

Elephant and Rider Type Buddhist Diptych Type Portable Shrines from Gandhara and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The elephant and rider type diptychs are among four main types of the Miniature Portable Shrines from Gandhara and Kashmir. The remaining three types of Buddhist diptychs include “Basket Man Type”, Brahmana Type” and “Plain Exterior type”. These diptych type portable shrines were used as another medium of narrating life story of the Buddha. The main objective of this paper is to explain exterior and interior iconography of the elephant and rider type diptychs. Exterior of these shrines give three-dimensional view of an elephant rider holding relics. The study also analyses the method of visual narration applied on inner wings of these shrines. Inner surface of these shrines is profusely carved and represents relatively different scheme of handling the main theme. In these shrines, couple of important events from the life of the Buddha such as “Bodhisattva cutting his hair” and “the Buddha contemplating the bodhi tree” are repeatedly depicted. We rarely find these episodes in general Buddhist reliefs. This particular aspect is one of the distinguishing features of these tiny objects and reflects their significance that lies beyond their size. Study of the presents and the remaining Buddhist diptych types is inevitable in order to extend our scope of understanding Buddhist sculptural art of Gandhara and Kashmir.

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