


ALONG
THE ANCIENT
SILK ROUTES
Central Asian Art
FROM THE WEST BERLIN
STATE MUSEUMS

An exhibition lent by the Museum für Indische Kunst,
Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin,
Federal Republic of Germany

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
NEW YORK 

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Front: King Ajatashatru, and His Wife(?);
detail of No. 24. Kizil, 600–650
Back: Seated Buddha; No. 47. Tumshuk, 5th century

FRONTISPIECE

King Ajatashatru; detail of No. 24. Kizil, 600–650

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Unless otherwise stated all the illustrations are from the archives of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.

The maps on pages 14, 16–17, 19, and 38 were drawn especially for this volume by Kathleen Borowik (© 1982 The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

The translation was by Ian Robson, with contributions by John Gabriel.

NOTE Transliterated words and names are printed without diacritical marks. The spelling of place and proper names has been adjusted for phonetic convenience.

FOREWORD

ONE OF THE GREAT rewards of a visit to the Museum für Indische Kunst in Dahlem, West Berlin, is the opportunity to see its extraordinary holdings in the art of Central Asia. With only a handful of important collections of Central Asian art in the world, Berlin's remains unrivaled, particularly in the magnificent assemblage of wall paintings. Acquired in the first quarter of this century as the result of four pioneering expeditions to the remote and inhospitable region of Chinese Turkestan, the Berlin collection has led the way to a greater understanding and appreciation of the ancient cultures of Central Asia.

It is in the context of our exchange agreements with the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz that we are able to present in New York a generous selection of the Berlin holdings. Through this unparalleled collection visitors to The Metropolitan Museum of Art will discover the wonders of early Buddhist painting and sculpture in Central Asia, as well as some rare examples of the little-known art of the Manichaeans and Nestorian Christians. The exhibition, it should be noted, is the first of any consequence of the art of Central Asia to be presented in this country.

I would like to express my thanks to Professor Dr. Stephan Waetzoldt, Director General of the Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, who was on the German side the architect of this exchange of exhibitions; it has already featured in Berlin an exhibition of treasures of Islamic art from the Metropolitan Museum, as a counterpart to "Along the Ancient Silk Routes." I take pleasure in acknowledging as well the unfailing cooperation of Professor Dr. Herbert Härtel, Director of the Museum für Indische Kunst, who, with the able assistance of Dr. Marianne Yaldiz of the Museum für Indische Kunst, wrote the text for this volume. Martin Lerner, Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art at the Metropolitan Museum, was responsible for the selection of the exhibition and its organization in New York. In addition, Mr. Lerner has contributed the Gandharan entries to the catalogue, and has acted as general editor and consultant for this publication.

Because of the fragility of the objects the exhibition will not travel. We are

all the more grateful and honored to have been entrusted with these masterpieces by the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

Finally, I wish to express my profound appreciation to IBM for its generous support of the exhibition and catalogue. Very simply, if IBM had not recognized the singular importance of the project and provided the necessary funding, it could not have been undertaken, and a unique opportunity for us to experience these works of art at first hand would have been lost.

Philippe de Montebello

Director

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

FOREWORD

THE EXHIBITION "Along the Ancient Silk Routes" from the holdings of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, is our response to the splendid show of masterpieces of Islamic Art from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, that we were privileged to mount in 1981.

In Germany—and indeed in Europe—the Museum für Indische Kunst is the only self-contained collection specializing in the art of India and of Central and Southeast Asia. In establishing such a museum, based on the old collections of the Museum für Völkerkunde—the Ethnological Museum—as well as on new acquisitions, the trustees of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz were aiming not only to expand their services to the public but also to honor the great cultural and aesthetic values which that art represents for the world.

In the Berlin State Museums we take pride in the scope of our collections. They embrace, as do those of the Metropolitan Museum, works of art and cultural history from all parts of the world and all epochs. We are glad, therefore, to offer our visitors the chance to see masterpieces from other collections, and in turn to send some of our own treasures abroad, where they can be enjoyed by many who might otherwise have been denied that opportunity.

It is in this spirit that a program of exchange exhibitions has been set up between the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin. In the realization of this program I am deeply indebted to Mr. Philippe de Montebello, Director of the Metropolitan Museum, and for their organization of this exhibition to Professor Dr. Herbert Härtel and Mr. Martin Lerner in Berlin and New York respectively.

Historical circumstances have made the Museum für Indische Kunst, of the Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, a repository of the art of Central Asia. Now, through the Metropolitan Museum, we share this heritage of a distant land with the American public.

Stephan Waetzoldt
Director General
Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz

Along the Ancient Silk Routes

Text by Dr. Herbert Härtel

Commentaries by Dr. Härtel and
Dr. Marianne Yaldiz

REPORTS OF A GREAT Buddhist civilization, dating from the first millennium A.D. and buried for centuries beneath the drifting desert sands of Central Asia—what could have been more provocative to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century explorers and archaeologists? Drawn by this startling news, those who braved the hazards of fabled Turkestan found a reality that far exceeded their expectations. What they discovered was indeed a missing chapter in the history of Asian art: the lost cities and Buddhist communities which had graced the ancient Silk Routes once connecting Rome to China.

For centuries these routes were the avenues along which the great caravans carried goods between East and West. Inevitably also they were channels for the communication of ideas, beliefs, and art styles. People of different races and professions—merchants, monks, soldiers, pilgrims, official emissaries from far-off lands—stopped at the cities along the way. Many languages could be heard there; many cultures blended to create an intellectual climate of high order. In the large cosmopolitan centers, where Jews mingled with Hindus and Zoroastrians traded with Muslims, valuable commodities from China and India, Rome and Persia changed hands no doubt many times before they reached their final destination. In all this traffic perhaps the single most significant and lasting treasure transmitted along the Silk Routes was the Buddhist faith.

That Buddhism, and with it Buddhist art and iconography, spread from its homeland in India to

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China is now well known, although the precise chronology and sequence of its movement have still to be worked out. To understand the complex nature of that movement, partly by sea but primarily overland, requires an appreciation of the richness and diversity of the cultures of Central Asia. In addition, the Buddhist art of Central Asia is crucial to an understanding of the dissemination of styles throughout the whole of the Far East.

This volume documents and vividly pictures treasures which archaeologists carried back to Berlin. In text and commentaries, Dr. Herbert Härtel, Director of the Museum für Indische Kunst in Berlin, combines scholarly accuracy with a connoisseur's delight.

*Over 200 illustrations,
including 110 plates in full color*

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