

Abstract

Buddhism in Gandhāra, broadly covering present-day northwestern Pakistan and northeastern Afghanistan, was supported by both lay and renunciate donors during the first century BCE until its decline around the seventh century CE. During its development, Buddhist sacred sites were built and funded by affluent donors including the local Apracarāja and Oḍirāja families. Gāndhārī donative inscriptions and images record the participation of these donors in the region. This article seeks to elaborate on the category of female donors based on epigraphic and art historical evidence. A direct relationship between female donors in inscriptions and images cannot be established, but this article makes a first step towards studying how they are represented differently in our sources. It demonstrates that while inscriptions highlight the identity and social nexus of female donors in the ritual sphere, schist statues and reliefs also follow their own visual conventions to embed their presence using generic images.

Keywords: donors; Buddhism; Gandhāra; female; portraiture.