

**ҰЛЫ ЖІБЕК ЖОЛЫНДАҒЫ ҚАЗАҚСТАН  
МЕН ОРТА АЗИЯДАҒЫ ДІНДЕР**

**РЕЛИГИИ КАЗАХСТАНА  
И ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ  
НА ВЕЛИКОМ ШЁЛКОВОМ ПУТИ**

**RELIGIONS OF KAZAKHSTAN  
AND CENTRAL ASIA  
ON THE GREAT SILK ROAD**





ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫ МӘДЕНИЕТ ЖӘНЕ  
СПОРТ МИНИСТРЛІГІ

"Мәдениеттерді жақындастыру орталығы" мемлекеттік  
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## **RELIGIONS OF KAZAKHSTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA ON THE GREAT SILK ROAD**

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## **THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM FROM GANDHARA TO SOUTH, WEST AND EAST CENTRAL ASIA (I BC - XIV AD)**

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**ABSTRACT:** The article studies the Buddhist spread from Gandhara to China across Central Asia under several aspects: geographical diffusion, chronological phases, types of monuments, correlation with Gandhara artistic styles, Buddhist schools, patrons and enemies. Chronological phases are established according to historical documents and supported by quantitative analyses of the archaeological record. The Buddhist colonization of Sogdia, Fergana and the Chu valley are analyzed in the context of this process.

**KEY WORDS:** spread of Buddhism, Central Asia, quantitative reconstruction, Gandhara art, Buddhist schools.

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### **Introduction**

The spatial description of the Buddhist spread from Gandhara to and across Central Asia can be provided by geographical and chronological thematic maps (regions, roads, main centers, phases).

Instead the explanation of the process, of its factors and causes, needs the analogical support of a kind of hydraulic model putting in dynamic interaction the following elements:

- *the moving substance:* Buddhist monuments (monasteries, caves, temples, stupas, manuscripts, etc), schools, human agents (monks, translators, supporting merchants, rulers, armies)
- *the itineraries:* roads and their sociopolitical context (peoples, rulers)
- *the basins of accumulation:* large clusters of Buddhist sites playing as centers of accumulation and diffusion
- *the pressure forces:* pushing (from India, and then from Gandhara, Kabul-Kapisa, Bactria, Tarim), pulling (from China <sup>1</sup>); favoring (monks, merchants, rulers); hindering and redirecting (Iranian Sassanids, Kidarites, Hephtalites, Caliphate)

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<sup>1</sup> Buddhism reached China in the I AD, from land or maritime routes or both, and received imperial support in 439 AD under the Northern Wei dynasty, founded by a clan of proto-Mongol steppe horsemen, the Xianbei, who inherited all the lands of the Xiongnu.

A data base has been elaborated in order to quantify the development of the spread. Row data are retrieved from archaeological reports. Other data sources are quoted in the alleged bibliography. Among them, the most largely used all along the text are the following references:

- concerning the presence of Buddhism in South and Central Asia: Brough (1965), Gaulier et alia (1976); Jettmar (1989); Litvinsky (1992); Stavisky (1998); Deom (2010).
- concerning the Buddhist sects present in different regions: Bareau (1955) and the traveler accounts of the Buddhist monks Fa-Xian, Song-yun, Xuan-Zang, I-tsing and Hue-Chao.
- concerning the southern spread of nomadic confederations: Harmatta (1978, 1992, 1994, 1996), Sinor et alia (1996), Jerofoeva (2008).

## 1 – Regions, sites, roads and centers of the Buddhist spread in Central Asia

The Buddhist spread from Gandhara to and across Central Asia concerned the following *regions*:

- *Indus valley*: Swat (Uddiyana), Gandhara, Kashmir, Upper-Indus valley <sup>2</sup>
- *South Central Asia*: Arachosia, Nangarhar, Kabul, Kapisa, Parvan, Bamiyan, South Bactria
- *West Central Asia*: North Bactria, Margiana, Sogdia, Fergana, Chu
- *East Central Asia*: South Tarim, North Tarim

Actually, the northwestern regions of the Indian sub-continent, until recent centuries, in spite of their mountains and deserts, provided the only door for a relatively easy contact with the external world, playing the fundamental role of gateway to and from India.

The main *roads* of the spread have been <sup>3</sup>:

- *Karakorum mountain road* (S-N) of the Indus and Kunar valleys from Gandhara to Tarim, active during I-X AD (Phases II-V, see par. 2.1)
- *Arachosia road* (N-S) from Nangarhar to Kandahar, and from Gandhara to Sindh and the Indian ocean, active during II-VII AD (Phases III-IV)
- *Kushan road* (S-N) across the Hindu-Kush from Gandhara to Bactria, active during II-V AD (Phases III-IV)
- *Bactria-Margiana road* (E-W) along the Amudarya valley from Bactria to Merv, active during IV-V AD (Phase IV)
- *Badakhshan road* (W-E) across the Pamirs from Bactria to Tarim, active during IV-VIII AD (Phases IV-V)
- *Northern silk-road* (E-W) from Tarim to Fergana and Chu, active during VI-IX AD (Phases V-VI)

The main *centers* of Buddhism switched successively to the north and east. In order of importance:

- I BC - I AD (Phase-II): Indus valley, i.e. Gandhara (Taxila, Hadda), Swat, and Nangarhar.
- II-III AD (Phase III): S-Central Asia, Indus valley (the same plus Kashmir), Bactria (Balkh, Termez), South Tarim (Yarkand, Khotan).
- IV-V AD (Phase IV): South (Khotan) and North Tarim (Kucha, Turfan), S-Central Asia (without Kabul-Kapisa), Bactria (Balkh, Termez), Indus valley.
- VI-VIII AD (Phase V) and further to the XV AD (Phases VI): North (Turfan), and South Tarim (Khotan), N-Bactria, Kashmir.

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<sup>2</sup> The Buddhist sites of the Lower Indus valley (Sindh) have not been included because, by being recently discovered and/or not properly studied, they still lack chronological attribution. In fact here monuments are quite abundant (Mohen-jo-daro, Sudheran-jo-thul, Siraj-jo-daro, Kaha-jo-daro, Mir-Rukan, etc) and are suspected spanning between II-VIII or even XI AD.

<sup>3</sup> The main itineraries of the Buddhist spread correspond to the corridors of southern migration and trails of ethnic relations of nomadic confederations that ended up supporting the Buddhist sangha (religious community) (see par 6 and Table-II).

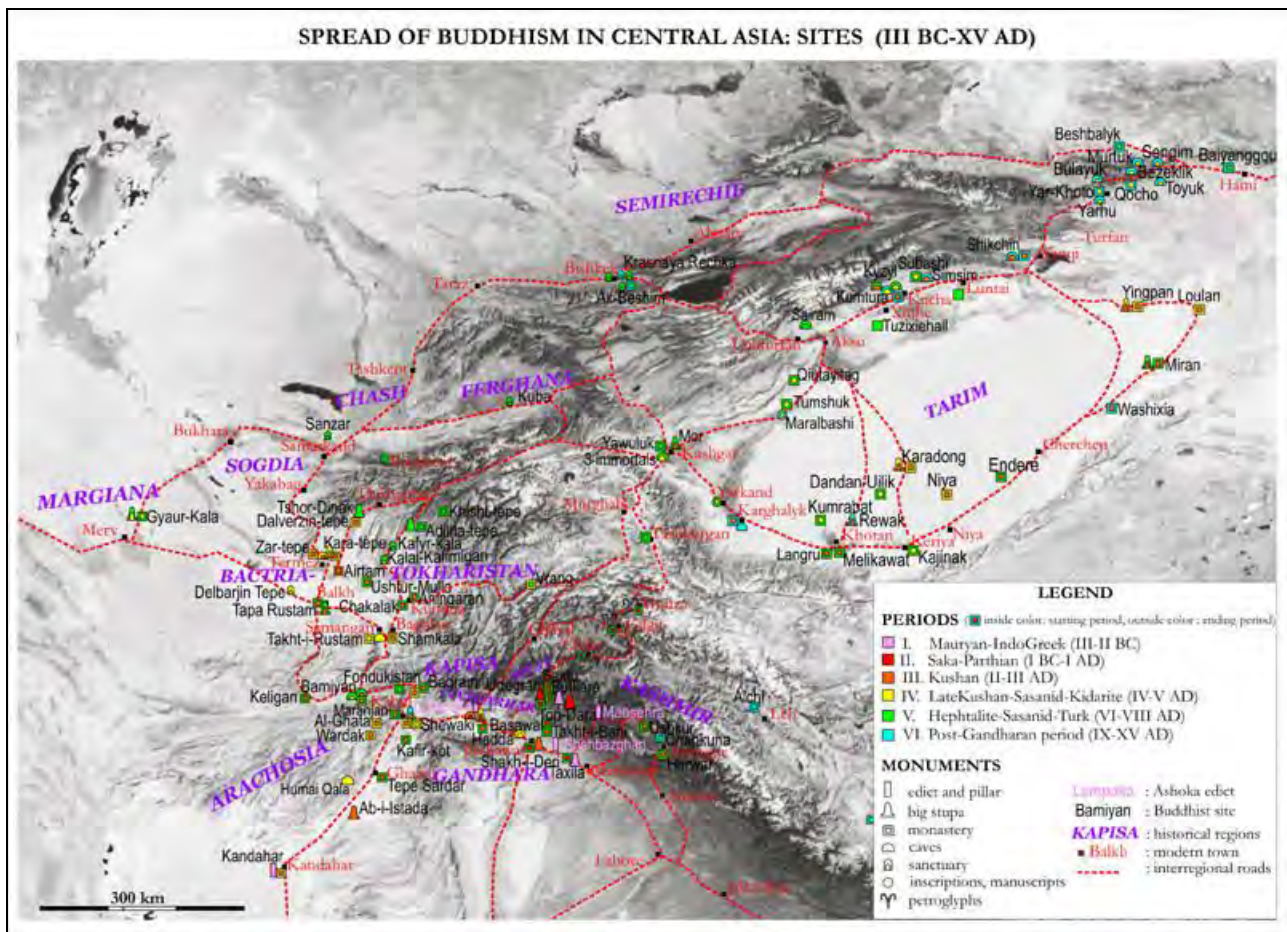


Fig 01 - General map of the spread of Buddhist sites in the Indus valley and in Central Asia (III BC - XV AD)

## 2 - Chronological phases of the spread

### 2.1 - Chronological Phases by historical sources

The Buddhist spread to Central Asia spans from the Asoka edicts of the III BC to the defeat of the Jungar empire in 1750 AD. As a whole, according to historical and archaeological sources, the Central Asian diffusion of Buddhist monuments, when analyzed by geographical location, magnitude and political context, consists of 7 Phases.

- *Phase-1 (III-II BC) Mauryan-IndoGreek* - It is a kind of proto-phase of the Buddhist spread from India to the Indus upper plain, witnessed by 4 Asoka edicts and 2 large stupas (Taxila, Butkara).
- *Phase-2 (I BC - I AD) Saka-Parthian* - Consistent diffusion of Buddhism (monasteries, etc) under Saka rulers from India to Gandhara, Swat, Nangarhar (and possibly already to S-Tarim along the Karakorum road).
- *Phase-3 (II-III AD) Kushan* - Major step of Buddhist spread in the context of growing international trade under the support of the Kushan rulers (a Yuezhi dynasty). Buddhism spreads northwards along the Kushan road to Kabul-Kapisa-Bamiyan and to South and North Bactria; and along the Karakorum road to South Tarim and, slightly, North Tarim. By the end of III AD, under incipient Sasanid pressure, the Kushan power fades, the empire splits in small kingdoms (Kushanshahs), and Kashmir becomes independent.
- *Phase IV (IV-V) Late Kushan-Sasanid-Kidarite* - Due to the Sasanid invasion and the Kidarite (a White Huns or Little Yuezhe tribe originating in the Syrdarya region) occupation of South Central Asia, some Buddhist sites are destroyed in S-Bactria in the IV AD, and much more in

Kabul-Kapisa in the early V century where Buddhism will never recover. Anyhow, during the V AD Buddhism develops in Bamiyan, and so it does in Bactria, from where reaches Merv and possibly Sogdia. High development in South Tarim and consistent spread to North Tarim, which by the end of the period makes of the Tarim basin, more protected from invasions, the largest Buddhist complex.

- *Phase V (VI-VIII) Hephtalite-Sassanid-Turk* - Deep contraction of Buddhism in Kapisa, South Bactria and eventually in Gandhara, due to several factors: the invasion of the Hephtalites (powerful confederation of White Huns based on the Central Asian piedmonts) from the late V to the early VI AD, the Sassanid control (mid VI AD), the decline of economic prosperity, and the renaissance of Hinduism (VII AD). But different regions are affected in different way, and some important monasteries are built in Fondukistan (Parvan province) and Bamiyan under tribal protection (Bamiyan kingdom, VI AD).

Instead, definitely cut from Gandhara and the Indian motherland, Buddhism develops under patronage of the Early Turks in N-Bactria (Tocharistan, VI-VII AD); and under local, Chinese and Turkic support in South and North Tarim (VI AD), from where in the VII AD spreads west in the Fergana and Chu valleys (here most probably together with the Chinese army), making of the northern silk road the active itinerary of a westward wave.

By the end of the VIII AD, after the conquest of Gandhara and S-Central Asia by the Muslim Caliphate (Umayyad and mainly Abbasid) and its northern expansion and expulsion of the Chinese, Buddhism practically disappears from both South and West Central Asia.

Definitely, starting with the VII AD, the Buddhist centre in Central Asia is definitely settled in Tarim, where it enjoys the support of the Tibetan empire and/or of the Chinese Tang dynasty.

- *Phase VI (IX-XV) Tibetan-Uighur* - Buddhism is still flourishing in Tarim where, under patronage of Tibetans in the South and of Uighurs in the North, now represents an independent center from where it largely diffuses to the northern steppes among Uighurs, Tangut, Naiman, Karakitai. The conversion to Islam of the Karakhanid empire engenders disturbances in W-Tarim, but the sites of North and East Tarim, more distant from Muslim disturbances, withstand until XV AD.
- *Phase VII (1578-1750) Mongol-Jungar* - Northern spread of Vajrayana Buddhism from Tibet among Eastern (1578) and Western Mongols (Jungars, 1617). The lasts will diffuse it to East Kazakhstan, Semirechie and the Issykul region (XVII-XVIII AD).

Phase-I is a kind of proto-phase.

Phases-VI-VII are not concerning anymore the Gandhara and West Central Asia regions (at the exception of the spread of Lamaist Buddhism in E-Kazakhstan and Semirechie under Jungarian rule during the 1617-1750 AD).

Phases II-V are concerning the Buddhist diffusion in the Indus valley and in South, West and East Central Asia; and are well correlated with the development of the 4 artistic styles of the Gandhara art. So, they represent the main focus of the quantitative analyses and of present article as a whole.

## ***2.2 - Chronological Phases by quantitative analysis of the archaeological record***

The background of the present research is the database of a selection of 200 most important Buddhist monuments (monastery or sanctuary), of which 119 provided of chronology and so statistically workable. Included are all the Buddhist monuments discovered in Margiana and West Central Asia (31), but just a small selection of the most important monasteries of the other regions (95 sites, i.e. around 2-3% of their historical number)<sup>4</sup>, a disproportion that must be remembered when comparing – in tables, graphics and maps – the Buddhist complexes of different regions.

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<sup>4</sup> In the VII AD Xuan Zang quotes the presence in South Central Asia of 496 active monasteries, against the 14 documented by our data during the same century.



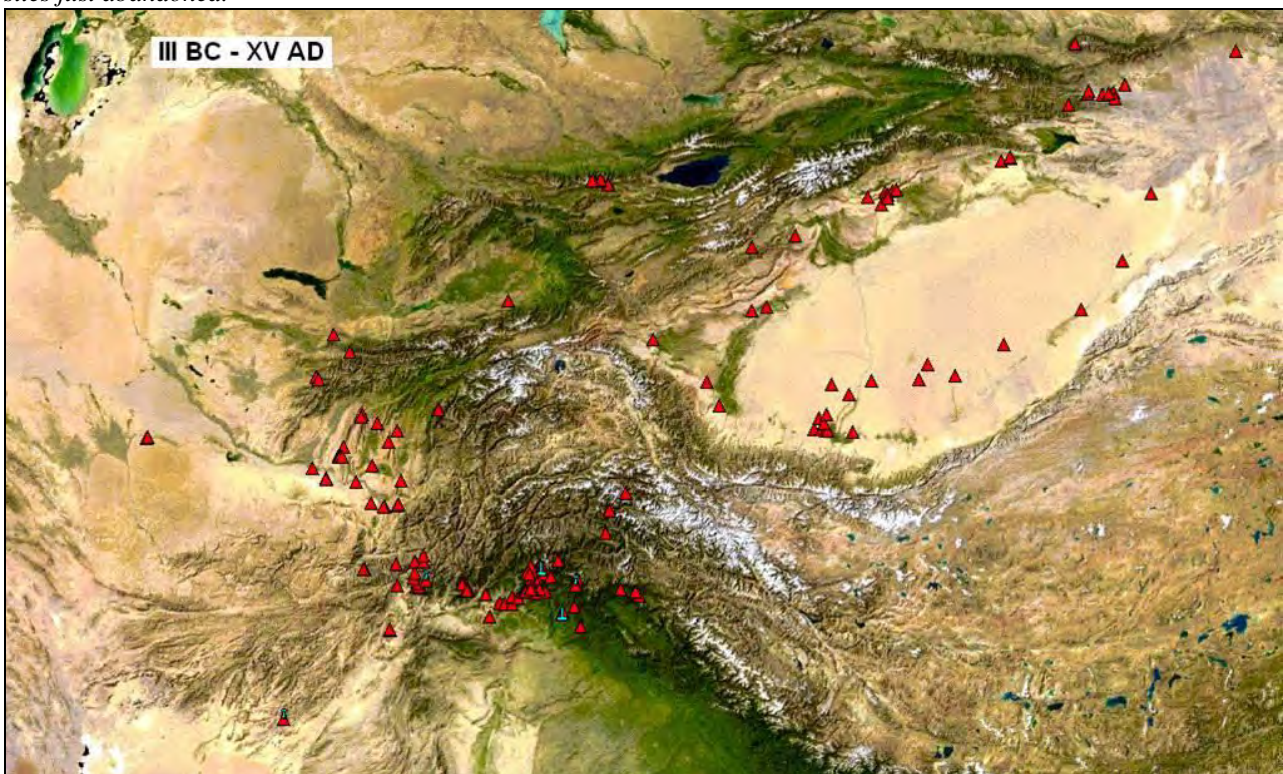
Table-I alleged here below provides a quantitative evaluation of the Buddhist spread in different regions during Phases I-V and, just as final end, Phase VI. On this basis are sorted out some graphics and 10 maps of chronological development by century.

Table I - Number of most important Buddhist sites built and abandoned by region during Phases I-VI (III BC - XV AD)

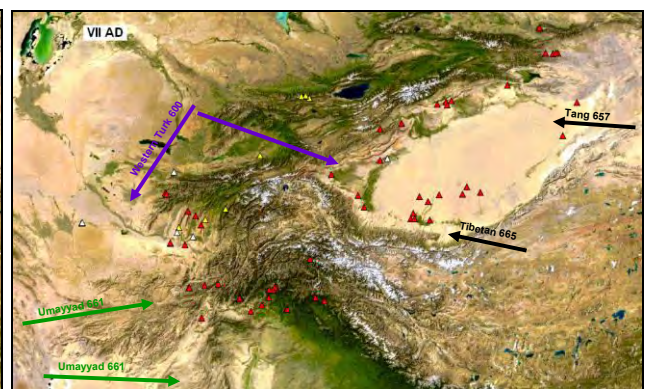
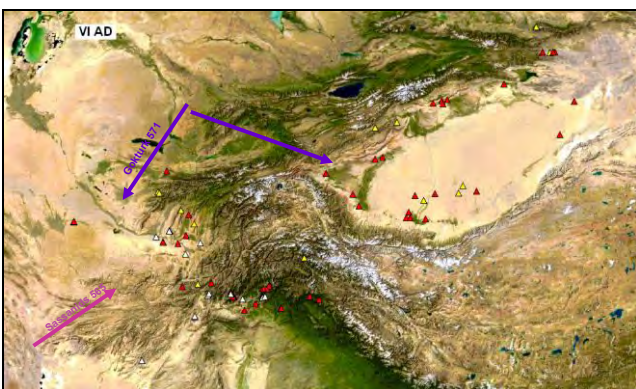
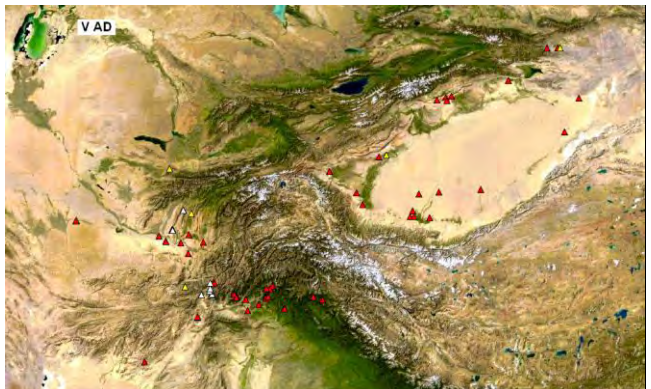
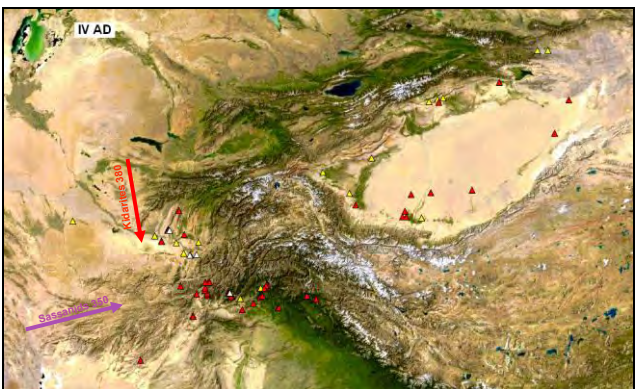
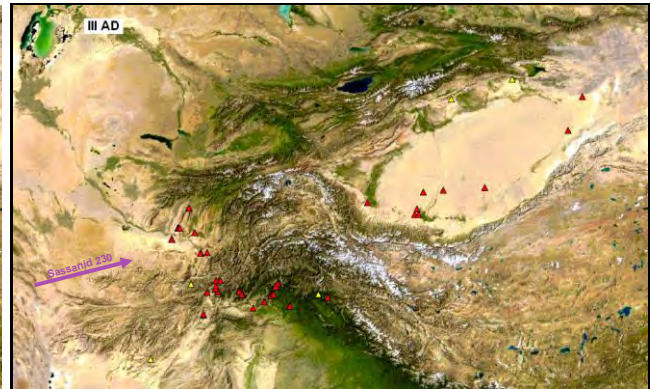
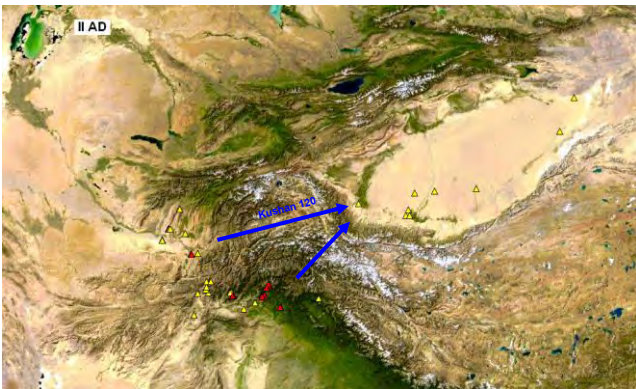
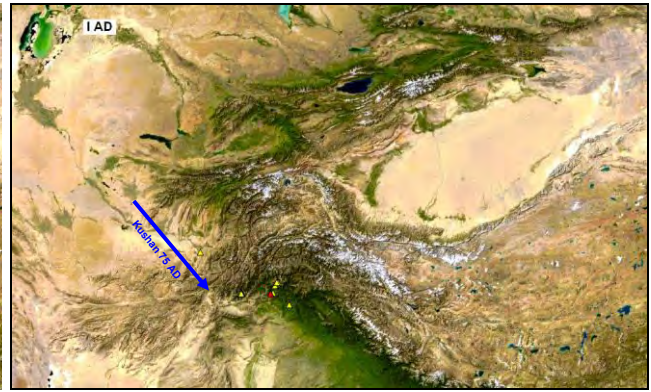
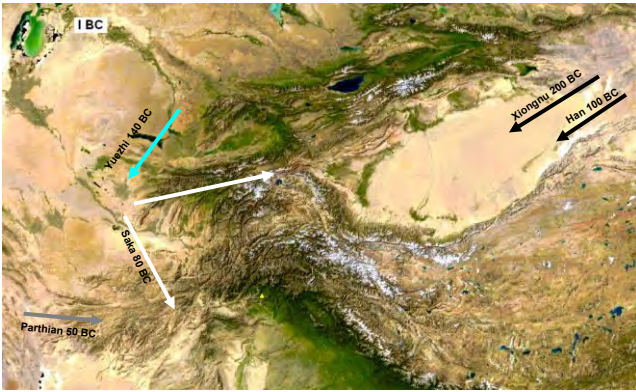
| REGION<br>(n° of monuments)                     |                       | NUMBER OF MOST IMPORTANT BUDDHIST SITES |      |                                     |      |                                  |      |   |      |   |      |                                      |      |
|---|-----------------------|---|------|-------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|---|------|---|------|--------------------------------------|------|
|   |                       | Phase I<br>Maurian<br>III-II BC         |      | Phase II<br>Saka-Parth<br>I BC-I AD |      | Phase III<br>Kushan<br>II-III AD |      | Phase IV<br>LateKushan-<br>-Sassan-Kidar<br>IV-V AD |      | Phase V<br>Hephtal-<br>-Sassan-Turk<br>VI-VIII AD |      | Phase VI<br>Tibet-Uighur<br>IX-XV AD |      |
|   |                       | built                                   | aban | built                               | aban | built                            | aban | built   | aban | built   | aban | built                                | aban |
| Indus valley<br>(18)                            | Gandh., Swat          | 2+2                                     | 0    | 7                                   | 0    | 3                                | 0    | 1   | 0    | 0   | 5    | 0                                    | 8    |
|   | Kashmir               | 0                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 2                                | 0    | 0   | 0    | 1   | 1    | 0                                    | 2    |
|   | Karakorum             | 0                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 0                                | 0    | 0   | 0    | 1   | 1    | 0                                    | 0    |
| S-CentralAsia<br>(50)                           | Arachosia             | 1                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 3                                | 0    | 0   | 0    | 0   | 2    | 0                                    | 1    |
|   | Nangarahar            | 0                                       | 0    | 3                                   | 0    | 2                                | 0    | 2   | 1    | 0   | 3    | 0                                    | 3    |
|   | Ghazni, Kapisa, Bamiy | 1                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 12                               | 0    | 3   | 9    | 3   | 9    | 0                                    | 10   |
|   | S Bactria             | 0                                       | 0    | 1                                   | 0    | 4                                | 0    | 5   | 3    | 0   | 5    | 0                                    | 2    |
|   | Margiana              | 0                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 0                                | 0    | 2   | 0    | 0   | 2    | 0                                    | 0    |
| W-CentralAsia<br>(29)                           | N Bactria             | 0                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 9                                | 0    | 3   | 5    | 5   | 7    | 0                                    | 5    |
|   | Sogdia, Fergana       | 0                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 0                                | 0    | 1   | 0    | 4   | 5    | 0                                    | 0    |
|   | Chu                   | 0                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 0                                | 0    | 0   | 0    | 6   | 6    | 1                                    | 1    |
| Tarim (29)                                      | South Tarim           | 0                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 9                                | 0    | 3   | 0    | 3   | 1    | 0                                    | 14   |
|   | North Tarim           | 0                                       | 0    | 0                                   | 0    | 2                                | 0    | 8   | 0    | 4   | 1    | 0                                    | 13   |
| <b>Totals</b>                                   |                       | 4+2                                     | 0    | 11                                  | 0    | 46                               | 0    | 28  | 18   | 27  | 48   | 1                                    | 59   |
| <b>Active sites at the start / end of Phase</b> |                       | 0 / 2                                   |      | 3 / 13                              |      | 48 / 59                          |      | 73 / 70   |      | 64 / 63   |      | 26 / 0                               |      |

Green cells: peaks of building / crimson cells: peaks of abandonment / italic font: 4 Ashoka edicts

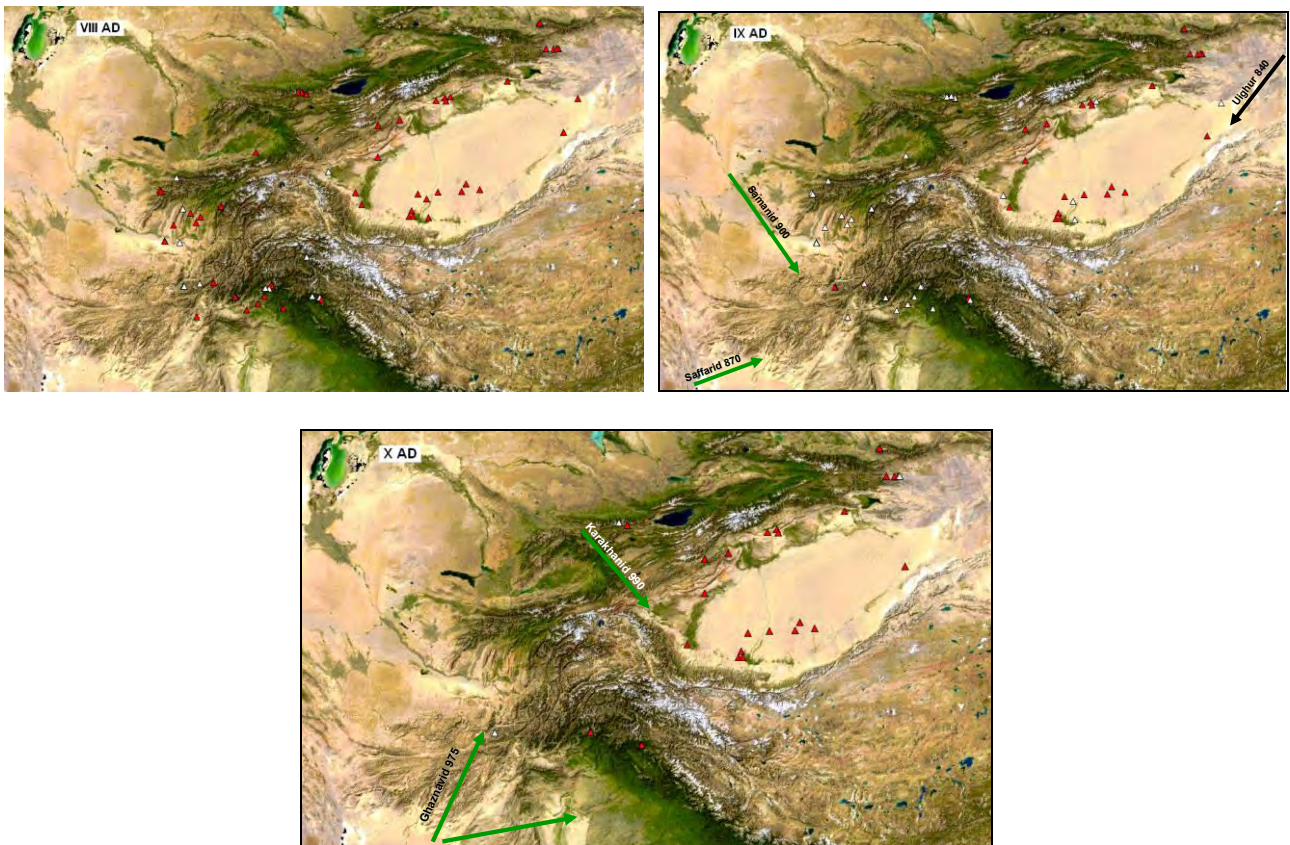
Figs 02-13 - Maps of chronological development by century of occupied Buddhist sites in the Indus valley and in Central Asia (I-X AD). Yellow dots = sites newly built during the century; red dots = sites still occupied; white dots = sites just abandoned.











The general trends of the evolution of Buddhist monuments in Central Asia between the I BC and the X AD (Phases II-V) have been quantified according to Table-I. The whole process can be summarized in 4 periods matching quite well the historical phases spoken above:

- I BC - IV AD: general expansion from Gandhara to S, W and E Central Asia, with main centers located in the Gandhara and Kabul-Kapisa-Bamiyan regions.
- Late IV-V AD: first disturbances from Sassanids, Kidarites, Hephtalites in Kabul and surroundings, severing the connection between southern and northern regions. The expansive center of Buddhism moves to Bactria (from where it spreads to Margiana) and Tarim.
- VI-VIII AD: the Sassanid and the following Caliphate invasions disrupt the Gandhara Buddhist complex and finally the entire S and W Central Asia complexes. Tarim stand as the only Buddhist center of Central Asia (from where Buddhism spreads westward to Fergana and Chu).
- IX-X AD: the Tarim complex starts also shrinking, until disappearing in the XIV AD.

In detail, quoting data from Table-I and Graphics 13-16.

Peaks of building are documented in I AD (Gandhara), II AD the most relevant (S-Central Asia, Bactria, S-Tarim), IV AD (Bactria, S-N-Tarim), VI AD (N-Tarim), VII (Fergana and Chu).

Peaks of abandonment: IV AD (S-Bactria), V AD (very relevant in Kabul and surroundings), VI AD (Gandhara and Bactria), IX AD the most relevant (everywhere at the exception of N-Tarim).

The first centuries up to the IV AD are connected with the Buddhist blossoming in India and Gandhara and are highly expansive, arriving to concern the regions of Central Asia up to N-Bactria and NE Tarim. The peak number of 73 Buddhist sites is reached in the IV AD: half of them are located in the original Gandhara region (15 sites) and its neighbor Afghan territories (21 sites), and half further north and east, in Bactria and Tarim.

Apparently, the first Sassanids and Kidarites invasions of the late IV AD, apart the destruction of few monuments in S-Bactria, didn't provoked a sensible contraction. But the Hephtalites

invasion of the V AD had a strong disruptive impact that halved the monument complex of Arachosia, Kapisa, Bamiyan (which, from that time on, never recovered) severing in that way the territorial continuity between Gandhara and Central Asia and promoting an independent positive diffusion of Buddhism in the northern regions: in Bactria (from where it spreads to Margiana), S-Tarim and mainly N-Tarim.

In the late V-VI AD, with the fading of the Hepthalites power but the reprise of Sassanids invasions, also the Gandharan and Bactrian complexes started contracting by 20-30%<sup>5</sup>. This makes that, by the VI AD, Tarim represents the safest and largest Buddhist region, reaching a stable plateau of around 30 monuments (the 40-45% of all Buddhist monuments of the territory under study).

Starting at the end of the VII AD and accelerating during the VIII, the Caliphate emulated the Sassanids territorial pretensions with much higher success and disruptive effects, which in a couple of centuries brought to ruin the entire Buddhist complexes of Gandhara and of South and West Central Asia. In the same century, from its last stronghold in Tarim, Buddhism diffuses westward to Fergana and Chu (10 sites, of which some resisted until the XI AD) and then its presence in E-Central Asia will gradually decrease until disappearing in the XIV AD.

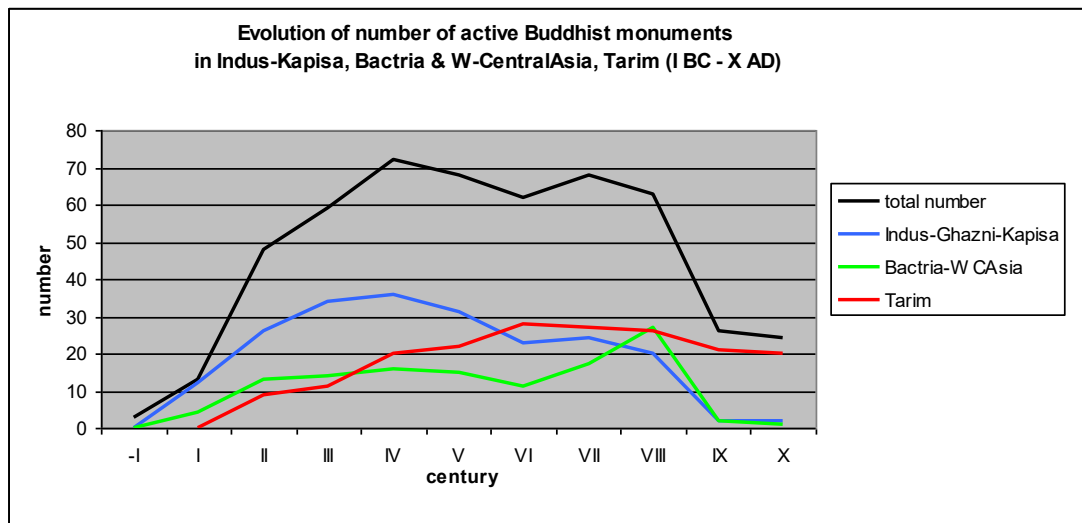


Fig 14 - Graphic: evolution of number of active Buddhist monuments in the Indus and Kabul valley, Bactria and W-CentralAsia, and E-CentralAsia, by century (I-X AD)

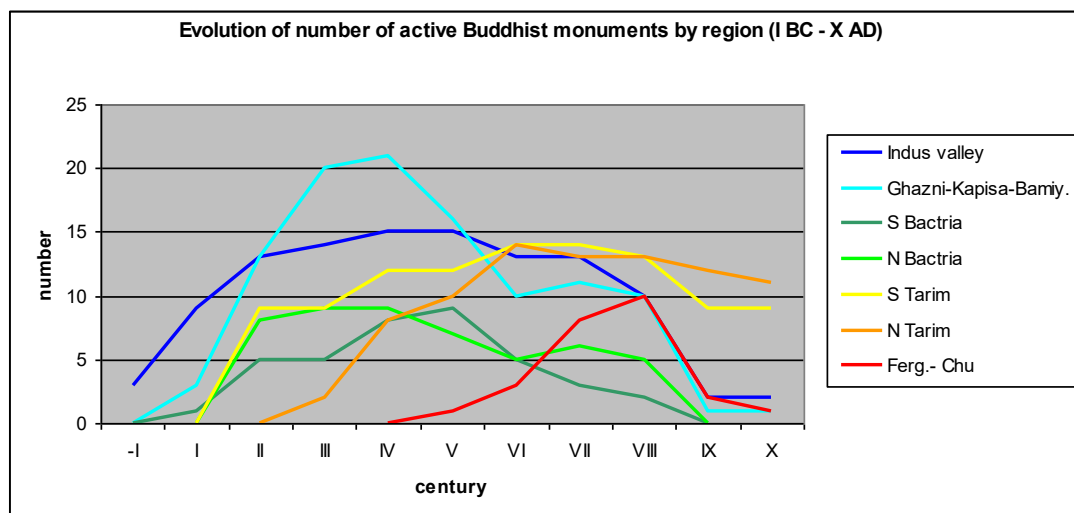


Fig 15 - Graphic: evolution of number Buddhist monuments occupied by region and by century (I BC - X AD)

<sup>5</sup> Actually, at the end of the VI and during the VII AD, the southern migration of Turkic tribes in S and W Central Asia protected local rulers, giving there to Buddhism an ephemeral renaissance that favored the expansion of its monuments by 10%.



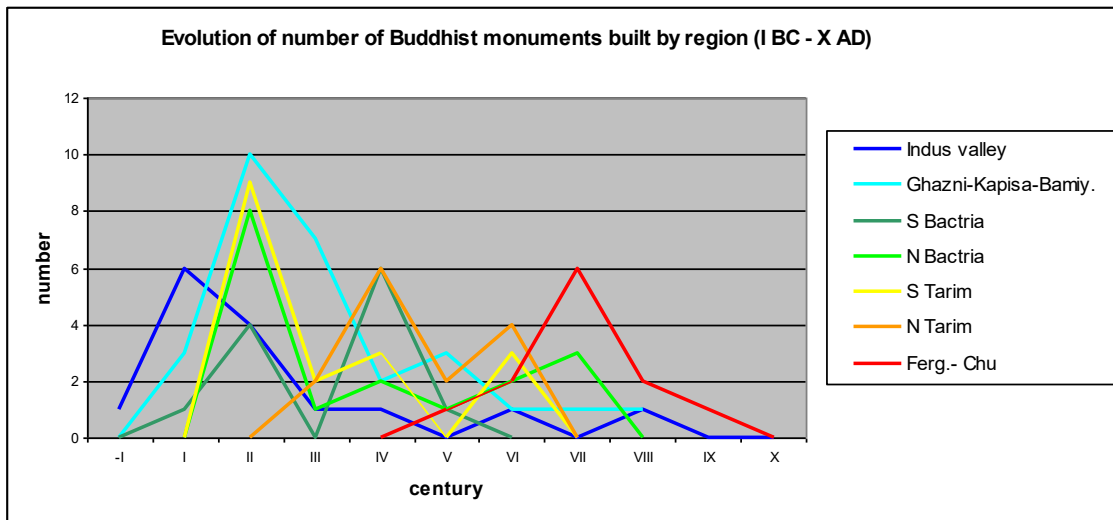


Fig 16 - Graphic: evolution of number of Buddhist monuments built by region and by century (I BC - X AD)

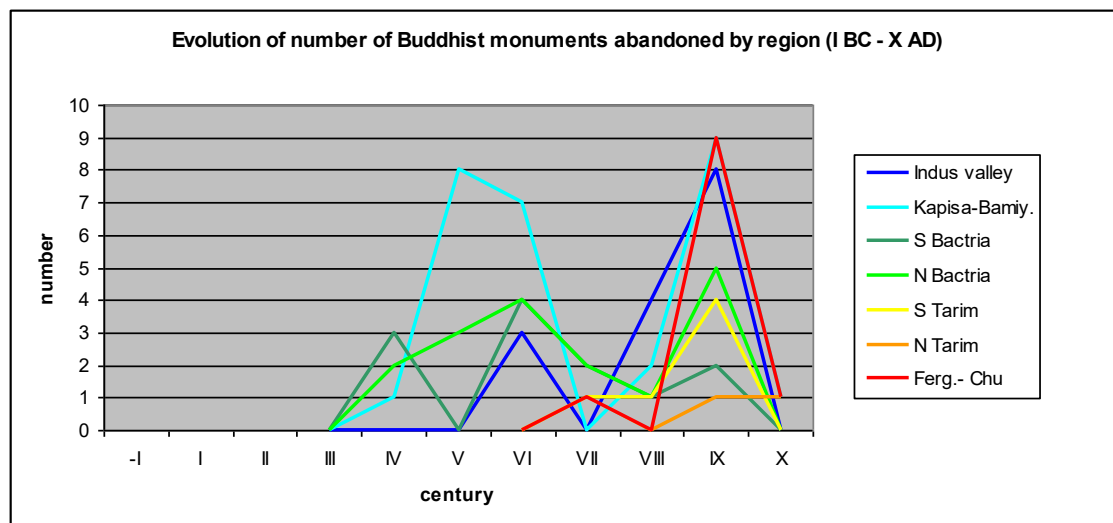


Fig 17 - Graphic: evolution of number of Buddhist monuments abandoned by region and by century (I BC - X AD)

### 3 - Buddhist monuments

The main types of monuments of the Buddhist spread are: monasteries, cave-monasteries, temples, stupas, manuscripts and inscriptions, cultic and Gandhara art objects. Their number and ratio differ by region.

- *Monasteries* represent the absolute majority of the monuments in Gandhara, South Central Asia and Tarim.
- *Cave-monasteries* are most abundant in areas of sedimentary rocks, i.e. in South Central Asia and N-Tarim.
- *Temples* are present everywhere, most often included in the area of a monastery. As isolated monuments, they constitute the total majority of the Buddhist monuments in regions north of the Amudarya (N-Bactria, Fergana, Chu) where are documented just 7 monasteries out of 31 monuments of different type.
- *Stupas* (funeral reliquaries) always accompany monasteries and temples and are diffused everywhere.

- *Manuscripts* are mainly found along the itinerary roads linking Kashmir and Tarim, i.e. the shortest road between India and China. Texts pertain to different schools and are written in different scripts and languages, witnessing the presence of a very diversified ‘sangha’ (Buddhist community) moving across a multilingual context.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4 - Gandhara art: 4 styles

Phases II-III-IV-V of the Buddhist spread coincide with 4 successive styles of Gandhara art.

- The first Gandhara style (I BC - I AD, Saka), circumscribed to the Gandhara, Udyana and Nangarhar regions, is characterized by the use of Hellenistic and Roman aesthetic elements for naturalistic representations of narrative Indian subjects and iconography.
- The second Gandhara style (II-III AD, Kushan) – the blossoming phase of the Gandhara art – concerns Gandhara, Kabul-Kapisa, Bactria and, slightly, SW-Tarim. It is characterized by the introduction of Parthian statuary tendencies representing Bodhisattvas in royal robes. A specific style of Buddhist stuccos develops in Bactria and arrives to influence the main stream of the Gandhara art.
- The third Gandhara style (IV-V AD, LateKushan-Sasanian) develops when Gandhara is under the pressure of Sassanid and Kidarite invasions. It manifests Iranian influences by the introduction of rich ornamentations and abstract images, mainly in newly built sites of Kapisa (Bamiyan) and Bactria-Tocharistan. This LateKushan-Sasanian style diffused widely to Tarim – where at the time Buddhism was blossoming – and there acquired local traits.
- The fourth Gandhara style (VI-VIII AD, Hephtalite-Turk), last phase of the Gandhara art, appears at the time the Indus valley is severed from the rest of Central Asia and starts to fade. The period represents a renaissance of Buddhist art under Turkic patronage, well represented in sites of Fondukistan, Bamiyan and Ghazni (Tepe Sardar), characterized by the intermixing of Gandhara tradition, East Iranian ornaments and Indian Gupta style (that in the V-VI centuries is blossoming in the Ganges valley). In the Tarim basin this last Gandhara style merged with Central Asian, Turkic and Chinese elements and influenced back the Western Central Asian regions and even some newly built South Central Asian sites (Fondukistan).

In Tarim, the earliest realizations of cave art are found in the Kizil grottos (Kusha, N-Tarim, III-VIII AD). Here 3 styles are distinguished: red (III-IV AD), similar to the Gandharan Kushan style; blue (V-VI), similar to Gandharan LateKushan-Sasanian; and a third style (VII-VIII) that developed under Tang rule and shows the presence of Chinese influences that are absent in the former two.

In the post-Gandharan Bezeklik complex (Turfan, N-Tarim, VIII-XIV AD), which developed under Tang (VII-VIII) and Uighur rule (IX-XIII), Chinese and Tibetan influences become dominant.

Just beyond the eastern borders of Tarim, the murals of Dunhuang (Gansu, IV-XIV AD) present the succession of all the Gandharan and post-Gandharan styles spoken above, witnessing alternate

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<sup>6</sup> Between the II-IV AD the transport and Chinese translation of Indian texts were done by Central Asian monks under patronage of Sogdian merchants operating in China. The activity of 29 translators is known, almost all monks, in chronological order: 4 Parthians, 6 Yuezhi (from Gandhara and from China), 6 Indians, 3 Sogdians, 2 Kuchean, 1 Khotanese and, finally, 7 Chinese. These early products were quite approximate and esoteric. Only at the end of the IV AD the introduction of scientific methods by part of the Kuchean monk Kumarajiva provided reliable translations and supported the theoretical development of the Chinese sects. From that moment all along the Tang period, Chinese pilgrims and translators became the direct agents of the import to China of dhamma texts by several routes. Until the VII AD Central Asia routes were privileged, then started to be avoided. The Chinese monk I-tsing, describing the perilous travels to India of 56 Chinese monks during the second part of the VII AD (i.e. the apogee of Buddhism in Asia) shows that most of these travelers were now using the maritime route from South China across Ceylon to Bodhi-Gaya and Nalanda; a few traveled by land from Gansu across Tibet until the Ganges valley, but rarely went further west treading the Karakorum way and visiting Kashmir or Swat; just a couple of them used the Kushan road.



phases of influence between Central Asia and the Chinese world. (see Annex: Illustration samples of Gandhara and Post-Gandhara styles)

## 5 - Buddhist schools

The reconstruction of the role of the different Buddhist schools in the spread of Buddhism is still problematic, being that information concerning their genesis, doctrinal position and number on the Indian continent is scanty and controversial, and so are the accounts of their diffusion in Central Asia. Anyhow, a tentative list can be advanced, and will provide some lights about the spiritual doctrines and practices of the protagonists of the Buddhist spread.

**5.1** - The first schism of the original Buddhist sangha occurred at the Second Council of Vesali in 350 BC, when the champion of orthodoxy *Sthaviravada* (teaching of the elders) spitted from the majoritarian liberal *Mahasamghika* (great sangha) school.

Then, in the following two centuries, other schisms happened from both schools, mainly from the Sthaviravada. From the Sthaviras branched 3 main groups of schools (between breaks are quoted their sects found in Central Asia): *Vibhajyavadins* (Mahisasaka, Dharmaguptaka, Kasyapiya), pluralist and realist, the nearest to the original Sthaviras and ancestors of the present Theravada school; *Sarvastivadins* (Sarvastivada, Mulasarvastivada) oriented by psychological and mentalistic tendencies; *Vatsiputriyas* (Sammitiya) supporting the existence of a kind of enduring person (pudgala). Concerning the Mahasamghikas, they are found in Central Asia together with their branch Lokottaravadins.

By the II AD, many other schismatic sects split from each of these earliest groups, constituting all together the so-called *18 Early Buddhism schools* (in reality more than 30), which in later times have been generically called *Hinayana* (lesser vehicle).

Out of some of these Hinayana schools, during the I-II AD, appeared the *Mahayana* (great vehicle) tradition, rising all over India gradually and not as a separated sect. In the same way, starting around the VI AD, the *Vajrayana* (diamond vehicle) tradition developed from Mahayana in N-India by introducing esoteric practices.

**5.2** - According to retrieved manuscripts and of the historical accounts of the Chinese Mahayana monks Fa-Xian (399-414 AD), Song-yun (518-522 AD), Xuan-Zang (629-643 AD), I-tsing (671-695 AD), Hue-Chao (723-726), etc, protagonist of the Buddhist spread in Central Asia have been representatives of all the three traditions, i.e. in order of order of appearance and also consistency: Early Buddhism sects from the earliest phase all along the spread; Mahayana sects appearing and developing quickly from IV AD; Vajrayana sects from the VI AD.

As a whole, in the territory under study is documented the presence of 8 Early Buddhism schools, representing each of the 3 main groups spoken above<sup>7</sup>; of 3 schools of the Mahayana tradition: the 2 main Indian-born Madyamika and Yogacara schools, and the Chinese Sukhavati school; and of some unidentified Vajrayana sects. This situation suggests for Central Asia a scenario of wide confrontation between different Buddhist schools, doctrines and disciplinary codes, making of the region a main center of Buddhist debate and innovation all along the first millennium of our era.

Their geographical distribution largely depended from the time of their origin and the actual activity of the roads. Briefly, all these 8 schools established strongholds in Gandhara, Kashmir and SW Tarim; Hinayana schools diffused in Arachosia, all along the Kushan road until Bactria, Margiana and Tocharistan (where are exclusively present) and in the entire Tarim; Mahayana became well established in Gandhara, along the first segments of the Kushan road until Bamiyan,

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<sup>7</sup> The Sthaviras themselves disappeared within a couple of centuries, absorbed within their derivative branches, so could not have been direct protagonists of the Buddhist spread in Central Asia.

along the Karakorum road to SW Tarim, and from here northeastward to Turfan (N-Tarim) and westward to Fergana and Chu; Vajrayana diffused in Kashmir and from there passed to SW Tarim.

The selection of the specific Buddhist sects that have been protagonist in the spread depended from complex sectarian interactions and conflicts on Indian territory and also from their particular doctrinal and cultic propensities. Possibly, the confrontation with the Iranian and Chinese religious worlds favored sects that became the most widespread by emphasizing: idealism (*Sarvastivada*); dualism, ritualism and worship of stupas (*Dharmaguptaka*); devotion to concrete heroes, complex supramundane pantheons and metaphysical paradises (*Mahasamghika*, *Mahayana*); partial restoration of the concept of 'soul' (*Sammitiya*). The confrontation with shamanistic peoples of Central Asia was favored by the presence of esoteric ritual practices and theocratic political tendencies (*Vajrayana*).

**5.3** - The list of the Buddhist sects that have been documented as active in Gandhara and Central Asia is the following.

It is documented the presence of 8 among the so-called 18 sects of the *Early Buddhism* (Hinayana) tradition. Three of them – the Sarvastivada, Mahasamghika, and Dharmaguptaka – have been at the very beginning the only protagonists of the Buddhist spread in the Indus valley as well as in Central Asia, and here constituted the main schools until at least the VI AD. They are present in Gandhara and Kashmir from the earliest phases, and during Phase-III appear everywhere along the Kushan and the Himalayan roads, becoming dominant in Bactria and in N-Tarim.

Concerning their beliefs, all three split in different times from the Sthaviras and, together with the lasts, represent the four combinations of the possible relation to two key doctrinal positions: the irreversibility or reversibility of the status of arahant (A-A'), and the mundane or supramundane nature of the Buddha (i.e. the inclusive or exclusive relation between Buddha and sangha) (B-B'). In order of consistency:

- *Sarvastivada* (A', B): it splits from the Sthaviras (A, B) in the wave of schisms of the III BC (Third Buddhist council under Ashoka) by dismissing the priority of the arahants, but keeps similar doctrinal positions concerning the inclusion of the Buddha within the sangha. Its main focus is on the Abhidhamma, and supports the existence of all phenomena (pan-realism: all things exist, even past and future). This psychological approach will influence the idealistic Yogacara Mahayana school (see below). It has been the main protagonist of the Jalandhar synod of 250 AD under the Kushan Kanishka and, present almost everywhere, surely played the central role in the diffusion of Buddhism in Central Asia.
- *Mahasamghika* (A', B'): it originated out of the first schism (IV BC, Second Buddhist council) of the Sthaviravadins, questioning the irreversibility of the state of the arahant and supporting the supramundane nature of the Buddha. The first position decreased the monastic power and, by emphasizing the bodhisattva path, softened the social boundaries between monks and lay people. The second position widened the conceptual boundaries between the sangha in general (monks and lay people) and the supramundane world of the Buddha. In that way the Mahasamghika introduced the main elements that will later characterize the Madhyamika school of the Mahayana tradition (see below). In Central Asia it is largely dominant in N-Bactria and present in SW and NE Tarim, and disappears relatively early, by the VI AD, absorbed within new Mahayana sects.
- *Dharmaguptaka* (A, B'): it split during III or II BC from the Mahisasakas (Vibhajyavadins group, see below), referring to Moggallana (the magician-disciple of the Buddha) as main master. It recognizes the priority of the arahants but considers the Buddha as supramundane; and emphasizes the merits that come from magic and esoteric rituals like adoring relics and stupas and proffering gifts to the Buddha and the Sangha. In Central Asia its presence is witnessed as early as the I AD by just manuscripts and inscriptions, under the support of Saka rulers, pointing to this sect as the earliest and most dynamic. It disappeared by the end of the VIII AD.



Between the IV-VIII AD, during Phases IV-V, is documented the presence of 5 additional Early Buddhism sects. In order of appearance in India and Central Asia:

- *Kasyapiya*: a school of the Vibhajyavadin group that splits in III BC from the Sthaviras by supporting the partial existence of the past and holding some positions similar to the Dharmaguptaka. Inscriptions quote its name in Gandhara in I BC, and its presence around Taxila in the III AD. Chinese travelers quote monasteries in Swat and in Khotan (SW-Tarim) and Yanqi (NE-Tarim) during the VI-VII AD. By the VIII AD this school disappears merging within the Mahayana tradition.
- *Lokottaravada*: it splits in II BC from the Mahasamghika with positions even closer to the Mahayana doctrine (transcendence of the Buddha and, to some extent, of the Bodhisattvas themselves). During IV-VIII AD it is detected as dominant, together with its ascendant Mahasamghika, in Bamiyan (to it should be attributed the local giant statue of Buddha) and in N-Bactria.
- *Mahisasaka*: it originates in India during the Third Council (III BC), splitting from the main trunk of the Sthaviras as an early representative of the Vibhajyavadin group, with positions less extreme than the Sarvastivadins, maintaining not only the inclusion of the Buddha within the sangha, but also the irreversibility of arahantship and the non-existence of past and future. It is found during the V-VIII AD in Swat, Gandhara, and in Khotan and Yanqi (Tarim). From monasteries of this sect, in Ceylon, at the turn of the Christian era, originated the present Theravada school, again out of a kind of orthodox schism that reinforced the archaic tendencies of the Sthaviras.
- *Sammitiya*: it appears in India in the I-II AD as a late but prominent offshoot of the Vatsiputriya group, characterized by supporting the reversibility of the arahant state and the reality of some kind of intermediate existence and, if not of a soul, at least of an enduring person (pudgala). It becomes quite important by the VII AD, when Xuan Zang documents its consistent presence in Sindh, with monks that “have narrow views and attack the Mahāyāna”.
- *Mulasarvastivada*: it is a very late derivative of the Sarvastivada that became prominent all along the Indian-Tibetan borders and inspired the Tibetan Vinaya. It is found along the Karakorum road (Gilgit) and N-Tarim (Turfan) in the VIII AD.

The *Mahayana* (great vehicle) tradition emerged all over India during the I AD from some of the Early Buddhist schools, supporting faith and devotion to a supramundane authoritarian Buddha. It has an important cradle in the Indus valley and counts some Kashmiri monks among the earliest masters. Anyway, in the Indus valley and Central Asia monuments attributable to it are not documented until the IV AD (Phase-IV), after which the school spreads very quickly and in only two centuries – according to Xuan Zang – constitutes the 40% of all Buddhist monasteries. As a whole it is represented by two Indian schools – *Madhyamika* and *Yogacara*)<sup>8</sup> – and by four Chinese schools (*Sukhavati*, *Saddharma-Pundarika*, *Avatamsaka*, *Ch’an*). In Central Asia the two Indian schools are dominant in Swat, Arachosia, Kapisa; and the same plus the Sukhavati are dominant in SW and NE-Tarim, from where they diffuse in the northern steppes (Fergana, Chu). Most of the Buddhist monuments of the Fergana and Chu valley could be attributed to an early Sukhavati school embedded with Taoist elements (Sala and Deom 2002).

The *Vajrayana* (diamond vehicle) tradition, which appeared in VI AD (beginning of Phase-V) in the Ganges valley from Mahayana and Saivism, became well established in Kashmir, present in Bamiyan and, moving along the Karakorum road, reached Khotan, Turfan, and Dunhuang.

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<sup>8</sup> The Mahayanist *Madhyamika* (middle-way) and *Yogacara* (yoga-practice) schools have respectively a logical-pragmatic approach (inherited from the Mahasamghikas) or psychological-metaphysical (from the Sarvastivadins).

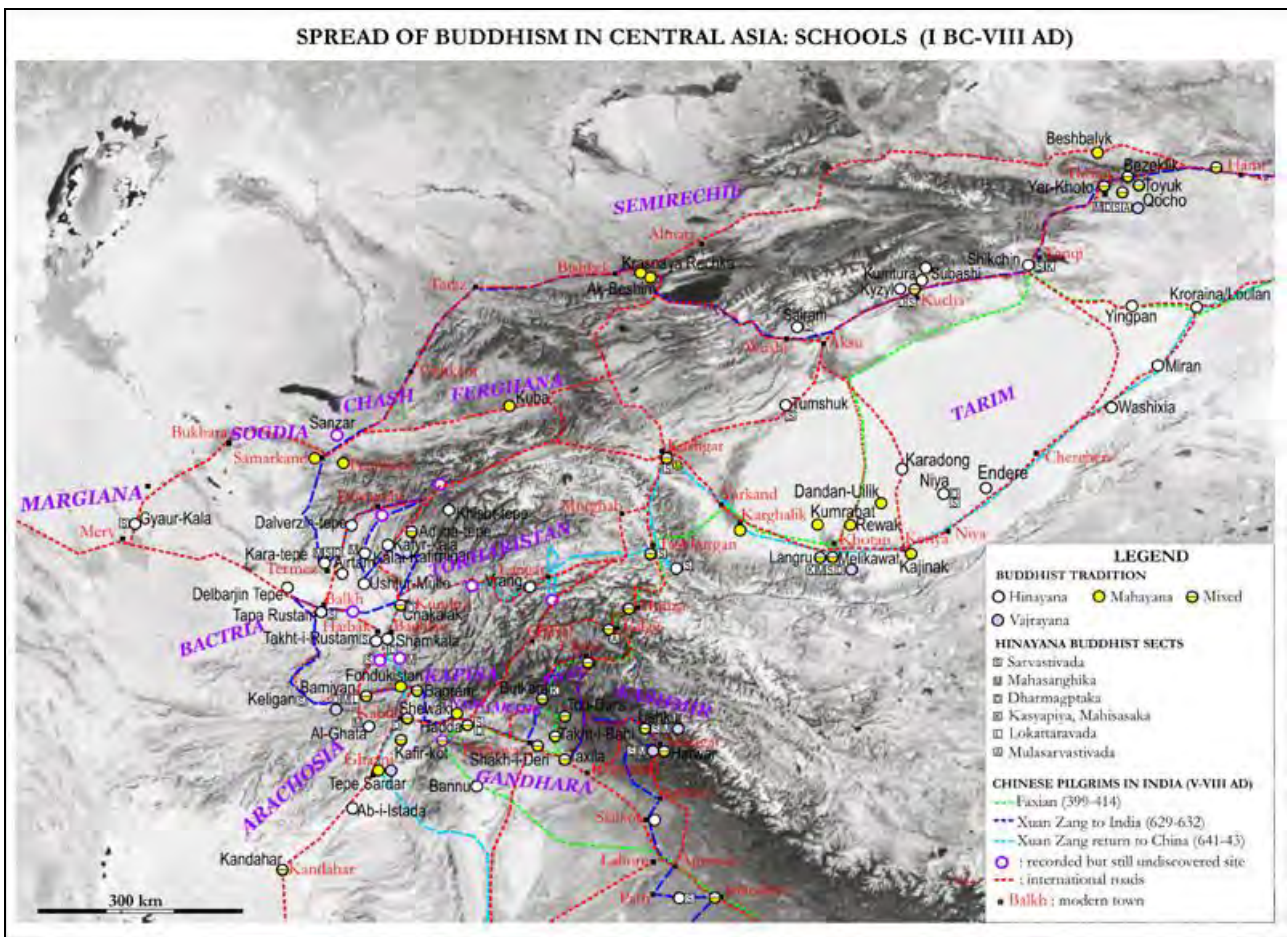


Fig 18 - General map of the spread of Buddhist sects in the Indus valley and in Central Asia (I-VIII AD)

**5.4** - Around 410 AD (during Phase IV, Late Kushan-Sassanid-Kidarite), the Chinese monk Fa Xian (Fa-hsien, 337-422), who went from China to N-India in 401 AD across Tarim and the Badakshan highway and returned by sea, quotes the presence of Hinayana schools in NE-Tarim (4000 monks in Kucha and 4000 in Loulan), Kashmir, Swat (500 monasteries), Gandhara and Nangarhar; the presence of Mahayana schools in SW Tarim (Khotan, with several thousand monks), Nangarhar and the low Kabul river (1000 monks); and, in various points of the itinerary, the presence of several thousands of unidentified monks.

A century later, in 518-522, (Phase V, Hephtalite-Sassanid-Turk), the Chinese Mahayana monk Song-yun traveled along the Badakshan and Kunar highways until Swat and Gandhara, two kingdoms under Hephtalite rule. In Swat it found Buddhism (Mahayana Buddhism) in splendor in a majestic cultural landscape<sup>9</sup>. In Gandhara it found people and Buddhism persecuted by an insolent and cruel king.

Around 640 AD, Xuan Zang (602-664), a Chinese Buddhist monk who personally was interested in Yogacara doctrines, went to India from N-Tarim along the Northern Tianshan piedmonts and the Kushan road, returned across the Pamirs and S-Tarim, and left a detailed account of the number and type of monasteries in the different regions of its itinerary.

In Central Asia and the Indus valley he quotes the presence of 1339 active monasteries with 63930 monks (an average of 50 monks per monastery), of which: 300 monasteries with 13600 monks in Tarim; 496 monasteries with 22500 monks in South Central Asia; and 543 monasteries with 27830 monks in the Indus valley. So, at that time, monasteries are still numerous in South

<sup>9</sup> In Swat and Gandhara, Sun-yun hears everywhere legends saying that in the past Sakyamuni Buddha wandered and preached in the region.

Central Asia (even if possibly already reduced by half, see Fig 14). And so they are in the Indus valley, but in different locations from the earliest times: they are now totally concentrated in the delta, some are left in Kashmir, and abandoned are instead the large original centers of Gandhara and Swat where 2400 monasteries are found in ruin!

Of these 1339 monasteries, 931 are attributed to specific schools: 536 monasteries with 24950 monks are Hinayana, and 395 with 15880 monks are Mahayana.

Hinayana monasteries are concentrated in S-N-Tarim, along the Badakhshan road and in the Lower Indus; very few still persist in South Central Asia (Bamiyan, Bactria) and none in Gandhara. Concerning the specific Hinayana sects, are counted: Sarvastivadins in Tarim and Badakhshan with 201/10000 monasteries/monks (plus possibly 100/5000 in Kashmir); Sammatiya in the lower Indus 80/14000; and Lokottaravadins in Bamiyan 10/1000. The Mahasamghikas, apart a small stronghold in Kashmir and another in South Bactria, practically disappeared.

Mahayana monasteries/monks are concentrated in Arachosia (200/10000), Kapisa (80/5000) and S-Tarim (81/4100), and just a few are left in Gandhara.

Xuan Zang finds in ruin the 30% of the Buddhist sites, and the almost totality of the ones of the Gandhara region: in Gandhara 1000 undetermined monasteries are without monks, in Swat 1400 abandoned monasteries, with few remnant Mahayana monks, and the same situation has been found in Nangarhar.

Less than 50 years later (673), according to the travel accounts of I-tsing (Yijing, 635-713)<sup>10</sup> who traveled between China and N-India by sea, the Kushan and the Karakorum roads became too insecure to be used as habitual pilgrimage routes, and all Chinese Buddhist travelers went directly to the Ganges valley or by sea from South China or by land from Gansu across Tibet (where Buddhism at the time starts diffusing).

## 6 - Ethno-political context

Concerning the social protagonists of the diffusion of Buddhism, the most direct actors, together with monks, have been *merchant* families and guilds of different nationalities involved in international trade: they have been the main patrons during the entire process. Merchants and monks interacted in all the towns of the Silk Road, commercial desks and monasteries rose together, and the first translators of Buddhist texts into Chinese language (II-III AD) were mainly sponsored by families of foreign merchants established in China<sup>11</sup>. Even the forms of the Buddhist spread show mercantile patterns, in the sense that monasteries of different schools didn't diffuse gradually through progressive popular conversion in neighboring territories, but by long jumps on scattered points of the road, following the opportunities given by merchant protectors. This pattern of diffusion would change only when Buddhism was adopted as state religion by powerful Central Asian nomadic confederations and empires (Xianbei, Tibetans, Karakitai, Mongols and Jungars), mainly during the last Phases VI and VII of the Buddhist spread.

Also the *peoples* living around the centers of the Buddhist spread have been important elements of its diffusion, and so their rulers, favoring or hindering the flow.

In general we can say that the Iranian borders (which after the III AD enclosed Zoroastrianism as compulsory state religion) stopped the Buddhist spread and diverted it to Central Asia<sup>12</sup>; and China,

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<sup>10</sup> Yijing was a Chinese Buddhist monk of the Vinaya school of Chinese Buddhism, specialized in study of all aspects of the Vinaya (rules of conduct).

<sup>11</sup> One of the most commonly depicted episodes in the Kushan period is the offering of food to the newly enlightened Buddha by the two merchant brothers, Trapusa and Bhallika, represented in Indo-Scythian dress.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Biruni, writing in the XI century, claims that, prior to the suppression of Buddhism in the III AD, "Khurasan, Persis, Irak, Mosul and the country up to the frontier of Syria were Buddhist...followers of Budasaf" and that the Buddhist concentration in the area of Balkh resulted from its eastwards retreat (*Hend*, p. 10; *Atar*, p. 204). This affirmation from the high Medieval scholar about the westernmost borders of the Buddhist spread is interesting but still lacks archaeological evidence.



very open to Buddhism, attracted and accelerated the spread to the east.

But most important have been the ethnic context established along the actual roads of the spread. Socially speaking, these roads were the stratified result of several waves (five-six) of massive southward displacements of northern Eurasian tribes along Central Asian meridional corridors, a process that went on for thousands of years, from 2200 BC to 1500 AD, i.e. roughly a big wave every 500-700 years. The original motherland of these moving tribes at first was northwest Central Asia; then, after the II BC, it switched to the northeast (see Table II).

The main migratory waves that concerned the Central Asia and Gandhara regions during the time of the Buddhist spread are the following:

- Saka tribes moved to Gandhara, Seistan (S-Central Asia), Sindh (Lower Indus) and Gujarat (II-I BC, Phase-II of the Buddhist spread);
- Yueche-Kushan started moving from Gansu in II BC, reached S-Central-Asia in I AD, and a large clan moved back to the east, across S-Tarim to Luoyang, in 200 AD (Phase-III-IV);
- Kidarites (Chionites) and Hephtalites (IV-V AD, Phase IV) are White-Huns (Little Yueche) tribal confederations respectively formed in the Syrdarya region and in the mountain piedmonts;
- Turks occupied West and South Central Asia and (together with Uighurs, Tangut and Karakitai) the Tarim during the VI-XII AD (Phase-IV-V), i.e. at the time when the main centres of Buddhism were switching from Gandhara and South Central Asia to northern and northeastern regions that fell under Turkic control.

At the contrary of Kidarites and Hephtalites, most of these nomadic confederations (and some others located beyond the northern frontiers of China) have been strong supporters of Buddhism. This fact allows joining the *nomadic rulers* – first of all the Saka, Kushan and Uighurs rulers – to the merchants as main patrons of Buddhism. For merchants the Buddhist monasteries represented safe bases for travels, social relations and commercial transitions, and under the Sakas and Kushans they also constituted centres for territorial management and moral control, with lands and villages at their dependence. The interest for Buddhism by part of the following nomadic rulers was mainly privileging Mahayana and theocratic Vajrayana Buddhism, a tendency that grew in time until the last Phase VII, when Lamaist Vajrayana Buddhism – and its proclaimed identity between state and religion – spread northwards from Tibet among Mongols and Jungars.

Table II - Synoptic table of waves of southern migrations of steppe peoples and events of the Buddhist spread in Central Asia

| year           | southward migration of steppe peoples   | northward spread of Buddhism from India<br><i>main schools</i><br><i>phases of Gandhara art</i><br><i>periods, places and agents of persecution of Buddhism</i>  |
|----------------|---|--|
| <b>2000 BC</b> | <b>I wave</b> – 2200-1500 BC<br>Indo-Aryans from Central Asia to Middle East and North India  |  |
| <b>1000 BC</b> | <b>II wave</b> – 1200-600 BC<br>Iranians from eastern Caspian to Iran.<br>Scythians, Sauromatians, Massagetae, Sakas, Yuezhi in Central Eurasian steppes  | 563-483 BC (±60 yrs) - Life of Gautamo Buddha in north India. First council at Rajagriya   |
| <b>500 BC</b>  |   | 350 BC (±60 yrs) - Second council and first schism at Vesali   |
| <b>300 BC</b>  |   | 273-232 BC - Asoka rules India. Third council at Pataliputra (247 BC). Further schisms. Buddhism spreads all over the Indian sub-continent. 4 Asoka rock edicts in Gandhara, Arachosia and Kapisa.   |
| <b>200 BC</b>  | <b>III wave</b> – 200 BC-500 AD<br>Sarmatians from Uralo-Caspian region to Ukraina.<br>Parthians from southeast Caspian to north Iran.<br>Xiongnu from Mongolia to whole Eurasian steppes.<br><br>Sakas from Central Asia to East Iran, Indus and N- India (80 BC). | <b>I phase</b> - Mauryan-IndoGreek (200-100 BC)<br>During the Indo-Greek kingdoms (180-10 BC), king Menander (160-135 BC) converts to Buddhism: 2 stupas, in Taxila (Gandhara) and Butkara (Swat)<br><br><b>II phase</b> – Saka-Parthian (100 BC-100 AD)<br>Buddhism is supported by Saka and Indo-Parthian rulers and adopted by local dynasties (Apraca and Odi). Few Buddhist monasteries develop in Gandhara and spread to the west in Nangarhar and to the north till Chilas (Indus valley).<br><i>Early Buddhist schools: Sarvastivada, Mahasamghika, Dharmaguptaka,</i><br><i>First phase of Gandhara art (Saka-Parthian): Hellenistic-Roman style on naturalistic narrative Indian subjects.</i> |
| <b>100 AD</b>  | Yuezhi-Kushan from Gansu to Central Asia and finally to Indus and N-India (75 AD).<br><br>Goths and Northern Huns towards Europe.<br><br>Proto-Mongol Xianbei from E-Mongolia inherit the Hiongnu territories (200 AD)  | <b>III phase</b> – Kushan (100-300 AD)<br>Kushan patronage and Jalandhar council under Kanishka (250 AD). Buddhism spreads <i>with Sogdian merchants</i> from Gandhara to Kapisa, Arachosia and Bactria, to south and north Tarim, to Gansu; and to China by land (carried by Parthian, Kushan and Sogdian monks and merchants) and by sea (through Vietnam).<br><i>Early Buddhist schools (idem)</i><br><i>Second phase of Gandhara art (Kushan): introduction of Parthian statuary tendencies and stuccos technique</i><br><i>Persecution in Termez by Sassanids (270-290 AD).</i>   |
| <b>300 AD</b>  | Kidarites (White Huns) from Amudarya to South Central Asia (380)  | <b>IV phase</b> – Kushan-Sassanid-Kidarites (300-500 AD)<br>Buddhism spreads from Bactria westward till Merv (Margiana); from Gansu and Tarim to the border zone between settled and nomads (Xianbei). From here it spread to Korea (372). Adopted by the Topa-Wei as state religion of Northern China (385-534 AD).<br><i>Early Buddhist schools (idem + Lokottaravada);</i>  |

|                       |   |  |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| <p><b>500 AD</b></p>  | <p>Xianbei-Topa from Manchuria to north China (N-Wei dynasty, 439).</p> <p>Hephtalites from Transoxiana to E-Iran, South Central Asia and NW-India (480)</p> <p>Rouran (Ju-Juan) from East Mongolia to Eurasian steppes.</p> <p><b>IV wave – 500-1200 AD</b></p> <p>Alans, Bulgars, and Avars to Eastern Europe</p> <p>Turks from South Siberia to the Central Asian steppes: Early Turks (571), Western Turks (600), Karluk (766), Oguz-Seljuk, Kipchak-Pechenegs (900)</p> <p>Khazars on the Caspian (650-969)</p> <p>Tibetans to Tarim (670)</p> | <p><i>Mahayana-Madhyamika in Gandhara and Tarim (400)</i></p> <p><i>Third phase of Gandhara art (Kushano-Sassanid): Iranian influence with introduction of abstract images and rich ornamentation, in newly built sites of Kapisa (Bamiyan) and Bactria-Tocharistan. This style spreads east in Buddhist monasteries of Tarim.</i></p> <p><i>Persecution in Bactria by Kidarites, and in Bactria and Gandhara by Hephtalites (470-490 AD).</i></p> <p><b>V phase – Hephtalite-Sassanid-Turk (500-800 AD)</b></p> <p>Buddhism contracts in Afghanistan and develops in NE Bactria (Tokharistan) and North Tarim, now severed from Gandhara. From Tarim it spreads westward to Sogdia, Fergana and Chu valleys under Turkic and Chinese rule (VII-VIII AD). From Korea it spreads to Japan (552). Vajrayana school rises in N-India (600).</p> <p><i>Early schools (idem + Mahisasaka, Kasyapiya, Sammatiya); Mahayana Madhyamika in Tarim and Central Asia, Sukhavati in Turfan and Chu; Vajrayana in Kashmir and Khotan.</i></p> <p><i>Fourth phase of Gandhara art (LateHephtalite-Turkic): artistic renaissance with Mahayana abstract images, mixing of Indian Gupta style and East Iranian ornaments (Fondukistan, Bamiyan, Tepe Sardar).</i></p> <p><i>Persecution in Kabul, Nangarhar, Gandhara, Kashmir by Hephtalites (510-530 AD), Sassanids (565) and Caliphate (661).</i></p> |
| <p><b>1000 AD</b></p> | <p>Uighurs from Mongolia to Tarim (840)</p> <p>Tangut from Tibet to Gansu and China (Xia dynasty, 1000-1200)</p> <p>Qarakhitai from Manchuria to northwest Central Asia (1150)</p> <p><b>V wave – 1200-1450 AD</b></p> <p>Mongols from South Siberia to all Eurasia</p>   | <p><b>VI phase – Tibetan-Uighur (800-1400 AD)</b></p> <p>Vajrayana Buddhism spreads from India to Kashmir, Khotan and among Tibetans. Uighurs support Buddhism.</p> <p><i>Hinduist resurgence and Muslim persecution and eradication in Gandhara and Bactria.</i></p> <p><i>Persecution in Central Asia and conversion of Karakhanids to Islam (950-1130 AD); and eradication from N-India under Ghaznavid rule (977-1186 AD).</i></p> <p>Buddhism spread northward from Tarim and Gansu among steppe tribes (Naiman, Karakitai); and, through them, feed-backs westward along northern routes. Karakitai import Buddhism in Semirechie (1200). Early Mongols sympathize with Buddhism (1244), which anyhow in Tarim is gradually substituted by Islam</p> <p><i>Mahayana in North Tarim and northern steppes; Vajrayana in South Tarim and Gansu</i></p> <p><i>Persecution and eradication from all Central Asia during Muslim Chagatai and Timurid rule (1400-1500 AD).</i></p>  |
| <p><b>1500 AD</b></p> | <p><b>VI wave – 1450-1755 AD</b></p> <p>Uzbeks and Kazakhs emerge from the White Horde in KZ; Uzbeks move to Transoxiana (1450).</p> <p>West-Mongols Oirat-Jungar from South Siberia to Jungaria, Tarim and East KZ (1450-1750).</p> <p>Tungus Qing from Manchuria to China.</p> <p>Russians from East Europe to Siberia and Central Asia (1850).</p>   | <p><b>VII phase – Mongol-Jungar (1578-1755 AD)</b></p> <p>Buddhism spreads northward from Tibet among eastern Mongols in Mongolia (1578); and among western Mongols (Oirat-Jungar) in Jungaria, East KZ, Semirechie and Issykul (1617).</p> <p><i>Vajrayana Tibetan Lamaism (Dgelugs-pa)</i></p> <p><i>Persecution in Central Asia after the defeat of the Jungars by the Chinese Qing dynasty (1755); and final eradication under the Russian communist regime that displaces the last monks from Semirechie (Narynkol) across the border into China (1930)</i></p>   |
| <p><b>1900 AD</b></p> |   |  |



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## Figures

Fig 01 - General map of the spread of Buddhist monuments in the Indus valley and in Central Asia (III BC - XV AD)

Figs 02-13 - Maps of chronological development of Buddhist monuments in the Indus valley and Central Asia by century (I BC - X AD). Yellow dots = sites newly built during the century; red dots = sites still occupied; white dots = sites abandoned before the start of the century.

Fig 14 - Graphic: evolution of number of active Buddhist monuments in the Indus and Kabul valley, Bactria and W-CentralAsia, and E-CentralAsia, by century (I-X AD)

Fig 15 - Graphic: evolution of number of active Buddhist monuments by region and by century (I BC - X AD)

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Fig 19 - Gandhara Art I - Greco-Bactrian (I BC – I AD)

Fig 20 - Gandhara Art II - Kushan (II-III AD)

Fig 21 - Gandhara Art III - Late Kushan -Sasanian (IV-V AD)

Fig 22 - Gandhara Art VI - Hephtalite-Turkic (VI-VIII AD)

Fig 23 - Post-Gandhara - Tarim (IX-XIV AD)

## ANNEX

### Illustration samples of Gandhara and Post-Gandhara styles





**Gandhara Art II**  
II-III AD  
**Kushan**



Starving Buddha, Gandhara (II-III AD)



Bodhisattva Maitreya, Gandhara (II-III AD)

**Gandhara Art III**  
IV-V AD  
**Late Kushan -Sasanian**



Bodhisattva, Hadda (IV AD)



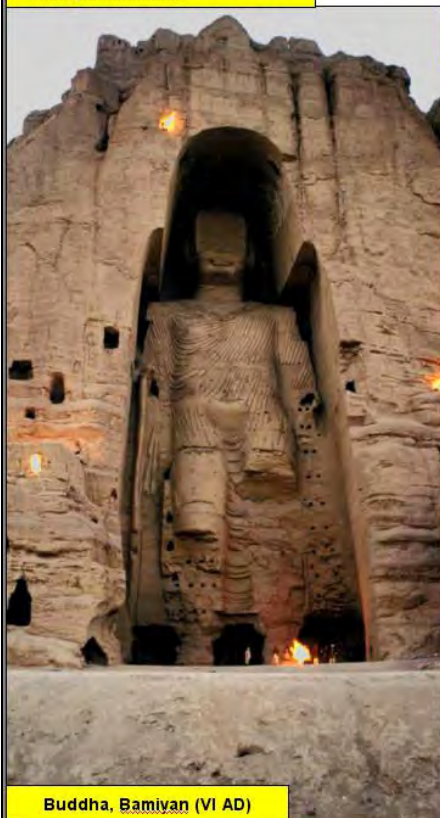
Dancing princess Chandraprabha, Kizil caves, N-Tarim, style-I (IV AD)



Mural, Kizil caves, N-Tarim, style-II (V AD)



**Gandhara Art VI  
VI-VIII AD  
Hephtalite-Turkic**



Buddha, Bamiyan (VI AD)



Bodhisattva Devata,  
Fandukistan (VI AD)

Celestial musician,  
Kizil caves, N-Tarim, style-III (VII AD)



**Post-Gandhara  
IX-XIV AD  
Tarim**



Brahman or bodhisattva Vairavani, Bezeklik, N-Tarim (IX AD)



Buddha, Bezeklik, N-Tarim (IX AD)