CHAPTER - VII.
ART AND ARCHITECTURE (II)

PAINTING

Evidence of the Activities of Painting in Kapiša and Gandhāra.

Fresco Paintings were used in decorating cave temples and palaces in Western Asia, 1 Iran and in some parts of Afghanistan 3 from very early times. Unfortunately the origin and early history of this art in Kapiša and Gandhāra is not quite clear. Painted pottery and painted images show that painting in that form was known.

From the accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Hsüan-tsang, we know that the Buddhist monasteries and cave temples of Kapiša and Gandhāra were decorated with paintings. The walls of the Sa-la-ka (Hostage's monastery) monastery "had paintings of the hostages, who in appearance and dress were somewhat like the Chinese". 7 Again while describing Kanishka-mahāvihāra, he not only mentioned Buddha images of golden colour, but also referred to a painting of the Buddha, sixteen feet high with two heads. 8 He also narrated the legend connected with this painting. According to him, like the erection of Buddhist stupas, use of painting to decorate the monasteries, were also held as an act of merit. 10 The donors of two unequal means caused this two headed picture of the Buddha to be made. 11

The portraiture of Chinese princes and the representation of the Buddha with two heads indicate considerable knowledge of this art of painting. Unfortunately we have very
few remains at hand. Various caves in Hadda, which con-
tains remnants of coloured plaster on the walls, preserved
traces of fresco painting. "One of these has a design
executed in red upon a green base, within a circle. The upper
part has been wholly disfigured, but lower part is decipherable
and represents a pair of legs seated on a throne or stool with
knees wide apart and the feet crossed. Surrounding the circle
there are a number of circles enclosing cinque foils marked in
red on a white ground."  

The Rev. Swinterton, who discovered the above traces
of frescoes, also found other caves (some of them vast in
extent) in Hadda with coloured plaster. "The whole of these
caves are beautifully arched or vaulted and plastered. The
plaster is now black with smoke, but in one cave, where the
plaster was but slightly blackened, there appeared a fresco,
consisting of broad right lines of black crossing each other
at right angles".

"In one of the domed caves, Rev. Swinnerton discovered
unmistakable traces of fresco painting. The dome was
surrounded with Buddhas, bust-size, enclosed in borders, the
whole being imitations of panelling. The roof as in other
cases was dreadfully obscured with the effects of smoke, and
the plasters had evidently and wilfully broken; but enough
remained to show that there were twelve Buddhas in each row;
that round the head of the each Buddha was the nimbus, giving
the whole representation greatly the character of pictures of
the saints; and that some of the colours used by the old artists were certainly blue, yellow, and black. Thus the inner surface of the dome was blue, and on this were painted Buddhas apparently in black with yellow outlines.

Another mural painting from Hadda, now preserved in Muse Guimet in Paris, shows two winged genie bearing a large wreath. The figures were outlined with black and grey colours against grey and greenish background. The figures recall Irano-Hellenistic theme. The winged figures may well be compared with winged Nike holding wreath as can be seen on coins and reliefs.

All these remnants of frescoes show that the fresco painting were used to decorate the cave temples and rock-cut monasteries of Hadda.

"It is certain that the paintings of Hadda (especially the image of standing Buddhas) come very close to the representational forms of early christian art. These arts were also employed in friezes of Buddhas painted in the vestibule of the sanctuary of Gr. G. of Bamian (The continuity and wide diffusion of this type of image are noteworthy). The form of the standing Buddha might seem to be derived completely from the Roman Byzantine west, but the pictorial tradition of frontal image already existed at the time of Kanishka I and later was particularly widespread in Kapiša. The form of the standing Buddha was forerunner of the stylized forms of many
Central Asian figures. The winged figures in the second fresco painting may be themetically and stylistically compared with similar figures at Miran (in Central Asia).

"The pictorial technique of this group of painting is distinctly Indian. The wall paintings of Miran (whose technique is similar) appear altogether belong to Gandhāra school."  

"A most interesting part of the technique of the paintings of the period is the method of preparation of the ground for painting. The Vishnudharmottaram lays down a complete prescription for laying of the ground for painting which it calls vajralepa; but judging from the extant remains this prescription does not seem to have been used anywhere. Powdered rock, clay and cowdung, not infrequently mixed with chaff or vegetable fibres, sometimes also with mudga decoction or molass, were made into a paste-like substance which was thoroughly and evenly pressed like plaster on the hard porous surface of the rock. The plaster was then levelled and polished with a trowel, and when still wet was laid over with a coat of lime. The entire ground was generally allowed to dry before any colour was applied.

"The outlines were drawn first and then colour was applied."  

Paintings in Nearby Areas

There are remains of paintings in such places, viz., Bamian, Kakrak, Dukhtar-i-Noshirvan, and Fondukistan
which are situated not very far from our area and partly belong to our period and so may help us in forming some idea of the character of the painting in the regions of Kapiśa and Gandhāra.

Bamian flourished from the second century to eighth century A.D. as stated. The rock cut monasteries, sanctuaries, grottos of Bamian reveals an extensive use of fresco-painting with sculpture and architecture, and traces clearly the development of a particular style. The Frescoes of Bamian in its essential is of Greco-Buddhist (Gandharan) tradition. To it were added Śasano-Iranian elements 'which were initially predominant in local style evolving from this fusion'. "Subsequently Gupta Indian influence came to balance and at length outweigh that of Iran thereby modifying the character of the later work. "The decoration of the oldest caves (C,D,) consisted primarily of paintings. It was later replaced by ornaments in relief."  

"The art of Bamian was essentially religious and dedicated to the service of Buddhism in its Hinayāna form. Tendency towards constant repetition of the same or similar aspects of the Buddha, which recalls the endless reproduction of the figure of the Master on the stupas at Hadda and Taxila, appears early. Through these frescoes it is possible to trace the formation and development of Irano-Buddhist style despite the confusing intersperson of hybrid elements to distinguish the main lines of its evolution."
"The decoration of the cave G "with Buddhas painted in the dome', indicates the continuity of 'the Hellenistic and Greco-Buddhist tradition'. "Only a donor displays the regional costume of a long tunic and with double revers which re-appear in Ser India."38

First traces of Sasanian influence appear in the paintings of Caves C and D 'in the typically pleated ribbons' (Kusti) 'that widen out at the ends'. This motif, an emblem of dignity in Iran, first 'appeared as accessories in the decoration of painted domes of the assembly halls and sanctuaries of group C, where they framed a vase-like motif — an Iranian element above the arches surrounding the standing Buddhas or were strewn over a background studded with little flowers'. In costume, pose and gesture, the seated and standing Buddhas in this group remains within the Gandharan or Greco-Buddhist tradition, but their haloes — composed of concentric circles of different colours and bold contrast of tones is characteristic of Irano-Buddhist school. These details and the entire composition in the dome of the sanctuary C were later transmitted to Serindia, to Kirish and Sim Sim and in a more fully developed form to Kizil (cave of Pigeons I, Pl. 480)."39

The decoration of the group D shows further development of this school which absorbed many Sasanian elements. 'In the vestibule, the beaded moldings and the motifs in medallions' like 'winged horse, boar's head, two birds back
to back holding in their beaks a string of pearls', 'are unmistakably of Iranian origin'. "On the ceiling of the sanctuary are a series of heads in relief; these vigorous masks of mustached men with sinuous beards and conical caps also are descended from an Iranian tradition, though one of more ancient origin." 41

"The painted decoration of the niche sheltering the 120 feet Buddha attests to a renewal of influence from Iran. The mural paintings in the niche of 120 feet Buddha revealed that not only different motifs were taken from Sasanian Iran but also Sasanian themes were used. "The soffit of this niche is covered with a vast composition, the subject matter of which is derived directly from the cults practiced in Parthian Iran and Western Asia and in particular in the caravan series of Palmyra and Dura Europos to which several details can be traced. The painting shows a towering solar divinity in a chariot drawn by four winged horses grouped in pairs and shown in profile on either side of the chariot. The large halo encircling the divinity is bordered with short rays, recalling rayed haloes of Iranian tradition." 48

"The hieratic conception, regid pose, and bold colouring of a Bodhisattva painted on the soffit of the niche of a seated Buddha (Gr. E, Pl. 13), attest to the presence of Iranian stylistic tendencies in the Irano-Buddhist school at Bamian; the immobile pose and intense gaze lend this figure a certain mystic strength. The details of the coiffure and
the costume are Iranian, while the arch that frames the Bodhisattva and the balconies each dominated by a figure are typical of Greco-Buddhist style. The constant juxtaposition of Indian and Iranian elements at Bamian was due partly to the consistent dealings there with both India and Iran and partly to the fact that artists of both schools frequently worked side by side. A typically example of this cooperation is a Bodhisattva of Group I, in a rigid pose, with costume of Indian fashion, who holds a stem with three flowers like the plants of Sasanian landscape; at the same time the conventional use of a fluttering ribbon resembles the Kusti of Sapur I and Bahram II at Naqsh-i-Rajab and Bishapur. The scarf wound sketchily around the body is another detail characteristic of the Irano-Buddhist art of Bamian; the motif of this parrennial strip of gossamer with its unrealistic undulations, may be seen on the figure of a stringed instrument player at Pyandzikhent (Russian Turkistan, 7th century) and appeared in the later works of Tun-huang at the eastern end of the terminus of the Silk Route."

The influence of Gupta India was blended quite felicitiously into the already assimilated influence of Iran. The essentially Indian motif of a balcony with figures half-concealed (first used at Bharhut) appeared constantly. In Group I (Pl. 12) a troupe of supple and lively, if rather heavy, female dancers and musicians appear in an otherwise auster and schematic composition with rows of medallions each containing a Buddha. These fair and dark-skinned female
figures of different ethnic types display the familiar Iranian ribbons which here flout naturally. The figures seem to wear light-fittings, low-cut corselets exposing their breasts (I. Pl. 476); "similar representation of female figures with same costume is also met with in Central Asia, in Tumshuk, Kizil, Kumtura and Shorchuk."

The same fusion of "Indian and Iranian elements and features of the fully developed Irano-Buddhist style stands out in the painted decoration that embellish the dome of the one of the sanctuaries in the nearby valley of Kakrak." The iconography has remained simple; the same Buddhas are constantly associated and repeated in a sort of monotonous "litany", which nevertheless is not lacking in a certain auster grandeur (Pl. 8)."

"The majority of caves near the 175 feet Buddha seem to belong to a later period (6th even early 7th century), and are marked by an increase in the relief decoration (Caves I and XI). The frescoes of Cave XI reveals an elaborate network of hexagonal coffers, each containing a small seated Buddha, which surrounds a Central octagon with another seated Buddha." "In spirit, the composition is close to that of Kakrak while this system of coffering is reminiscent of that observed in various Syrian monuments at Dura Europos and Baalbeck in particular (ceiling of the temple of Bacchus); subsequently hexagons are used as decorative motifs in Sasanian art, in textiles and stucco-work of the late period (Bishapur, Ctesephon). Hackin
also found some curious heads with pointed hats in this dome at Bamian which he compared with certain images of priests from Dura-Europos; their headdresses too reappears on a few Sasanian coins and on the spirits represented around a fire-altar at Pyandzhikent. The complexity of the elements which penetrated to Bamian thus is demonstrated vividly in sanctuaries I and XI, where Iranian motifs of widely diverse epochs mingle with motifs of Indian and even Roman West Asian origin; some perpetuate themes from the immemorial past, while others anticipate new themes."

"The decoration in the upper part of the niches of 175 feet Buddha seems to have been executed during the final period of activity at Bamian. Although certain parts have disappeared completely, enough remains to give an idea of the compositional scheme and figure style. Under the arris of the projection of the niche are contiguous, oval medallions containing genies and their companions in groups of three, flying toward the Buddha to present him with flowers and garlands. High in the vault, above ornamental bands of draperies and flowers, looms a pantheon of huge seated Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, enriched with multi-coloured haloes. Here again, Iranian inspiration is conspicuous in such details as beribboned vases, the diadems with three crescents, and flying ribbons. A donor bearing a tray of offerings wears a long tight-fitting tunic with revers, boots, and a baldric holding a short dagger — an ensemble worn throughout the regions
between Iran and Serindia, examples of which recur at Pyandzhikent, Kizil and Kumtura. It is however the influence of Gupta India that predominates in this composition, manifesting itself in the presence of the female figures with strongly inflected posture, in the theme, of the flying figures, in the predominance of Indian fashion as exemplified by the bare torsos and gossamer draperies and in the affectation of the hands, which are extremely elegant, expressive and slender. The slight mannerist tendency discernable here and there is a reflection of the similarity of Ajanta."

"The art of Bamian founded on Greco-Buddhist traditions subsequently permeated by elements proceeding chiefly from Sasanian Iran, evolved an Irano-Buddhist style. It assimilated and blended a variety of influences and attaining full maturity (late 4th and 5th century ?), revealed its truly individual character in such work as the beautiful Bodhisattva of Group E and the dome at Kakrak. A fresh influx of Gupta Indian influence subsequently modified the style, causing it to assume what might be described as a Sasano-Gupta aspect, which was to be expressed in slightly later work at Fondukistan. The art of Bamian, religious in nature, was principally concerned with the exaltation of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas; indeed, from hieratic representations of these superhuman beings to the timeless quality of the schematic composition with their endless repetitions
everything seems to serve this purpose. It is the predisposition towards repetition and the formalism pervading the art of Bamian which make it, if not the direct prototype, a close ancestors of subsequent manifestations of Buddhist art; the theme of the Thousand Buddhas which first appeared at Chinese art of the Wei dynasty and reached full development in the depictions on the walls and ceilings of sanctuaries in Central Asia."

Mural paintings preserved in the small monastery of Fondukistan is closely related to Bamian group. It is not unreasonable to assume that it shows further development of stylistic tendencies present at Bamian. Bamian group of paintings in its last stage of activity was heavily influenced by those of Ajanta. The clay sculptures and painted decoration of Fondukistan reveals unmistakable influence of India.

Among the frescoes of Fondukistan mention may be made of those in the Niche of E and K.

The murals of Niche E consists of a Bodhisattva and Buddha (portrayed between pilasters at the entrance) and two female figures (who adorned the base of the niche). Of these the figure of the Buddha is very much damaged. "The figure of Bodhisattva Maitreya in good condition, exhibits very Indian suppleness and graceful elegance inspite of a certain clumsiness in the portrayal of its left arm. Costume and jewellary worn by the Bodhisattva betrays presence of Iranian and Indian
motifs. This image continues the charm and grace of Indian models of the sixth century and could be compared with certain paintings, specially of white Tārā. The sources of Indian inspiration of these Indian images may obviously be assigned to the same epoch as the paintings of Fondukistan."

"The fresco painting with two female figures which adorned the base of the Niche E had suffered much damage. Two female figures with a clear complexion, the other with a dark skin, appeared to come out of the background on a seed-bed of four leaves. The circular ear-pendants appeared large. The white female wears a stripped dhoti (sari?). Both figures have the nude torso. The breasts are particularly developed. The style is clearly Indian. Presence of these types of female figures is also noticed in Bamian. But the theme and details of the paintings preserved in the Niche K of Fondukistan represents another stylistic element present at Bamian. The murals of this Niche K consists of the lunar and solar divinities standing side by side. The details of costume and attributes are Iranian, while the lunar deity's diadem bearing three crescents repeats those of Bamian and Kakrak."

Thus the paintings of Fondukistan shows preservation of two stylistic tendencies of Bamian.

From the above discussion we can conclude that the fresco-paintings of all these areas, which developed side by
side, are related to one another. The paintings of this area in its earlier phase followed the Greco-Buddhist tradition, which was well-illustrated by those of Hadda, Bamian (Caves C, D, G). Subsequently this trend was influenced by the Iranian elements. Ultimately influence of Gupta India modified these styles. And the resultant stylistic traits in their turn spread to Central Asia (Khotan).
Notes and References

3. Ibid., Col. 282.
7. Ibid., p. 124.
8. Ibid., p. 204.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Swinnerton, op. cit., p. 82.
15. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 35.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
32. Ibid., Col. 9.
33. Ibid., Col. 9.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., Col. 9.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Cols. 9-10.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 10.
40. Ibid., Col. 10.
41. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 10.
42. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 10.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 10.
47. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 10.
48. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 10.
49. Ibid., Col. 11.
50. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 12.
51. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 12.
54. Ibid., Vol. VIII, Col. 14.
55. Hackin, "Monastery of Fondukistan," JIGS, 1940, No. 1, pp. 1-14, No. 2. See fig. 0.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.