

Galerie Hioco

Detailed file – Śākyamuni Buddha (P630)

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What do we like in this sculpture?

- Its early datation, around the 10th century, and its significant size: this kind of pieces have become extremely rare on the market!
- Its complex and enigmatic iconography which contrasts with the incredible fluidity and clarity of the sculptural work.
- Its remarkable condition, which allows us to admire all the refinement of the details of the clothes, the nimbus, the vegetal elements and the modelling.

I. Detailed description

Śākyamuni Buddha (P630)

Black stone

Northeast India (Bihār, Bengal)

Circa 10th century, Pāla dynasty

H. 69 cm or 27 ¼ in

A very codified representation

The Blissful One, of heroic size, stands in the middle of the stele. With his right hand, he distributes charity (varadamudrā). His left hand, at arm level, clutches a fold of his monk's robe (saṃghāṭī), also called the "outer cloth" (uttarāsanga). Of the distinctive signs (lakṣaṇa) of a "great man" (mahāpuruṣa), tradition kept only two essential items in its images, both of which are evident here: the fleshy protuberance on the crown of the head (uṣṇīṣa) and the whorl of hair on the lower forehead (ūrṇā). The earlobes distended by the wearing of heavy gold jewelry demonstrate the renouncing of the vanities of his former worldly life. The face is surrounded by a triple halo.

An original and complex iconography

Two attendants accompany him. They are difficult to identify. The one on the left has an elaborate hairdo which means he is royalty. His rich clothing indicate he is not a disciple of Buddha. However, the clothing on the attendant on the right designate him as a monk. Such standing buddhas sometimes allude to the descent of Śākyamuni from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods (Trāyastriṃśa) in Vaiśālī, where he preached to his mother. At this event, the Blissful One was accompanied by the king of the gods, Indra, and by Brahmā. The attendant on the right does not have the three characteristics of this deity and so this double identification can be dismissed. It is more plausible to evoke two other characters linked to this episode who welcomed him at the foot of the magic triple staircase: Ūdāyana, the king of Kauśāmbī, and the nun Upalavarṇā.

It is from this perspective that the two reliquary tumuli (stupas) should perhaps be interpreted. In Pāla iconography, they sometimes indicate a famous sanctuary or place of pilgrimage, here Śāṅkāśya, the place of the miracle of the descent, geographically located much farther west than the sites related to the life of Śākyamuni.

On the base is a small female kneeling, which we could perhaps identify as a donor. She is wearing a serpent, an attribute difficult to explain.

An inscription on the base: the Buddhist *credo*

In the lower left of the sculpture, and continuing throughout the lotus petals, runs an inscription that can be transcribed and translated as follows:

Ve dharma hetu prabhayā hetun

Teṣāmtathāgato hyavadat

Teṣām ca yo nirodha

Evam vadi mahāśrama

All phenomena arise from causes.

Those causes have been taught by the Tathāgata

And their cessation too has been proclaimed by the Great Śramana

A purified style, characteristic of an early datation

Stylistically speaking, the stele appears to predate that characterizing Pāla art as of the 11th century. The elongated face, with its full lips and somewhat protruding eyes, is similar to post-Gupta art of the 7th-8th century, and beyond that to classic Indian art of the 5th-6th century. Buddha's body is subtly animated by a very slight shift of the body and by the discreet movement of the left leg. A mystical wind blows the thin fabric of his clothing against his asexuated body to create a delicate "wet drapery" effect. At the ankles, the undergarment (antaravāsaka) is clearly visible under the uttarāśanga.

In her work, *The Pāla-Sena Schools of Sculptures* (Leyde : Brill, 1984), Susan L. Huntington reproduces several Buddhas whose variety is proof of the piety of its sponsors. There are Buddhas with pleated robes having a "wet drapery" effect. (Fig 108, 116) or smooth robes (Fig. 109, 114), sometimes crowned (Fig. 107, 109). We can recognize the two favorite disciples, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana (Fig. 109) or two bodhisattvas (Fig. 107). Others, as on the stele here, remain difficult to identify (Fig. 114) and are subject to commentary.

II. Image of the piece – view 1



III. Image of the piece – view 2



IV. Provenance

. This piece comes from the George P. Bickford collection, famous collector of Indian and Southeast Asian art. His collection was exhibited in major museums in the 1970s and the Cleveland Museum of Art acquired many of his pieces. The Cleveland Museum's Archivist was able to send us a copy of an old picture of this stele, probably taken in Bickford's home (reproduced below).

. We are always very cautious and diligent about the provenance of the artworks we offer. Ensuring the seriousness and reliability of the information given by the former owners is one of our priorities and we then guarantee this origin by engaging our responsibility.

. In order to reinforce this guarantee, we systematically verify that these artworks have not been registered as missing or stolen. As Interpol has granted us the right to directly consult their database of stolen or reported items, we verify by ourselves and issue a certificate attesting to this.



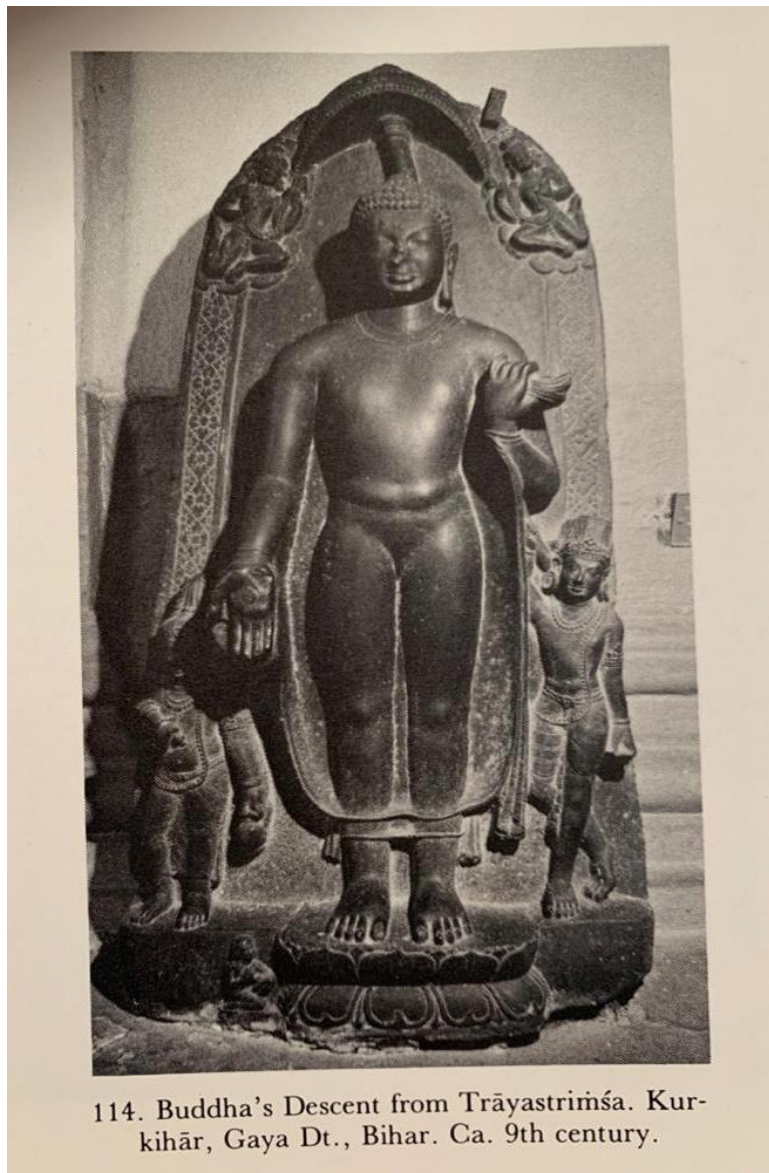
V. Condition report

This large Pāla stele representing the historical Buddha is made of black stone, dated about the 10th century and measures 69 cm high or 27 ¼ in. It is in a very good condition. Only slight losses are to be noted. They are easily identifiable: the nose of the Buddha is missing, while the tip of his earlobes, the fingers of his right hand, as well as the nose of the small deities are slightly damaged. This is not at all surprising given the known fragility of these protruding parts. A restoration work is visible at the level of the ankles and allows, following a diagonal line, to make the junction between the base and the body of the sculpture. No other restoration work has been detected.

Please note that since we are not conservators or restorers, it must be understood that any condition report we made is a subjective qualified opinion, even if we do our best efforts. Prospective buyers should inspect the piece to satisfy themselves as to condition.

VI. Comparable museum artwork - 1

A Buddha with a smooth robe, published in Susan L. Huntington, *The Pāla-Sena Schools of Sculptures*, Leyden: Brill, 1984, fig. 114:



VII. Comparable museum artwork - 2

A Buddha with a pleated robe having a “wet drapery” effect, published in Susan L. Huntington, *The Pāla-Sena Schools of Sculptures*, Leyden: Brill, 1984, fig. 116:



116. Buddha's Descent from Trāyastriṃśa. Kurkihār, Gaya Dt., Bihar. Ca. 10th century.

VIII. Our guarantees

- More photos will be sent to you on request.
- In case of purchase, we will establish an invoice that you can pay by bank transfer.
- You will receive our certificate of authenticity with the photo of the artwork, its detailed description and the mention of the provenance.
- We will define together the shipping modalities and we will take care of all customs formalities if you live outside of France.
- If you do not like the piece, we give you the possibility to return it to us and we will assist you with the resulting terms and conditions.