

Photographs by

**BENOY BEHL**

Gallery Guide

Written by the students of *ARTH 171: Buddhist Art*

Department of Art & Art History

Georgetown University

# Preface

New Delhi-based photographer, filmmaker, and scholar Benoy K. Behl (b. 1956) has traveled the world since the 1990s with camera in hand, documenting the transmission of Buddhism as reflected in localized architectural and artistic expressions. His 35,000-plus collection of photographs and over one hundred documentary films are a testament to his extraordinary dedication and unparalleled knowledge of Buddhist sites and artifacts ranging from the more well-known remains in India, China, and Japan, to yet others in Afghanistan, Bhutan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Myanmar, and even Kalmykia in the south of Russia. He is known for his pioneering technique of photographing mural paintings in conditions of very low light, thereby capturing their details with greater clarity than the use of conventional photography with strong lighting. In recognition of his skill, he has led workshops on advanced photography on behalf of the Government of India and has presented papers on the use of digital imaging technology. His photographs have been published in several monographs, including the critically acclaimed *The Ajanta Caves: Ancient Paintings of Buddhist India* (1998) and have been profiled in numerous publications including *National Geographic*.

Behl's photographic documentation of Buddhist sites and artifacts seemed a fitting complement to the 2014-2015 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded John E. Sawyer Seminar "Critical Silk Road Studies." Many of the geographic regions pertinent to "Critical Silk Road Studies" ([silkroadseminar.georgetown.edu](http://silkroadseminar.georgetown.edu)) coincide with those documented by Benoy Behl. Co-organized by Department of History faculty member James Millward and myself, the aims of "Critical Silk Road Studies" are to investigate the invention and development of the concept of the Silk Road as well as its on-going impact. Similar to Benoy Behl, the students in my undergraduate course *ARTH 171: Buddhist Art* have been tracing the transmission of Buddhism throughout Asia by means of close study of architectural sites and artifacts, many of which are represented in "Benoy Behl: Photographs." The twenty-two student-authors of this gallery pamphlet logged many hours in assiduously researching, writing, and critiquing one another's entries; the results of their cooperative efforts are proudly presented here.

Lucille and Richard Spagnuolo, long-time friends of the Department of Art and Art History at Georgetown, have with great dedication supported the Spagnuolo Gallery and its related programming. The organization of “Benoy Behl: Photographs” received additional funding from the Department of Art and Art History and the Asian Studies Program at Georgetown University. I would like to thank Professor Evan Reed and Carolanne Bonanno of the Spagnuolo Gallery for their planning of “Benoy Behl: Photographs,” and I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Professors Collier Hyams and Mike Osborne in arranging for the printing of Mr. Behl’s photographs, which was capably undertaken by studio art minor Lauren Ashley Panawa (MSB ’15). Darlene Jones of the Department of Art and Art History, Kathy Gallagher in the Department of History, and Kat Harrington of the Asian Studies Program provided valuable administrative support. Professor Harriet McNamee of the M.A. Program in Art and Museum Studies and Sandy Hussey in Lauinger Library led instructional sessions for the students of ARTH 171: Buddhist Art. I am grateful for the support of Professor John Morrell, chair of the Department of Art and Art History. Finally, I extend sincere thanks to Benoy Behl for sharing his work and artistic vision with us.

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*Editor’s note: Previous printouts of this guide incorrectly referred to the site in image number 18 as Mogao cave 4. The correct number and location, printed in this version, is Mogao cave 45.*

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## Ashoka Pillar

At first glance, the Ashoka Pillar at Lumbini appears rather simplistic and might escape the notice of many passersby. Yet, another look, and the golden gate and the colorful Buddhist prayer flags that surround the pillar clearly indicate its significance. The pillar commemorates the site of one of the most important events in the life of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni: his birth. The pillar was erected under the reign of Emperor Ashoka, who ruled the Maurya Dynasty from 269 to 232 BCE.

Pillars like the one at Lumbini could be found throughout the Mauryan Empire, which covered lands from present-day Afghanistan to the southern parts of India. Emperor Ashoka, known for his ardent support of Buddhism, had Buddhist teachings, edicts, and demarcations of worship sites carved into the stone pillars. Because Emperor Ashoka wanted various peoples in his empire to understand the pillars' messages, he had the inscriptions carved in different languages.

Unfortunately, the Ashoka Pillar at Lumbini shows signs of damage due to its age. Believed to have been originally topped with a horse capital, the crowning statue no longer exists. Despite signs of decay, the Ashoka Pillar at Lumbini continues to be a site of worship and pilgrimage for Buddhist followers today.

Molly DePippo, C'15

## 2

# Mahabodhi Temple

Imagine stepping on to the pathway leading up to the Mahabodhi Temple and looking skywards to capture its full glory. This towering structure with its intricately detailed carvings and surrounding natural landscape has long made an impact on visitors from around the world. In fact, devoted monks, worshippers, and others have been making visits to the Mahabodhi Temple for around 2,000 years! This is perhaps not so surprising since Bodhgaya is widely recognized as the most sacred Buddhist site in India, if not the entire world. Bodhgaya is the place where Prince Siddhartha reached enlightenment in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Meditating under the Bodhi tree for 49 days, he was continuously distracted by the evil demon Mara who sent his army of warriors and seductive temptresses to prevent Siddhartha from reaching his goal. However, Siddhartha managed to resist Mara's temptations and eventually succeeded in attaining *nirvana*, which literally means "blowing out," indicating the cessation of suffering upon reaching spiritual enlightenment. After this accomplishment, Siddhartha became known as Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha that we commonly refer to today.

Walking around the Mahabodhi temple alongside the devotees performing their worship and circumambulation, the act of walking around a sacred site, one will come across a Bodhi tree which is a direct descendent of the original tree in the tale of the Buddha's enlightenment. Next to it is a stone throne marking the spot where the Buddha sat during his meditation, known as the Diamond Throne or *Vajrasana*, so named in order to invoke the steadfastness that the Buddha exemplified during his defeat of Mara. In addition to these two famous objects, the carvings throughout the temple that depict the Buddha's life similarly inspire all visitors to reflect on the Buddha's enlightenment and the strength and patience he upheld throughout his meditation.

Elizabeth Cheung, SFS'15

## Great Stupa, Sanchi

The Great Stupa at Sanchi is one of the most impressive landmarks of Buddhism in India. Stupas are earthen mounds that contain relics of the historical Buddha and cannot be entered. The idea behind such structures was derived from ancient Indian burial mounds that marked graves of religious or political leaders to remind people of their power. Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan Dynasty commissioned the Great Stupa to pay homage to the Buddha and encourage the spread of Buddhism. This stupa was modified multiple times between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, suggesting the continual importance that it had over the generations.

The *toranas* (or gates) of the Great Stupa, such as the one in the forefront of Behl's photograph, have some of the earliest known Buddhist relief sculptures. Also, the *toranas* reflect the contributions of multiple donors, as certain life events of the Buddha are depicted several times and there is no chronological order for the carvings. As mentioned, stupas cannot be entered, so worshippers perform circumambulation on two levels as they reflect on the teachings of the Buddha. Circumambulation is characterized by meditative walking around an object of worship, usually a stupa or image of a Buddha. The animal carvings on the top three beams of the *toranas* would be examined best from the higher level, while illustrations on the lower columns of the past lives of the Buddha (*jataka* tales) can be seen from the ground level. Another important element of the stupa is the three-tiered umbrella structure at the top of the earthen mound, as seen in the photo. Each umbrella represents one of the three jewels of Buddhism: Buddha, his teachings (*dharma*), and the community of monks (*sangha*), which are central to the religion and serve as a Buddhist's first vows when becoming a believer. Overall, the Great Stupa is a rich and well-known historical site of Buddhism.

Karen Zhang, C'17

## 4

### Ajanta Caves

The Ajanta Caves, located in the Indian state of Maharashtra, are a complex of 29 caves carved into volcanic rock on the side of a horseshoe-shaped cliff that rises above the Wagora River. This provided a lush and serene setting for the community of over 200 Buddhist monks and artists who are believed to have studied and worshipped here. The monks inhabited 24 of the caves, called *vihara*, while the remaining five caves were used as temples for worship, called *chaitya*. The former contain small rooms for individual monks, and the latter are characterized by the presence of their object of worship, a stupa (reliquary mound). The caves employ non-functional rock cut beams and pillars in order to imitate wooden buildings.

The construction of the caves took place over two distinct periods. The first period of excavation took place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, and the second period occurred between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, during the Gupta period under the royal patronage of the Vakatakas and their feudatories. They are characterized by the same wooden imitation as the earlier caves. However, they are decorated much more splendidly with an abundance of carved Buddha images, and most notably, magnificent wall paintings, which are considered among the major achievements of Gupta period Buddhist art. After the fall of the Vakataka dynasty, the site was abandoned until a British Army officer rediscovered it in 1819. Since then, the architectural marvel has been a popular tourist location and named a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Ajanta Caves provide scholars and visitors with a unique glimpse into the evolution of Buddhist art and architecture over many centuries.

Leigh Gilliland, C'17

## Exterior, Ajanta cave 19

Multiple Buddhas and guardian deities intricately cover the facade of Ajanta cave 19, revealing Buddhism's expansion from its earlier focus on the historical Buddha to include a wide pantheon of celestial beings. A horseshoe-shaped window lets natural light flow into the cave. The columns show how artisans mimicked aspects of freestanding wooden structures. The painstaking carving and time consuming removal of rock from a mountainside – hinted at by the rough, natural rock at the top of this photograph – reveal how important it was to the artisans and their patrons, including a king, that these Buddhist images and spaces be rendered permanent.

David Warren, C'16

## 6

### Mural, Bodhisattva Padmapani

The detail of a mural painting in Cave 1 depicts a bodhisattva in the guise of Padmapani, or “lotus bearer.” The lotus, a flower that blooms after rising from dark, muddy waters, symbolizes enlightenment. The figure is Avalokiteshvara, who like other bodhisattvas, remains on earth, forgoing his own *nirvana* to aid others on the path to enlightenment. Sensuous traits such as his bare chest, full lips, and arching eyebrows in addition to the string of pearls laying around his neck, a crown sparkling with precious metals and gems, and a deerskin band stress his permanent inhabitation on earth.

Both caves belong to the second period of activity at Ajanta (*photograph no. 4*). Strikingly, neither cave was used as its designers intended. Since their construction was highly dependent on local politics, the death of a king could halt the frenzy of activity immediately, until another royal patron renewed construction once again. Cave 19 was never consecrated and Cave 1 was never inhabited.

David Warren, C'16

## Chaitya, Ellora cave 10

The *chaitya*, or hemispherical worship cave presented in the photograph is Cave 10, one of thirty-four rock-cut caves at the site of Ellora, located in the Charanadri hills in the western state of Maharashtra, India. Cave 10 is also known as the “Carpenter’s Cave.” The stone-ribbed ceiling and the reliquary mound located at the rear, called a stupa, are two classic characteristics of *chaitya* caves.

Cave 10 was first excavated circa 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. Within the cave are two rows of fourteen plain octagonal columns, one row on each side of the stupa. The human figure on the front of the stupa represents the Buddha, who can be identified by his two distinctive characteristics: the protrusion on the top of his head, known as an *ushnisha*, and his preaching gesture. The 3.3 meters tall Buddha icon is seated in a posture that mirrors the stylistic and iconographic traits of earlier caves, such as Ajanta’s Cave 19 (*photograph no. 5*). These similarities allow us to recognize the spread of artistic styles around the late fifth to seventh centuries.

The two standing figures on both sides of the Buddha may be representations of his two popular attendants, Bodhisattva Maitreya and Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. The arrangement is a common “triad” in many Buddhist sculptures. Above the Buddha, there is a protruding arch consisting of miniature slim and long figural reliefs of flying celestials, which may allude to the Buddha’s austerity and spiritual aura. Since this is a *chaitya* worship hall, the Buddha icon serves as a way for the devotees to maintain the presence of and keep a close relationship with the Buddha.

Erica Nguyen, C’17

## 8

### Nalanda University site

In this photograph, Benoy Behl shows an image of the ruins of Nalanda University. Rather than focusing on details, his photograph spans the site. This artistic choice grants the viewer a holistic understanding of the architecture. The image shows brick buildings that were once part of the university under a blue sky, surrounded by trees. More specifically, it depicts foundations of structures that at some point must have been established buildings. In what is left of the ruins, one can see the remains of murals, pottery pieces, and inscriptions. Nalanda was invaded and destroyed at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, which is why one can see fallen bricks and cracks on what is left of the site.

The ruins are located in the city of Rajgir, which is in the Nalanda District of the Indian state of Bihar. Nalanda existed as a residential Buddhist university with 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nalanda was an attractive site for students from all over Asia. In Buddhist literature, there are many references to the Buddha stopping at this site throughout his journeys as well. Although Nalanda was recognized as a Buddhist university, it combined Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings, making it the ideal site for students. Today, there has been a revival of the Nalanda University and thus its ideals. The university aspires to be an international campus, providing education for students around the globe.

Claudia Taselaar, C'17

## Borobudur Stupa

Borobudur, a Buddhist devotional site on Java, typifies the blending of Buddhist beliefs and ideologies that existed on the island in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Built during the Shailendra Dynasty (8<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries), the structure is composed of terraced platforms topped with a large stupa, a Buddhist reliquary mound. Borobudur functions neither as a temple to be entered by worshippers nor solely as a stupa to be circumambulated – instead, often referred to as a sacred mountain, the site allows devotees to ascend upwards to spiritual enlightenment.

The structure can be divided vertically into the three “realms of existence:” the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the realm of formlessness. These three realms, evident in the terraced architecture, contain didactic reliefs and statues detailing important Buddhist tenets. The relief images depicting Buddhist narratives as well as the small stupas erected on the terraces speak to the rich Buddhist tradition perpetuated by the Shailendra rulers.

Due to Java’s advantageous positioning as a major trading post, numerous religions flourished on the island. As a result, Buddhist sites like Borobudur co-existed with Hindu and other religious sites. Volcanic rock, the medium used to construct this “sacred mountain,” highlights regional architectural influences, as volcanoes account for the majority of Java’s landscape. By contextualizing Borobudur within the Javanese cultural and topographical landscape, one can appreciate the innovative design and function of the structure as a Buddhist monument.

Madeleine Rollings, C’16

# 10

## Pagodas at sunrise

This photograph captures a glimpse of the over 2,000 pagodas, multistoried towers constructed for Buddhist religious purposes, that overwhelm the sixteen square mile landscape in which they are located. The site is found in the ancient city of Bagan, located in Burma, officially the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, in Southeast Asia. These pagodas are massive structures in the “lotus bud” form, symbolizing rebirth, enlightenment, and purity that were built from the 11<sup>th</sup> century through the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The density of temples on this plain, encircled by mountainous terrain, accentuates the tiered shape and composition of each structure. Pagodas vary in shape, size, and style. The pagoda represents a further development of the Indian stupa, which is a Buddhist reliquary mound. Therefore, their architectural diversity takes on deep spiritual meaning, and is highly significant to the flourishing of Buddhism as a religion in South East Asia over the centuries under different emperors.

Through this photo, taken at sunrise, Behl captures the contrast, vastness, and beauty of the pagodas. It offers an ephemeral perspective corresponding to the overall function of these religious structures. The serenity of the surrounding environment with the mountains in the hazy horizon is captured perfectly in this image. There is a sense of tranquility and stillness in the photograph as the viewer looks into the golden sky of Bagan.

Paige Vincent, C'15

Camilla Monteiro de Barros, C'15

## Alms giving

Behl captures a scene of *Binthabat* – morning alms-giving. Four women sit in a placid street and offer portions of food to a line of brightly-robed monks that stretches into the image’s horizon. Alms-giving is a daily ritual in many Laotian communities. At sunrise, hundreds of Buddhist monks walk silently and in single file through the streets of Luang Prabang, forming a procession commonly called the “Parade of Monks.” Locals wake well before dawn to offer rice, fruit, or snacks, fulfilling an understood responsibility to provide for those who have renounced worldly lives and serve the community’s spiritual needs.

Behl’s image conveys a convergence of modernity and tradition in Laos. Monks and alms-givers perform this centuries-old ritual in a paved street. Parked cars and a white picket fence juxtapose with a stone shrine. The alms ceremony highlights a fascinating contrast between Buddhist practices in Laos and typical Western religious customs. Rather than seeking out clergy in temples and places of worship, here the faithful sit in preparation for the monks who, in turn, come to them.

Notice the vivid colors: the blue-gray of the pavement, the sharp white of the house and fence, the deep green of the lush foliage overhead, and the bright orange of the monk’s robes. In one photograph, Behl presents an aesthetically compelling scene that speaks to traditions at the heart of Laotian society.

Ben Brown, SFS’17

# 12

## Bayon

The Angkor temple complex gloriously stands as one of the most significant archaeological sites in Southeast Asia. With its breathtaking temples built at monumental heights, this Hindu site reflects the artistic achievements of the Khmer Empire from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The empire's traditional practice of Hinduism, however, came to an end with the reign of Emperor Jayavarman VII in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This Buddhist emperor is responsible for one of the most remarkable sites at Angkor, the "great capital" of Angkor Thom. Angkor Thom is the last of the Khmer capitals and is home to the magnificent Bayon Temple.

The Bayon reflects the Khmer empire's shift from Hinduism to Buddhism and the merging of the two religions. The Bayon consists of one large tower at the center of the site surrounded by fifty-two smaller towers all carved with relief images. The temple is notable for its grand and numerous carvings of smiling bodhisattvas, or Buddhist enlightenment beings, on the towers.

The Bayon temple has gone through several renovations since its establishment. One such renovation reshaped the eyes of the bodhisattva faces. Originally wide and staring straight ahead, the eyes now contently gaze downward. This alteration of the Bayon led many scholars to identify the faces as images of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. Avalokiteshvara's presence helps give viewers a sense of peace and tranquility when visiting and worshipping the site.

Amanda Corcione, C'18

## Samye Monastery

The Samye Monastery is the first Buddhist monastery built in Tibet and is where the first seven Tibetan monks were ordained. It was likely first constructed between 775 and 779 CE under the patronage of King Trisong Detsen of Tibet, with the help of the Indian Buddhist monks Padmambhava and Shantarakshita, whom the king had invited to Tibet to help spread Buddhism. The three-story design of the main hall of Samye touches upon the wide span of influence Tibetan Buddhism had from both China and India, with each layer following a different artistic and architectural style: the bottom Tibetan, the middle Chinese, and the top Indian.

Samye Monastery is furthermore laid out in accordance with the concepts of the Buddhist world. At the center, the main temple represents the sacred Buddhist Mount Meru, the mythical mountain at the center of the Buddhist universe; the *Nyima* (sun) temple in the south and the *Dawa* (moon) temple in the north symbolize the cycles of the sun and the moon; and the four larger halls and eight smaller halls symbolize the four large continents and eight small ones. A circular wall also surrounds the temple as if marking the periphery of the world. Behl's image of the Bayon mountain-like temple (*photograph no. 12*) within the Cambodian Angkor Thom complex is similarly arranged in this diagrammatic manner, with Mount Meru in the center and four gates at each of the cardinal directions reflecting the Buddhist universe.

The Samye Monastery is renowned for the Tibetan murals and statues, as well as ancient relics (remains of the Buddha or significant Buddhist monks) and other religious art within its buildings, and thus remains a significant pilgrimage site for many Tibetan Buddhists, some of whom take weeks to make the journey.

Skye Graham-Welton, C'17

Galen Haas, C'15

# 14

## Phugtal Monastery

One of the most isolated monasteries in India, Phugtal Monastery is located in the secluded Lungnak Valley of Zaskar, in the Himalayan region of Northern India called Ladakh. The monastery is built into the face of a cliff under the entrance of a very large cave. The cliff itself is a lateral gorge, at the foot of which flows the Lungnak River. The monastery can only be reached on foot; therefore all supplies are delivered to the monastery on horses and donkeys.

The Phugtal cave itself has been a place for meditation and worship for centuries, and has been visited by important scholars and sages from as early as 500 BCE. Since then, Phugtal (*Phug* meaning “cave” and *tal* meaning “leisure”) has been a place for learning, retreat, and meditation. Although the cave has served as a holy place for centuries, the Phugtal Monastery was only established in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. According to the legend, a spiritually gifted man named Jangsem Sherap Zangpo caused a spring to run in the cave, a tree to grow above the cave, and the cave itself to grow larger. Then, under Zangpo’s guidance, the present monastery was built.

Today the monastery houses the Phugtal Monastic School, which, according to the monastery’s website, combines traditional subjects with a modern curriculum. The facilities include a main temple, prayer rooms, a library, numerous apartments, teaching facilities, a kitchen, and of course, the original cave and protected sacred spring. The monastery also serves the local community of the Lungnak Valley with its traditional Tibetan medical clinic and their series of festivals and traditional prayer ceremonies.

Mary Ahearn, C’16

## Bamiyan site

The cliffs in the Bamiyan valley of Afghanistan are renowned for their myriad caves and Buddhist images. The caves, which were initially constructed during the Kushan Period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, functioned as dwellings for monks and assembly halls. Between the mid-6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, two massive Buddhas were carved into niches, like the one seen here, in the cliffs. The niches that surrounded the Buddha were painted with images of Buddhist divinities as well as the patrons of the paintings. The large Buddhas themselves were originally painted in bright colors and adorned with gilding, metals, stones, and ornaments. In this photo, the niche is empty. This 136 foot tall Buddha image is no longer present because sadly, in 2001, both Buddha sculptures were completely destroyed by the Taliban.

Kathleen Daly, C'17

# 16

## Recently excavated Buddha

The relief from Mes Aynak illustrates a *jataka* tale, a story about one of Shakyamuni Buddha's past lives before he achieved enlightenment. In this tale, Sumedha, one of the previous incarnations of Shakyamuni Buddha, bows before Dipamkara Buddha, the current Buddha in Sumedha's lifetime. There have been many Buddhas throughout the history of the world; the Buddha who founded Buddhism is the historical Shakyamuni Buddha. Sumedha shows respect to Dipamkara in this work by bowing before him and allowing Dipamkara to step on his hair. As is seen by the traces of paint on the relief, the work was originally painted and gilded. Influences from the ancient Gandhara region, which included modern-day Afghanistan, can be seen in the defined drapery on Dipamkara Buddha. Overall, this relief is quite significant. It furthers our understanding of Shakyamuni Buddha, because it tells us that, even in his previous life, he was so spiritually advanced as to be able to recognize the Buddha of that lifetime.

Kathleen Daly, C'17

## Statue of Kumarajiva

The ancient Buddhist kingdom of Kucha was built on the northern branch of the Silk Road, bordering the Taklamakan Desert in the Tarim Basin. From the 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, hundreds of cave sanctuaries were constructed at several Kuchean communities. The site in the photograph, Kizil, is home to two hundred devotional caves as well as living and administrative quarters and buildings. The flourishing Kuchean civilization and its sophisticated Buddhist monasteries at sites like Kizil were responsible for transmitting Buddhist texts to China in the third century through missionary monks.

Kumarajiva (344 – 413) was one such monk, renowned for his knowledge of Indian learning. Born in Kucha to an Indian nobleman and Kuchean princess, Kumarajiva entered the monastic life at an early age. He studied Buddhist doctrine at Kucha, Kashmir and Kashgar, attaining fame and praise as a scholar in India and China. Kumarajiva is perhaps most famous for his work translating Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit to Chinese, much of which occurred as a captive at court in the Chinese capital of Chang'an. His efforts as a translator led to the dissemination of Buddhist religious and philosophical ideas across China.

In this bronze sculpture, Kumarajiva is portrayed in a seated position on top of a pillar. Several features, including the sculpture's slightly hunched posture, closed eyelids, arm placement and retracted right leg, draw attention to the meditative nature of the figure's pose. Look at the elegant, powerful qualities of the sculpture, such as its slender fingers and toes, full shoulders and proportionate body. What do you think this depiction says about the artist's interpretation of Kumarajiva? Based on the context of this piece, how might this interpretation reflect the general perception and legacy of Kumarajiva at the time?

Michael Ng, C '15

# 18

## Interior, Mogao cave 45

Built during the 8<sup>th</sup> century in the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907), this cave remains one of the most outstanding and well preserved of the 812 Mogao cave shrines located just outside of Dunhuang, China. Dunhuang, which means “blazing beacon,” developed into a bustling desert oasis linking China to the West. Traders and travelers, who found it particularly attractive because of its large and fertile agricultural district, frequented Dunhuang. After their arduous journey on the Silk Road, Dunhuang offered them a place to load their camels for the long journey ahead, as well as a site to pray for a safe passage or to render thanks for their survival. The Dunhuang region was such an essential stop on the Silk Road that it is no surprise that many sacred Buddhist sites are associated with this area. Beginning in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, Buddhist caves such as the ones at Mogao were often excavated for purposes of worship and habitation for monks. Later, these caves became important sites for worship and pilgrimage for the general public. The Mogao cliffs, almost two kilometers long, were the perfect place to accommodate spiritual devotion and artistic production for more than a thousand years.

In this particular image, the Buddha is centrally positioned with ornate decorations surrounding his pedestal, reflecting his spiritual authority. The Buddha’s raised right hand displays the “fear-not” gesture. It is also important to note the various figures that appear on either side of the Buddha, each of which is ornately dressed. There are three figures on each side of the Buddha. Those closest to him are his disciples Ananda and Kashyapa. The next two are bodhisattvas, beings who assist devotees in their quest for enlightenment. Finally, the outermost figures are guardian figures dressed in armor.

James Appleton, C’17

## Colossal Buddha

The Colossal Buddha statue of Cave 172 at Bingling Si represents Maitreya, a unique Buddhist deity. Maitreya is both a Buddha and a bodhisattva, or enlightenment being, and is thought to reside in Tushita Heaven until it is his time to come down into this world as Buddha. In this way he is the Buddha of the Future, or successor of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Located in Gansu province, Bingling Si consists of 200 caves with sculptures and wall paintings dating from 420 CE. This statue of seated Buddha Maitreya was carved during the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907). Images of Maitreya in Buddhist art are usually marked by a pensive pose, signifying his contemplating the right moment to descend from Tushita Heaven. In this instance, Maitreya's head is carved from living rock, while the body is composed of a mixture of clay and straw. Measuring an impressive height of 89 feet, it is believed that the artists hung down from the cliff by ropes in order to chisel Maitreya's features.

The tradition of cave temples reached China from Central Asia via the Silk Road. Other examples of cave temples photographed by Behl include the Ajanta cave complex in India (*photographs no. 4-6*) and the Bamiyan site in Afghanistan (*photograph no. 15*). As sites along the Silk Road, these man-made caves were places of both worship and habitation, and therefore played an important role in the dissemination of Buddhism through Central Asia and into China. The Colossal Buddha at Bingling Si is similar to the two colossal Buddhas that stood at either end of the Bamiyan valley in Afghanistan until their destruction in 2001. These Buddha statues were roughly carved into the surface of the hillside and date between the mid-6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Like the Colossal Buddha of Bingling Si, they are examples of colossal sculpture *in situ*, or sculptures created at the site where they are to be displayed.

Sarah Jolley, C'17

Briani Boyd, C'16

## 20

### Kinkaku-ji

This photograph of the Kinkaku-ji Temple captures one of Japan's best-known sites. Kinkaku-ji is a Zen Buddhist temple, located in Kyoto, Japan. Dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it is not only an architectural feat, but also a piece of history. The temple was originally built during the Muromachi period (1392 – 1573), when a samurai warrior government, based in Kyoto, ruled the country. In 1950, a crazed monk burned the temple to the ground; however, it was rebuilt shortly thereafter. Mostly following its original design, the temple still accurately depicts the structure at the time of its early construction.

The temple rests, alone on stilts, in a peaceful pond amidst dense woods to create a sense of contemplative isolation. Each of the three floors has a distinct architectural style representative of political patronage and Buddhist thought. The bottom floor displays the palace-style, *Shinden-zukuri*, of the Heian period (794 – 1185), with its open space, natural wood, and white plaster. The second floor embodies the samurai house-style, *Buke-zukuri*, of the warrior aristocrats, and the last floor is representative of the Zen temple-style, *Karayo*. The uppermost floors are covered with gold leaf because they house the shrines of the temple.

Kinkaku-ji means “Temple of the Golden Pavillion,” wherein the lustrous quality of the gold leaf and the impression of sunlight reflecting off the structure and onto the pond, adds to the underlying meaning of the gold, which is to deflect and purify one's negative thoughts and feelings regarding death. The natural quality of the landscape and spiritual quality of the temple encourage a direct meditative experience of the soul and the mind. Kinkaku-ji conveys an overall feeling of harmony between opposing themes: man and nature, structure and environment, life and death, and the earthly and the heavenly.

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