

Weapons, Tools and Implements as depicted in Gandhara Art

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Introduction

Weapons, tools, implements and garments are human inventions and are as old as man's first effort to exploit nature to his own benefit. Extremely plain and simple in the beginning and greatly improved over the centuries, they have played a significant role in quickening the pace of progress in every field of human activity—be it peaceful or violent. Besides ideology it is indeed sophistication brought about in weapons and tools that has often been a determining factor in deciding the fate of nations.

In Pakistan the earliest examples of weapons and tools, besides the stone-age hand-axes, come from Harappa and Mohenjodaro (2600-1700 B C) (Mark Kenoyer 1997: 25)—the well known twin capitals of the Indus Valley Civilization (Piggot 1961:136). The major forms include spears, knives, leaf-shaped spearheads, flat axes (without shaft hole) etc. Sir Mortimer Wheeler (1959: 58: 61) has drawn attention to two examples of axes having shaft holes on the pottery of Mohenjodaro. Allchin (2003: 193) maintains that most of these forms set the pattern for later Indian types for centuries to come. These weapons and tools were made of copper and bronze with the occasional use of chert.

The discovery of chert blades on several Indus Valley sites shows that the use of stone as a material for manufacturing weapons and tools continued side by side with metals as the latter was a rare commodity and costly as well. Therefore, the use of stone, particularly on the countryside, continued long after the introduction of metal weapons. As a matter of fact, outside the main urban centres, many people in Pakistan still had their bows and arrows as late as the beginning of the 20th century. Keeping a gun, for instance, was looked upon as a luxury which only the rich could afford. This is why we find occasional representations of stone weapons in Gandhāran reliefs as well.

Weapons

A weapon is a thing or object designed or used for inflicting bodily harm or physical damage such as, in modern terminology, a nuclear weapon. A weapon may be used for crushing (or beating), piercing, throwing and cutting. The simplest form of a weapon, when used for the purpose of crushing or beating had traditionally been that of a long bamboo stick now called *dang*. On the country side where people often come across snakes, it is still a very effective weapon. Besides this, it is widely used by the elderly as a supporting stick and is abundantly depicted as such in Gandharan reliefs.

Another form of this weapon is a heavy' stick or club (called *Gorz* in Persian, and *Bugdar* in Prakrit), looking more like a mace with a thick end often used as a tool in athletic exercises or as a weapon in war. Two varieties are found in the reliefs.

Variety 1 (still in use) is a plain heavy piece of wood tapering to one end for easy grasp. Ingholt (Nos. 2 and 3) has two examples. In these reliefs (Fig:1) an athletic human figure is shown with a club in his right hand not unlike the Heracles, except that the club found on the Bactrian Greeks coins, where it occurs most profusely, has projected knobs all over (Bopearachchi et al 1995: 87. Figs.101-112).

Variety 2 is represented by two examples in Kurita (Nos. 627,629; Ingholt: No.64). Fig. 2 shows one of these. This example has a knobbed globular bottom end, while the upper portion is decorated with circular bands in low relief.

i. Offensive weapons

Of the offensive weapons the most important are (1) spear, (2) trisula, (3) sword, (4) dagger (5) archery and (6) battle-axes. These are amply depicted in Gandharan reliefs. Bow and arrows were also in use.

1. Spear (*Sanskrit. Prase;Prakrit. Barccha*)

It is a composite weapon consisting of a long wooden stick or shaft with a pointed blade fixed or tied at one end; the other end is also pointed in some cases. It is undoubted one of the oldest weapons invented by man. Spearheads of bone have been found amongst

the early remains of man's life (Harrison 1929: 30).

The discovery of a number of 'spearheads' in the Indus cities is very significant. Unlike the stone spearheads of Egypt or Sumer, there are all metallic specimens and are invariably tanged. Wheeler describes that "Most of them are thin, flat, leaf-shaped blades which would buckle on impact and must have been stiffened by being set back between the split ends of the shaft, which would serve as a mid-rib ... Rarely, the blade has a slight median thickening, the section being diamond shaped" (Wheeler 1993: 73). Such reinforced blades are up to eighteen and a half inches in length and may rather represent short swords or dirks. According to the Wheeler (op, cit) spear-heads found in the Indus cities are invariably tanged and cannot be clearly distinguished from knives. It is interesting to note that no barbed blade has been found there, although, there is a clear illustration of a barbed spear on a Mohenjodaro seal. Sir Mortimer Wheeler rejects the simple chert blades, which occur abundantly on all Harappan sites, as implements of war and says that chert and flint weapons are almost unknown in the Indus Valley: exceptions are from Kot Diji (Khan 1956: 38) and from Periano Ghundai (Fair Service 1971: 148-49) in northern Baluchistan.

Gandhāran reliefs show three main varieties of spearheads:

- (1) Leaf-shaped with mid-rib
- (2) Conical
- (3) Concave sided blade with conical tip

From their illustrations in the sculptures it is difficult to precisely tell the materials they are made of, although from their shape and size one may make a reasonable guess. Some of the examples, for instance, (Kurita: No, 470) show disproportionately heavy blades, while others (Ingholt 1957: Nos. 10, 39, 40) have long thin blade. Those having thick and heavy blades—thicker indeed even than the shaft which supports them—in our view follow the tradition of stone spearheads, whereas the lighter blades represent their counterpart in metals.

Spears with leaf-shaped heads (var.1) are in general held by *Yavani* guards associated with palace scenes such as the Dream of Maya (Fig: 3), Life in the Palace

(Figs.4, 5), The Renunciation (Fig. 6), The Great Departure (Fig. 7) etc. Male guards holding this kind of spear may be seen in the reliefs Maras' Attack (Ingholt: 63), the Urn Carried into Kusinagara (Fig: 8). Spears with conical heads are generally held by warriors with or without scale armour (Figs: 9-10).

A good example of var.3 may be seen in Fig. 11 showing seated *Pancika*—the semidivine war-lord of the *yakshas*—holding in his left hand a spear with a bell attached near the top. The spearhead shows concave sides under a triangular point. The bottom end of the spear in this case is hidden behind *Pancika's* left foot, but in Fig. 12, showing a standing Kattikeya, the spear shows a lightly pointed mount at the end. There are many other examples which, following the Greek pattern, show a sharply pointed mount.

A sub-variety of the conical spearhead variety appears in a relief (Zwalf: No: 315) showing a hunting scene. One of the hunters on the left hand side holds a hafted spear with a short shaft. This obviously is meant for throwing at the animal from a distance like a dart. In the left hand side top corner of the panel showing the submission of Apalala (Fig: 13), a half-length male figure holds a similar short spear or javelin.

2. *Trisula*

The *Trisula* was probably another offensive weapon or a symbol of peaceful authority. In Greek art it is held by Bacchus (Hope 1962: Pl. 50) and Jupiter (Ibid: Pl. 115). It is one of the attributes of the Indian god Siva and, in this position it has countless illustrations on coins and sculptures.

Fig. 14 shows a standing *Hariti*, originally a *yakshi*, and the personification of the most dreaded of all infantile diseases, smallpox, holding a *trisula* in her left hand. Like the spear, it is also pointed at the nether end.

3. *Swords*

Swords and spears, amply illustrated in our reliefs, were favourite weapon of the Kushans. Typically Iranians are both the straight hilt of the sword and the way it is attached to the body by its special sword-belt or baldric (Pope 1938-9: pl. 155; Roger 1962: pl.100). Characteristic of Iranian or Iranizing tribes is also the manner in which the

sword-belt passes through a loop or bridges half way down the scabbard.

The sword is found mainly in the panels illustrating the hostile actions of Mara, personification of the evil, against the Bodhisattva Siddharta. The evil Mara realized that his power in the world would be seriously jeopardized if Siddharta should obtain the supreme knowledge and subsequently lead other people to salvation. He therefore used all possible means to persuade Siddharta to give up the quest. He first tempted him with promises of power and pleasure. But, when he saw that neither offer of power, nor feminine charms could change the mind of Siddharta he resorted to force and brought out an army of demons and human warriors. These warriors were equipped with all sorts of weapons with Mara himself carrying the sword.

Except in two cases (Ingholt: Nos. 64,118) where the sword is naked and the blade can very well be seen, it is difficult to tell its precise shape when it happens to be within a sheath, as is the case with the rest of our examples. However, taking clue from the naked examples and the straight scabbards, one may say for certain that the sword had a straight blade.

The scabbard shows three variant forms: (1) Rectangular, (2) with the bottom end round off, (3) with the bottom end pointed. These varieties may represent different but concurrent cultural traditions regarding the model of a scabbard; in some cases (Kurita: Nos. 620-21) all the three occur together in one and the same panel. In most cases the scabbard shows a margin fillet on all the four sides. The area thus enclosed accommodates a loop or bridge for the baldric to pass through, and is occasionally decorated.

Fig. 15 shows Mara ready to draw his sword from a rectangular scabbard which hangs by a short, straight baldric from his left shoulder. A scabbard with the bottom end rounded off may be seen in Fig. 16 which shows the figure of a standing moustached Vajrapaṇi holding the pommel of his sword. A naked pointed sword may be found illustrated in the panel "Host of Mara". On the extreme left, almost in the middle, is a demon holding a naked sword (Fig. 17). It is a short, double-edged and straight weapon with a clearly visible mid-rib. There is a projection looking like a herring bone at the base of the hilt suggesting a rudimentary form of a cross-guard. Similar iron swords are

reported from Taxila referred by Marshall (1951: 1, PL. 544) to the first century AD. The sword more usually depicted in the carvings as well as Gandhara reliefs is a short weapon like the Roman *gladius* (op, cit).

4. Dagger

The dagger has a very distinctive shape in our reliefs and can easily be distinguished from the sword. It has a short and broad blade almost triangular at the apex. This type of dagger has not been reported from Taxila. Except in the matter of length, the daggers found at Taxila closely resemble the swords (Marshall 1951: I, 545) and might well have answered to the term *semispathium*, applied to the Roman *pugio* in later Imperial times. But the two examples found in Gandhara art (see Kurita: Nos. 624,871) look more like their Etruscan counterparts (comp. Hope; Pl. 41). In both the cases the shape of the blade may only be guessed from the shape of their sheaths (Fig. 18).

5. Archery

Archery was a favourite art of the nobility. Jotipala, son of the royal chaplain of Brahmadatta, king of Benares, was advised by his father to go to Taxila to learn archery besides other arts. On his return to Benares he excelled at an archery competition and was appointed commander-in-chief (*Jataka* No. 522). *Mahavastu* relates the story how Siddharata proved his excellence in martial arts, archery in particular, in an open contest held at Kapilavastu. The contest was prompted by the refusal of Mahanama, Yosodhara's father, to give the hand of his daughter in marriage to Siddharata on the ground that the latter was brought up amongst women and therefore lacked manly qualities. To show the strength of his arms Siddharata brought out an extremely heavy bow of the time of his grandfather and challenged others to string it; no body could perform this feat. He then pierced all the targets with his arrows.

The archery kit consisted of three items: (1) Bow, (2) Arrow, and (3) Quiver. The bow in a drawn position is abundantly depicted particularly in the hunting scenes and a *Jataka* story. But the arrow is very often missing and its existence is suggested by the position of the archers' flexed right arm. The bow consists of a short but a straight middle portion held by the archer to keep the bow in correct position, and curved sides

(Fig: 19). Both ends are connected by a tight string. The arrowhead looks barbed (Fig: 20) in some cases and conical in others. Fig. 21 shows a three headed much damaged deity with a bow flung across his body. A complete archery kit is visible in Fig. 22 in which a standing figure on the extreme left of the panel holds a bow flung across his neck with his left hand and an arrow in the outstretched right and, while the upper end of the quiver is visible at his back.

Accounts of the Bodhisattvas' display of the skills to prove his fitness for marriage agree on his superiority in archery and tell how only he could string an ancestral and hugely difficult bow and pierce all the targets. Fig. 23 shows the archery contest just outside the city gate of Kapilavastu. In the first scene (on the right) is a projecting gateway with sloping jambs in a crenellated wall with oblong loopholes, a farther line of crenellation behind, and on the left hand side two archers draw thick bows at a target fixed on a branch of tree. No arrows are visible but behind the second archer there exists a compound quiver suggesting arrows.

Ancient Indian literature refers to arrow-head of many shapes, e.g. *ardhacandra* ('half-moon'), *Kshurapra* (with a razor edge), *sucimukha* (needle-shaped), *vats-danta* (like a calfs' tooth). At Taxila in the Saka-Parthian period (first century BC to first century AD) the conical and 'three bladed' varieties make their first appearance (Marshall 1951:11, 547). Strabo refers to arrows made of wood and hardened in fire (Majumdar 1960:96) and Curtius to 'two cubits long' arrows (Ibid: 105).

6. Battle-axe

As with other arms and armour, the battle-axes is also associated with the reliefs showing Maras' Attack. But this weapons, it seems, was not very common. We have only two examples in the entire range of our panels. A very clear example may be seen in Fig. 15. It shows a warrior on the extreme right with armour like that of Mara holding a battle-axe below its head, the end of the shaft is resting on the ground. In the second relief (Ingholt: No. X3) Mara himself is shown wielding an axe with both hands.

ii. Defence armour

The defensive armour of Gandhāra consisted of a helmet, breast plate, greaves, shield and scale armour. In the defensive equipment the helmet must have played a very significant role in protecting the warrior against head injuries. But, contrarily, its representation in Gandhara art is scanty. Similarly meager is the evidence found at Taxila. Marshall (1951: II, 550) uncovered only one iron specimen in Sirkap (stratum 11). It is a "helmet with cheek piece on one side, attached seemingly by pivot, enabling it to be raised or lowered. The other side of the helmet is missing... the crown is of one piece beaten out like an oval bowl and afterwards deepened by horizontal bands hammered on to it. It is large enough to admit of a thick padded cap underneath, even on a big head. On the summit is a boss intended for the attachment of a ring, spike, or crest. Grecian helmets appear to be comparatively more developed. Of these there were two principal types: that with an immoveable visor, projecting from it like mast ; and that with a movable visor sliding over it in the shape of a mere slip of metal. In order to protect the cheeks, two leather flaps were attached, which when not used, were tucked up inwards (see Hope 1962: XXXVI).

Of the meager number of representations in the panel reliefs, one example may be seen in Ingholt: No.64 (Fig. 16). Two of the warriors in the first row wear scale armour. The warrior to the right shows a helmet on the head, recalling, according to Ingholt, the so-called morion from Spain (1957:66), supposedly brought from the East. The other example is to be seen in Zwalf: No. 186 (Fig. 24). On the right hand in this relief is a half length armed figure above the figure of the discomfited Mara trying to steal away. He wears a helmet with a curved brim rising to a point above the forehead.

The breast-plate as a separate piece of defensive equipment is equally rare in archaeological remains as well as in panel reliefs. This may perhaps be due to the use of cuirass which protected the breast as well as the back. Even the eighteen armour plates along with three links of an iron chain found in Sirkap (Taxila) are so heavy that they were unsuitable for a human warrior. The size and weight of these plates, says Marshall (1951: 549), suggests that they served as armour for horses or even for camels or elephants rather than men. Marshall also refers to the Parthian camelry, which was also

heavily armed and may have been copied from the Roman dromedarii. Horses and riders clad in mail or plate armour were from early times a feature of the Persian, Seleucid, Parthian and Sarmatian armies.

We have several examples of horses with breast plate in Gandhara art but they appear more like a decorative rather than a defensive feature. The horse mounted by Siddhartha, for instance, (Fig. 22) at the time of the Great Departure, shows a breast plate. But it was a time of peace, not war. Therefore the breast-plate in this case may be a defensive equipment whose use in peaceful times would be unnecessary.

Greave—a piece of armour used to protect the shin—was commonly used by the nobility and is abundantly depicted in the panel reliefs. Fig. 25 shows standing figure wearing greaves. (See also Kurita: 620; Ingholt: 420, 64, and 65). In some cases it may be confused with the long boots of Kushan emperors (Rosenfield 1993:Fig.63).

The shield shows two main varieties: (1) round, and (2) rectangular. No complete shield came to light in the Taxila excavation but its existence is amply suggested by the discovery of a number of iron, copper and silver shield bosses (see Marshall 1951: 111, PL. 177, No. 388-89; PL. 187, No.22). But representations of complete shields may abundantly be seen in the panel reliefs.

Variety (1) has two sub-varieties: (a) Decorated with floral or other designs (see Kurita: No. 624; Ingholt: No.63) and (b) Receding steps winding up to a central boss (Ingholt: 64 and Kurita: 623). Fig. 26 shows a warrior with a dagger in the right and a shield with lotus design, in the left hand. Variety 2 is represented by a solitary example in Kurita: No. 627. The shield has grooved parallel lines on the outer side and is slightly curved.

A curious type of shield looking like the numeral 8 appears in a panel depicting a warrior wearing a double skirted cuirass (Fig. 27). In another panel (Fig. 28), illustrating the story of “Conversion of Angulimala”, Angulimala is depicted twice: first in the pose of attacking his mother and then the Buddha, his sword being in the right and shield in the left hand. The shield he is holding has the upper part like a cone or semi-circle and the lower part rectangular. The way it is presented makes it difficult to determine its real shape. But its comparison with the shield held by the figure standing in the middle in the

bottom row in Fig. 20 makes the real form of the shield absolutely clear. This is the second case in which we have a figure with sword in one hand and shield in the other.

Armour

The metal coverings (i.e. armour) worn by soldiers or warriors to protect the body in battle may be amply witnessed in Gandhara art, particularly in the scenes representing Mara and hosts. Fig. 17 in this context successfully portray the terrifying and frightening effect that Mara wanted to create by the use of the popularized figures of demons in frightful poses and human warriors to drive Siddharta from the 'diamond seat'. Two of the standing warriors in the bottom row wear armour comprising a half-sleeved jacket (coat of mail) covered with scales with round ends upwards to protect the upper half of the body, and a skirt of pendent plates of metal with the foundation fabric rolled at the bottom just above the knees, perhaps to prevent metal chafing on the body. A similar pattern but better delineated appears in Fig. 7 which also shows how the skirt was secured round the waist overlapping the lowest part of the jacket. Fig. 12 has a slightly different pattern in that the jacket, perhaps quilted, has a cross-hatched design marking perhaps sewing lines. In another relief (Fig: 21) the jacket leaves the abdomen naked. A yet another example (Fig: 29) shows each strip of the skirt marked by a dimple in the centre. We have mentioned here just a few representative examples, there are many others (see Kurita: Nos. 476-78,623,520; Ingholt: Nos. 47, 63, 64, 561; Zwalf: Nos. 102,104,434 etc).

Tools and Implements

Although a fairly large variety of iron tools and implements was found in the Taxila excavations which give a precise picture of the nature of these equipments, there is not much in the panel reliefs except a few representations of the plough (Ingholt: Nos. 36,284) and hoe (Ibid: No. 172). It is interesting to note that exactly the same wooden plough with iron blade drawn by a pair of oxen is still in use not only in Gandhara but also all over of Pakistan and is now in the process of being replaced by the more sophisticated devices such as tractors and other agricultural machinery. In Gandhara art the plough (Fig: 30) is the symbol of the "First Sermon".

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Figures



Fig. 1 Adventure and punishment of Maitrakanyaka



Fig. 2 Stucco



Fig. 3 Dream of Maya

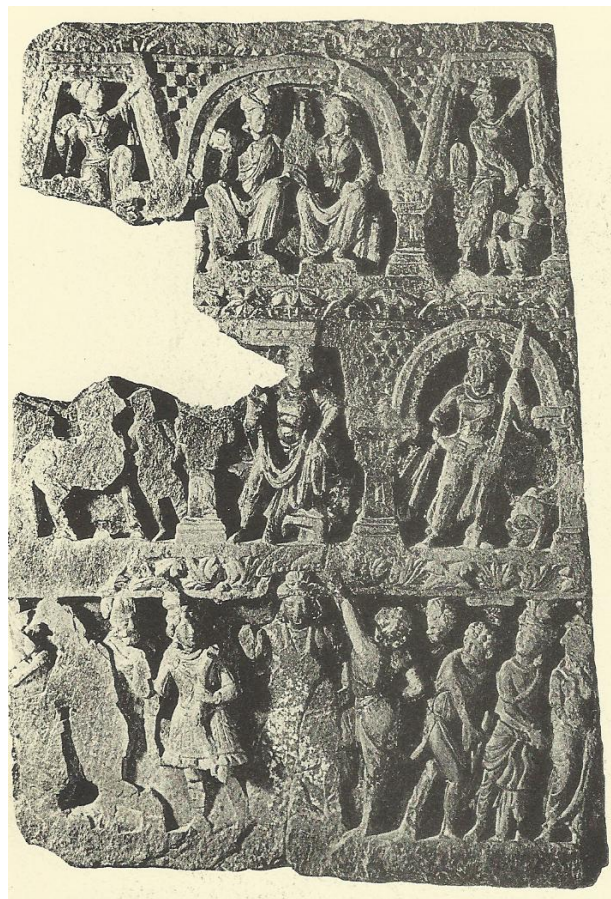


Fig. 4 Life in the Palace



Fig. 5 Life in the Palace



Fig. 6 The Renunciation



Fig. 7 The Great Departure



Fig. 8 The Urn Carried into Kusinagar

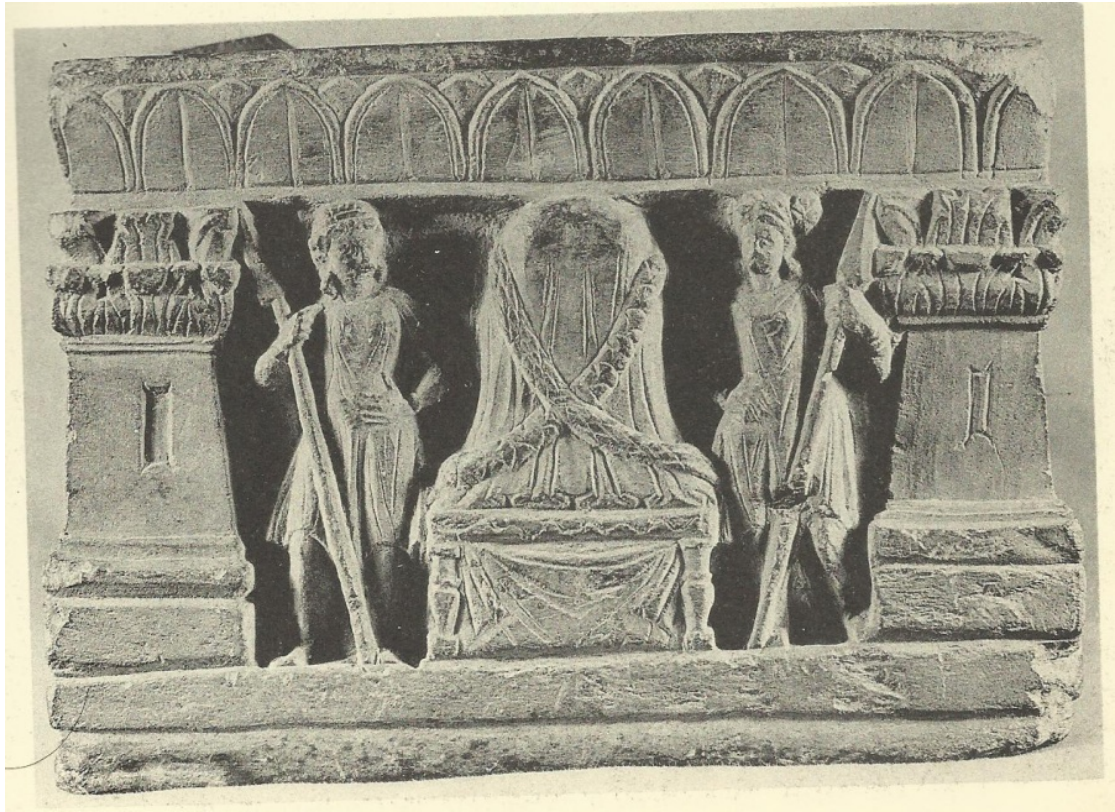


Fig. 9 Guarding the Urn



Fig. 10 Seated figure



Fig. 11 Panciha



Fig. 12 Skanda Karttikeya



Fig. 13 Submission of Aplala



Fig. 14 Hariti from Sahri Bahlol



Fig. 15 Assault of Mara



Fig. 16 Panel showing Vajrapani and figures



Fig. 17 Host of Mara



Fig. 18 Private collection.



Fig. 19 Hunting scene



Fig. 20 Hunting Scene



Fig. 21 Private collection



Fig. 22 Private collection



Fig. 23 Stupa drum panel



Fig. 24 Assault of Māra



Fig. 25 Standing figure wearing greaves



Fig. 26 Warrior with dagger and Shield



Fig. 27 Statuette of a warrior



Fig. 28 Conversion of Angulimāla



Fig. 29 Standing figure in coat of mail



Fig.30. The First Meditation

