

TWO SCULPTURED CHINESE HEADS

THE lately acquired stone heads of Buddha and Kuan-yin, dating, as they do, from a time when Chinese sculpture was just entering upon its period of highest development, present a number of points of great interest.

They must be assigned, in all likelihood, to an epoch slightly earlier than that of the statue of the Lo-han described elsewhere in this number of the JOURNAL; that is to say, to the earlier part of the T'ang period (A. D. 618-907). The faces are not, as is the case with the Lo-han, of a native Chinese type; and, as will readily be seen by a comparison of the photographs, they quite lack the portrait-like quality which so strongly marks the latter. On the contrary, they are of that conventionalized ideal, characteristic of Gandhara* and Turkestan, through which Buddhist art reached China in the early centuries of our era.

THE BUDDHA

Let us consider first the head of the Buddha (Fig. 70), which is, to borrow a term from classical phraseology, of truly "heroic" size. The arrangement of the hair is perhaps the first characteristic to strike one, quite differentiating it from the ordinary convention of tufts, or little curls. This head, in marked contrast to the majority of others, indicates the hair in a manner rather strongly reminiscent of that Greek influence which was so strongly felt at Gandhara, although just above the forehead are two whorls of hair slightly approximating to the more usual treatment. Traces of pigment are still noticeable. The lips are tinted a deep red, and the hair, especially above the temples, retains well marked indications of a black coloring matter. The pupils of the eyes, too, were evidently colored, although the slight traces remaining make it difficult to say with certainty whether the hue employed was black or a very dark blue. The fact, however, that one of the thirty-two

* Gandhara was a kingdom and great Buddhist center in the northwest Punjab; its art was very strongly influenced by that of Greece, after the time of Alexander the Great, and in turn passed on this influence, modified by native Indian ideas, to Buddhist art. Some interesting examples of this have recently been discovered in desert ruins on the confines of China.

lakshanas, or "signs of auspiciousness," supposed to occur upon the person of every Buddha, was that of "dark blue eyes," suggests that the latter color was used.

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FIG. 70.—Head of a Colossal Statue of Buddha.

Among others of these signs indicated are the uplifted and constricted crown of the head—a feature often shown in much more exaggerated form; the long-lobed ears (that on the left still shows

traces of having been pierced); the rounded cheeks (considered to resemble those of a lion); and the hemispherical depression in the forehead; this last represents the traditional whorl of hair* just above the point where the eyebrows converge, and undoubtedly once held a jewel of some kind.

The eyes are half closed in profound meditation, and a smile indicates the greatness of the all-embracing love and pity which inspired the teaching of Shâkyamuni.

THE KUAN-YIN

Turning now to the head of Kuan-yin (Fig. 71)—or Kwannon, to give her the Japanese title—it is worth while first of all to note that, by what seems on the surface a strange anomaly, this divinity was transmuted in sex somewhere on the road from India to China. For there is no doubt that she is derived from Avalôkitêshvara, a male deity and an emanation, countless eons ago, of Amitâbha Buddha.† It is possible that this change in sex occurred before the extension of Buddhism to China. On the other hand, it is quite conceivable that there was already an indigenous Chinese goddess of mercy, whom the Buddhist missionaries identified with their Avalôkitêshvara, explaining away the difference in sex by recourse to the theory of avâtârs, or successive rebirths. By this theory a deity, itself pure spirit, might be born again and again on earth as an individual, now of one sex, now of the other.

However this may be, Kuan-yin is beyond doubt one of the most attractive concepts of the entire Buddhist pantheon. In addition to her special function of mercy and helpfulness, she is often represented as the particular protectress of children, and in fact is frequently shown with a child in her arms. A curious instance of this is related of a certain cave in Japan, where a Christian image of the Blessed Virgin, holding the Infant Jesus in her arms—a relic, of course, of the Portuguese missionaries of the sixteenth century—was discovered by peasants and worshiped as a representation of Kwannon.

Like the head of Buddha just described, that of Kuan-yin

* Known as the *ûrna*; out of it the Buddha is able to "send forth streams of light illuminating every universe."

† The Japanese Amida, of whom the great bronze statue at Kamakura, known as the Dai Butsu, is a well-known representation. Amitâbha was originally a personification of "boundless light;" the concept appears to have taken shape about 300 A. D.

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FIG. 71.—Head of a Statue of Kuan-yin.

C444

shows clear traces of Indian influences, scarcely, as yet, modified by native Chinese concepts. This is especially true of the symbolism. Fragmentary though it be, the head still presents several of the "thirteen items* of a perfectly dressed lady"—these being symbolic of the thirteen degrees of perfection which complete Nirvâna. Among those represented by the head under discussion are the headdress, the earrings, and the silken folds attached to the crown.

The headdress, or crown, has suffered somewhat, the front peak having been knocked off. However, as may still be seen, it is not the headdress with the "five jeweled peaks" (signifying the five attributes of the divine perfection) so often seen, for this headdress had, when intact, but three peaks.

In another point, too, this head differs from others representative of Kuan-yin, inasmuch as the *urna*, or mark on the forehead, so characteristic of Buddhist art, is wanting. This, however, appears not to have been considered essential, since the goddess is shown without this mark quite as often as with it.

The earrings are still plainly in evidence. The traces of the silken folds attached to the headdress are not so easily made out. On the left side is only a ragged indentation in the stone to mark where the attachment of the fold once was. On the right side the traces are more apparent. The rosette, or cockade, marking the attachment of this bit of drapery to the tiara, is still quite intact, and the beginning of the scarf itself may also be seen. These two scarfs once undoubtedly descended gracefully over the shoulders in the shape of long streamers (compare Figs. 39 and 41 in the June issue of this JOURNAL).

Unlike the head of the Buddha just described, the features of Kuan-yin show no traces of pigment.

The eyes are nearly closed, after the convention of Buddhist art, indicating quiet contemplation, and the head in its entirety seems to express exceptionally well the majesty, the mystery, and the all-pervading love, characteristic of Buddhist art at its very best.

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* For a complete list of these, see the June issue of this JOURNAL, pp. 85-87.