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## **Influence or Appropriation? Reassessing our Approach to the Buddhist Art of Gandhara**

Dr. Michael Willis

The Gandhara region, in northern Pakistan, has been a consistent source of fascination since sculptures were first discovered there in the 1840s. With links to the west known from Alexander's conquests, the classical style of Gandhara sculpture pointed to a long tradition of classicism in the east. This prompted significant art historical engagement, beginning, most notably, with Alfred Foucher and Ananda Coomaraswamy. Much has been written subsequently about the ultimate source of particular stylistic devices and conventions of representation in the art of Gandhara. But one basic question remains: why does Gandhara art look the way it looks? The usual assumption is that Gandhara art is somehow 'influenced' by western example. In this lecture, Dr. Willis will examine this idea of influence and explore the limits of formalism as a means of explaining cultural phenomena. He will suggest that Gandhara art does not so much reflect influence from the west but is rather a conscious appropriation of western styles for specific historical and religious purposes. By way of example, the appropriation process is most clearly shown by the career of Heracles in Gandhara art.

The lecture will be illustrated primarily with pieces from the collections in the British Museum.

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