archeological survey, Dr. Paul Bernal found the old Greek city Alexander named Ai-Khanoum at the delta area by the river Am Darya and Kokcha, which is located near the border between Afghanistan and

Tajikistan. The area is supposed to be the birth place of Zoroaster 3,500 years ago. There were about six thousands Greek settlers there up until 145 B.C., 200 years after Alexander the Third occupied the area around 334 B.C. Archeologist Paul Bernal found the left foot of Zeus made of marble there. The strange Zeus statue took his seat on the chair just the same as the figure in the coin, i.e. the god with the halo, the symbol of the Persian god. The Greek Settlers worshipped the same god as Zeus while the inhabitants of Central Asia worshipped the god Mithra as the sun god Ahura Mazda. Alexander the Great never rejected Persian gods, rather he adopted the Persian Shrine to build his huge palace. The Hellenists adopt whatever they think reasonable for their life style.

Plates 9 and 10 are the marble left foot of Zeus and his image imagined.

Here we see another syncretic aspect of Greek Zeus and Persian Aframazda.



Plate 9



Plate 10

7. Bamiyan Canopy and Kaniṣka Relics Casket

Finally, I would like to show you the Bamiyan Canopy of the Great East Buddha and the Kaniṣka Relics Casket.



Plate 11

The above photo is the East Great Buddha (35m) of Bamiyan which does not exist anymore. The left photo in the next page, plate 12, is supposed to be the right palm of the Buddha lacquered gold.



Plate 12

When the Chinese Translator Xuan Zang (pilgrim to India, 629-644) visited the great Bamiyan Buddhas, the stone statue might have been lacquered in gold on the stucco. This photo is enough to prove it. This hand is now kept at Musee national des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, Paris. Xuan Zang⁸ says,

“In the North-East of the King Castle Mountain, there is a Standing Buddha, the stone’s height is about 140 or 150 feet and the statue is shining gold.”

The top right picture (plate 13) is the exact copy of the canopy that was drawn by Jan Karl in 1935 from the ceiling of East Great Buddha. The halo design of an encircled saw indicates the sun god. The image wearing a cloak is the sun god Mithra. The god was carried by four horses. I would like to draw attention to the two *hamṣa* geese above the god image. The geese are migrating birds from India and they hatch around the Bamiyan oasis.



Plate 13

The *hamṣa* birds relief is also seen in the Kaniṣka Relics Casket as follows.



Plate 14

⁸ 大石仏：王城の東北の山の阿に立仏の石像の高さ百四、五十尺（53m）のものがある。金色にかがやき、宝飾がきらきらしている。東に伽藍がある。この国の先の王が建てたものである。伽藍の東に鑿石の釈迦仏の立像の高さ百尺余（35m）のものがある。身を部分に分けて別に鑄造し、合わせてできあがっている。水谷真成『大唐西域記1』東洋文庫653（平凡社、2000）p. 124

8. Haṃsa geese and the system of the Store Consciousness.

Asaṅga (395-470)⁹ says in the *Mahāyānasamgraha* that

“it is just like the *haṃsa* goose who, when drinking, extracts milk from water. In a similar fashion, when worldly states are freed from desire, permeations from non-concentrated realms are eliminated and permeations from states of concentration increase. This is how a worldly conversion of support becomes a world transcendent conversion of support.”

This is the simile of water and milk in the Asaṅga's argument. The *haṃsa* is a goose that can only drink milk out of water but can not drink milk itself. Hearing Permeation (*śrutavāsanā*) like a parasite is imprinted in the Store Consciousness *Ālayavijñāna*. Through the process of accumulating meditation, one can eliminate attachment. He or she can obtain the world transcendent conversion of support. Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (400-480) were brothers living around current Peshawar (Puruṣapura, Gandhāra) around 5th century.

9. Where did Mahāyāna take place in Asia?

The *Shobon Hannyakyo*, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, one of the oldest Mahāyāna sūtras, says that

The Prajñāpāramitā¹⁰ will spread in the south, then in the west and it will spread in the north after the Tathāgata entered Nirvāṇa.

As the Sūtra indicated above, Mahāyāna spread in the North after Buddha had entered Nirvāṇa. Gandhāra was located in the North India. The reason why the halo of Buddha Statue emitting

flame is that the Mahāyāna occurred in Gandhāra where the Kushan dominated there. The Kushan worshipped both Zoroaster and Buddhism as I mentioned above.

10. Mucalinda Routes

In the case of the southern route of communication, Buddhism spread toward South India, such as the image Mucalinda in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and Guardian Nāga in Sri Lanka. Recently our colleague Dr. Yoshiaki Ishizawa, president of Sophia University in Japan, discovered 274 discarded Mucalindas in the Angkor Dynasty Banteay Chmar. The temple is situated in Khum Banteay Chmar, 15km to the north of Thmar Pouk district. The complex was erected under the reign of Jayavarman VII (1181~1219).

The characteristics of the temple are a presentation of the personage of Avalokiteśvara and historical scenes of the battles between the army of Cham and the army of Khmeru. Dr. Yoshiaki Ishizawa discovered amazing numbers of Mucalinda images in 2001 buried 3m underground in the temple compound. He says that Cambodia was a Mahāyāna Buddhist country at the time of the thirteenth century. Current Theravāda Buddhism took place after the 16th century in Cambodia.



Plate 15: Buried Mucalinda at Banteay Temple

⁹ 長尾雅人『撰大乘論和訳と注解』上、講談社、昭和57年) pp. 230-231): Bodhisattva Asaṅga tr. by John P. Keenan. The Summary of the Great Vehicle (Numata Center, 1992), pp.32-3

¹⁰ T8, p. 555b4 : 般若波羅蜜當廣流布北方耶。舍利弗。後五百歲當廣流布北方。

It is interesting to note that the halo of Buddha images from the southern route is mostly of snakes or Nāgas, instead of fire. Snakes are cold blooded. In hot countries like India, Thailand, and Cambodia, the snake was used as a halo for the Buddha, as well as for the god of water for agriculture.



Plate 16: 274 images



Plate 18



Plate 17: Mucalinda



Plate 19



Plate 20

Photos of Plates 18 and 19 are from Thailand and the above photo is from Angkor Tom, Cambodia. These snake halos transformed into dragons in China, Korea and Japan. Snake gods are said to bring water in the East Asian religions.

11. The meeting of the Diamond Maṇḍala with the Embryo Maṇḍala.

The Japanese monk Kūkai (空海 774-835, posthumously granted the title Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師) brought Dual Maṇḍalas, the Daimond Maṇḍala (金剛界曼荼羅) and the Garbha Maṇḍala (胎藏曼荼羅) from Hui-guo (惠果 746-805) at Chang-an (長安) in China. One of the nine square boxes Maṇḍala of the Daimond Realm, Jyojin-ne (成身会) contains the Water God at the upper left corner. The Water God has a snake halo. It is interesting to find that this Diamond Realm Maṇḍala came to China through the ocean Silk Road while the fire halo drawn in the Jimyoin (持明院) right under Chudai-hachiyoin (中台八葉院) of the Garbha



Plate 21



Plate 22

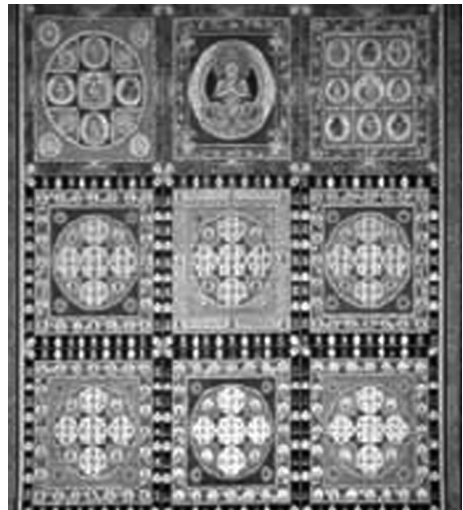


Plate 23



Plate 24

Maṇḍala came from the land Silk Road. The Enlightened Buddha Acala (不動明王) and Gosanze Myoo (降三世明王) lined up there. All of the Myoo class Enlightened Kings have fire halos which were transmitted to China through the land Silk Road to China. Kūkai brought them to Japan around 806 A.D.

12. Udayagiri Stūpa and the four Buddhas of the Vajradhātu Realm Maṇḍala

The *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* is the basic scripture of the Taizo Maṇḍala, and Subhakārasimha (善無畏 637-735) brought the sūtra into China around 716 from Orissa. Another tantric scripture, the *Tattvasaṃgraha* (金剛頂經), is the sūtra that explains how to draw the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, and Vajrabodhi (金剛智 671-741) brought the text to China. Vajrabodhi came to Chang-an in 712 from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa in central India via the ocean Silk Road from India, Sumatera, and Guang Zhou (広州). It is quite exciting that both sūtras and Maṇḍalas were obtained by Chinese monk Hui-guo (746-805) at Chang-an in China. The Japanese monk Kūkai (774-835) was transmitted from Hui-guo to Japan around 806. Sugawara Masaaki, vice president of Wakayamaken Bunkazai Center (和歌山県文化財センター) in Japan, reported his discovery of the Dual Maṇḍala (立体両界曼荼羅) in Orissa in January 1986 from the Udayagiri ruins. Orissa is located 350 km from the bay of Bengal. The great Chinese Translator Xuan Zang 玄奘 (pilgrimage to India, 629-644) visited Udayagiri around the early seventh century. There are famous Buddhist Ruins in Orissa such as Ratnagiri, Lalitagiri, and Udayagiri. Udayagiri has a square monastery that was 34 meters by 34 meters. The Buddha images were there from 9th century according to Indian Archaeology 1986-7 A Review.

We can trace Nāga Gurdian Deities in the four Buddhas of Vajradhātu at Udayagiri Stūpa as follows: look at the bottom Nāgas under the West seated Amitābha, North Mahāvairocana, and the South Ratnasambhava. The Nāgarāja couple support the above sitting Tathāgata from underground. This is one of the historic traces of the Nāga route. Most probably, the Nāga tradition spread to the south east area originally from Mathurā through Udayagiri, Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, to the South Eastern countries. Plate 28 shows the route of the Dual Maṇḍala's travel. The fire route was through the land Silk Road while the Nāga route came from the ocean Silk Road.



Plate 25



無量寿如来 (金)

Plate 26

The above upper photo (Plate 25) is the Amitābha relief of the west side pagoda at Udayagiri and the lower one (Plate 26) is the same Buddha enlarged.



Plate 27

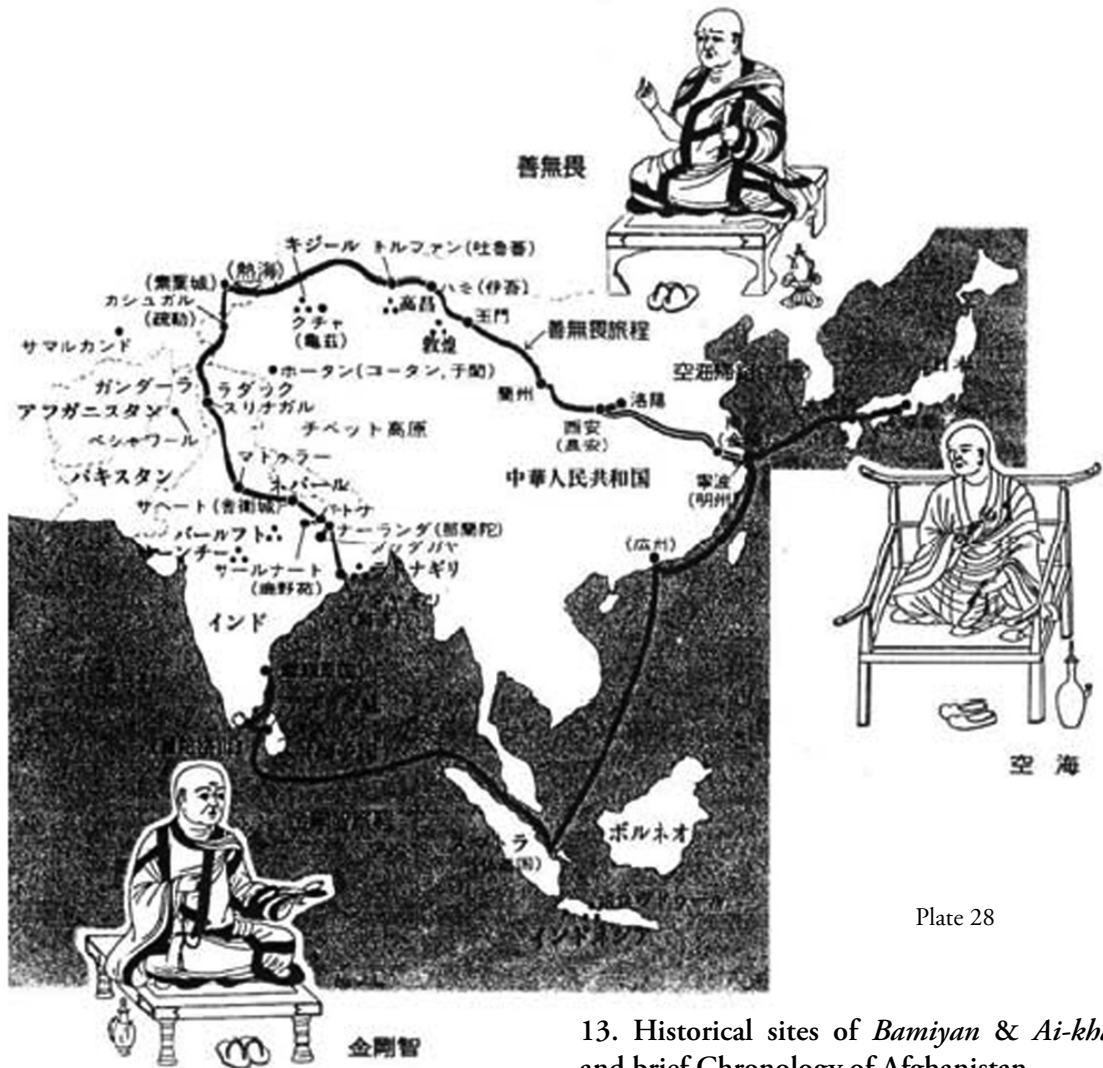


Plate 28

13. Historical sites of *Bamiyan & Ai-khanum* and brief Chronology of Afghanistan.

The map in the previous page (plate 27) shows the location of Udayagiri in Orissa. The above map is the travel routes of the great transmitters of esoteric Buddhism, Subhakārasimha (637-735), Vajrabodhi (671-741) and Kūkai (774-835). Subhakārasimha came from Udayagiri to Chan-an China and he brought the sūtra into China around 716 from Orissa. Vajrabodhi came to China in 712 by way of ocean Silk Road. Finally, Kūkai brought the Mahāvairocana, Tattvasaṃgraha and Dual Maṇḍalas to Japan in 806. Kūkai met his Chinese master Guang Zhou in 804 at Chang-an.

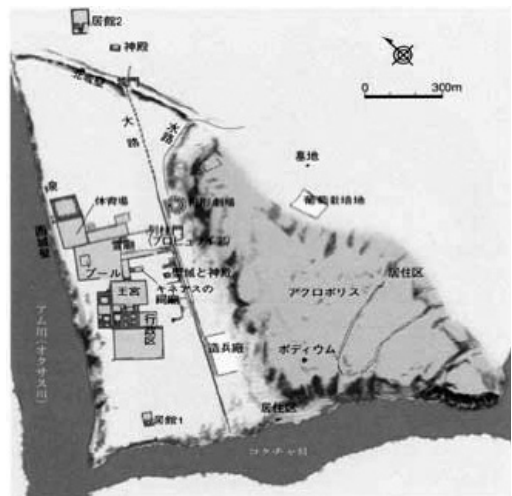


Plate 29

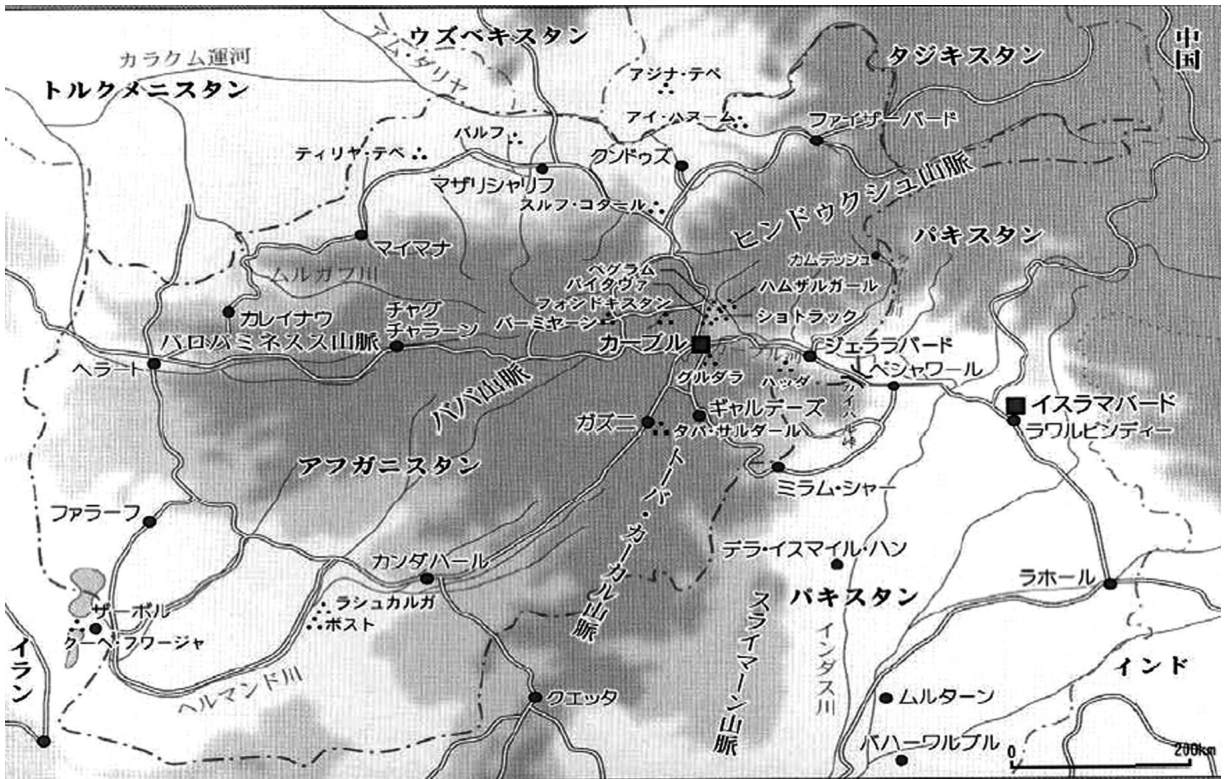


Plate 30

The Great Miracle of Śrāvastī and the ancient chronological table of Afganistan.



Plate 31

Plate 31

Ancient Chronological Table of Afghanistan:

327BC - Ruled by Alexander the Great. Bactria was dominated by his empire.
305BC - Mauryan empire ruled.
250BC頃 - Mauryan emperor Aśoka ruled and spread Buddhism.
250BC～128BC - Bactria empire ruled.
50BC～250AD - Kushan Dynasty ruled.
225年頃～600年代 Sasanian Empire ruled Persia.
630年頃 Xuan Zang visited Bamiyan.

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