



Gandharan Influence on Chinese Art during Tang Dynasty: Taking Lion as an Example

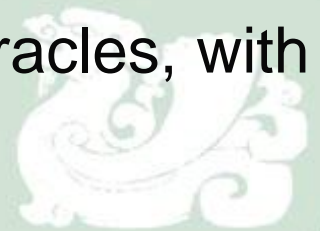
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Wrestler's Weight with Hercules and the Nemean Lion (ca. 1st Century AD)



- A wrestler's weight that shows a naturalistic Heracles, who holds a lion skin and leans on a club, twisting to look at the approaching Nemean lion.
- The Greek myth tells of Heracles going to Nemean plains to fight a terrible lion, and when his arrows failed to pierce its skin, he was obliged to strangle it. Heracles took the lion's skin and wore it as a form of armor.
- In the weight, the Gandharan artist depicted Heracles, with his club, holding the lion skin.



- The back of the relief has sockets for lifting the weight and a scene depicting a wrestling competition.
- One wrestler lifts the other off the ground, and both twist: a spatial organisation of figures seldom seen in Gandharan art.



- As Buddhism became more established in Gandhara in the late first century A.D., such interest in Western narrative faded, eventually to be replaced by a sophisticated tradition of illustrating the biography and actions of the Buddha.



A Buddhist Story on Lion

- Mahāśāsakavinaya, Book 3: 五分律卷三：
- A manava 摩訶 (修道人) was reading the Book of Ksatriya 刹利書 in the cave.
- A fox passed by and listened to the content. It grabbed the meaning quickly and with its confidence, the fox wanted to become the King of Creatures 獸中王.



- The fox then showed off in front of the other creatures and it eventually became the leader of them.
- Thinking of its supremacy among the creatures, the fox would like to marry the princess of a human kingdom.
- It told the king a war between the creatures and the kingdom would be inevitable if he denied its marital request.



- A brilliant official in the king's court suggested whether the fox could let the lion roar at the beginning of the battle.
- The fox accepted and did so.
- Finally all the creatures escaped after hearing the lion's roar.



From Gandhara to Yotkan

- The archaeologist Aurel Stein suggested that many of the earthenwares he obtained from Yotkan show a relationship to the traditions of Greek and Gandharan art.
- The Khotanese potters did indeed take many of their motifs from the classical ornamental vocabulary.
- The monster mask found on the Yotkan earthenwares can be traced to Ancient Greece.



- The Hellenic motifs could have travelled eastward from Greece with the Alexander the Great (r. 335-323 B.C.), whose farthest conquests reached into the northwest frontier provinces of Indian region.
- Particularly in Gandhara, in modern Pakistan, the Greek culture that Alexander the Great carried with him had a profound influence on Indian religion and art.
- Hellenistic influences on countries to the east were to persist after Alexander, as commerce continued between Greece and the many lands he had conquered.

- Ceramics found by Sir John Marshall at Taxila, Pakistan, suggest one possible link between the frontal head motif on Grecian material and the similar ornament found on the earthenwares at Yotkan.
- Among the fragments of Greek-type black wares is the lower half of a handle adorned at the base with a frontal head of Heracles.
- Some earthenware appliqués of frontal lion masks from the side of vessels were excavated from the Dharmarajika site near Sirkap.
- Marshall noted that they imitated Hellenistic prototypes. He attributed these lion masks to the time that Sirkap was under Parthian rule (ca. first century A.D.).

- A Pottery Molded appliqué ornament. Ca. 1st Century. From the Dharmarajika site, near Sirkap, Pakistan.



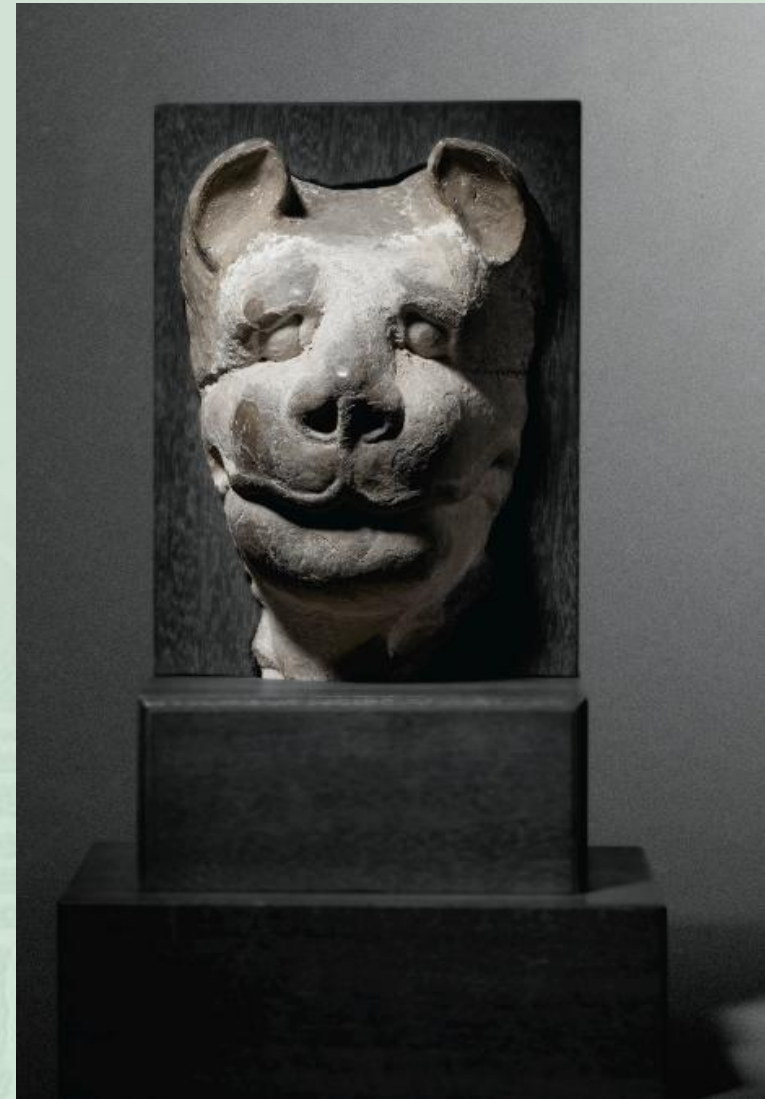
- A Khotanese Pottery Molded appliqué ornament. Ca. 2nd -5th Century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



- The Hellenistic influences evident in ceramic material at Taxila probably were transmitted to Yotkan with the expansion of Buddhism.
- With the firm establishment of Buddhism in China in the Six Dynasties period (AD316-589), lions, regarded as guardians of the faith and the Buddhist law, began to be used in a specifically Buddhist context.
- Paired guardian lions are ubiquitous in all manner of Six Dynasties Buddhist art, ranging from exquisite gilt bronze altars to sculptures in the northern Chinese cave temples.

A Limestone Fragment of a Lion Head

- Northern Qi Dynasty (AD550-577), formerly from the Sakamoto Goro Collection.



A Xiangtangshan Limestone Sculpture of a Seated Lion

- Northern Qi Dynasty (AD550-577), formerly from the Sakamoto Goro Collection.

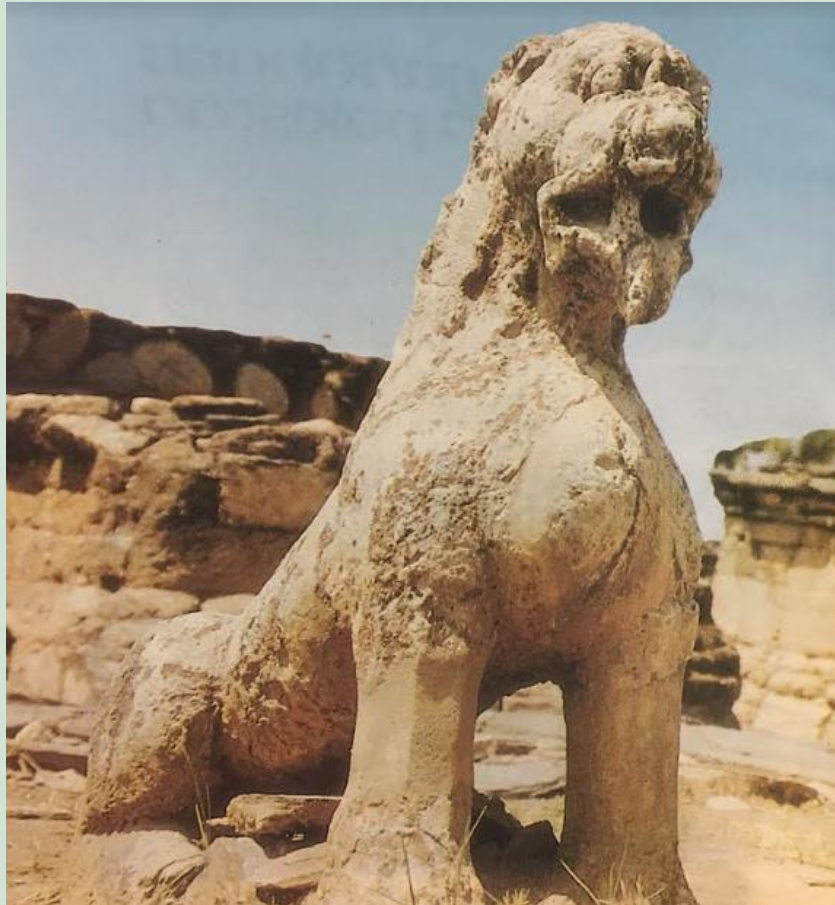


A Xiangtangshan Limestone Sculpture of a Seated Lion

- Northern Qi Dynasty (AD550-577), formerly from the Sakamoto Goro Collection.



A Stone Lion Guard near the Buddhist Temple at Butkara, Swat Valley



- Many specimens of lion were brought to China both in antiquity and in medieval times.
- Two words for 'lion' followed the animal into China:
- 1) 狻猊 : A word sounding like suangi, obsolete except as an intentional archaism during Tang, came from India to China before the Christian Era;
- 2) 獅子 : A word like sisak, came some centuries later from Iran.
- It is curious that the latter form occurs most commonly in medieval literature as the name of the country we called Ceylon.



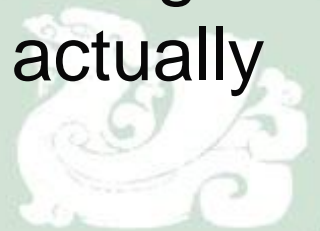
- The lion made a profound impression on the Chinese imagination, as the most powerful of all animals.
- According to the Old Book of Tang (舊唐書 Jiu Tangshu), in the year 635, the emperor Taizong 太宗 received a lion from Samarkand and ordered Yu Shih-nan 虞世南 to compose a rhapsody in its honour.

- 「瞋目電曜，發聲雷響。拉虎吞貔，裂犀分象。破適兕於齧腭，屈巴蛇於指掌……」
- "It glares its eyes - and lightning flashes,
- It vents its voice - and thunder echoes.
- It drags away the tiger,
- Swallows down the bear,
- Splits the rhinoceros, Cleaves the elephant;
- It crushes the mighty gaur between gums and palate,
- It bends the boa snake between finger and palm..."



- The Arabian lion gave the monarch Chung Tsung 中宗 an opportunity for some characteristic moralising:
- He had already shown his pious concern for preserving life, in accordance with the precepts of the Buddha, by rejecting falconry and hunting.
- Consistent with this policy, he rejected the carnivorous gift, not forgetting either that one of his ministers had pointed out the great expense of feeding the beast.

- The following anecdote illustrates the spiritual forces at the disposal of a lion:
- "At the end of the Kai Yuan years (ca. AD740), a Western nation offered us a lion. When they came onto the West Road of Chang-an (now Xian), they tied it to a tree at the post-station. Now this tree was close to a well. The lion roared horribly, as if it were disquieted. All of a sudden, there was a great onset of wind and thunder, and a dragon actually came from the well and made off."

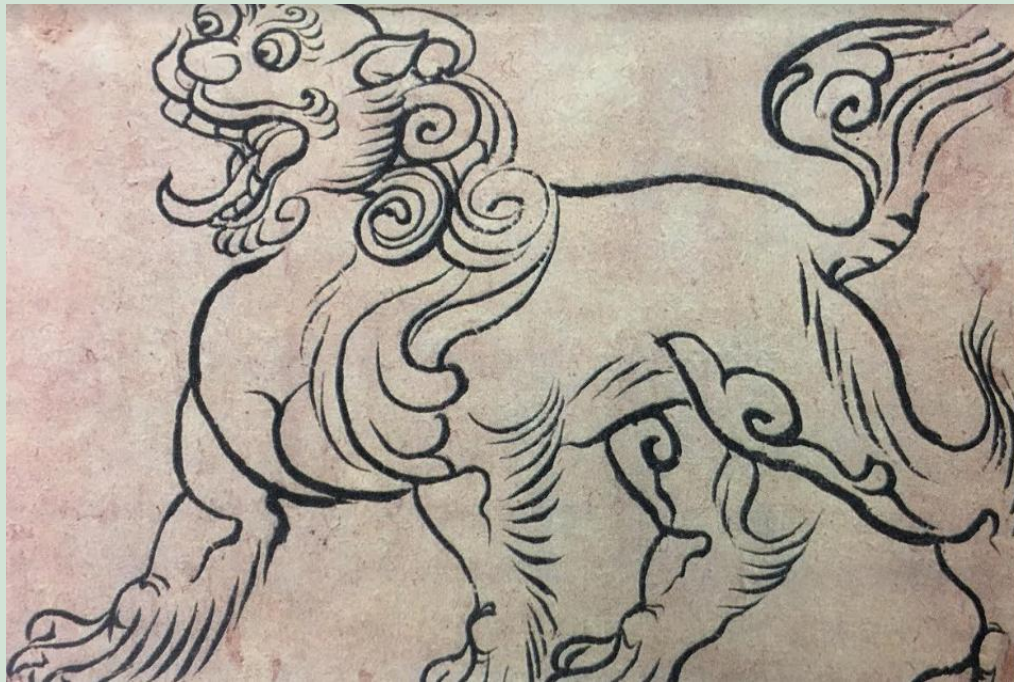


- 「開元末，西國獻獅子。至長安西道中，繫於驛樹。樹近井。獅子哮吼，若不自安。俄頃，風雷大至，果有龍出井而去。」《國史補》卷上



- Even the painted representation of a lion was awe-inspiring.
- The eighth century court painter Wei Wu-tien (韋無忝) was celebrated for his ability to paint strange animals, and "when foreign countries presented lions to the court, he made paintings of them that were strikingly lifelike. Later the lions would be returned to their homes, and only their paintings were kept; even so, whenever the pictures were unrolled, any other animal that caught sight of them would be terrified."
- 「曾見貌外國所獻獅，酷似其真。後獅子放歸本國，唯畫者在圖。時因觀覽，百獸見之皆懼。」《太平廣記》卷212引《畫斷》

- A Sketching of a Lion. Late Tang Dynasty.
Found at Mogao Cave 17, Dunhuang.



- The lion in China evoked images of India and Buddhism.
- It's roar was a recognised metaphor of the voice of Buddha was a lion among men, wherever he sat was styled the 'seat of the lion' (獅子座), an image extended to eminent Buddhist ecclesiastics, and made real by the craftsmen who built their thrones.



- Poet Li Po 李白, writing in honour of a priestly friend, referred to "the lion of yellow gold which holds your exalted seat." 「黃金師子乘高座」
- Icons of Manjusri 文殊師利 himself, a popular figure in religious art, showed him mounted on a lion.



Lion Skins

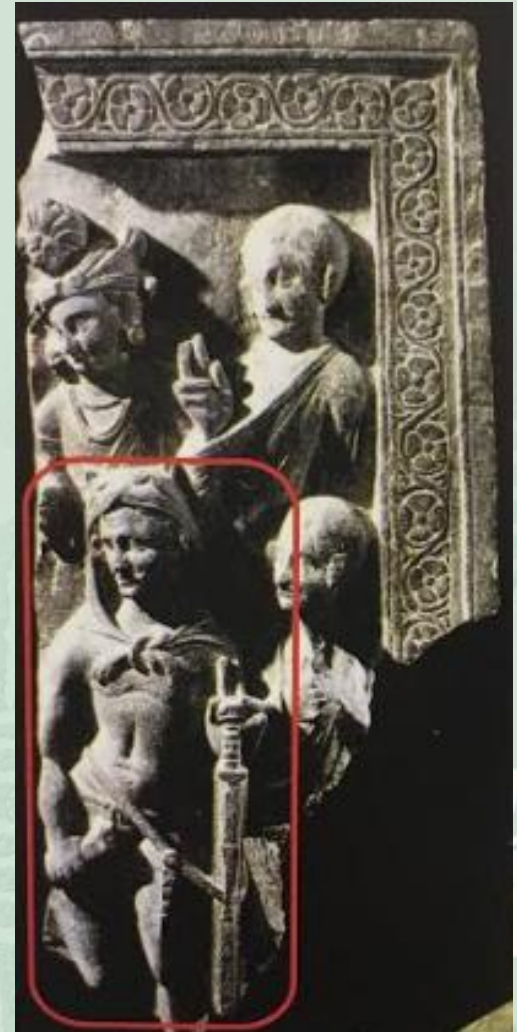
- "In the fourth month, the Yabghu Qaghan of the Western Turks sent envoys who offered up a lion's skin." The Year was 622, and the pelt a trophy worthy of Nimrod or Hercules.
- 《冊府元龜》卷970:「四月，西突厥葉護可汗遣使獻獅子皮。」



- A Pottery Warrior with a Lion Skin, Tang Dynasty (AD618-907).



- Gandharan Fragment of Heracles. ca. AD1st Century. British Museum.



- The design of earth spirits (鎮墓獸) was inspired by the lion image.
- The mane of the adult male lion is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the species.
- It was thus used as a decorative symbol on the earth spirits since Northern Wei (386-534).
- The lion image, potent symbol of strength and power in India, whose roar is said to proclaim the Buddhist doctrine, probably arrived in China together with Buddhism in the Han Dynasty (206BC-AD220).

- In the following centuries, real lions arrived in China together with foreigners travelling the Silk Route, being offered as tribute to Chinese courts from Western regions.
- By the Tang dynasty (618-907) lions had become a popular subject for artists.



- However, images of the lion changed dramatically since early Tang, achieving a far more realistic quality.
- This change in artistic conception must have been the result of appearance in China of real lions for the first time.



- By the beginning of the 8th century playful versions of the lion were admitted alongside the sterner design favoured as funeral monuments.
- Three models provide the basis for the ceramic tradition in both stoneware and lead-Glazed earthenware.



■ 1) A lion seated upright, with pointed ears and a mask more like a jackal, set on a rectangular base divided into four segments, which support its paws;

* Julius Eberhardt Collection



- 2) A lion licking its front or hind paw;



- 3) A pacing lion which sometimes can be served as a stand for a Buddhist image.



- A 9th Century painting preserved in the cave temples of Dunhuang shows both manifestations:
- the real and the mythical, with a diminutive black lion tamer accompanying a roaring lion that carries a majestic Bodhisattva on its back.





Earth Spirits as 'Lion Guards'

- The lion was at the service of Buddhism, its roar representing the dissemination of the Buddhist scriptures.
- In their role as guardian figures lions and the lion-typed earth spirits (鎮墓獸) can be found in pairs in tombs.
- A pair of stone “lion guards” can also be found outside the front room of the underground hoard of Buddhist relics at the Famen Temple (法門寺).

A Pair of Tri-colored (Sancai) Glazed Pottery Earth Spirits

- Formerly from the Arthur M. Sackler Collection.



Lion with a Ribbon Ball

- The origins of the lion's attribute, an embroidered (繡花) ball tied with ribbons, are unclear, but a lion with its paw resting on such a ball is seen already on a woven textile (無紡布) recovered from the Liao (遼) (907-1125) tomb of Yelu Yuzhi (耶律羽之) (890-941).



Lion seated under a tree,
with a beribboned ball (c. AD941)



- The complete transformation to the distinctive friendly Chinese lion with curly mane, playing with ribbons that are tied to a ball can be seen in a *kesi* (絳絲) panel of the Song dynasty made further west (perhaps outside Song territory).
- This motif has become a decorative topos with auspicious associations, symbolizing physical and spiritual power, and more popularly conveying wishes for high rank.



Lion with a beribboned ball,
detail from a kesi panel (11th-12th Century)



A Grey Pottery Brick Carving of a Lion with Ribbioned Ball, Jin Dynasty (AD1115-1234)



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THANK YOU!

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