



Unknown (Indian)
Chauri Bearer, ca. 2nd century CE
red sandstone
28 15/16 x 7 7/8 x 4 1/8 in.
Museum purchase, Anonymous Fund, Karl E. Weston
Memorial Fund
91.14

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Unknown (Indian)
Chauri Bearer, ca. 2nd century CE

A *chauri* is a fly whisk held by attendants of royal or religious individuals. The chauri bearer was originally a symbol from the Hindu religion that Buddhist and Jain iconography later incorporated. Sculptures of male chauri bearers are rare in comparison to the large number of extant female figures. This relief fragment was probably part of a larger panel originally on a *stupa* (a Buddhist structure) in which the chauri figure attended a representation of the Buddha.

The figure of the chauri bearer reflects cross-cultural influences. The Kushan Empire spanned a significant portion of the ancient Silk Road, in what is today northwestern India, Pakistan, and the Kabul Valley of Afghanistan. Long-distance trade connected China to Rome and created thriving urban centers along the way. The Kushans fused Hellenistic and Buddhist elements in both language (adopting the Greek and Kharoshthi scripts) and art (the famous art of Gandhara melded with Hellenistic influences). The heavy earrings worn by the chauribearer pose a conundrum: typical Buddhist figures appear unadorned, indicating the renunciation of worldly desires and materialism.

INDIAN ART COLLECTION



DISCUSS

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Chauri Bearer, ca. 2nd century CE

A *chauri* is a fly whisk held by attendants of royal or religious individuals. This relief fragment of a chauri bearer was probably part of a larger panel, in which the chauri figure attended a representation of the Buddha. The panel was likely part of a *stupa*, a mound-shaped structure that contains important religious objects.

Take a close look at the *Chauri bearer*. What colors, textures, shapes, and lines do you see? What other details do you notice? Can you imagine this *Chauri bearer* as part of one of the stupas shown below? Why or why not?

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Above: Great Stupa, Sanchi, India
Image source: Copyright © 2003, Gérald Anfossi.



Left:
Ruwanwelisaya Stupa
in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.



Above: Phra Sri Ratana Chedi within Wat Phra Kaeo, Bangkok, Thailand.
Image source: ScorpienPK.



Right: Dhâmek Stûpa in Sarnâth, India. Image source: 1999, Gérald Anfossi.



Left: The main Stupa crowning the Borobudur Buddhist monument in Java, Indonesia. Image source: Gunkarta.

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CREATE

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This fragment of a sculpture of a *chauri* bearer (attendant holding a fly-whisk) was probably part of a larger panel originally on a *stupa*, a mound-shaped structure housing, protecting, and honoring important religious objects. The architectural design of a *stupa* carries symbolic meaning. For example, the fourteen rings around the spires of modern stupas represent the fourteen stages of the Buddha on his path to enlightenment. At some stupas, visitors will hear bells tinkling in the breeze, a sound meant to convey a feeling of liberation.

Think of an object that is very important to you and your family. If you had the opportunity to design a building to protect and honor that object, how would you design that building? Try creating a drawing to show your ideas. Consider how the design of the building could reflect the history of your object and what it means to you.