

Objects related to Buddhism at The Ashmolean

- Buddhism is 2,500 years old and was introduced from India in the first few centuries AD. Buddhism arose as a result of Siddhartha Gautama's quest for Enlightenment in around the 6th Century BC.
- Buddhism was introduced from India to China in the first few centuries AD. It has been widely practised as a popular religion and is evident in many Chinese works of painting and sculpture.
- Buddhism arrived in Japan from China and Korea around 550AD. It was adopted as the official religion in the belief that it would bring with it the sophisticated culture of continental Asia and help to unify Japan.
- Buddhists can worship both at home or at a temple. Many of the objects on display were once installed in temple or household shrines as objects of daily devotion and meditation.
- The objects that feature here have been selected specifically to enable exploration of ideas and issues relating to Buddhism as a religion through Buddhist art and artefacts.

Galleries containing objects related to Buddhism

Gallery 12: India to AD 600

Gallery 32: India from AD600

Gallery 38: China from AD800

Gallery 36: Japan from 1850

Gallery 12: India to AD 600

1. Standing figure of the Buddha Sakyamuni, Gandhara, schist, about AD200



In a classic standing pose, the Buddha raises his right hand in the fear-dispelling gesture; his left hand would have held the folds of his monk's robe. The finely carved head and the modelling of the robe show strong Greco-Roman influences.

EAOS.26

Gallery 12: India to AD 600

2. Relief depicting the birth of the Buddha, Gandhara, schist, about AD200



Standing in a grove, Queen Maya gives birth to Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the future Buddha, from her right side. The infant is received by the god Indra, while other deities stand in attendance.

EAOS.3

Gallery 12: India to AD 600

3. Relief depicting the death of the Buddha, Gandhara, schist, about AD200



The Buddha died at the age of eighty, reclining in a grove of trees. His last words to his disciples before attaining final nirvana were, 'All composite things must pass away. Be therefore mindful and vigilant!' EA05.10

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

4. Stone model of the Mahabodhi temple, Bodhgaya, Bodhgaya, Bihar, about 1050



This temple, with the bodhi tree on its terrace, is shown before its various later restorations. Portable models of this kind were commissioned by visiting Buddhist pilgrims, and a number have survived in Tibet. EA1996.4

Gallery 32 : India from AD 600

5. Standing figure of the Buddha, Thailand, Mon style, AD700-800



Maritime trade between India and South-East Asia brought Indian merchants who settled across the region, bringing the practice of Buddhism and Hinduism. Local ruling dynasties began adopt to these religions copying Indian styles of temples and models but reinterpreting them to reflecting local physical types and costumes. EA2013.59

Gallery 32 : India from AD 600

6. Votive stupa, Bodhgaya, stone, Bodhgaya, Bihar, AD700-800



Many stupas of this kind were erected by monks or laymen around Buddhist shrines such as the Mahabodhi temple at Bodhgaya. This stupa is carved in a single piece, with niches containing Buddha figures on each side. EA05.57

Gallery 32 : India from AD 600

7. Statue of the Buddha beneath the Bodhi Tree, stone, Bodhgaya, Bihar, AD 850-950



The Buddha stands in a sinuous, flexed posture beneath the Bodhi Tree (pipal or ficus religiosa), beneath which he had attained Enlightenment.

EAOS.56

Gallery 32 : India from AD 600

8. Seated figure of Tara, East India or Tibet, Pala style, about 1200



This image would have served as a focus for meditation and devotional ritual within monasteries. Some visiting monks would carry images of this kind to their homelands in Tibet or South East Asia. EA2013.76

Gallery 38: China from AD 800

9. Seated figure of the bodhisattva Guanyin, fig tree wood with gesso and traces of pigment, Shanxi province, 1200-1300



This image is of Guanyin, or Avalokiteshvara, who assists souls to achieve Enlightenment. Constructed in thirteen parts, it was fitted together using mortise and tenon joints, a technique also used in making furniture and buildings. This figure would have occupied a central position towards the rear of a temple hall. EA1982.2

Gallery 38: China from AD 800

10. Figure of the bodhisattva Guanyin, wood with gesso, polychrome and gilding, Northern Song dynasty (960-1127)



This elaborately robed bodhisattva is an image of Guanyin, or Avalokiteshvara, who became widely worshipped as a goddess of compassion. This figure is from northern Shanxi province, possibly the Wutai mountains, an ancient holy site of Buddhist pilgrimage. EA1999.96

Lines of enquiry RE:

- Consider how historical artefacts can help develop knowledge and understanding about religious beliefs and teachings.
- Look at how objects reflect the influence of religion on individuals, communities and societies and their links with peace and conflict.
- Consider the role of religious beliefs, teaching and practices in society and how they are represented by objects and artworks.
- Explore how objects represent values, meaning, purpose, truth and their influences on human life and relationships.
- Explore the geographical spread of Buddhism over time.
- Learn about the different faiths which are practised alongside Buddhism in India, China and Japan.

Working with objects: key questions

- Who made it?
- Where and when was it made?
- What materials is it made from?
- How was it made?
- What was it used for? How was it used?
- Who used / owned it?
- How might it be interpreted by different people? at different times?



Standing figure of the bodhisattva Guanyin, EA1961.151

Lines of enquiry: Art & Design

- Research different materials, media and techniques used to create sculpture and models.
- Explore the ways that different countries have developed distinctive regional styles of sculpture, art and architecture. Compare and contrast these different interpretations and approaches taken in different countries.
- Explore Buddhist artefacts created for use in public and private spaces. How are they similar or different?
- Explore the impact of the style, design and materials used in Eastern art on Western architectural styles and art at different times.

Further resources

Ashmolean's Eastern Art collection online
<http://www.jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/>

Ashmolean Education Learning Resources:
www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources

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