

# Herakles and the 'Perpetual Acolyte' of the Buddha: Some Observations on the Iconography of Vajrapani in Gandharan Art

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The frequent use of strikingly Classical, and specifically Heraklean, types in the depiction of Vajrapani ('Bearer of the Thunderbolt') on the Early Buddhist reliefs of Gandhara has long been known and commented upon (Marshall, 1960; Soper, 1951; Zwalf, 1979). In several instances, however, such borrowing exceeds mere stylistic detail and facial characteristics and tends instead towards a complete transposition of Heraklean iconography in a Buddhist context.

On a relief in the British Museum (Fig. 1; Zwalf, 1979, fig. 21) Vajrapani is depicted wearing a head-dress composed of a lion skin complete with head, its paws knotted around his neck. He carries the *vajra* in his right hand, a long sword of Kushan type in his left, and is clad only in a loin-cloth, in contrast to the surrounding *saṅghati*-robed Buddhist *bhikṣu*.

More recently, the excavations at Tapa-i-Shotur in northern Afghanistan have produced a stucco relief of the third century A.D. showing a small Vajrapani figure of pure Classical Heraklean type with the lion skin around his waist (Snellgrove, 1978, fig. 132), a naked foil to the elaborately-draped Buddha of Gandharan type by which he crouches. The lion skin is seen also draped across the shoulders of a Vajrapani shown on the left of a Buddha in Peshawar Museum (Tissot, 1985, fig. 96), and in examples from Sikri (Foucher, 1905, fig. 245) and Sahri Bahlol (Foucher, 1918, fig. 317).

Soper (1951, p. 304, plates 24 a-b) identified a further instance of a relief showing a Vajrapani figure wearing something resembling the Heraklean lion skin over the shoulders, knotted in front like the example in the British Museum.

Nor is the sculpture of Mathūra lacking in examples of Vajrapani with the lion claws knotted about his shoulders, an indication of the strength of this iconographic type. On a red sandstone sculpture from Bar-eilly now in the National Museum New Delhi, Vajrapani appears on the proper right of the Buddha sporting



Fig. 1. Fragmentary relief showing Vajrapani with lion skin (BM 1970 7-18 1, courtesy of the British Museum) (height 1'9½").

the characteristic wreath and feline shawl of Gandhara (Sharma, 1984, fig. 98). A similarly Heraklean formula is employed on a Mathūran relief in a private collection in Düsseldorf (Czuma, 1985, fig. 9). The knotted lion skin also appears in connection with Vajrapani on a sculpture from Mathūra now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Czuma, 1985, fig. 77) and in a piece in the Millikin collection in Cleveland (*ibid.*, fig. 12). The marked stylisation of the lion skin in the Mathūran examples is no doubt responsible for its designation as a 'scarf' by Czuma, but the detail is more likely to relate to the Gandharan examples mentioned. The dating of the Düsseldorf piece in year 32 of Kanishka, and the Gandharan iconographic influence postulated here may have implications with regard to the Gandharan influence at Mathūra prior to that proposed by J. E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1949, pp. 180–1, 196–7). The Boston Vajrapani with lion claw 'scarf' was recognised by Lohuizen-de Leeuw as employing a Heraklean iconographic motif comparable to that of the 'Nemean Lion' sculpture from Mathūra (*ibid.*, p. 73). If my hypothesis and identification of these figures is correct, these Mathūran instances offer an explanation for the conclusion, evidently surprising to Lamotte (1966, p. 157, that;

'... tandis que le Gandhara multipliait à l'infini son Vajrapani, Mathura, par autant que je puisse juger, ne l'a pas représenté une seule fois.'

Lamotte's conclusion that; '... la vraie partie de Vajrapani est le Nord-Ouest de l'Inde...' (*ibid.*, p. 157), is interesting in view of the western influences suggested here.

In addition to these relatively explicit iconographical borrowings, it is possible in the case of at least one pose frequently associated with Vajrapani on the Gandharan reliefs to trace an evolution from the repertoire of Graeco-Bactrian Heraklean iconography.

Of the two types of Herakles appearing on Graeco-Bactrian coinage, and the third known from certain Kushan issues (Monneret de Villard, 1948), that of Herakles crowning himself appears frequently on coins of Euthydemus II and Demetrios I. It is this type of Herakles *incoronatus* that is of interest here. The type shows a frontal view of a standing Herakles in contraposto pose with a pronounced 'Praxitelean' curve to the body holding the lion skin and club in his left hand, while the right hand is engaged in bringing a wreath to rest on the head. There are variants in the rendering of the figure; on coins of Demetrios I Herakles is depicted at the moment of crowning himself (Gardner, 1886, pl. IIa), while, curiously, on issues of Euthydemus II

(*ibid.*, p. III 3) an incoronate Herakles is shown in the act of raising another wreath in his right hand. Both types derive ultimately from the 'Apollo Lykeios' of Praxiteles (Roberts, 1959). The popularity of the type of the athlete crowning himself stems from a fourth century work by Lysippos of which there is a copy in the Getty Museum (Vermeule, 1981, pls 8, 59). Of the surviving copies of the Apollo Lykeios, including the 'Youth of Sutri', an ivory statuette from the Athenian Agora (Bieber, 1955, figs 17, 19, 20) offers the closest analogies with the Graeco-Bactrian figures, with the outstretched left arm rendered in similar fashion to the Bactrian coins, where it holds the cognative attributes of Herakles. The Lykeian Apollo also figures on Attic coins (*ibid.*, p. 18). The adaptation of such a type for use as a formulaic mode of representing the legendary hero is perhaps explained by the association of both the Apollo Lykeios and Herakles with gymnasia. Of the Apollo Lykeios we read the following in Lucian (*Anarchasis* 7):

'The place itself, Anarchasis, we call a gymnasium, and it is consecrated to Lykeian Apollo; you see his statue – the figure leaning against the pillar with the bow in his left hand; his right arm bent back above his head indicates that the god is resting, as if after long exertion.'

The gymnasium of the Hellenistic *polis* of Ai Khanoum in Afghanistan was dedicated to Herakles in his role as the traditional protector of such institutions (Bernard, 1967, p. 318).

The use of this type of Herakles figure on coin issues continues from the era of the Graeco-Bactrian monarchs, through those of the Saka and Parthian rulers of north-west India<sup>1</sup> and enters the Kushan repertoire on issues of Kajula Kadphises, imitating those of Hermaeus (Tarn, 1938, p. 503 ff.). On later gold issues of Huvishka the figure of Herakles resting on a club is identified as HPAKHAO (Whitehead, 1914, pl. XIX 162), and appears alongside representations of other deities derived from Indo-Greek prototypes (Rowland, 1962, p. 78), thus demonstrating the survival not only of isolated iconographic details, but of a holistic conception of the deity.

It is to precisely this category of 'Lykeian Herakles' that the bronze statuette of the hero, 'imberbe, tenant la massue dans sa main gauche et posant de la droite une couronne de feuillage sur la tête' (Bernard, 1974, fig. 13), found at Ai Khanoum belongs, further reinforcing the importance of Hellenised Bactria in the transmission of iconographic types to India. Evidence from the same site suggests continuous contacts with the

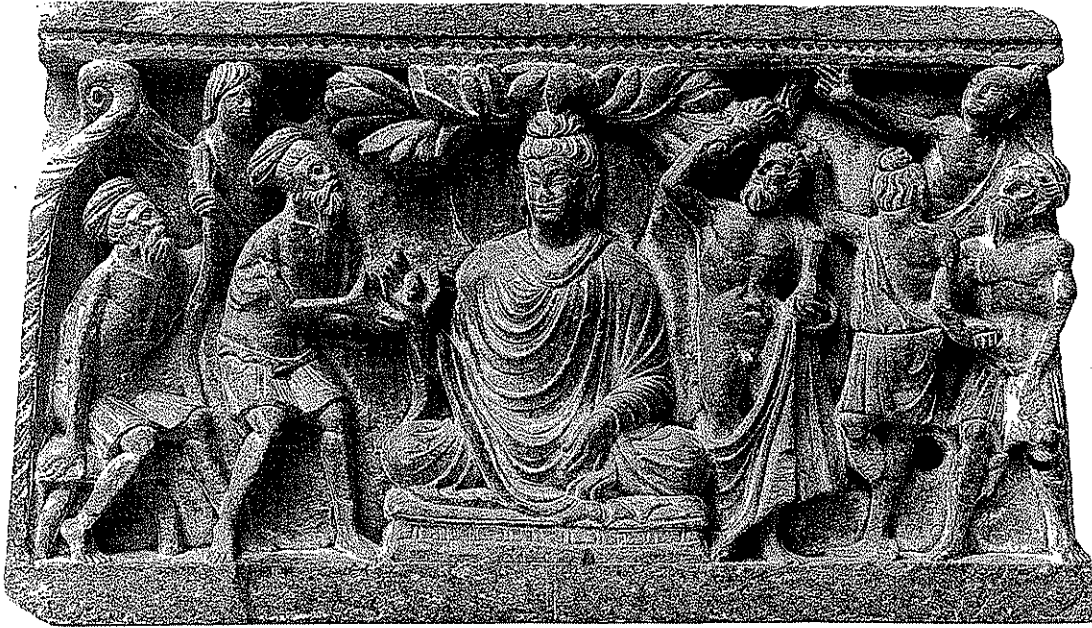


Fig. 2. Relief showing the Conversion of the Kasyapas (BM 1961 2-18 1, courtesy of the British Museum) (height 11 $\frac{2}{8}$ ").

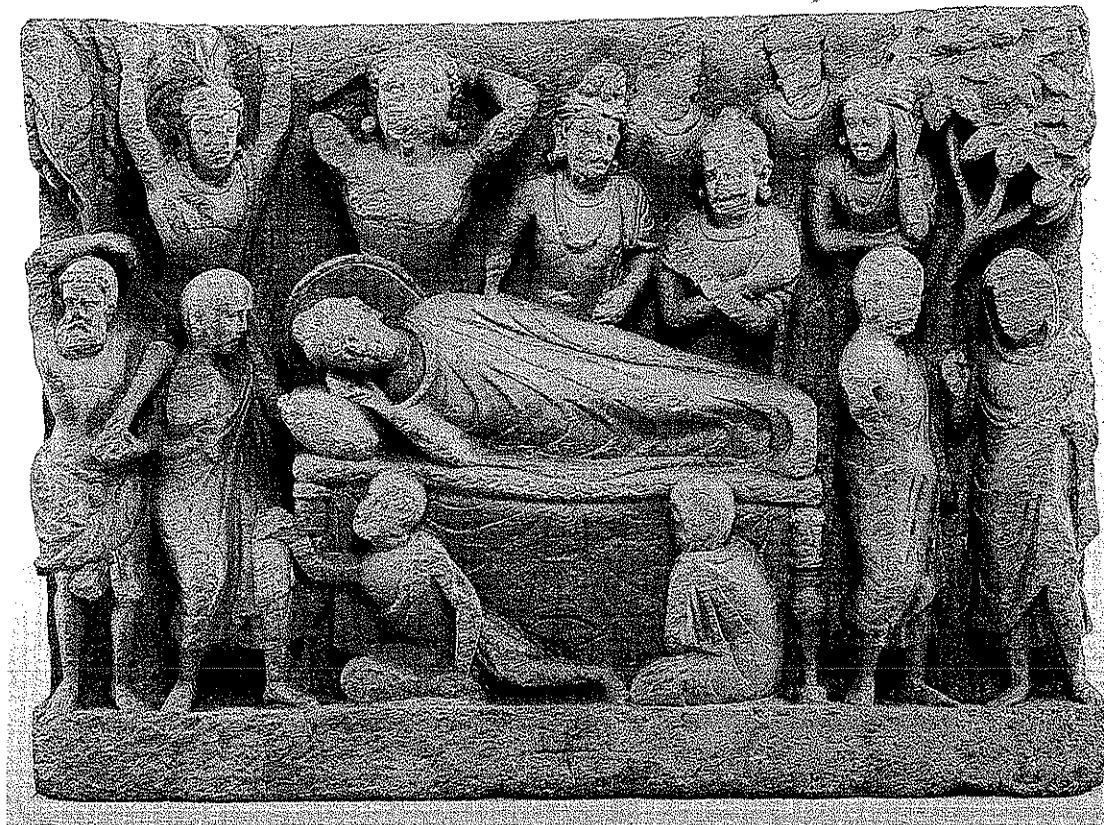


Fig. 3. Death of the Buddha (BM 1913 11-8 17, courtesy of the British Museum) (height 1'0 $\frac{4}{7}$ ").

subcontinent from as early as the third century B.C. (Rapin, 1987, figs 17–21).

In Gandharan art, the pose of 'Lykeian Herakles' is adopted almost exclusively for representations of Vajrapani, although this is by no means the sole form in which the Buddhist figure is represented—among the differing Vajrapani types discussed by Grünwedel (1901, pp. 87–9) are examples with the iconographic attributes and appearance of a Silenus, of Kushan contemporaries, and some instances of depiction in the Palliate posture associated with the Classical Philosophers (Rowland, 1945). A less frequent rendering of Vajrapani, with obvious affinities to the 'Lykeian Herakles' is exemplified by the reliefs shown in Figs 2 and 3.

In the depiction of the Conversion of the Kasyapas (Fig. 2) Vajrapani stands to the left of the Buddha, holding an upright *vajra* and the hem of his robe in his left hand, with his right brandishing a *chauri* (fly whisk) overhead in place of a wreath. The semi-nudity of the

figure is unusual in Gandharan art and, as in the early examples, contrasts with the dress of the accompanying characters. A similar treatment of another bearded Vajrapani is apparent in the scene of the Death of the Buddha (Fig. 3) where Vajrapani, in a pose contrasting sharply with that of his fellows, raises his right arm above his head, in a gesture perhaps intended to suggest a grief-stricken rending of the hair; the *vajra* occupies a similar position to the last example and to that of the club and lion skin in Graeco-Bactrian art, although the figure is clad in a *dhotī*.

The unusual, stilted, treatment of drapery in the Kasyapas relief is seen again in a panel showing the Offering of Dust at Rajagriha (Fig. 4). In this, the figure of Vajrapani is once more almost naked, apart from a summary loop-like arrangement of drapery. As in the preceding examples, the *vajra* is held in the left hand, while the right gives the *abhaya mudrā* gesture—the contraposto recalls dimly the 'Lykeian' type, the hair seems a degenerate or provincial form of that seen

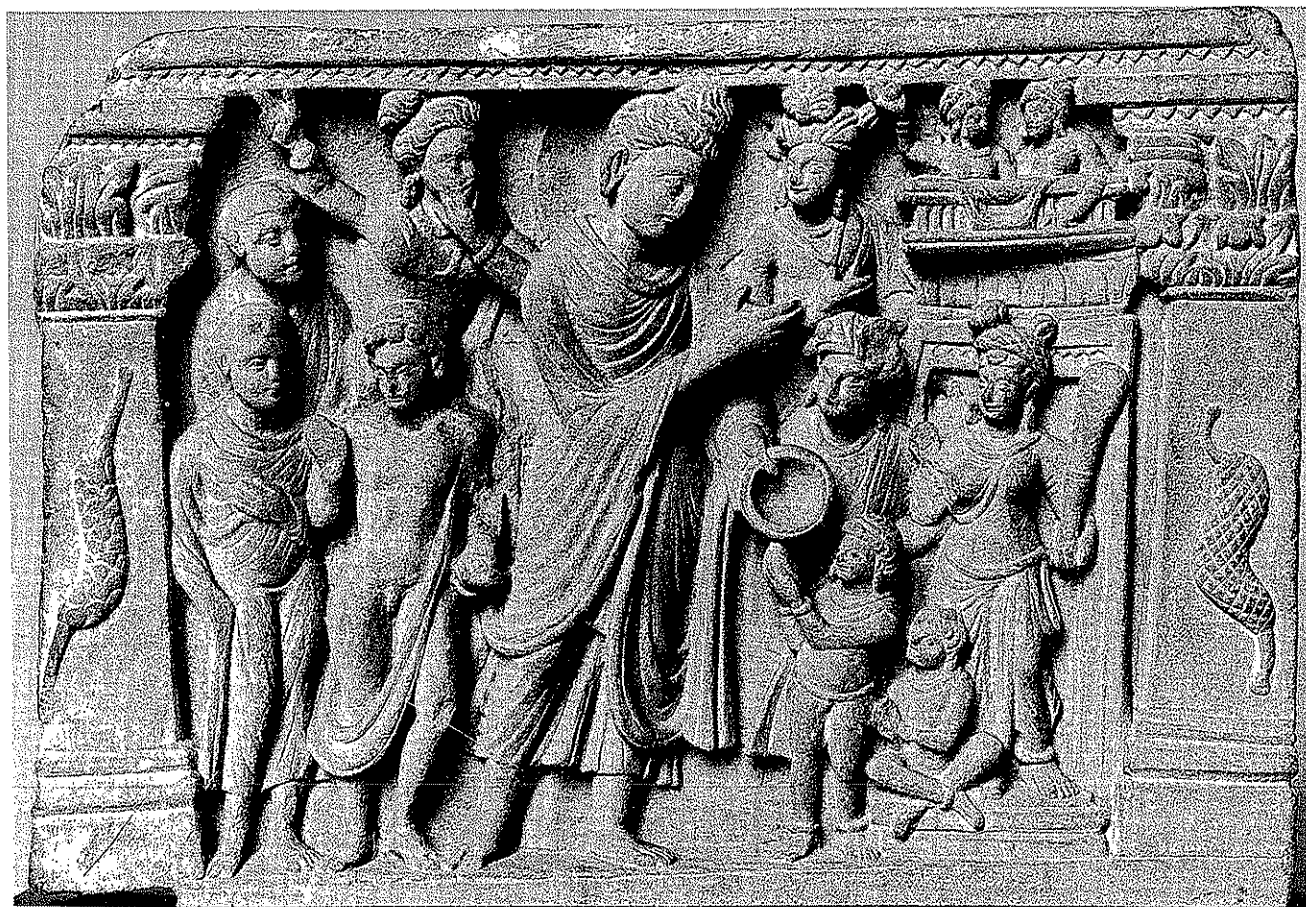


Fig. 4. The Offering of dust at Rajagriha (BM 1922 2-11 I, courtesy of the British Museum) (height 1'3 $\frac{3}{4}$ ").



in the 'Hadda Antinöus' (Rowland, 1984, fig. 110). A similar non-functional arrangement of drapery is seen in the figures of the Genius of Riches and an ascetic in Peshawar (Lyons and Ingholt, 1957, figs 438-9), is employed in the erotic sculpture of Butkara (Facenna, 1962, pls CCLXXXIX, CCXL, CCXCI a-b), and appears in connection with a Vajrapani in the Musée Guimet (Tissot, 1985, fig. 102). The device seems to result from a formulaic abstraction of the *uttariya*, although the reasons for its consistent associations with Vajrapani (especially its use in the absence of the usual *parīdhara*) remain obscure, resulting in a nudity rarely in harmony with the scene depicted.

In a relief depicting the Death of Buddha in the Houghton Collection (Buchthal, 1945, pl. IIIc), the figure of Vajrapani is shown in contraposto position with a strong curve to the body, wearing a dhoti and carrying the vajra in his left hand, while the right clutches at his hair in similar fashion to the Vajrapani of Fig. 2, although the head is turned in three-quarters profile to gaze upon the reclining Buddha in a contextual modification of the 'Lykeian' type. On coins of Vima Kadphises, certain frontal representations of a standing Shiva in contraposto with the right hand raised in the manner of 'Lykeian Herakles' to hold the Shivaic trident (Rosenfield, 1967, pl. II 22) bear a resemblance to this Vajrapani figure. A less careful rendering of the Houghton Vajrapani appears on a relief in Peshawar (Lyons and Ingholt, 1957, fig. 142).

In the depiction of Vajrapani it can therefore be seen that the Gandharan reliefs employ not only specific iconographic attributes of Herakles, but also a formulaic compositional type ultimately derived from Graeco-Bactrian representations of the deity. The fact that Kushan coinage shows a familiarity with Heraklean iconography and that the 'Lykeian Herakles' pose is so intimately associated with Vajrapani, the most frequent recipient of a Classical treatment in Gandharan art, would appear to leave open the possibility of a conscious adaptation of the imagery of Herakles by the Gandharan sculptors, to serve the character of Vajrapani. As Soper comments:

'... it is interesting that this pose seems to have been allotted most frequently to the Vajrapani, a deity whose physical type could be assimilated to that of Hercules and whose very function may be non-Indian in origin.' (1951, p. 309)

Although it has been suggested that the 'Lykeian Herakles' pose and its derivatives have a more widespread application in Buddhist art, being used for such figures as Brahma and Maya, such a view appears to result

from a confusion of the *tribhanga* posture of the indigenous Indian repertoires with the contraposto and Praxitelean curve of Hellenistic art. In the Gandhara figures of Queen Maya giving birth (e.g., Hallade, 1968, fig. 85), only the position of the right arm corresponds to that of 'Lykeian Herakles'. The posture of the crossed legs seems to me to be most convincingly paralleled in the *tribhanga* pose of such *yaksha* figures as are found earlier at Bharhut and Sanchi and of which such superb examples have recently been excavated at Sanghol (Gupta, 1985). The presence of the tree only serves to reinforce the links with the traditional Indian *yaksha* iconography (Viennot, 1954). M. Hallade (1968, p. 119) comments that the presence of the tree and the attitude of Maya in the Birth cycles are just two examples of the adaptation of local iconography.

The pillar from Mathūra representing 'Herakles and the Nemean Lion' (Vogel, 1930, pl. XVIIa) with its overhanging tree, owes more to the western tradition than the indigenous. Tanabe (1974) similarly equates the posture of Herakles on Graeco-Bactrian coinage with the *tribhanga*, from which it is seen to be derived – a somewhat unlikely possibility, in view of the evolution of the Heraklean type traced here, a pre-existing pose resorted to by the Kushan die-cutters as typical of the deity.

In the case of a bronze figure of a standing Buddha in which the right knee is slightly bent, Buchthal (1945) sees the stature as deriving from the Classical contraposto, while the strong S-curve of the body, 'is quite unusual in the North-West and is certainly due to influences from outside'. Ghosh (1978, p. 35) postulates an indigenous evolution for the pose of Queen Maya from the *vrikshaka* motifs of Mauryan art. It is, however, possible that in certain respects the parallels in form between the *tribhanga* pose and that of 'Lykeian Herakles' account in some measure for the adoption of the latter by the Early Buddhist sculptors.

A multitude of finds and dedications relating to the worship of Herakles bear witness to,

'... l'extraordinaire faveur que connut le culte de ce héros dans l'Asie centrale grecque et d'une façon générale dans tout l'Orient hellénisé.'

(Bernard, 1974, p. 302)

Dura-Europos has produced evidence of a Heraklean cult not identified with any Oriental deity (Downey, 1969), at Palmyra the worship of Herakles was usually associated with that of other gods (Colledge, 1973), pre-eminent among them being Nergal (Seyrig, 1944), and appears on some of the art of that city in a more western form than at Dura or Hatra (Colledge, 1973, fig. 36). A

syncretic figure of Artagnes (Verethragna) – Ares – Herakles occupied a prominent place in the pantheon of Nimrud Dagh in eastern Turkey and appears in some of the reliefs from the hierothesion of the dynastic shrine c. 69–31 B.C. (Rosenfield, 1967, fig. 154). Elsewhere in the Near East, Hatra has produced over thirty representations of the deity, including a fragmentary life-size marble sculpture from Temple 7. Among the myriad figures from the Hatrene shrines a bronze Hercules-Nergal in Classical contraposto and with a pronounced S-curve to the body (Colledge, 1977, pl. 11d), and a third century statue from Shrine 9, dedicated by Petronius Quintianus (Downey, 1968, pl. 70, fig. 5) also feature. Shrine 10 at Hatra was dedicated to the deity in his syncretic aspect as Hercules-Nergal (Al-Salihi, 1971) and Hercules-GND is represented with lion skin and Hatrene dress in one of the smaller satellite shrines of the Temple complex (Al-Salihi, 1982, 1987), while in the private chapel of Martabu in Shrine 5 the hero is identified with Verethragna, Iranian god of war and victory (Al-Salihi, 1971, n. 22). Such an identification is paralleled in the composite Commagenian form of Nimrud Dagh and in the syncretic Hercules-Verethragna figure from Parthian Old Nisa (Colledge, 1977). In Mithraism Verethragna is identified with Herakles, however, on Kushan coinage the former deity appears as  $\text{OPAAINO}$  in a representation distinct from that of the Greek god (Monneret de Villard, 1948).

As in the Bactrian coins and statuette, in almost all these depictions Herakles appears nude, even when surrounded by fully-clad figures. In the light of other iconographical borrowings from Heraklean models, given the tradition of heroic nudity associated with the god and the fact that, 'from Gandhara westwards, male nudity normally indicated divinity' (Colledge, 1977, p. 130), the nudity of Vajrapani in Early Buddhist art is more likely to derive from an adaptation of the heroic type than from any poverty of status, as has been suggested (Roberts, 1959, p. 119).

Nor is the popularity of Herakles any less evident nearer the Indian subcontinent, despite statements in the Classical sources regarding the Heraklean tradition in India to be weaker than the Dionysian.<sup>2</sup> The bronze Serapis-Hercules from Begram (Hackin, 1951), is of the western Asiatic type mentioned above, while a sword-hilt from Takht-i-Sanguin in Soviet Bactria showing Herakles wrestling with a Silenus dates from the fourth century B.C. or later (Litvinskij and Pitchikjan, 1981, fig. 12). From Quetta in Pakistan comes a badly corroded figure of Herakles carrying the Nemean Lion in his left hand (Garwood, 1887), likely to represent an

indigenous work based on a Western prototype (Rowland in Rosenfield, 1967, p. ix ff.). A statuette of the deity from Nigrai in the British Museum (Foucher, 1918, fig. 476) displays Praxitelean features but appears to be the product of a local workshop. The 'Herakles' from Mathūra (Vogel, 1930, pl. XLVIIb) may have some connection with the worship of the Hindu Vasudeva, or may evidence a worship *in propria persona*, connected with the eclectic syncretism of Kushan religion. An awareness of the mythology of the demi-god is seen also in a Kushan seal in the Ashmolean Museum showing Herakles wrestling with the mare of Diomedes (Harle, 1985). The Heraklean theme survives in the region as late as the sixth-seventh centuries A.D., as reflected in the painted clay grotesque head wearing a cat or lion skin, from Qyzyl in Chinese Central Asia now in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (Hallade, 1968, fig. 133). Recently excavated fragments of a bearded head from Khalchayan have been identified as belonging to a bust of Herakles, but this has been disputed (Morris, 1983).

Yet more relevant to the discussion at hand is that class of Hellenistic 'portrait' which attempts the identification of certain figures with the heroic demi-god. Such a formula is an old one, possibly enjoying a tenuous existence in Classical Greek art (Boardman, 1972, 1975); in Asia Minor it appears in portraits of Mithridates VI Eupator modelled on those of Alexander (Bieber, 1955, pl. 12). A head now in the Louvre shows a figure, thought to be Mithridates, represented as Herakles, wearing the lion skin (*ibid.*, figs 482–3). From Pergamon comes a group, heavy in political symbolism, showing Mithridates in the guise of Herakles liberating Prometheus, sporting the lion skin over his head and back (*ibid.*, pls 485–7). Nearer India, such Heraklean imagery appears in association with the person of Alexander, self-styled son of the Heraklean tradition, on an ivory sword scabbard from Takht-i-Sanguin (Litvinskij and Pitchikjan, 1981, fig. 17) which shows a bust of Alexander-Herakles crowned with the lion head, the paws of the animal knotted across the chest in typical fashion, recalling that of the British Museum relief. A comparable terracotta bearded head crowned with the lion skin was recovered at Charsada (Wheeler, 1962, pl. XXXVIb), where it formed part of the appliqué decoration of a jug or amphora. From the same site came a headless alabaster statue of Herakles (*ibid.*, pl. XLI), or of a figure in the guise of the hero, although it is unclear whether the work represents an import or is of local manufacture. At Taxila an analogous head with a *terminus post quem* of the late second century was found on the base of a pot from the latest

stratum of the Bhir Mound (Marshall, 1951, pl. 130, fig. 226). Such finds from the north-west of India demonstrate a familiarity with the use of Heraklean iconography in the depiction of heroic figures from an early date.

Having established a popular tradition within which to locate the Heraklean iconography of Gandhara and its adoption for the figure of Vajrapani – which seems too consistent to admit of random borrowings – the underlying explanation for such a borrowing is to be sought in the evolution and nature of the character of Vajrapani itself. The position occupied by Vajrapani (Sanskrit, 'Bearer of the *vajra*') in Early Buddhist thought is somewhat unclear, but the figure appears to owe its derivation, in part, to the Zoroastrian concept of the *Fravashi* (Marshall, 1918, p. 77, n. 2). The *Fravashi* is a kindred concept to the Greek *ἀγῶθος δαίμων* or Roman *Genius*, a spiritual emanation from all righteous beings (both divine and mortal), 'attaching itself to the body at birth and leaving it at death' (Baynes, 1899). The postulation of Zoroastrianism as a major influential force in Early Buddhist thought is hardly surprising in view of the place afforded Iranian religion in the pantheon of the Kushans. That the memory of Zarathustra's stay in Bactria was kept strongly alive at this period is witnessed architecturally in the Fire Temple at Surkh Kotal (Schlumberger, 1953, 1961), and in the appearance of numerous small fire altars on the base of Gandharan works such as the emaciated Buddha of Lahore (Lyons and Ingholt, 1957, fig. 52). In Peshawar Museum there exists an unpublished work depicting a group of worshippers on the base of a Buddha statue gathered round a flaming altar while a servant feeds the flames by pouring oil. Lyons and Ingholt (1957, p. 36) point out that on Sassanian coins the reigning monarch is often depicted worshipping at the fire altar, emblem of the chief Zoroastrian deity, Ahura Mazda. On the Gandharan reliefs the altar may represent the Buddha, as regional equivalent of Ahura Mazda in power, or may be simply a further witness to the syncretic tendencies of Kushan religious practice. In discussing the relationship of Vajrapani to Heraklean iconography, it may be little more than a noteworthy coincidence that the concept of the *Fravashi* is derived directly from Iranian practices of ancestor-worship (Moulton, 1913b, p. 277 ff.), given the connection between ancestor-worship in Dark Age Greece and the development of the hero-cults, occupying an evolutionary position intermediate between the mortal and divine (Wright, 1982; Snodgrass, 1987).

While I am in agreement with three of the four particular features attributed by Spooner (1916) to the

character of Vajrapani – divinity, invisibility, identity of emotional experience with Gautama (in some of the scenes depicting the austerities of Gautama the face of Vajrapani displays an emaciation empathetic to that of the Buddha) – the postulation of the quality of 'inseparableness (sic.) from Gautama', ending with the disappearance of Vajrapani on the death of the former, is erroneous. The reunion of *Fravashi* and soul at death is one of the central tenets of the Zoroastrian concept (Moulton, 1913a), but in several of the Gandharan reliefs the figure of Vajrapani features among the spectators gazing upon the dead Buddha, while on a relief in Peshawar a *chauri* -bearing *bhikshu* among a group of mourners at the closed coffin may represent the same character at a later stage of the funereal proceedings (Lyons and Ingholt, 1957, fig. 344). Invisibility of Vajrapani to all but the Buddha and his adversaries seems characteristic (Lamotte, 1966).

From this it is clear that, while the character of Vajrapani may owe something to Zoroastrian thought, it is not to be identified as merely an Indian manifestation of the *Fravashi*. The associations of Vajrapani with the Indian *yaksha* are seen in his retention of the *chauri* / fly whisk and on several of the sculptures from Butkara Vajrapani is shown holding both *vajra* and *chauri* (Facenna, 1962, pls XXb, XXXI); in the later Tantric *Sutra of Perfect Wisdom* the *vajra* -bearer is referred to as, 'the great *yaksha*' (Conze, 1975, pp. 398–9).

The literary and theological evolution of Vajrapani from *yaksha* to divinity has been well elucidated by Lamotte (1966). In the Mahayana school Vajrapani became a *Dhyani-Bodhisattva*, one of the five Bodhisattvas accompanying the *Dhyani* Buddhas, spiritual counterparts of the *Manushi* (human) Buddhas. It is perhaps worth noting that in Avestan psychology the human personality was divided into five immaterial elements (Moulton, 1913b). In the *Ādi* Buddhism of Tibet and Nepal the supreme *ĀdiBuddha*, by five acts of his contemplative power, creates five *Dhyani* Buddhas ('Buddhas of Contemplation'). These cannot function as agents, but give birth to five *Dhyani* -Bodhisattvas which function as the actual creators of the perishable physical universe (de la Vallée Poussin, 1913). Vajrapani is thus perceived as the spiritual son of the *Dhyani* Buddha Akṣobhya (Bhattacharyya, 1958). In Tantric Buddhism Vajrapani has risen from a position as a mere *yaksha* to that of a Bodhisattva equal in power only to Padmapani, and eventually becomes pre-eminent as the 'expression of Perfect Enlightenment' (Snellgrove, 1987, p. 134). However, the Vajrapani of the Gandharan reliefs shows none of the iconographic

traits of the Vajrapani of the Mahayana pantheon (Krishan, 1964) and is likely to represent an early evolutionary stage of the bearer of the thunderbolt which later became the *Dhyani* -Bodhisattva of the Mahayana, much of the doctrine of the latter resting on the Zoroastrian *Fravashi*.

I believe that the key to the underlying suitability of borrowing from the Heraklean repertoire is to be found in the functional significance of Vajrapani in the biographical legends of Gautama. The *vajra*, as a symbol, is representative of,

'... indestructable essence and overwhelming power, destroying all the obstacles of ignorance, delusion, and passion.' (Snellgrove, 1978, p. 425)

The symbol may be derived from the Hindu iconography of Indra as the basic iconographic element of the *vajra* is common to both deities. Despite 'Vajrapani' being an epithet of the Hindu god, this would appear to relate to a Brahmanic reinterpretation in the Gupta period (Konow, 1930). Although in the literary sources Vajrapani shares some secondary characteristics with Indra (Lamotte, 1966), Senart (1906) and Foucher (1905, 1918) seem correct in evaluating the appearance of Vajrapani as a qualitatively new phenomenon. Certainly the artists of Gandhara are imminently capable of distinguishing between the two, with Indra almost always appearing as a Kushan noble wearing a head-dress of *polos* type in contrast to the more iconographically diverse Vajrapani. When wielded by Vajrapani, the 'diamond' shape of the *vajra* is an instrument no less symbolic than functional, a symbol by extension of the victorious power of permanent Buddhist knowledge over the impermanence of illusion and evil, 'the cutting force of adamant truth', the truth of the Buddhist *dharma*, 'ready to crush every enemy' (Grünwedel, 1901, p. 38). In the stories surrounding the life of the Buddha, Vajrapani features when force is necessitated. To facilitate the subjugation of the Naga Apalala, causing much distress to the population of Swat by periodically inundating the region, Vajrapani smote the mountainsides with his thunderbolt, an act which terrified the Naga into making peace on the Buddha's terms and one which appears on several Gandharan reliefs (Lyons and Ingholt, 1957, fig. 162; Marshall, 1960, fig. 69). Similarly, when Gautama was forcing Ambattha to a confession,

'... the spirit who bears the *vajra* stood above Ambattha in the sky with a mighty mass of iron, all fiery, dazzling and aglow, with the intention, if he did not answer, there and then to split his head in pieces.' (Grünwedel, 1901, p. 90)

When the Naga Elapatra refuses to appear before Buddha in other than human form for fear of falling prey to the serpent-eating *Garudas*, Buddha commands Vajrapani to protect the creature, while on a relief in Lahore (LM 1169) carrying a double image Vajrapani is present in 'Lykeian' form to witness both Mara's attack and the subjugation of a poisonous snake. In the *Tantric Symposium of Truth*, Vajrapani is the means of conversion of Maheshvara (Shiva), having first killed and resurrected the god with his great power (Snellgrove, 1987, p. 136). The role of Vajrapani and the thunder weapon in the struggle against various demons and evil-doers is strongly reminiscent of that of the *Fravashis*, originally offered a choice by Ahura Mazda between,

'... abiding eternally in the spiritual world, and becoming incarnate to join the battle against the demons.' (Moulton, 1913b)

Thus it is clear that alongside the protective function afforded Vajrapani in Buddhist thought, the figure has a quasi-martial role connected with the use of the force necessary to effect conversion or submission and one inseparable from the *vajra* as '... le foudre servant d'arme offensive et défensive' (Lamotte, 1966, p. 154). Such a role is epitomised in the *Tantric Symposium of Truth*;

'Oho! I am the means of conversion, possessed of all great means. Spotless, they assume a wrathful appearance so that beings may be converted by these means.' (Snellgrove, 1987, p. 136)

It is precisely this quality which renders fitting the adoption of Heraklean iconography for certain depictions of Vajrapani in Gandharan art. Early Buddhism was by no means beyond drawing causal connections between moral and temporal power; the child who offers a symbolic handful of dust to the Buddha at Rajagriha is rewarded with the promise of being reborn as a powerful Buddhist monarch, and the symbolic attributes of the spiritual and temporal *Chakravartin* are shared, witness to an overlapping of the concept in both domains (Zimmer, 1953, p. 127 ff.).

The character of Herakles, as the embodiment of the Classical hero ethos, and the military deity *par excellence*, was (as has been shown above) freely available in representational, and perhaps ritual, aspect for the sculptors of Gandhara to draw on. As a hero-figure accomplishing feats of superhuman strength, the activities of Herakles are comparable to those of the smiter of mountains and scourge of unrecalcitrant demons.

The quasi-martial aspects of Hercules made for his



popularity among the Roman Legions and his frequent assimilation to a *Genius Cohortis* in Africa and elsewhere (Maricq, 1957). At Hatra the deity, assimilated to Nergal, appears clad in a tunic associated with military and guardian figures (Downey, 1968). Elsewhere in the Near East, the martial connection is emphasised in the syncretic assimilation of Herakles to the war-god Verethragna. The intimate associations of this military aspect with figures adopting Heraklean imagery is amply evidenced in the Takht-i-Sanguin Alexander-Herakles, found on a sword scabbard.

At Gandhara, the iconographic counterpart of such assimilation occurred in certain images of the *Genius* or *δαίμων* of the *dharma*. In at least one Gandharan relief Vajrapani is depicted in armour (Soper, 1951, fig. 29). The existence of a certain class of relief in which Vajrapani appears in a posture intimately associated with Graeco-Bactrian renderings of Herakles, or with specific attributes derived from the Classical iconography of Herakles, can best be explained by reference to a deliberate adaptation of such iconographic elements in the light of the analogous protective and quasi-martial functions of both. It may be pushing the argument too far to further suggest that the protective function of Vajrapani in relation to the Buddha is consciously analogous to that of Hercules as protector of the Roman Imperial House, but a third century dedication to the latter deity in just such an aspect was found on the statue of Petronius Quintianus at Hatra (Maricq, 1957; Downey, 1968), and in view of the borrowings from Imperial iconography in other spheres (Buchthal, 1943), this cannot be dismissed entirely.

At a crude reading, the early character of Vajrapani may be seen not, as has been suggested, as a personification of the *dharma* (Vogel, 1909), but as 'a descriptive term or poetical appellation crystallised into a special deity' (Grünwedel, 1901, p. 90), a personification of the *force* of the *dharma*, '... cette sorte d'incarnation de sa puissance surhumaine' (Foucher, 1918, p. 61). As the wielder of a temporal power related to the moral force of the Buddhist *dharma*, symbolised by possession of the *vajra* (occupying, in the reliefs under discussion, a similar position to that afforded the club of 'Lykeian Herakles'), Vajrapani almost certainly represents the assimilation of syncretic borrowings from Iranian and Indian religious thought, well evidenced in other aspects of Early Buddhist religious practice (Rosenfield, 1967). As a syncretic combination of non-Buddhist borrowing in concept and iconography, the protective function of Vajrapani, and the quasi-martial role accorded him in Early Buddhist thought rendered the character uniquely suited to the adaptation of Herak-

lean iconography from readily-accessible Graeco-Bactrian and Graeco-Roman prototypes. Such iconographic and artistic borrowings were a well-established tradition in Gandharan art from its inception, and the traditional Hellenistic portrayal of political and military figures in Heraklean guise was known, even in far-flung India.

That is not to say that the Heraklean formula was rigorously applied to every instance of the appearance of Vajrapani – a brief perusal of the works of the Gandharan school shows that this is far from the case.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, in certain instances, the analogous functions of both deities lent itself to the treatment of Vajrapani in a form distinctively Heraklean in details of iconography, physiognomy, and posture; a form ultimately derived from western classical art.

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#### NOTES

1. The following summary of those issues depicting a frontal view of a young Herakles holding a club and lion skin in the left hand and crowning himself with the right is compiled from Gardner (1886) and Whitehead (1914). Although some vary slightly, all are of the same basic type.

**Demetrius I:** Gardner Types 1–12, pl. II 9–12.

Whitehead Type 9, pl. I 18 (reverse).

**Eutydemus II:** Gardner Types 1–3, pl. III 3–4 (reverse).

**Lysias:** Gardner Types 1–7, pl. VIII 5–7 (reverse).

The wreath is composed of vine leaves, a palm branch is included among the paraphernalia held in the left hand.

**Theophilus:** Gardner Type 1, pl. XXXI 3 (reverse). Whitehead pl. IX, 8.

**Zoilos:** Gardner Types 1–2, pl. XII 10 (reverse).

**Maues:** Gardner type 8, pl. XVI 5. Right hand on hip instead of holding a crown.

**Azes I:** Gardner Types 186–7, pl. XIX 11 (square, obverse).

Whitehead pl. XII 256.

**Azilises:** Gardner Types 38–9, pl. XXI 5 (square, obverse).

Whitehead pl. XIV 357.

- Sphalares with Vonones:** Gardner Types 5-7 and Supplement, Type 1, pl. XXI 9, 11 (square, obverse). Whitehead pl. XIV 375-81.
- Hermæus and) Kadphises:** Gardner Types 1-10, pl. XXV 1 (reverse).
- Despite the association of Herakles with the Rock of Aornos, supposed site of the prison of Prometheus in India (Strabo XV 8), Arrian (*Indika* 5.8; 9.1-4) states that, '... about Herakles there is not much tradition'. Strabo (XV 6-7) discusses the Indian Heraklean tradition with characteristic scepticism, seeing its origins in Macedonian flattery of Alexander. See also Carter (1968).
  - One of the most curious apparitions of the Vajrapani type must be a centaur-like creature in Peshawar Museum (PM 1658, unpublished), shown wielding aloft the *vajra* and clutching a shield.
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