The spread of Indian, very particularly Gandhāran motifs along the Silk Roads

This talk examines the spread of Indian, very particularly Gandhāran motifs along the Silk Roads to Bāmiyān in Afghanistan, Kizil Caves in Xinjiang and then to Dunhuang in north-western Gansu Province in Western China. In order to develop further this point, the author examines the origin and development of the beribboned diadem also known as fluttering ribbons or flying streamers, emanating behind the heads of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, nobles and traders, on the paintings of Bāmiyān, Kizil and Dunhuang. This iconography became very popular under the Sasanians known as Kharreh. The diadem with flying ribbons on the coins of Ardašir I and his successors like Shapur I were among many types of iconographies popular during the Sasanian period. However, by the fifth century CE these motifs were diffused widely in Buddhist iconographies to the extent that the divine royal symbolism of the Greeks and Persians lost its specific signification with the appearance of images of nobles, traders, celestial beings, and even animals wearing fluttering ribbons in many Buddhist paintings in India, Central Asia and China. Although the first motifs have originated in Central Asian and Gandharan regions, as they travelled in space and time along the Silk Roads to the Buddhist centres in distant lands they developed in cross-fertilized contexts, ingenuously incorporating the sentiments and aesthetics of their respective populations creating new forms of art.

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