

PEOPLED VINE SCROLL IN GANDHARAN SCULPTURE

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Introduction

In Gandhara, north of Pakistan, flourished Buddhist art which was influenced by Greek, Hellenistic, Roman, Iranian and Indian arts. A good example of Roman influence upon Gandharan Buddhist art, is a motif that is called 'peopled vine scroll' composed of vine stems inhabited by human figures and wild animals[1].

It is B. Rowland, who made a research of Gandharan peopled vine scroll for the first time, that is depicted on a vertical relief panel (fig.1) in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [2]. He identified this panel as door jamb which probably decorated a niche enclosing a Buddha statue in a Buddhist temple. He also pointed out that several images of this panel is related to Dionysus and his *thiasos*, and correctly remarked that they are similar to those depicted on pilasters found in the Roman East. Consequently, he maintained that Gandharan peopled vine scroll had been diffused from the Roman East from the middle of the second to the late third century A. D.

However, the problem with Rowland's view is his insufficient survey of Gandharan types of peopled vine scroll and also of Roman types of peopled scroll. As he did not take into consideration Roman 'peopled acanthus scroll', he could not explain the reason why peopled vine scroll was exclusively adopted in Gandharan art.

In this presentation, therefore, first of all, I will show several new Gandharan relief panels depicting peopled vine scroll that Rowland did not quote. Secondly, I will show that both peopled vine scroll and peopled acanthus scroll are attested in the art of the Roman East. Thirdly, I will clarify the reason why only peopled vine scroll motif was transmitted to Gandhara.

1 Gandharan Peopled Vine Scroll Motif

Gandharan types of peopled vine scroll are almost divided into four according to the form of vine stem.

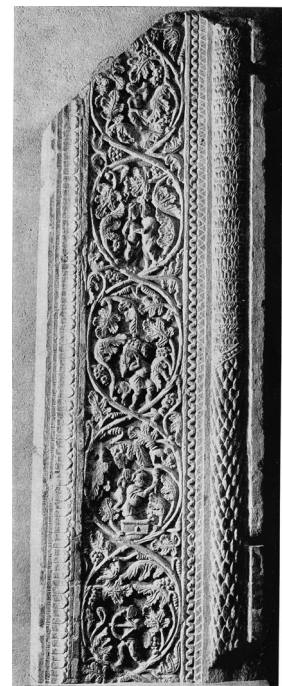


Fig.1 door jamb

Type I is composed of a vine stem with leaves running horizontally making a wavy scroll inhabited by human



Fig. 2 peopled vine scroll

and animal figures. On the

relief panel (Fig.2) in the collection of the Hirayama-Ikuo Silk Road Museum in Japan, two male figures picking grapes and two monkeys are depicted in a wavy vine scroll. On the other hand, on the panel in the collection of the Peshawar Museum, a monkey, a deer, a male figure shooting an arrow, and a male figure having a shield are depicted [3].

Type II is that of the door jamb in the collection of Museum of Fine Art, Boston (Fig.1). On this panel five medallions are formed by the symmetrical intertwist of two vine stems. These medallions enclose a male figure drinking, a fraternizing male and female couple, a male figure picking grapes, a male figure stamping grapes and a male shooting an arrow.

Type III is composed of two vine stems knotted into five medallions. In these medallions boys plucking grapes or struggling for a bunch?, and a goat nibbling the vine are depicted [4].

Type IV is also composed of medallions made by two vine stems but tied by the Heracles Knot. On a broken door jamb owned by a private collector in Tokyo, are depicted a goat, a bird and a peacock.

Human, animal and bird figures depicted in the above-mentioned Gandharan four types of peopled vine scroll are related to Dionysus and his *thiasos* [5]. For example, a drinking male figure is modeled on Silenus drinking wine, a fraternizing male and female couple modeled on amorous Satyr and Maenad, a male figure picking grapes modeled on Eros harvesting grapes, and a hunter shooting an arrow modeled on Eros the hunter. All the wild animals and birds are regarded to be under the control of Dionysus.

2 Peopled Scroll Motifs in the Roman East

In the art of Roman East, peopled scroll motif is divided into two types. The first type is peopled vine scroll, and the second is peopled acanthus scroll. These types are carved on the pilasters found at Leptis Magna in Libya, Aphrodisias in Turkey, Baalbek in Lebanon, Palmyra in Syria, and Beth-Shian in Israel [6] [7] [8] [9] .

On a pilaster of the tetrapylon at Leptis Magna, peopled vine scroll is depicted. The type of this vine scroll is the same as the second type above mentioned. In the medallions are depicted human figures related to Dionysus and the Greek Gods such as Heracles. What is more, peopled acanthus scroll is depicted on pilasters of



Fig. 3 Pilaster from Aphrodisias

the Basilica of Leptis Magna. Acanthus is a auspicious plant symbolizing immortality.

On a pilaster (Fig. 3) from Aphrodisias, peopled acanthus scroll is vertically depicted. In spaces formed by the stems arranged into wavy form, human figures like a hunting Eros and animals like a lion are seen.

On a beam from Palmyra, vine scroll motif is depicted. In the medallions, two vine stems are seen. On the other hand, there is a sarcophagus which depicts a Palmyran aristocrat lying on a couch(Fig. 4). He wears a tunic. The front of the tunic is decorated with peopled vine scroll. In the two medallions an Eros picking grapes is seen. This medallion is connected by the Heracles Knot.

Among the pilasters found in the Roman East, are observed both peopled vine scroll and peopled acanthus scroll. There are also two types of medallions: one is formed by simply intersecting stems and the other by Heracles Knot. What is more, in the medallion of peopled vine scroll, not only Dionysus and his *thiasos* but also the Greek Gods such as Heracles appear.

3 Gandharan peopled vine scroll and the Paradise of Dionysus

As stated above, there are both peopled vine scroll and peopled acanthus scroll motifs in the architecture of the Roman East. As regards the human figures depicted in medallions of architecture of this region, not only Dionysus and his *thiasos* but also Greek Gods are attested. However, in Gandharan architecture, only peopled vine scroll is observed, and human figures related to Dionysus and his *thiasos* are depicted in medallions of this kind of scroll. This fact means that Gandharan sculptors intentionally chose only those motifs that are intimately related to Dionysus and his *thiasos* among a lot of decorative motifs transmitted from the West.

Why did they not choose peopled acanthus scroll but select only peopled vine scroll motif? I believe that it is because they needed only the paradisiacal imagery of Dionysus and his *thiasos*.

Dionysus is generally regarded as the god of wine, grapes, winemaking, birth and rebirth, and fertility. He is also the god of the luxuriant growth of plants. Plants die in winter and are reborn in spring. Therefore Dionysus is related to resurrection and rebirth of beings. The dead is thought to be reborn after death in Dionysiac Paradise and to be able to enjoy the pleasure given by Maenads forever there. The Dionysiac figures represented in Gandharan art is also related to the resurrection and rebirth in paradise of afterlife. As a result, Gandharan sculptors chose only the Dionysiac peopled vine scroll motif. This is the most appropriate motif to show concretely and vividly a blissful scene of paradise to the Buddhists in Gandhara.

Conclusion



Fig. 4 peopled vine scroll from Palmyra

This presentation makes it clear that peopled vine scroll motif in Gandharan art symbolizes a paradise of afterlife. All the four types of Gandharan peopled vine scroll decorated the Buddhist temples. Therefore, this motif must have been related to Gandharan Buddhism and the faith of the Buddhists. This motif should be interpreted in the Buddhist context, that is to say, it might symbolize the afterlife that the Buddhists in Gandhara imagined and aspired to attain. I am ready for discussing what it concretely and particularly means, in another forthcoming paper.

Sources of Figures

Fig. 1 Rowland 1956, fig. 1.

Fig. 2 K. Tanabe, *Gandhāran Art from the Hirayama Collection*, Tokyo, 2007, fig. I-71.

Fig. 3 Author's photo.

Fig. 4 Schmidt-Colinet, A, T. *Palmyra, Kulturbegegnung im Grenzbereich*, Mainz, 1994, Figs. 48, 49.

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