

Dating the Bimaran Casket – its Conflicted Role in the Chronology of Gandharan Art

Joe Cribb

There has been wide disagreement about the dating of the Bimaran reliquary. (David MacDowall 1987¹)

... it has not always been possible to establish any link between stylistic differences and chronology [in Gandharan sculpture]. One distinguished example ...is the famous, much-discussed Bimaran reliquary, attributed now to a pre-Christian date, now to the 2nd century A.D. or even later. (Anna Filigenzi 2000²)

The Bimaran casket, a small round bejewelled golden box, decorated with two images of the Buddha in the Gandharan style, and now exhibited in the British Museum, has played a pivotal role in determining a chronology for Buddhist art since its discovery in Afghanistan by Charles Masson in 1834.³ Its importance was first recognised in the late nineteenth century when western scholarship started to focus on the supposed Greek features of Buddhist art produced in the northwestern territories of the South Asian subcontinent, now identified as the ancient province of Gandhara. Since then there has been a debate about its significance in the history of Buddhist art, prompting Deydier to judge it to have a pivotal role in his analysis of the contemporary state of Gandharan studies in 1950: ‘The majority of authors think that the beginning of the first century AD seems the most likely answer to the question of the foundation of the Greco-Buddhist school [of art]. Most theories on this question are based on a single piece of evidence, the Bimaran reliquary.’⁴

¹ D.W. MacDowall, ‘Buddhist symbolism on the coinages of the North West’, in M. Yaldiz and W. Lobo, eds., *Investigating Indian Art: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Development of Early Buddhist and Hindu Iconography Held at the Museum of Indian Art Berlin in May 1986*, Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 1987, pp. 179–90, see p. 187.

² A. Filigenzi, ‘Review of *A Catalogue of the Gandhāra Sculpture in the British Museum*, by Wladimir Zwalf’, *East and West* 50, 1.4, 2000, pp. 584–6, see p. 584.

³ C. Masson ‘Memoir on the topes and sepulchral monuments of Afghanistan’, in H.H. Wilson, *Ariana Antiqua*, London, East India Company, 1841, pp. 55–118, see pp. 70–71.

⁴ ‘La majorité des auteurs estimait que le début du 1er siècle de notre ère semblait la solution la plus probable pour la formation de l’école gréco-bouddhique. La plupart des théories sur cette question prenaient pour base un seul document: le reliquaire de Bimaran’, H. Deydier, *Contribution à l’étude de l’art de Gandhara: essai de bibliographie analytique et critique des ouvrages parus de 1922 à 1949*, Paris, Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1950, see p. 8. For a more recent summary of scholarly engagement with this topic see R. DeCaroli, *Image Problems – The Origins and Development of the Buddha’s Image in Early South Asia*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2015, pp. 18–20.

The wide disagreement highlighted by MacDowall continues to the present day⁵ and illustrates well the problems of the history of this region and its art in the ancient period. In this paper I intend to show how the controversy over the significance of the Bimaran casket for the development of the Buddhist art of Gandhara has been the subject of a long-standing debate confronting interpretations of archaeological and numismatic evidence with analyses of the changing style of Gandharan sculpture. A not-yet fully accepted resolution of this confrontation has been developed over the last twenty five years through a more holistic approach to the problem and brought closer together the different disciplines involved. This holistic approach has produced a solution which shows that there is insufficient evidence to produce a categorical conclusion, but that a growing consensus places the deposit of the casket during the second half of the first century to the first half of the second century AD. This has largely been helped by a clearer identification of the coins found with the casket and the continuing archaeology of Buddhist sites in the Gandhara region.⁶

⁵ G. Fussman, 'Kushan power and the expansion of Buddhism beyond the Soleiman mountains', in H. Falk (editor), *Kushan Histories – Literary Sources and Selected Papers from a Symposium at Berlin, December 5 to 7, 2013*, Bremen 2015, pp. 153–202, see pp. 154–159 '...the early dating of the Bimaran gold casket ...conclusive evidence, to my mind, that the technique of the sculptors evolved very fast in the 1st century AD'.

⁶ I have written elsewhere a more detailed account of the casket building on this holistic approach developed by Neil Kreitman, Martha Carter and Elizabeth Errington: 'The Bimaran casket, the problem of its date and significance' in a collection of essays on Buddhist reliquaries edited by Janice Stargardt, at press. I have also published a new attribution of the coins found with the casket: 'Dating and locating Mujatria and the two Kharahostes', *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic*

Charles Masson and the Discovery of the Bimaran Gold Casket

The casket was excavated from a Buddhist stupa, Bimaran no. 2, in Darunta district to the west of Jalalabad. Charles Masson published his memoir of its excavation in 1841.⁷ (Fig. 1) His account of the excavation was brief and, as reflects the state of archaeology in the 1830s, his activities were limited. He described the shape and size of the surviving structure and his entry into the stupa to discover the relic chamber with its finds. The stupa had already been partially entered by another explorer Martin Honigberger, who had dug a hole into it but not as far as the relic chamber. Masson's account describes his penetration into the centre of the monument, where he found a square chamber containing the gold casket within a stone container, in which there were also 'a small metallic plate – apparently belonging to a seal, and engraved with a seated figure, – thirty small circular ornaments of gold, sundry beads of burnt coral, numerous burnt pearls, and eighteen beads of nilam (sapphire), agate, crystal, etc.' (Fig. 2) The stone container (Fig. 3) and its inscriptions and the gold casket (Fig. 4) were illustrated from Masson's own sketches.⁸ The gold casket was lidless and had 'two lines of lals or rubies of Badakshan, twelve in each, and inserted at intervals', and on its sides were 'eight figures in separate compartments, formed by a series of flat columns supporting finely turned arches, the spaces between them filled by eagles hovering with extended wings.' The identification of two of the figures as the Buddha was added by Wilson in a footnote.⁹

Society 223, pp. 26–48.

⁷ C. Masson, 'Memoir on the topes', pp. 70–71.

⁸ *ibid.*, pls. II and IV (after p. 54).

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 71, n. 3.

In the chamber, but not in the stone container he also found four coins ‘without the steatite vase were also deposited four copper coins, in excellent preservation, having been inserted new.’ Masson also added the observation that ‘They were the most useful portion of the discovery, as enabling us with some certainty to assign the monument and its era; they were of the horseman type, and bearing Greek legends on the obverse, corrupt indeed, but allowing the title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ to be distinguished on them. The characters of the legends on the reverse are Bactro-Pali: they are fortunately distinct, and point out the commemorated monarch as one of the Azes dynasty.’¹⁰

The Bimaran Casket and Buddhist Art

These coins have created for the casket its important role in the discourse on Buddhist art and the origins of the Buddha image. The dating of the casket on the basis of its discovery in the context of these coins appear to position the casket in the earliest phase of representations of the Buddha in human form: ‘perhaps the earliest standing example [of Buddha image]’.¹¹ In the absence of any externally datable Gandharan Buddha images before those appearing on coins struck towards the end of the reign of the Kushan king Kanishka I (c. AD 127–150),¹² the Bimaran casket

images, through their association with coins in the name of Azes, have therefore offered the possibility of a datable marker, as Masson pointed out, for the casket and therefore for the pre-Kanishkan development of Gandharan Buddhist art. The Western features of the design, such as the pilasters and the treatment of drapery on the figures, have also positioned the reliquary within the debate on the Greek or Roman influence on the Buddhist art of the Gandhara region. This aspect of the casket and its broader significance has accordingly encouraged scholars to invoke or discard the attribution and dating of these coins, and to question the nature of their relationship with the casket. Since the casket was first discussed after Masson’s publication a broad range of datings have been proposed for the casket from the first century BC to the third century AD.

The following account of past opinion and discussion on the casket is therefore designed to show the origins and validity of the various datings and interpretations which have been attributed to the casket. The aim is to develop an analysis of balance between the use of evidence and the repetition of opinion presented by scholars to position the casket chronologically. This will help clarify the significance of the casket within the debate on the origins of Gandharan art and hopefully eliminate invalid opinions on the subject. The value of such an analysis can be judged from the following categorical statement, based on the misunderstood evidence of the coins and on the opinion of its author, in a recent account of the casket’s significance in the development of Buddhist art in Gandhara within a general history of Central Asia: ‘One of the earliest representations of the Buddha is found on the Bimaran Reliquary. ...found in a steatite casket, whose Kharoshthi inscription states that the

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 71.

¹¹ N. Kreitman ‘Deposit from Stupa no. 2, Bimaran, Afghanistan’, in E. Errington and J. Cribb, eds., *Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol in the Art of Ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Cambridge, Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992, pp. 186–92, see p. 192.

¹² The dates given here for Kanishka I are based on the most current view of Kushan chronology. These dates are still contested by some scholars and many of the past views of the chronology of the casket and Buddhist art discussed here were based on a different dating for Kanishka I.

reliquary contained bones of the Buddha. In this casket were also found four coins of the Indo-Saka king Azes II, who ruled in the last decades of the first century BCE. ...in the opinion of the present author there are no reasons to date the reliquary any later than 30–50 CE.¹³ This author's 'opinion' is based on the repetition of a long since invalidated piece of 'evidence', as he seems to be unaware that the coins found with the Bimaran casket can no longer be attributed to Azes II, as they have been identified since the 1960s as 'posthumous Azes' coins, issued after the reign of Azes, retaining his name, but with designs not used by Azes.

Dating the Coins Found with the Bimaran Casket

Recent research at the British Museum, led by Elizabeth Errington, on the finds made in Afghanistan by Charles Masson during the 1830s, has greatly clarified his account of the discovery of the Bimaran casket.¹⁴ She has located and published Masson's sketches of the stupa, stone container, gold casket and the associated finds. Included in these are Masson's drawings of the blundered Greek inscriptions on the coins. As well as refocusing attention on his description of the process of discovery and what he found in Bimaran 2, and on his sketches of the stupa and its relic deposit, this research has also brought to light Charles Masson's own comments on the identification of the coins which he originally believed had been placed in the

stupa to mark it as a monument to the king who issued them: 'Of these kings we have the topes or cenotaphs at Jelalabad: there appear to be two families: that of Hermaeus and his descendants, whose coins are distinguished by the figure of Hercules, with his club on the reverse [i.e. the coins of Kujula Kadphises], and those of the princes, whose coins have a horseman on the obverse, and the figure of Ceres on the reverse [i.e. the Tyche reverse type as found with the Bimaran casket]...' ¹⁵

To Masson it was clear that the coins with the casket were issued by rulers subsequent to Azes, nevertheless many scholars have disregarded his comments and accepted at face value their attribution to king Azes. His view was summarised by Wilson 'They are evidently of a later and more barbarous period than most of the preceding, and are probably the coins, not of Azes, although his name appears upon them, but of some of his successors.'¹⁶ Masson himself wrote of them, in the papers rediscovered by Elizabeth Errington, that 'Fig 111 [i.e. the type found with the Bimaran casket] is the type of a variety of the Azes coin, which we are able to appropriate to a successor of the great king above [i.e. Azes].'¹⁷ Recent publications of the type classify them as imitation-Azes coins.¹⁸

¹⁵ C. Masson, 'Second memoir on the ancient coins found at Beghram', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 5, 49, 1836, pp. 1-28, see p. 20.

¹⁶ H.H. Wilson, *Ariana Antiqua*, London, East India Company, 1841, see pp. 330-1, no. 25.

¹⁷ C. Masson's, 'Analysis of the Beghram coins with reference to plates' 31 Dec. 1835, Additional papers of Charles Masson, British Library, Mss Eur F526, see p. 13, no. 111.

¹⁸ C. Fröhlich, *Monnaies indo-scythes et indo-parthes, catalogue raisonné*, Paris Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2008, series 33; R. Senior, *Indo-Scythian Coins and History*, London, Classical Numismatic Group, 2001 (volumes 1-3) and 2006 (volume 4), type 139.

¹³ C. Baumer, *The History of Central Asia*, volume 2: *The Age of the Silk Roads*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2014, pp. 68-9.

¹⁴ E. Errington, 'Rediscovering the collections of Charles Masson', in M. Alram and D. Klimburg-Salter, eds., *Coins Art and Archaeology – Essays on the pre-Islamic History of the Indo-Iranian Borderlands*, Vienna, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999, pp. 207-37.

This research has enabled me to locate the four coins found with the Bimaran casket in the British Museum collection and to identify them as part of the last issue of a local satrap named Mujatria, who ruled in the Jalalabad region during the late first century AD,¹⁹ confirming the view expressed by MacDowall²⁰ that the coins were not issued by a king called Azes but were imitation of Azes coins issued at a date after the reigns of Azes I and II.

The Origins of the Discourse

In spite of the publication of Masson's opinion on the coins by Wilson, it was overlooked by Sir Alexander Cunningham when he became the first scholar to assign a date to the casket in print. He used the coins as his means for dating the relic deposit containing the gold casket, identifying the coins as issues of king Azes and therefore should be dated to his reign in the first century BC: '...No. 2 tope at Bimaran, on the plain of Darunta near Jelalabad. ...The date of this tope may, I believe be safely ascribed to the close of the reign of Azes, or about 90 BC. For the relic chamber which had evidently not been disturbed since the day on which it was first closed, contained, along with the usual quantity of gold ornaments and gems, four copper coins, all of which are of a well known type of the great Scythian king Azes. As no other coins were found in this tope, the soundness of

this conclusion is, I think undeniable.'²¹ Cunningham based this on his dating of Azes to the period 110–90 BC.²² His purpose was to demonstrate that the stupas excavated by Masson were Buddhist and that Buddhism flourished in the Jalalabad area during the Indo-Scythian period.²³

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century a discussion began about the impact of Greek rule in the area on the art of ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan,²⁴ however the Bimaran casket did not feature in this discussion until 1897, when Eugène Goblet d'Alviella, the Belgian historian of religions, alluded to the casket in his account of Greek influence on India.²⁵ He included a description of the casket in his discussion: 'The uncontested conclusion which emerges from all these views, is that, in the North-West of India the local art was subjected to classical influence during the first centuries of our era.'²⁶ He dated the casket according to the coins found with it, but hesitated to confirm Greek origins for the style of art found on the gold reliquary: 'However not only do we have here an object [the Bimaran casket] which is essentially Indian or even better Buddhist, not only in its subject matter, but also in its

¹⁹ See note 7.

²⁰ MacDowall, 'Buddhist symbolism', p. 184; D.W. MacDowall, 'The chronological evidence of coins in stupa deposits', in M. Taddei, ed., *South Asian Archaeology 1987, Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe, Held in the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, Rome, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente*, 1990, pp. 727–35, see p. 728.

²¹ A. Cunningham, 'Coins of Indian Buddhist satraps with Greek inscriptions', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 23, 1854, pp. 679–714, see pp. 707–8.

²² *ibid.*, p. 689

²³ *ibid.*, p. 710.

²⁴ e.g. V.A. Smith, 'Graeco-Roman influence on the civilization of Ancient India', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 58, 1, 3, 1889, pp. 107–98.

²⁵ E. Goblet d'Alviella, *Ce qui l'Inde doit à la Grèce: des influences classiques dans la civilisation de l'Inde*, Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1897.

²⁶ 'La conclusion incontesté qui se dégage de toutes ces opinions, c'est que, dans le nord-ouest de l'Inde, l'art local subissait l'influence classique aux première siècles de notre ère.' *ibid.*, p. 63.

production, but also one of those rare Indian objects which can be dated, more or less. Effectively we take account of the four coins placed beside the steatite pot which contained the casket, all bearing the image of Azes, placing them accordingly in the last third of the first century BC.²⁷ His dating of Azes to the last third of the first century BC was perhaps derived from the chronology used in the British Museum catalogue.²⁸ However he questioned the presence of classical influence, i.e. that of the Greco-Roman world, in the case of the casket: 'I don't know of a better example to warn the observer against drawing premature conclusions about similarities of detail between examples of Indian art and certain later Western products. On both sides, the first input may have come from classical culture, but nothing precludes the same feature changing simultaneously in both directions under similar influences. So it becomes pointless to assume subsequent loans, when, on both sides, one can explain these changes by local factors.'²⁹

²⁷ 'Cependant nous avons là non seulement une oeuvre essentiellement indienne ou plutôt bouddhique, dans le sujet et dans la facture, mais encore une des rares productions de l'Inde antique qu'il soit permis de dater, ou à peu près. En effet on a recueilli, à côté d'un vase en stéatite qui renferme le coffret, quatre monnaies en place portant l'effigie d'Azes, remontant par conséquent au dernier tiers de siècle avant notre ère.' *ibid.*, pp. 92–3.

²⁸ P. Gardner, *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum*, London, Trustees of the British Museum, 1886, see p. xliii.

²⁹ 'Je ne connais pas d'exemple mieux fait pour mettre l'observateur en garde contre les conclusions à tirer prématurément des ressemblances de détail entre les manifestations de l'art indien et certaines productions occidentales d'une âge plus avancé. Des deux côtés, la donnée première peut avoir été fournie par la culture classique, mais rien n'empêche d'admettre que le thème originaire se soit modifié parallèlement dans

A change in the attribution of the coins found with the Bimaran casket was signalled by Vincent Smith, attributing the coins to a second king called Azes 'Coins of this class, evidently of later date, occur in the Afghan topes; four were found with the gold casket in No. 2 Bimārān tope.'³⁰ He dated Azes II to the period c. 15 BC–AD 20. His division of the coins in the name of Azes into two kings appears to have been made in order to extend the issue of such coins down to the time of Gondophares, whom he dated to c. AD 20–60.³¹ This had first been proposed by Bhandarkar³² in 1902 and was already adopted by Smith in his general history of ancient India in 1904, and it soon became accepted as fact, with the end of Azes II's reign dated by Rapson in his general history to c. AD 19.³³ This

une direction identique, sous des influences analogues, et il devient inutile de supposer des emprunts ultérieurs, aussi longtemps que, de part et d'autre, on peut expliquer ces modifications par des facteurs locaux.' *ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁰ V.A. Smith, *Catalogue of the coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, including the cabinet of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, volume 1, *Coins of Ancient India*, Oxford 1906, p. 52, no. 32 and note 1. In spite of this new attribution, however, Smith attributed a copper coin of Mujatria, the issuer of the coins found with the Bimaran casket to Azes I, who he dated c. 90–40 BC, *ibid.*, p. 49, no. 87, pl. IX, no. 3.

³¹ *ibid.* pp. 36 and 54.

³² D.R. Bhandarkar, 'A Kushana stone inscription, and the question about the origin of the Saka era', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, pp. 269–302, see pp. 286–289. This analysis of the evidence as well as latter attempts to distinguish Azes I and Azes II coins have been critiqued by Bob Senior in several publications which attempt to show that there was only one Azes ruling in the first century BC, see R. Senior 'The final nail in the coffin of Azes II', *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* 197, 2008, pp. 25–27.

³³ V.A. Smith *The Early History of India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1904, see p. 203; E.J. Rapson, *The Cambridge History of India*,

shifted the possible dating of the deposit into the first century AD for those who accepted Smith's attribution of the coins.

In 1918 John Marshall, the excavator of Taxila, used the Bimaran casket to characterise the development of Greek art style in Gandhara: 'Later on (that is to say, about the beginning of the Christian era) we find Indian ideas beginning to coalesce with the Greek and art becoming somewhat more hybrid. Witness, for example, the well known gold casket from Bimārān, in Afghanistan, in which the figures of the Buddha and his devotees (the chief and central figures) are in inspiration clearly Hellenic, but the arches under which they stand are no less clearly Indian; while beneath the base of the casket is the sacred Indian lotus, full blown.'³⁴ He did not explicitly explain the rationale for this dating of the casket to the early first century AD, but indicated his acceptance of Smith's attribution of some of the coins in the name of Azes to a second king of this name, who ruled c. 5 BC–AD 20 until the accession of Gondophares³⁵ and used it to show the transition of Gandharan Buddhist art from what he saw as pure Hellenic objects of the first century BC through to the Indianised and less-Hellenised sculpture of the Kushan period from c. AD 60 onwards. Four years later Marshall expanded on this framework for understanding the Buddhist art he was encountering during his excavations at Taxila, positioning the Bimaran casket again between the purely Hellenic and later Indian influenced work, characterising this transitional position as Scytho-Parthian.³⁶

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922, see p. 573.

³⁴ J. Marshall, *A Guide to Taxila*, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, 1918, p. 30.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁶ J. Marshall, 'The Monuments of Ancient India' in E.J. Rapson, ed., *The Cambridge History of*

Similar considerations were also addressed by the French scholar Alfred Foucher, in his influential study of the Buddhist art of Gandhara and its classical influences.³⁷ He asserted that the associated coins provided the context for dating the casket: '... coins are likely to provide us two services. When found in situ during excavations, they approximately date the deposit with which they are associated; for example such is the case of the coins of Azes placed as offerings with the Bimaran reliquary...'³⁸ Foucher dated the dynasty associated with Azes, probably on the authority of the British Museum catalogue, between the mid first century BC and the mid-first century AD, but showed no engagement with the reattribution of the coins by Smith and Marshall.³⁹ However, with more perspicacity than Goblet d'Alviella, he judged that the evidence of classical influence represented by the images on the casket could only be used to confirm that: 'Strictly speaking this assessment proves only that the reliquary is later than Azes: the clear treatment of the two praying gods leads to the conclusion that it is in any case before that of Kanishka [i.e. the Kanishka reliquary].'⁴⁰ In his discussion of the

India, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922, pp. 612–49, see pp. 646–647.

³⁷ A. Foucher, *L'Art Gréco-Bouddhique du Gandhara*, 2, Paris, l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1922, see pp. 37 and 440.

³⁸ '... les monnaies sont susceptible de nous rendre deux sortes de service. Trouvées *in situ* au cours des fouilles, elle datent approximativement le dépôt auquel elles sont associées: tel est par exemple le cas des monnaies d'Azès jointes comme offerandes au reliquaire de Dêh Bimārān...' *ibid.*, p. 492.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 436.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 478, 'À la grande rigueur cette travaille prouve seulement que la reliquaire est postérieur à Azès: mais la caractérisation si nette des deux divinités orantes donne à penser qu'il est en tout cas antérieur à celui de Kaniska.'

iconography of the Bimaran casket and the Shah-ji-ki-Dheri Kanishka reliquary he offered for the first time a possible explanation of the Bimaran casket's imagery, suggesting that it was inspired by the Buddha's descent from heaven, referring presumably to the descent from the Trayastrimsha or Tushita heaven.⁴¹

The German scholar Ludwig Bachhofer, although aware of the reattribution of the coins by Smith to Azes II, followed Whitehead's attribution of the 'four coins of Azes I' found with it to date the casket to the mid-first century BC. He saw the gold casket as the earliest example of the Gandharan school: 'as the earliest piece we have the above mentioned Bimaran reliquary. The circumstances under which it was found admit, without doubt, that it belongs to the time of king Azes I.'⁴²

Rejecting the Coins as the Only Means of Dating the Casket

Stylistic considerations also motivated the analysis of the evidence of the Bimaran casket by the Sri Lankan art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy in his paper on the origins of the Buddha image. He summed up earlier attempts to date the casket, citing Bachhofer's 1924 book: 'The Bimaran reliquary excavated by Masson in Afghanistan before 1840 has been assigned

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 37 and 440.

⁴² L. Bachhofer, *Zur Datierung der Gandhara Plastik*, München 1924: 'daneben lager vier Münzen des Azes I' (p. 11); 'so ergibt sich damit auch der Zeitpunkt an dem Gandhara-Schule zu arbeiten begonnen hat... Als frühestes Stück haben wir, wie gesagt, das Bimaran-Reliquiar. Die Umstände, unter denen es gefunden worden ist, laßen keinen Zweifel zu, daß es in die Zeit des Azes I gehört...' (p. 14). R. B. Whitehead, *Catalogue of Coins in the Panjab Museum, Lahore*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1914, p. 93 rejected the existence of Azes II.

to the first century BC on account of coins of Azes associated with it.'⁴³ He also signalled, citing Marshall, a more recent view that the casket could be dated later: 'about the beginning, that is to say, of the Christian era.' His main focus was to argue for the possibility that the casket could be dated later than the coins, as the 'coins in any case merely provide a *terminus post quem*.'⁴⁴ This sound argument was designed to reject the early dating of Gandharan art in comparison with the art of Mathura: 'the whole evidence for the dating of Gandharan Buddha types in the first century BC, or early first century AD rests upon five objects of which three are dated in unknown eras, one excavated nearly a hundred years ago is dated on the evidence of coins alone [i.e. the Bimaran casket], and one is of the Kaniska period.'⁴⁵

Coomaraswamy's view was not widely accepted, even though it was based on a sound argument that the coins found with the Bimaran casket could only serve to demonstrate that it was deposited after they were issued and not necessarily at the time of the issue. The primacy of the dating of the coins remained the accepted view for some scholars: 'These coins do not, of course, prove the casket to be of the time of Azes though the presumption is not unwarranted...'⁴⁶

Coomaraswamy's argument, however, opened up a different perspective on the question and was followed by Benjamin Rowland in his article on the chronology of

⁴³ A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'The origin of the Buddha image', *The Art Bulletin*, 9, 4, 1927, pp. 287–329, see p. 319.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 319.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 323.

⁴⁶ H. Hargreaves, *Handbook to the Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum*, Calcutta, Government of India Central Publication Branch 1930, see p. 10.

Gandharan sculpture in the 1936. Like Coomaraswamy, he proposed a separation of the Bimaran casket from the dating suggested by the coins.⁴⁷ His motivation to do so was different as he was not addressing the relationship between Gandhara and Mathura, but between Gandhara and the Mediterranean world. Unlike his predecessors, who were focused on the Greek influence on Buddhist art, he was proposing a strong relationship between Gandharan art and Roman sculpture. On this basis he sought to demonstrate a much later date for the casket on the basis of the style of the Buddha representations on it, by pointing to its parallels to the figures set in pillared arches on second to third century Roman sarcophagi. This led him to reject completely the chronological relationship between the casket and the coins found with it. 'It will be remembered that, on the evidence of the coins of the Indo-Parthian monarch Azes I that were found within its steatite container, the Bimaran relic casket has customarily been dated in the late first century B.C., thereby taking its place as the earliest relic of Gandharan art. The drapery of the figures on the Bimaran casket belongs very definitely to the developed type which we have dated in the second and third centuries A.D.' 'It belongs to a later period than that suggested by the numismatic evidence... dating by coin finds in India is always a dangerous matter.'⁴⁸

Rowland's reference to the Bimaran casket coins as issues of 'Azes I', rather than just Azes reflects his awareness of the arguments proposed by Bhandarkar⁴⁹ that there were two kings called Azes. His dating

in this article of the first year of Azes I's reign to 58 BC reflected Fleet's view⁵⁰ and John Marshall's cautious suggestion of a link between the start date of Azes I's reign and the Indian Vikrama era, beginning in 58/57 BC.⁵¹ Although Marshall had stressed that the link was hypothetical and based on coincidence,⁵² it quickly became a widely accepted fixed point in Gandharan chronology. 'To Azes I has been attributed the foundation of the Vikrama era beginning in 58 B.C.'⁵³

Writing a catalogue of Gandharan sculpture in the India Museum, Calcutta, in the following year, N.G. Majumdar seemed unaware of Rowland's new hypothesis and reasserted the importance of the coins for dating. He used Smith's attribution of the coins to Azes II to date the casket to the first

⁵⁰ J. F. Fleet, 'Moga, Maues, and Vonones', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1907, pp. 1013–1040, see p. 1016. Fleet had derived this suggestion from J. Dowson's article 'Notes on a Bactrian Pali Inscription and the Samvat Era', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 7.22, 1875, pp. 376–383.

⁵¹ J. Marshall, 'The date of Kanishka', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1914, pp. 973–986, see p. 977.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 977 '...the identity of the era of Azes and the Vikrama era can hardly be regarded as fully established, and, to my mind, it is quite possible that the era of Azes will be found to have commenced a few years earlier or later than 58 B.C.' This 'fixed point has recently been questioned by J. Cribb 'The Greek Kingdom of Bactria, its Coinage and its Collapse', in O. Bopearachchi and M-F. Boussac, eds., *Afghanistan ancient Carrefour entre l'est et l'ouest*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2005, pp. 207–225 and by H. Falk and C. Bennett, 'Macedonian Intercalary Months and the Era of Azes', *Acta Orientalia*, 2009, 70, pp. 197–216, both dating the start of the Azes Era about ten years later.

⁵³ E.J. Rapson, *The Cambridge History of India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922, see p. 571.

⁴⁷ B. Rowland, 'A revised chronology for Gandhara sculpture', *The Art Bulletin*, 18, 3, 1936, pp. 387–400, see p. 388.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 398–399.

⁴⁹ D.R. Bhandarkar, 'A Kushana stone-inscription', p. 286.

century BC. Like Coomaraswamy he positioned the casket images at the beginning of the representation of the Buddha in Gandhara, but also claimed for it primacy over all other Buddha images: 'The earliest datable representation of the Buddha occurs on a casket found inside the relic chamber at Bimaran in Afghanistan.'⁵⁴ He dated Azes II to the end of the first century BC, but also saw parallels to the architectural features of the casket in the excavations at Sirkap Taxila: 'The ogee-shaped arches, beneath which the Bimāran figures are made to stand, occur also on the facade of the shrine at Sirkap in Taxila of the Scytho-Parthian period. Not a single Buddha figure has yet been discovered that can be assigned to an earlier epoch.'⁵⁵

In contrast, the Greek historian William Tarn, following Rowland, again rejected the link between the Bimaran casket and its associated coins when he discussed the chronology of Gandharan art in his study of the history of this region under Greek rule in 1938. He rejected the Bimaran reliquary as providing evidence of the chronology of Gandharan art: 'And though the Bimaran casket in the British Museum was found with some coins of Azes I, that only means that it is probably not earlier than c. 30 B.C. and may be a good deal later; his big coinage may have long remained in circulation.'⁵⁶ His rejection appeared to be motivated to give more weight to the evidence he proposed for the origins of the Buddha image, arguing that designs on Indo-Scythian coins (now understood to be

depicting a seated king, not the Buddha) represented the earliest Gandharan images of the Buddha. He also shows no awareness of Smith's reattribution of the coins to Azes II.

The views on Gandharan art presented by Tarn provoked the art historian Ludwig Bachhofer to write a response in 1941.⁵⁷ Bachhofer demonstrated the nonsense of Tarn's identification of images of the Buddha on Indo-Scythian coins⁵⁸ and argued for an early date for the casket as well as stressing its position as the earliest datable example of Gandharan style, particularly because of its Hellenistic treatment of the figures, which he compared with the gold Aphrodite excavated at Taxila.⁵⁹ Curiously he cited Rowland's paper of 1936, but did not address his conclusions about the casket. He rejected the need for the use of the coins to date the reliquary as it could be dated by the association of its style with archaeological evidence from Taxila Sirkap: 'Neither coins nor inscriptions thus provide a means to decide whether the Bimaran reliquary was donated in the second half of the last century B.C. or in the first decades of the first century A.D. In the light of the finds in Sirkap, the more recent date seems the likeliest one. In other words, when I formerly believed it to be connected with Azes I, I am now, for the reason just given, rather persuaded that it was made under Azes II. ... it is one of the oldest monuments of Gandharan art. It proves that this art was in the making at least in the time of Azes II, i.e. at the beginning of our era. No other work can be ascribed to an earlier period, either by an undisputed date, or by

⁵⁴ N.G. Majumdar, *A Guide to the Sculptures in the Indian Museum*, vol. 2 *The Graeco Buddhist School of Gandhara*, Delhi, Archaeological Survey of India, 1937, pp. 13.

⁵⁵ *idem.* p. 14

⁵⁶ W.W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1938, see p. 399.

⁵⁷ L. Bachhofer 'On Greeks and Sakas in India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 61, 4, 1941, pp. 223–50.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 229–30.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 228.

its style.’⁶⁰ Apart from the switch from Azes I to Azes II, Bachhofer was reiterating his earlier views on the periodisation of the earliest Buddhist art in the Gandharan style: ‘Thus if we are anxious to discover the ruler who can be connected with the oldest remains of Buddhist art in the North-West of India, we continually come across the name of Azes I. This gives us in round figures the middle of the first century B.C. as the beginning of Buddhist architecture in Gandhara.’⁶¹ In using the evidence from Sirkap for dating the casket to the early first century AD, he was, however, still using numismatic evidence, as the dating of the Sirkap site was largely based on the coins excavated there.

The Big Debate

Rowland’s radical redating of the casket prompted a heated exchange of opinion. The first direct rebuttal was made in 1943 by Reginald Le May.⁶² He reasserted the evidence of its discovery and its designs as confirming the date suggested by the coins found with it: ‘Summing up the evidence available, and considering it dispassionately without bias towards any particular theory regarding the period of the Gandharan school of art, I do not see how one can avoid assigning it to the first century A.D., and more probably to the first rather than the second half...’⁶³ Le May’s dating emphasised the association of the coins with the relic deposit and the likelihood of the coins being issued by Azes II. He also observed that the Kharoshthi inscriptions on the stone container were also datable to the

first century AD, according to Konow,⁶⁴ therefore consistent with the date suggested by the associated coins. Konow, in his commentary on the inscriptions on the stone container, had provided his chronological insight into the context of the casket. Konow argued that the inscriptions should be dated in the early first century AD,⁶⁵ because the stylistic features of its Kharoshthi were comparable with those in the Rajavula lion capital inscription from Mathura, which he dated to the period AD 5–10.⁶⁶

Rowland’s late dating of the casket still found a champion in the art historian Hugo Buchthal who rejected the view proposed by Le May in a review of an exhibition of Gandharan art in London in 1944, stressing the weakness of the numismatic dating.⁶⁷ This prompted Le May to restate his arguments, emphasising the importance of the dating of the Kharoshthi inscriptions on the stone container.⁶⁸ Buchthal responded to this with a more detailed argument that the chronology of late antique style was better understood than that of the development of Kharoshthi script ‘our present knowledge of late antique style is a more serious basis for the classification of a work of art than the epigraphists’ verdict on the approximate date of a Kharoshthi inscription.’⁶⁹ He

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 229.

⁶¹ L. Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture*, Paris, The Pegasus Press, 1929, see p. 73.

⁶² R. Le May, ‘The Bimaran casket’, *The Burlington Magazine* 82, 482, 1943, pp. 116–20 and 123.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶⁴ S. Konow, *Kharoshthi Inscriptions with the Exception of Those of Asoka (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum 2, 1)*, Calcutta, Archaeological Survey of India, 1929.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 51.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶⁷ H. Buchthal, ‘The Houghton collection of Gandharan sculpture’, *The Burlington Magazine* 86, 504, 1945, pp. 66–73.

⁶⁸ R. Le May, ‘Letters: The Houghton collection of Gandharan sculpture’ *The Burlington Magazine*, 86, 506, 1945, pp.128–9.

⁶⁹ H. Buchthal, ‘Letters: The Houghton collection of Gandharan sculpture’, *The Burlington Magazine* 86.507, 1945, pp. 152–3, see p. 153.

concluded with a significant observation on the relationship between the gold casket, its stone container and the coins found with them: ‘The possibility that a container several hundred years older was re-used when the casket was buried in the stupa should not be altogether excluded.’⁷⁰

Le May’s article and the resulting debate prompted Rowland to return again to the question of the date of the Bimaran casket at greater length in the following year.⁷¹ He drew parallels between the composition of the design on the casket and those on sarcophagi from the Roman Empire, dating to the late-second and fourth centuries AD, such as early Christian sarcophagi from Arles and Perugia⁷² and the British Museum’s *Projecta* casket.⁷³ He dismissed the Bimaran casket’s chronological association with the coins found with it, arguing that ‘coins continued in circulation sometimes centuries after they had been struck, and therefore the coppers of King Azes may well have been deposited for any number of reasons long after their original date of issue.’⁷⁴ He also argued that the architectural features of Bimaran stupa no. 2, in which the casket was found, equally pointed to a second century date for its construction, and that any dating of the Kharoshthi inscriptions related to the stone container not the gold casket, so were not relevant.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 153.

⁷¹ B. Rowland, ‘Gandhara and early Christian art: the *homme arcade* and the date of the Bimaran casket’, *The Art Journal*, 28.1, 1946, pp. 44–7.

⁷² M. Lawrence ‘Columnar sarcophagi in the Latin West’, *The Art Bulletin* 14, 1932, pp. 103–85, see figs. 18 and 45.

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http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx?museumno=1866,1229.1 (consulted 18 August 2016).

⁷⁴ Rowland, ‘Gandhara and early Christian art’, p. 44.

In his discussion Rowland attempted to explain the meaning of the imagery of the casket. Drawing from his linkage of the casket with western representations of figures within an arcade, he suggested that the design on the casket represented an image of the Buddha in a heavenly palace. He cited the depiction of a divine palace in the form of a pillared hall on the East Gate of the Sanchi stupa as an Indian example of this kind of imagery.⁷⁵ He suggested that the Bimaran casket design could represent the Buddha’s descent from the Tuṣita heaven. ‘In this regard, it is interesting to note that we may identify the three central figures of the Bimaran reliquary as a representation of the descent of Sakyamuni from the Tuṣita Heaven.’⁷⁶

A year later, apparently unaware of the arguments put forward by Rowland, the archaeologist John Marshall, excavator of Taxila, made a similar proposal for dating the Bimaran casket, rejecting the significance of the coins found with it.⁷⁷ His article was written to engage with the views Bachhofer had expressed on Gandharan art and history, as the war had previously prevented him from seeing Bachhofer’s article.⁷⁸ He argued from a stylistic perspective that the casket was later than the coins. ‘I cannot agree with Bachhofer in his dating of the Bimaran casket. Whether the coins found with the casket are those of Azes I or Azes II is not of any great moment. In the light of what we now know about the beginnings of Gandhara art, it is out of the question to assign this casket to the first quarter of the first century A.D. The

⁷⁵ Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture*, pl. 69.

⁷⁶ Rowland, ‘Gandhara and early Christian art’, p. 47.

⁷⁷ J. Marshall, ‘Greeks and Sakas in India’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1, 1947, pp. 3–32, see p. 14.

⁷⁸ Bachhofer ‘On Greeks and Sakas in India’.

embossed reliefs are work of the second century A.D., and cannot be put earlier. Evidently this is a case of re-burial of relics, of which I have come across not a few examples in the course of my excavations on Buddhist sites. The coins belonged to the original stupa, and were sedulously preserved, when the relics were transferred to a new and more important edifice, and enshrined in a more sumptuous casket. Up to the present we have found no image of the Buddha in a traditional pose which can be dated as early as the reign of Azes II, let alone an image in the highly developed style portrayed on this casket. Fig. 10 [a sculpture from the Taxila excavation] may, as I have suggested, conceivably be an image of the Bodhisattva and date from a substantially earlier date than the reign of Azes II, but at the best this is problematical, and apart from this statue there is no Buddha or Bodhisattva that we can refer for certain to an earlier period than the second quarter of the first century A.D. And even those images are still in an embryonic stage.⁷⁹

Although the articles of Rowland and Le May and of Bachhofer and Marshall presented radically different assessments of the chronology of the Bimaran casket, their ‘debates’ highlighted most of the issues involved in understanding its significance. Trying to date the casket remained a key issue, because if the casket could be dated through its association with the coins found with it, then it presented the earliest ‘datable’ Buddha images in the Gandharan style, and therefore closer to Hellenistic art in style. If the date of the casket were disassociated from the coins, then a later date could be justified and its significance for the development of the Gandharan would be of a different nature and tied it to the chronology of Roman art. What first

Coomaraswamy, Rowland and Buchthal had suggested and then Marshall was highlighting on the basis of his experience as an excavator was a more sophisticated use of the archaeological evidence presented by Masson. They all articulated the possibility that the deposit of the casket did not coincide with the issue of the coins. Their arguments were driven by their desire on grounds of artistic development to see a later date for the casket’s imagery than that currently proposed by numismatists for the date of the coins. By this period a consensus had emerged that the reign of Azes I began c. 58 BC, with the foundation of the Vikrama Era and that Azes II’s reign ended with the accession of Gondophares c. AD 20, a date calculated from the era year 103 and his reign year 26 recorded in the Takht-i Bahi inscription, by equating the recorded era with the Vikrama Era.⁸⁰ In this way the latest date of issue for the coins found with the casket was thought to be c. AD 20, as date considered by many too early for the stage of development of Buddhist art represented by the casket.

Art-Historical View Predominates

The ‘big debate’ had moved the discourse on the date of the Bimaran casket from a simplistic equation of the date of the associated coins with the date of the casket. This brought together two sets of opinions. One derived from numismatics and the structure of the history of the region during the Indo-Scythian, Indo-Parthian and early Kushan period and the other based on stylistic analysis of the casket’s imagery. The numismatic analysis was based on the process of attributing and sequencing the known coins; the historical analysis was

⁷⁹ Marshall, ‘Greeks and Sakas’, pp. 14–15.

⁸⁰ The Takht-i Bahi inscription had the era date 103 and the reign date of year 26, Konow, *Kharoshī Inscriptions*, pp. 57–62.

based on the results of the numismatic analysis alongside the dated references to coin issuing kings in contemporary inscriptions together with the rare references to the region in Latin, Greek and Chinese sources. Both numismatic and historical understanding demanded a high level of reconstruction as the data was so limited and open to a wide range of interpretations. There was also a growing recognition that the casket coins and other material from the Bimaran no. 2 stupa did not have to be of the same period. Stylistic analysis, based on subjective interpretations of the development of art in the region produced even more widely differing opinions about the casket, emphasising its position at the beginning of the Gandharan school because of its closeness to Greek style or at a more developed stage due to its inclusion of Roman influence. There was a settled view emerging giving preference to its interpretation as an object of art-historical significance, favouring stylistic analysis, over an acceptance at face value of its archaeological context. The attribution of the coins to Azes II had become the most widely held position, but their earlier attribution to Azes I still played a role in the discourse. The dates derived from these attributions placed the coins between 58 BC and AD 20. The stylistic analyses dated the casket between the first century BC and the second century AD.

Within this conflict between archaeological context, historical uncertainty and stylistic opinion an agreement emerged which widely accepted the art-historical view over the archaeological context, while a variety of historical interpretations were brought into play. As a background to this there was also a variety of views about the chronological framework based on the difficulty of agreeing a fixed date for the Kanishka era. Like the equation of the Azes

Era with the Vikrama Era commencing 58 BC, there was a growing tendency to equate the Kanishka Era with the Shaka Era beginning in AD 78.⁸¹

In 1949 Johanna van Lohuizen de Leeuw argued for a late dating of the casket using the same type of stylistic analyses as used in Rowland's identification of the casket's relationship with late Roman funerary art and in Marshall's view of its place well after the beginnings of Gandharan art.⁸² Her argument largely rested on the detail of the columns separating the figures on the casket as her primary reason to suggest a late date after the start of Kanishka I's reign, which she dated to AD 78. She rejected arguments for an earlier date which used the associated coins, the Kharoshthi inscription and the quality of the Hellenistic style of the figures: 'So the arguments in favour of the antiquity of the reliquary of Bimaran, to wit: the coin deposit, the good style, and the palaeography do not hold good, and the arguments in favour of a late date impel us to conclude that the casket probably was not made until Kaniska, and rather in the first half of the 1st century of his era than in the second half, judging by the moustache of the Buddha.'⁸³

Harold Ingholt likewise adopted an art-historical approach in 1957 to suggest an even later date, rejecting completely the numismatic and palaeographic evidence, 'It is, however, now generally recognized that these coins only prove that the reliquary is

⁸¹ '...it seems almost certain that Kanishka was the founder of the well-known era which began in AD 78', Rapson, *Cambridge History*, p. 583

⁸² J.E. van Lohuizen de Leeuw, *The "Scythian" Period, an Approach to the History, Art, Epigraphy and Palaeography of North India from the 1st Century BC to the 3rd Century AD*, Leiden, Brill, 1949.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 94.

later than the time of Azes.’⁸⁴, but he looked to the Sasanian empire for related stylistic treatment and argued that the casket should be dated to the period of the Sasanian invasion of Kushan territory, i.e. according to him after AD 241.⁸⁵ A similar date in the ‘early 3rd century A.D.’, based on Rowland’s analysis, continued to be asserted into the 1960s.⁸⁶

A very different use of stylistic analysis was proposed by Mario Bussagli in his essay on the art history of the Kushan period for the 1960 Kushan conference (published in 1968) with a substantially different outcome. He argued for an earlier date, but without any reference to the associated coins. He judged the figures arranged under pillared arches to be a ‘Parthian habit’⁸⁷ and dated both the Bimaran casket coins and the Kharoshthi on the stone container to the first century AD.⁸⁸ These pieces of evidence led him to suggest that the casket should be ‘semi-contemporary, in fact, to the Kaniska reliquary’ which he dated between the ‘second half of the first and the middle of the 2nd century AD.’⁸⁹ A very different position, rejecting the dominant focus on stylistic analysis, was also voiced at the same conference. Raymond Allchin preferred an earlier date for the casket, invoking the coin evidence, associating them with Azes II, and placed the casket in the mid first century AD, in the time of the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises, more than

half a century earlier than Kanishka I, whom he dated in the second century AD, Kanishka year 1 = c. AD 130–40.⁹⁰

Stylistic Considerations for Dating

The use of art-historical analysis continued to dominate the discourse, but with a tendency to also make use of the evidence of the associated coins to argue for placing the casket earlier than Rowland’s second century date. In the first essay to directly address the Bimaran casket, published in 1968, Walt Dobbins also chose a stylistic approach, comparing the casket with examples of gold figurines from the Taxila excavations, which he dated according to Marshall’s chronology for the site.⁹¹ But he related the casket back to what he understood to be the period of the coins found with the casket, using this comparison with the Taxila excavations he dated the casket ‘after the accession of Azes I (and perhaps of Azes II) and before the time of Kanishka, and probably before the end of Parthian rule at Taxila.’⁹² This dating led him to conclude that ‘This work is thus distinguished as depicting the earliest known Buddha image from Gandhara. ... If the reliquaries from Bimaran and Kanishka’s stupa are interpreted in their proper chronological setting, they may be helpful in analyzing how this transformation [from Parthian to Gandharan style] took place.’⁹³ In a broader overview of relic deposits written more than twenty years later he maintained this view, but now focused more directly on the archaeological

⁸⁴ H. Ingholt and I. Lyons, *Gandharan Art in Pakistan*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1957, see p. 23.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸⁶ S. E. Lee, *A History of Far Eastern Art*, Harry N. Abrahams, New York 1964, pp. 101–102.

⁸⁷ M. Bussagli, ‘Kaniska as seen by the art historian’, in A.L. Basham, ed., *Papers on the Date of Kaniska*, Leiden, Brill, 1968, pp. 39–56, see p. 52.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 48 and 52.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 53–5.

⁹⁰ F.R. Allchin, ‘Archaeology and the date of Kaniska: the Taxila evidence’, in A.L. Basham, ed., *Papers on the Date of Kaniska*, Leiden, Brill, 1968, pp. 4–34, see pp. 26–7 and 31.

⁹¹ K.W. Dobbins, ‘Two Gandharan Reliquaries’, *East and West* 18, 1/2, 1968, pp. 151–162.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 154.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 161.

evidence of the associated coins as his dating criteria: 'By virtue of the coins these are the earliest datable depictions of the Buddha image.'⁹⁴

In 1980 and 1984 I pointed to the stylistic relationship between the Buddha images on the Bimaran casket and those on the copper coins of Kanishka I.⁹⁵ The Bimaran casket Buddha images share with those on Kanishka's copper coins a treatment of the Buddha which is untypical of Gandharan art, in their posture and in the positioning of the Buddha's cloak end, hanging over his wrist rather than held.⁹⁶

Dobbins' analysis of the evidence marked the beginnings of a consensus to disregard Rowland's dating by comparison with Roman prototypes. The next detailed account of the casket was included in Susan Huntington's 1985 study of Indian art.⁹⁷ Her view on the chronology reverted to Foucher's position, dating the casket to the late first century BC because of the coins found with it: 'The finding of mint condition

coins in the chamber, however, is a compelling reason to believe that the coins are a vital factor to consider in estimating the date of the reliquary.'⁹⁸ She attributed the coins to Azes II and dated his reign to 35 BC – AD 1, but without indicating the source for this dating. She also claimed for the Buddha images on the casket that they 'mark the initiation of the image making tradition.'⁹⁹ Her arguments against a later date did not deal with the stylistic considerations raised by Rowland and Dobbins, but focused on the probability that such imagery of the Buddha could exist in the first century BC, unfortunately using evidence of a Chinese pot of 36 BC with a Buddha image which has now been discredited as a modern fake.¹⁰⁰

In the same year the Bimaran casket was also discussed in two of the papers published by A.K. Narain in a collection of essays on the Buddha image.¹⁰¹ Narain criticised van Lohuizen de Leeuw's dismissal of the numismatic evidence and

⁹⁴ K.W. Dobbins, 'Buddhist Reliquaries from Gandhara', in D. Handa and A. Agrawal, eds., *Ratna-Chandrika, Panorama of Oriental Studies*, Delhi, Harman Publishing House, 1989, pp. 105–124, see p. 109.

⁹⁵ J. Cribb, 'Kaniska's Buddha coins – the official iconography of Sakyamuni and Maitreya', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 3, 2, 1980, pp. 79–88; 'The origin of the Buddha image – the numismatic evidence', in B. Allchin (ed.) *South Asian Archaeology 1981, Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe Held in Cambridge University 5–10 July 1981*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 231–44.

⁹⁶ Cribb, 'Kaniska's Buddha coins', p. 83; Cribb 'The origin of the Buddha image', p. 236.

⁹⁷ S.L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India – Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*, New York, Weatherhill, 1985, pp. 113–114.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 629.

⁹⁹ Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, p. 114; a view she repeated in a later article: 'The well-known gold and ruby reliquary found at Bimaran in Afghanistan is generally assigned a date of about the second century AD in spite of the virtually incontrovertible scientific evidence surrounding it that suggests that it was made about the first century BC. The resistance to the early dating of the reliquary is based solely on the assumption that Buddha images were not introduced into the Buddhist artistic repertoire until the early centuries of the Christian era, and therefore that any work that bears an image of the Buddha must be of a comparably late date.' S. L. Huntington, 'Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism' *Art Journal*, Vol. 49.4 1990, pp. 401–408.

¹⁰⁰ R. Linrothe, 'Inquiries into the Origin of the Buddha Image: A Review', *East and West*, 43, 1, 1993, pp. 241–256, see p. 245.

¹⁰¹ A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*, New Delhi, Kanak Publications, 1985.

concluded that ‘we cannot but date the Bimaran reliquary in the period of Azes II, who preceded Gondophares, and whose reign most probably came to an end before the beginning of the Christian era.’¹⁰² His dating of Azes II to the first century BC, like Huntington’s dating, was without reference to a source. My own paper in this volume again returned to the stylistic relationship between the images of the Buddha on Kanishka I’s coins and those on the Bimaran casket and used this as evidence in a simplistic attempt to date the casket to the same period as Kanishka I’s coins. I summarised what was then known about the Bimaran casket coins: ‘The only relatively datable objects associated with the reliquary and pot were four ‘bronze coins’. These coins have been previously attributed to Azes I or II, but are now generally considered to be posthumous imitations of coins of Azes II... Coins of this type could have been issued from the end of the reign of Azes II up to the beginning of Vima Kadphises’... It is only possible to say that the stupa’s relic chamber was closed later than the reign of Azes II.’¹⁰³ I concluded that none of the contextual evidence was sufficient to date the reliquary, so the stylistic connection with Kanishka’s coins suggested that ‘perhaps therefore the reliquary should be dated to the same period as the coins [of Kanishka I].’¹⁰⁴

‘Consequently, this writer dates it

¹⁰² A.K. Narain ‘First figures of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas: ideology and chronology’ in A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*, New Delhi, Kanak Publications, 1985, pp. 1–21, see p. 14.

¹⁰³ J. Cribb 1985 ‘A re-examination of the Buddha images on coins of king Kaniska – new light on the origins of the Buddha image in Gandharan art’, in A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*, New Delhi, Kanak Publications, 1985, pp. 59–87, see p. 82.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 82.

contemporaneously with, or perhaps slightly later than, the Kaniska reliquary’. Stanislaw Czuma gave this view on the Bimaran casket in his catalogue of a Kushan sculpture exhibition in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1986, reiterating the dating proposed by Bussagli in 1968.¹⁰⁵ He made no mention of the associated coins, but restricted his remarks on the casket to the similarity of its pillared arcade to those appearing on the double-headed eagle shrine at Taxila, which he dated to the early Kushan period (‘possibly built by Kujula or Wima Kadphises’). However he felt that the stylistic features of the casket’s Buddha images to be very close to those on the Kanishka reliquary and therefore dated it later than these architectural features.¹⁰⁶

Reassessing the Coins

My 1985 reference to the coins found with the Bimaran casket being posthumous imitations of Azes II coins reflected the 1960 reattribution of the type by David MacDowall¹⁰⁷ to the period of the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises. They had also been classified as posthumous by Michael Mitchiner in his 1976 catalogue.¹⁰⁸ The weight of the numismatic evidence suggested that these coins should be later than all previous assessments of them in relation to the casket. This evidence was already included in the first notices of the

¹⁰⁵ Bussagli, ‘Kaniska as seen’.

¹⁰⁶ S.J. Czuma, *Kushan Sculpture – Images from Early India*, Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1986, see p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ D.W. MacDowall, in ‘Appendix III: Summary of Discussions at the Conference’, prepared by G.L. Adhya and N.K. Wagle, in A.L. Basham, ed., *Papers on the Date of Kaniska*, Leiden, Brill, 1968, p. 404–34, see p. 412.

¹⁰⁸ M. Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage*, London, Hawkins Publications, 1975–6, nine volumes, vol. 6 *The Dynasty of Azes*, London 1976, p. 577

coins, where Charles Masson identified them as issues of successors of Azes, rather than issues of Azes.¹⁰⁹ This confirmation of Masson's perspicacious description of the coins has led to a reassessment of the relationship between the casket and its associated coins, but for some scholars this distinction has not yet entered into their accounts of the casket.¹¹⁰

In 1987 Gerard Fussman and David MacDowall both wrote on the addition of coins to Buddhist relic deposits in Gandhara. Their discussions of the Bimaran casket coins focus on the dating. Fussman¹¹¹ identified the coins as issues of Azes II, but reiterating MacDowall's earlier suggestion that they should be linked with the reign of the first Kushan king Kujula Kadphises.¹¹² On this basis and taking AD 78 as year 1 of Kanishka, he dated the deposit to c. AD 20–50, but argued that the casket should be earlier, at least as early as the first two decades of the first century AD.¹¹³ In another article published in the same year Fussman also described the coins as 'four billon coins, bearing designs and legends attributed to Azes II and additional marks to be found on Kujula Kadphises coins... they are debased Azes II coins or an Azes II posthumous issue.'¹¹⁴ Again he suggested

that the casket 'came from a former deposit and was reinshrined later, at the end of the reign of Azes II...'¹¹⁵ His acknowledgement of MacDowall's re-assignment of the coins to the period after the end of Azes II's reign appears to have not prevented him from returning to the earlier attribution of them to Azes II's reign. In his most recent comments on the Bimaran casket, published last year, Fussman seems again to have forgotten that the coins have been identified as posthumous, listing them as 'four coins of Azes II' and basing his arguments on this dating.¹¹⁶ He also uses this identification of the coins to date the inscribed stone container in which the gold casket was found: 'now dated sometime between AD 20 and 50.'¹¹⁷

MacDowall's article of the same year commented on the Bimaran casket coins as an aside in his discussion of numismatic references to Buddhism. He gave a detailed account of the coins, pointing out their differences from the issues of Azes II and re-emphasised the inclusion of a 'trisceles' (three part circular symbol) which also appears on late coins of Kujula Kadphises, dating them to the period of Kujula Kadphises and even suggesting that the Bimaran coins were issued by Kujula

¹⁰⁹ See above footnotes 16 and 17.

¹¹⁰ See above footnote 13;

¹¹¹ G. Fussman, 'Numismatic and epigraphic evidence for the chronology of early Gandharan art', in M. Yaldiz and W. Lobo, eds., *Investigating Indian Art: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Development of Early Buddhist and Hindu Iconography Held at the Museum of Indian Art Berlin in May 1986*, Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 1987, pp. 67–88.

¹¹² MacDowall 'Appendix III: Summary of Discussions at the Conference', p. 412.

¹¹³ Fussman, 'Numismatic and epigraphic evidence', pp. 70–1 and 77.

¹¹⁴ G. Fussman, 'Coin deposits in stupas', in P.L. Gupta and A.K. Jha, eds., *Numismatics and*

Archaeology, Nasik, Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies, 1987, pp. 11–15.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹⁶ Fussman, 'Kushan power', p. 157. Fussman's suggestion in this article (p. 156, note 2) that Elizabeth Errington, 'following J. Cribb' (Errington, 'Reliquaries in the British Museum' p. 135), attributed the coins found with the Bimaran casket to Azes II is mistaken, as she explicitly identifies them as posthumous issues, datable to the period of the end of the reign of Kujula Kadphises, c. AD 90. He also wrongly attributes to her the dating of Azes II to AD 40–90, whereas she dates him to 1 BC–AD 16 (*ibid.*, p. 116).

¹¹⁷ Fussman, 'Kushan power', p. 160.

Kadphises.¹¹⁸ It should be noted that MacDowall was not the first to use the trisceles design to link the Bimaran casket coins with those of Kujula Kadphises, as this connection had already been noted by Masson in 1835 ‘the obverse monogram of these coins is valuable, from being again apparent on the coins of Kadaphes Choranus as depicted by Mr. Prinsep [i.e. the Roman head type of Kujula Kadphises].’¹¹⁹ MacDowall also reaffirmed the views expressed by Bachhofer in 1941 and the more recent observations by Dobbins in 1968, that the casket should be dated after the period of Azes II, i.e. in the 40s to 50s of the first century AD; ‘the chronological context is the same – the period of Kujula Kadphises and his Pahlava contemporaries.’¹²⁰ MacDowall reasserted his findings in a second paper, supporting van Lohuizen de Leeuw’s dating of the casket: ‘the billon tetradrachms found at Bimaran were struck in the early Kushan period of Kujula Kadphises, more than a century after the accession of Azes I [57 BC, therefore dating the coins c. AD 43–64]. Van Lohuizen de Leeuw’s scepticism about an early Scythian context for the Bimaran deposit was well founded.’¹²¹

A return to the numismatic dating of the Bimaran casket to the reign of Azes II was employed by Lolita Nehru in her study of Gandharan art in 1989, following the opinion of Allchin,¹²² placing it alongside the discovery of Azes II coins in monuments at Swat associated with the earliest Gandharan style reliefs at the site and similar evidence from Marshall’s

excavations at Taxila.¹²³ She drew connections between the pillared arcade motif with birds above on the casket and examples at Swat and Taxila, all dated, according to her evidence, by coins of Azes II, placing all three in the phase of the beginnings of the Gandharan style in the second quarter of the first century AD.

A New Holistic Approach

The exhibition of the Bimaran casket in 1992 in an exhibition exploring the meeting of cultures in ancient Afghanistan at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, marked a new beginning for its study. In the accompanying catalogue Neil Kreitman described and discussed the casket and its associated coins and stone container.¹²⁴ This study reopened the debate on the casket by returning to Masson’s account of its discovery and by reassessing each of the components in the relic deposit in relation to broader archaeological, art-historical and numismatic research. Two other scholars Martha Carter and Elizabeth Errington followed the same lead and together with Kreitman created a more balanced view of the chronological position of the casket by examining a wide range of evidence, positioning it within its archaeological, architectural, art-historical, epigraphic, numismatic and religious context.

Kreitman began by presenting a detailed description of each part of the deposit (apart from the accompanying ornaments which had not yet been identified by Elizabeth Errington¹²⁵). His analysis marked a

¹¹⁸ MacDowall, ‘Buddhist symbolism’, p. 184.

¹¹⁹ Masson, ‘Analysis of the Beghram coins’, p. 13.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 187.

¹²¹ MacDowall, ‘The chronological evidence of coins’, p. 728.

¹²² Allchin, *Archaeology and the Date of Kaniska*, p. 26–7.

¹²³ L. Nehru, *Origins of the Gandharan Style: a Study of Contributory Influences*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 87–8.

¹²⁴ Kreitman ‘Deposit from Stupa no. 2’.

¹²⁵ E. Errington, ‘The Buddhist remains of Passani and Bimaran and related relic deposits from south-eastern Afghanistan in the Masson Collection’, in J.

departure from earlier accounts of the casket because he looked at a much broader context for it, including archaeological, architectural, epigraphic and numismatic evidence, some of which had been highlighted separately by earlier commentators. Kreitman followed Le May in dating the Kharoshthi inscriptions to the period AD 50–70, and pointed to similar stone relic containers of the same period or slightly later, again drawing the conclusion that the container should be dated AD 25–75. For the Bimaran casket coins he accepted the date of c. AD 60, which I had proposed elsewhere in the same volume, following the dating suggested by MacDowall in 1987.¹²⁶

On the basis of these datings he also dated the gold casket to the period AD 20–60. His chronology for the casket also called upon artistic parallels from the excavations at Taxila and Butkara, particularly referencing Dobbins' ¹²⁷ association of the casket's Buddha figures with gold figurines from Taxila and Carter's ¹²⁸ with relief carvings from Butkara. He also showed that the architectural motifs on the casket were very similar to those on the stupa in which it was found and to those on the other stupas in the same region, accepting the mid-first century

Stargardt, an as yet untitled collection of essays on Buddhist reliquaries, at press. E. Errington et al, *Charles Masson and the Buddhist Sites of Afghanistan. Explorations, Excavations, Collections 1833–1835*, London, British Museum Press, at press, figs 117–119.

¹²⁶ J. Cribb, 'Coins and the reconstruction of chronology', in E. Errington and J. Cribb eds., *Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol in the Art of Ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Cambridge, Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992, pp. 12–18, see p. 16.

¹²⁷ Dobbins, 'Two Gandharan Reliquaries'.

¹²⁸ M.L. Carter, 'A Gandharan bronze Buddha statuette: its place in the evolution of the Buddha image in Gandhara', in P. Pal, ed., *A Pot-Pourri of Indian Art*, Bombay, Marg, 1988, pp. 21–38.

AD dating proposed by Fabrègues for similar motifs at Taxila and Butkara.¹²⁹ Kreitman also argued that the casket's images pre-dated Kanishka I because of my indication of the similarity of the Bimaran casket's Buddha images to those featured on Kanishka I's coins.¹³⁰

Kreitman supported the date he gave the deposit on stylistic grounds by his assessment of the associated coins, which he saw as 'providing the *terminus ante quem* for the deposit ... a terminus ... further suggested by the pristine condition and debased silver, rather than copper, content of the coins, which were probably more or less new at the time of the deposit.'¹³¹ This outcome gave, in his opinion, the casket an important position in the development of Gandharan art, 'for it affirms a pre-Kanishka evolution for its Buddha prototype, perhaps the earliest standing example of which is rendered with such delicacy and refinement on the magnificent gold casket from Bimaran.'¹³²

Kreitman's achievement in this new holistic assessment of the casket was invoked by Wladimir Zwalf in his 1996 catalogue of Gandharan art in the British Museum. Zwalf provided a very detailed descriptions of the gold casket¹³³ and its stone container¹³⁴ and summarised past scholarship on the casket, emphasising the growing tendency to date it

¹²⁹ C. Fabrègues, 'Indo-Parthian beginnings of Gandharan sculpture', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 1, 1987, pp. 33–43.

¹³⁰ Cribb, 'Kaniska's Buddha coins', p. 83; Cribb, 'The origin of the Buddha image', p. 236.

¹³¹ Kreitman 'Deposit from Stupa no. 2', p. 191.

¹³² Kreitman 'Deposit from Stupa no. 2', p. 192.

¹³³ W. Zwalf, *A Catalogue of the Gandhara Sculpture in the British Museum*, London, British Museum Press, 1996, two volumes, vol. 1, pp. 348–50, no. 659.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 346–7, no. 652.

to the context associated with the mid first century date of the coins found with it.¹³⁵

In the following year, Martha Carter published a reconsideration of the evidence for the dating and context of the reliquary, based on her paper at the conference associated with the 1992 exhibition, for which Kreitman had composed the catalogue entry on the casket.¹³⁶ She wrote it before Zwalf was published, but like him observed the growing consensus for a first century AD date for the casket. Like Kreitman she also presented a broader context for the casket, reiterating the dating associations highlighted by Kreitman. In addition to the context Kreitman had outlined she extended the range of comparators for the gold casket, drawn from contemporary artifacts, architecture and epigraphy. She compared the casket's gold working with that of the jewelled ornaments found in the Tillya Tepe tombs, datable by their inclusion of the Roman coin (a gold issue of Tiberius, AD 14–37).¹³⁷ She even suggested that the casket and Tillya Tepe ornaments might have come from the same workshop: 'The school of artisans that produced well-crafted gold personal ornaments and items of luxury for a barbarian aristocracy in Bactria at the

beginning of the Common Era, could have easily produced the Bimaran reliquary for a Buddhist clientele.'¹³⁸ The casket's use of figures between pilasters she compared with such structures in Parthian and Greek Bactrian architecture,¹³⁹ rejecting Rowland's hypothesis that such representations could only come from second to third century Mediterranean prototypes. She also linked the mention of the donor Śivarakṣita in the Kharoshti inscriptions on the stone container with two other first century AD epigraphs containing the same name.¹⁴⁰

Carter's dating of the casket to the first century drew on the parallels she had cited and positioned: 'the casket within the evolution of Gandharan art, and specifically to representations of the Buddha'. Like Foucher, Bachhofer, Lohuizen de Leeuw, Dobbins and Kreitman, she concluded that 'The Bimaran Reliquary illustrates two of the earliest Buddha representations extant' and therefore of importance in understanding the origins and early development of the Buddha image in Gandharan art 'Chronologically, it belong to an era when the representations of the Buddha were first created within the decorative scheme of the stupa.'¹⁴¹

Carter also discussed the significance of the casket's iconography and its bearing on the overall meaning of the casket. She characterised the positioning of the figures of Buddha, Indra and Brahma under an arcade, composed of arched niches, separated by pilasters, as a representation placing them in a 'palatial building', and like the arcades on stupas 'the arcades... are visual metaphors for heaven seen as a

¹³⁵ Kreitman 'Deposit from Stupa no. 2'.

¹³⁶ M.L. Carter, 'A reappraisal of the Bimaran Reliquary', in R. Allchin, B. Allchin, N. Kreitman and E. Errington, eds., *Gandharan Art in Context: East-West Exchanges at the Crossroads of Asia*, New Delhi, Regency Publications, 1997, pp. 72–93.

¹³⁷ V. Sarianidi, *The Golden Hoard of Bactria: From the Tillya-tepe Excavations in Northern Afghanistan*. Harry N. Abrams, New York 1985, see also for chronology of these tombs E. Zeymal, 'Tillya Tepe within the context of the Kushan chronology', in M. Alram and D. Klimburg-Salter eds., *Coins Art and Archaeology – Essays on the pre-Islamic History of the Indo-Iranian Borderlands*, Vienna, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998, pp. 239–44.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 76.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 77–8.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 72–3.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 87, 89.

palace balcony.’¹⁴² In this she followed and referred to Rowland’s discussion of the iconography. She also followed Rowland and Foucher (but without reference to this) in explaining this setting as representing the Buddha’s descent from heaven. Making it clear that it would be the Trayastrimsha heaven from which the Buddha descended accompanied by the Hindu gods Indra and Brahma. She identified the casket as a reliquary in the form of a miniature stupa, depicting the heavenly palace ‘from whence the Buddha descends to earth accompanied by Brahma and Indira.’¹⁴³

The most recent commentary on the Bimaran casket is contained in Elizabeth Errington’s account of the Gandharan Buddhist relic deposits in the British Museum in David Jongeward’s volume on Gandharan reliquaries.¹⁴⁴ Errington had spent most of her career at the British Museum researching, identifying and interpreting the collections amassed and the manuscripts written by Charles Masson as they survive in the British Museum and the British Library. This enabled her to reassess the casket in the context of Masson’s account of his discoveries and her rediscovery of many of its associated finds. By placing the casket in this context and locating it among the other known Gandharan reliquaries, she created a clearer perspective of the various aspects which have been used to date the reliquary and extract a broader significance for it in relation to Gandharan art.

Like Carter, Errington discussed, but questioned, the possible link between the inscription on the stone container and the two other inscriptions in Kharoshthi which

feature the same name as the container’s donor Śivarakṣiṭa. One is dated in the Azes era, but with unclear numerals, although clearly a high enough number to date it in the late first century AD.¹⁴⁵ She linked the stone container with three other examples of similar shape and internal structure. One from the stupa called Passani tumulus 2, from the Darunta region (the region including Bimaran), another from a stupa at Qul-i Nadir, near Begram, and the third without provenance, but naming the rulers of the kingdom of Apraca (Avaca), which appears to be in the Bajaur region, and dated in the Azes Era and a ‘Greek Era’. She argued that their Afghan and north-western Pakistan origins suggested they were not connected to the other Śivarakṣiṭa inscriptions which both came from further east, from Shahdaur and Taxila.

In addition to a detailed description of the gold casket, Errington pointed to the architectural parallels of its pillared arcade with eagles in Gandharan style reliefs from Butkara, Kohat (near Peshawar) and Taxila. The Butkara parallel is from a datable first century context, established by the coin of Azes II in its relic deposit.¹⁴⁶ She also discussed the meaning of the imagery. The representation of the Buddha flanked by Indra and Brahma is identified by her as representing the Buddha’s descent from the Trayastrimsha heaven, the identification also suggested by Foucher and Carter. To identify the youthful figure whose image separated the two sets of images of the Buddha with Indra and Brahma, she compared his appearance, particularly his hairstyle with those of later bodhisattva figures in Gandharan style. She concluded that it was most likely that he represented Siddhartha as bodhisattva, or that a

¹⁴² *ibid.*, pp. 87–8.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁴ Errington, ‘Reliquaries in the British Museum’, pp. 142–50.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

generalized image of the bodhisattva type was intended.¹⁴⁷

Errington's detailed work on the Masson finds in the British Museum enabled her to reintroduce into the discussion of the deposit the small objects, gold ornaments, crystal, agate, amethyst and other beads, pearls and a broken bronze seal ring, which were originally found in the stone container with the gold casket. These enable her to compare the small gold ornaments in the find with those found in the first century AD tombs at Tillya Tepe.¹⁴⁸ The strong association with material from the Tillya Tepe tombs also suggested to her, as it had to Carter, that the casket images belonged within the same metalwork tradition of repoussé and chased gold figures and jewel inlay techniques as that exhibited by the objects from these tombs.¹⁴⁹

In line with most other recent commentators on the reliquary Errington dated the casket in the first century AD, paying close attention to the justification of that date, because the casket and its associated finds are 'one of the most important relic deposits for the chronology of Buddhist art in Afghanistan.'¹⁵⁰ She identified the Bimaran casket coins as 'posthumous Azes billon coins', repeating Masson's report that the coins were 'in excellent preservation'.¹⁵¹ She dated them to the period c. AD 60-90, on the basis that they were imitations made after the reign of Azes II, and noted that they are generally 'considered to provide the earliest evidence for the dating of the emergence of the first Buddha images. For if the coins and casket are contemporary they indicate that a fully developed image

existed by the end of the first century CE.'¹⁵² She, however, warned that there were circumstances which could separate the casket chronologically from the other finds, so that the coins would only provide a *terminus post quem*, if, for example, 'the missing lid [of the gold casket] and the imperfect state of the steatite one suggest that they and the associated finds could have originally been placed in an open shrine (and by extension added to at any time) and suffered damage before their final interment in the stupa.'¹⁵³ She indicated that the coins of Kanishka I provide a better 'benchmark', showing that the Buddha image was already established by the middle of the second century AD.

In the same volume, the inscriptions on the stone container were re-edited by Stefan Baums,¹⁵⁴ who dated them according to the opinion of Fussman¹⁵⁵ to the period AD 20–50. The discord between this dating and that proposed by Errington's analysis is perhaps a reflection of the AD 78 dating for Kanishka I's first year used by Fussman and the AD 127¹⁵⁶ dating used by Errington.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 146–147.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁵¹ Wilson, *Ariana Antiqua*, p. 71.

¹⁵² Errington, 'Reliquaries in the British Museum', p. 148.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁵⁴ S. Baums 'Catalogue and revised texts and translations of Gandharan reliquary inscriptions', in D. Jongeward, E. Errington, R. Salomon and S. Baums, *Gandharan Buddhist Reliquaries*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2012, pp. 200–251, see p. 249, no. 52.

¹⁵⁵ G. Fussman, 'Numismatic and epigraphic evidence', p. 70. An opinion repeated last year, Fussman, 'Kushan power', p. 160.

¹⁵⁶ Errington is following the redating of Kanishka I's first year to AD 127 by H. Falk, 'The "yuga" of Sphujiddhva and the era of the Kuṣāṇas', *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 7, 2001, pp. 121–136.

Conclusion

The recent holistic studies of the casket by Kreitman, Carter and Errington show the value of an approach taking account of the evidence derived both from the casket itself with its associated objects and from their broader context. The images on the casket will continue to play an important role in understanding the development of Gandharan art, but also continue to present problems in understanding their place in terms of chronology. The growing consensus derived from these holistic studies now presents a more coherent understanding, although opinion based on previously published suggestions still accounts for many passing attributions of the casket.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Alongside the publications already mentioned in footnotes 6 and 13, see also C. Sachs retaining the attribution of the coins to Azes II, ‘no. 210 Buddha debout avec inscription’ in O. Boppearachchi, C. Landes and C. Sachs (eds.) *De l’Indus à l’Oxus, Archéologie de l’Asie Centrale*, Lattes, Association Imago, musée de Lattes, 2003; pp. 233–234, likewise R. DeCaroli, *Image Problems*, pp. 18–20. Wikipedia also continues to retain the same assignment of the coins to Azes I or Azes II, but also raises the recent suggestions that there was only one Azes. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bimaran_casket, cited 17th August 2016). Perhaps most striking of recent publications overlooking recent publications on the subject is the Fussman’s imagined narrative about the making and deposition of the gold casket, which ignores Masson’s description of the construction of Bimaran Stupa no. 2 as being without an interior structure and MacDowall’s identification of the associated coins as ‘posthumous Azes II coins’. Fussman ‘Kushan power’ p. 160: ‘it is now widely agreed that the golden reliquary was first installed in an earlier stupa, decayed or partially destroyed, and later reinstalled by Śivarakṣita in a new *stūpa* encasing the remains of the earlier one.’ The date he provides for Śivarakṣita’s deposit inscription is ‘between AD 20 and 50’ (see also footnote 115 above).

The historical analysis of the Buddha images has moved beyond the initial opinions based on a decontextualisation of the casket, focused either on the simplistic deduction of their chronology from the date of the associated coins, without a full examination of their attribution and date, or on the stylistic features of the casket by comparing them with a limited range of parallels.

More evidence is needed before all the questions can be answered as to how the casket can be used as a tool in the study of the development of Gandharan art. The most important steps in improving the evidence now available have come from the work of Elizabeth Errington in tracing Masson’s original documentation of the discovery of the casket and identification of the objects found with it. Among this documentation was Masson’s drawing of the inscriptions of the four coins found in the same relic chamber as the gold casket.¹⁵⁸ (Fig. 5). This enabled the coins to be identified as the last issues of the satrap ruling the area where the casket was found (Fig. 6). This satrap – Mujatria, son of Kharahostes (not the Kharahostes of the Mathura lion capital inscription) – can be dated through coin finds (Fig. 7) and associations with the latest phase of the reign of the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises (c. AD 50–90) and the reign of his son Wima Takto (c. AD 90–113). This evidence places the relic deposit containing the casket after c. AD 80. This does not date the casket, but provides a context for its excavation. All attempts to date it to the reign of king Azes I or Azes II, or just Azes (if Senior’s view is acceptable) should no longer play a part in the discourse. More important evidence will also be revealed shortly through the

¹⁵⁸ E. Errington et al, *Charles Masson and the Buddhist Sites of Afghanistan*, fig. 117.1–4.

research of Kay Wannaporn Rienjang on the contents of the relic chamber of Bimaran Stupa no. 2, when her doctoral research is made available.

The dating of the coins found with the casket after the rule of any king called Azes and their association with the reign of Kujula Kadphises was already made clear by Charles Masson himself.¹⁵⁹ The importance of his remarks was not properly understood until the 1960s, when MacDowall identified these coins as ‘posthumous Azes’. Charles Masson’s expertise in the archaeology and the numismatics of ancient Afghanistan was remarkable and had already laid the foundation of the structure of Afghanistan’s ancient history almost two hundred years ago. It is wise not to ignore what he had to say about his discoveries. Returning to Masson’s original identification of the coins enabled a much later date to be proposed for the associated coins than those made by scholars who attributed them to Azes, and eventually led to their attribution to the late first century AD satrap Mujatria. This provides an excellent example of the importance of understanding the nature and relative value of earlier scholarship, and the need to continually question it.

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stupas Masson excavated and from the ancient city at Begram. The coin finds from both contribute greatly to revising the chronology of the political and cultural environment in which the casket was deposited. I also thank her for sharing her deep knowledge of the archaeology and art history of Buddhist Gandhara. I am also indebted to Gul Rahim Khan of the University of Peshawar who has shared with me his records of the Kushan coin finds from Taxila, which have allowed a reappraisal of the chronology of that site. I have also found my good friend David Jongeward’s recent book (D. Jongeward, E. Errington, R. Salomon and S. Baums, *Gandharan Buddhist Reliquaries*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2012) an important resource for this research. I am also appreciative of the many conversations about Buddhist relic practice I have had with Kay Wannaporn Rienjang over the last few years, she has opened my eyes to many dimensions of research in this subject. I would like to thank Pia Brancaccio, Elizabeth Errington, Robert Bracey, Kay Wannaporn Rienjang, Martina Stoye for their help and patience, for listening to my idle speculations and for re-educating me in my understanding of Gandharan art and history. I am also appreciative of the contributions to this research made by Naushaba Anjum, Stefan Baums, Kurt Behrendt, Shailendra Bhandare, Martha Carter, Harry Falk, Christine Fröhlich, David Jongeward, Gul Rahim Khan, Nasim Khan, Christian Luczanits, David MacDowall, Micahel Mitchiner, Luca Olivieri, Bob Senior, Janice Stargardt and Peter Stewart. Finally I would like to give special thanks Neil Kreitman whose support and encouragement over more than two decades has enabled me to learn so much about the coins and culture of ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¹⁵⁹ See footnotes 10, 15, 16 and 17 above.

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			100–51	50–26	25–1 BCE	CE 1–25	26–50	51–75	76–100	101–25	126–50	151–75	176–200	201–25	226–50
1	Cunningham	1854	C												
2	Goblet d'Alviella	1897		C	C										
3	Foucher	1922		C/S	C/S	C/S	C/S								
4	Marshall	1922				S/A									
5	Coomaras wamy	1927						S	S	S					
6	Bachhofer	1929		S											
7	Hargreaves	1930		C	C										
8	Rowland	1936								S	S	S	S	S	S
9	Tam	1938		S	S	S	S								
10	Bachhofer	1941				C/S/A	C/S/A								
11	Le May	1943				C/S/E	C/S/E								
12	Buchthal	1944								E/S	E/S	E/S	E/S	E/S	E/S
13	Rowland	1946												S	S
14	Marshall	1947								S/A	S/A	S/A	S/A		
15	Van Lohuizen de Leeuw	1949							S	S					
16	Ingholt	1957													S
17	Lee	1964												S	S
18	Bussagli	1968						S	S	S	S				
19	Allchin	1968					C	C							
20	Dobbins	1968					C/A/S	C/A/S							
21	Huntington	1985		C	C										
22	Narain	1985		C	C										
23	Cribb	1985								C/S	C/S				
24	Czuma	1986							S	S					
25	Fussman	1987				C/A	C/A								
26	MacDowall	1987					C	C							
27	Nehru	1989					C/A/S								
28	Dobbins	1989					C	C							
29	MacDowall	1990					C	C							
30	Kreitman	1992					C/A/S/E	C/A/S/E							
31	Zwalf	1996					C	C							
32	Carter	1997				S/A/E	S/A/E	S/A/E	S/A/E						
33	Errington	2012						C/A/S	C/A/S	C/A/S					
34	Baums	2012				C/A	C/A								
35	Fussman	2015				C/A									

Table 1: relative chronologies of the Bimaran gold casket. C = dating by associated coins; S = dating by artistic style; A = dating by archaeological context; E = dating by epigraphy.

(Photographs are by the author, unless stated otherwise)

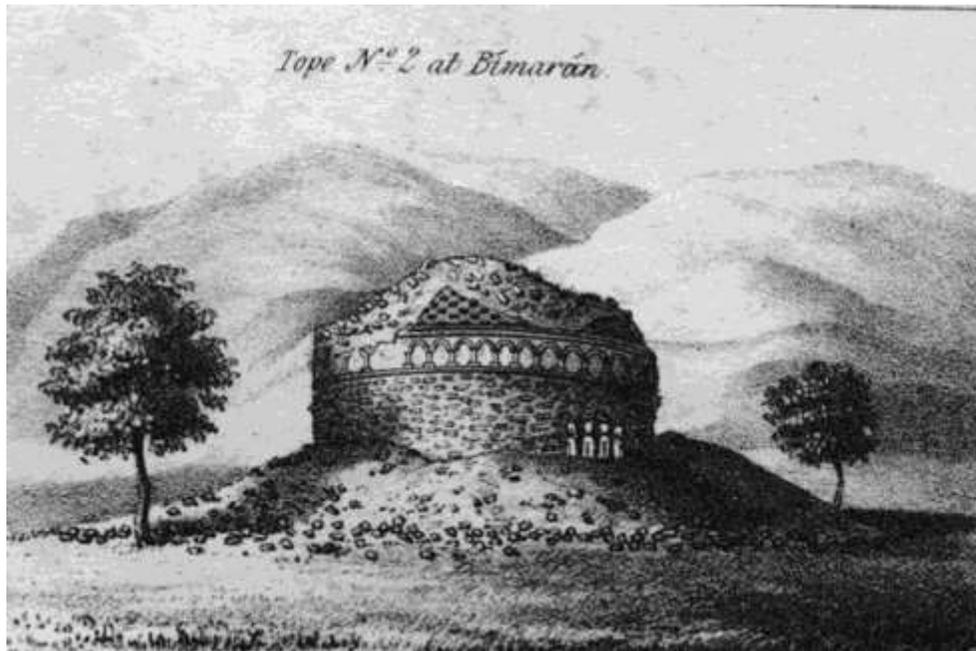


Fig. 1 Drawing of Bimaran Stupa no. 2 by Charles Masson (Masson 1841, plate III).



Fig. 2 Bimaran Stupa no. 2 relic deposit, as exhibited at the British Museum.



Fig. 3 Bimaran Stupa no. 2 stone container (British Museum 1880.27).



Fig. 4 Bimaran Stupa no. 2 gold casket, a–b) sides c) base (British Museum 1900,0209.1).



Fig. 5 Sketch of Bimaran Stupa no. 2 relic deposit by Charles Masson (British Library India Office Collections Uncatalogued Masson MSS, Bundle 1a, f. 1; Errington 1999, p. 231).



Fig. 6 Base silver tetradrachm of satrap Mujatria, in name of king Azes II, found with Bimaran casket (British Museum IOC.202).



Fig. 7 Copper coin of satrap Mujatria, son of satrap Kharahostes in his own name (Classical Numismatic Group, electronic auction 226 (27 January 2010), lot no. 329).