

# FACES OF THE BUDDHA: LORENZO PULLÈ AND THE MUSEO INDIANO IN BOLOGNA, 1907-35

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From November 24, 2018 to April 28, 2019, the Museo Civico Medievale in Bologna hosted the exhibition *I volti del Buddha: Dal perduto Museo Indiano di Bologna (Faces of the Buddha: From the Lost Indian Museum of Bologna)*. It gathered together some of the artifacts originally stored in the Museo Indiano, but which are divided today among the Museo Civico Medievale and the Museo di Palazzo Poggi in Bologna and the Museo di Antropologia of the University of Padua. The exhibition also included some of the photographs from the Museo Indiano collection, which are now conserved at Museo Civico Medievale and available online, thanks to a digitalization and conservation project supported by Fondazione Del Monte di Bologna e Ravenna.<sup>1</sup> This valuable group of artifacts and photographs, all specially restored for this occasion, showcases the Hindu and Buddhist art that was on display back when the Museo Indiano was open to the public. It also highlights the activities of archaeologists who collected these artifacts during the last decades of the 19th century.

From 1907 to 1935, the Museo Indiano was located in the Archiginnasio, the present public library of Bologna. Its rooms exhibited artifacts, photographs, and manuscripts collected by Francesco Lorenzo Pullè (1850-1934) [Fig. 1]. It also contained a high-relief fragment that the archaeologist Giovanni Verardi has in recent years identified by as having coming from the Sanchi area, possibly obtained by Pullè during his brief stay in Lahore. Pullè, a professor of Indo-European philology (i.e. Sanskrit) at Bologna University since 1900, founded the Gabinetto di Glottologia Sperimentale in 1902 and subsequently served as its director.

Also in 1902, he traveled to Hanoi to attend the International Congress of Orientalists. On his way back to Europe, Pullè stopped in what are now Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan. There he visited monuments, gave lectures on ancient Indian cartography at the Calcutta and Bombay branches of the Asiatic Society, and collected artifacts, photographs and manuscripts. All these acquisitions were later exhibited in the Museo Indiano, which he created with the support of the University of Bologna and the Municipality. The Municipality expressed its support for the newly established museum collection by purchasing some Asian art from a private dealer (e.g., the Chinese metal statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas from the Pellegrinelli collection) and by lending items that were already part of public collections. This latter category includes the Oriental vases from the Sieri Pepoli collection, today stored in the Collezioni Comunali d'Arte. The museum grew little by little into the form its founder had imagined: a museum of Indian and Eastern Asia Ethnography, as it is often described in the archival documents.



Fig. 1. Stephania Pullè, *Portrait of Francesco Lorenzo Pullè*, 1914 ca., Bologna, Quadreria del Rettorato dell'Università degli Studi.

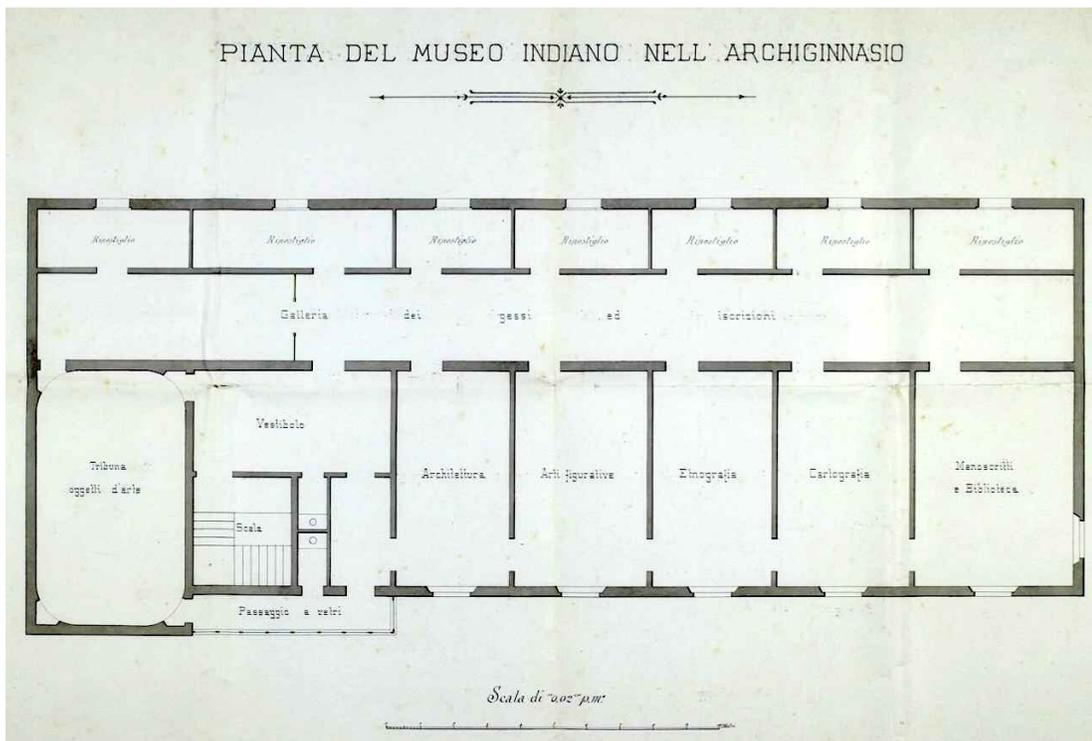


Fig. 2. Plan of the Museo Indiano di Bologna, 1907 ca., Bologna, Archivio Storico Comunale.

research technique he had been refining for more than a decade by then. This provided him with faithful but portable copies of many Indian manuscripts held in German institutions, which he used for both research and teaching purposes.

Pullè's enthusiastic embrace of photography as a means of supporting scholarly

research is well demonstrated by his acquisition in 1903 of a collection of 150 photographic prints from the Lahore Museum [Figs. 3-9]. Jean Philippe Vogel, who was at that time based in Lahore as Superintendent of the Punjab, Baluchistan, and Ajmer on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India, presumably helped to facilitate this transaction. In fact, at the Congress of Orientalists held in Paris in 1897, Pullè was appointed as president of the Italian branch of the Indian Exploration Fund.<sup>3</sup> It may seem surprising that a philologist with no previous experience in the field of archaeology re-

### The Photographic Collection of Gandhāran Relics from the Lahore Museum<sup>2</sup>

Pullè considered the Museo Indiano [Fig. 2] to be his museum, with the aim of reinforcing Sanskrit teaching at the University of Bologna. And yet Pullè was not an art historian, nor even an expert on Indian art when he traveled around the Indian subcontinent. In his presentation at the 1902 Hanoi Congress, he noted his attendance at many of the International Exhibitions that had been held in previous years in several different European cities. It was at these exhibitions that he had been able to catch a firsthand glimpse of specimens and artifacts from India and the rest of Asia. As a scholar, Pullè was internationally recognized for his studies on ancient Indian cartography: since the 1890s, he had conducted extensive research on maps of India held in various library collections in Italy. At the 12th International Congress of Orientalists held in Rome in 1899, Pullè presented more than fifty maps, many of them photographed from books—a



Fig. 3. Dream of Queen Māyā, b/w photograph, silver bromide - gelatin print / paper, Lahore, c. 1902, Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, fondo Speciale "Museo Indiano."



Fig. 4. *Māyā Gives Birth to Siddhārtha*, b/w photograph, silver bromide - gelatin print / paper, Lahore, 1902 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, fondo Speciale "Museo Indiano."

Fig. 5. *Siddhārtha's Horoscope is Explained to Suddhodana and Māyā*, b/w photograph, silver bromide - gelatin print / paper, Lahore, 1902 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, fondo Speciale "Museo Indiano."

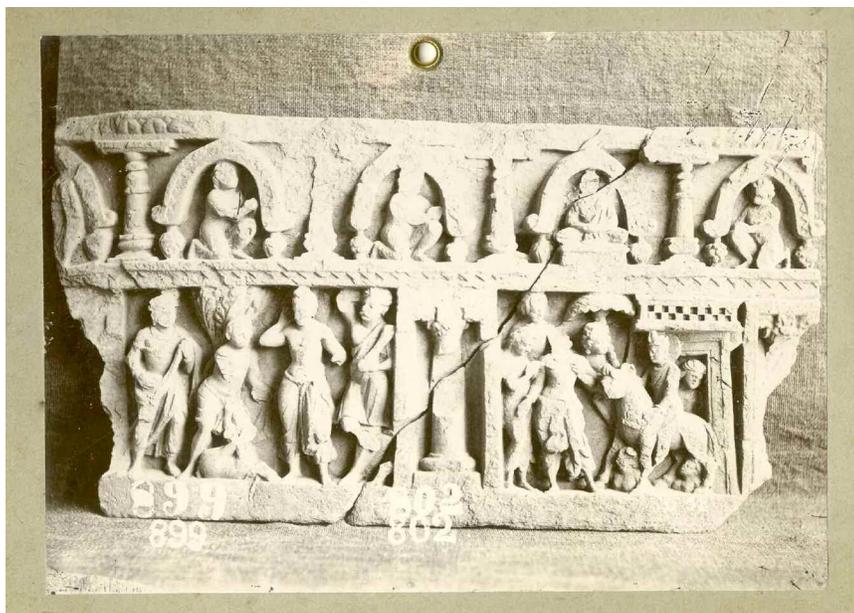
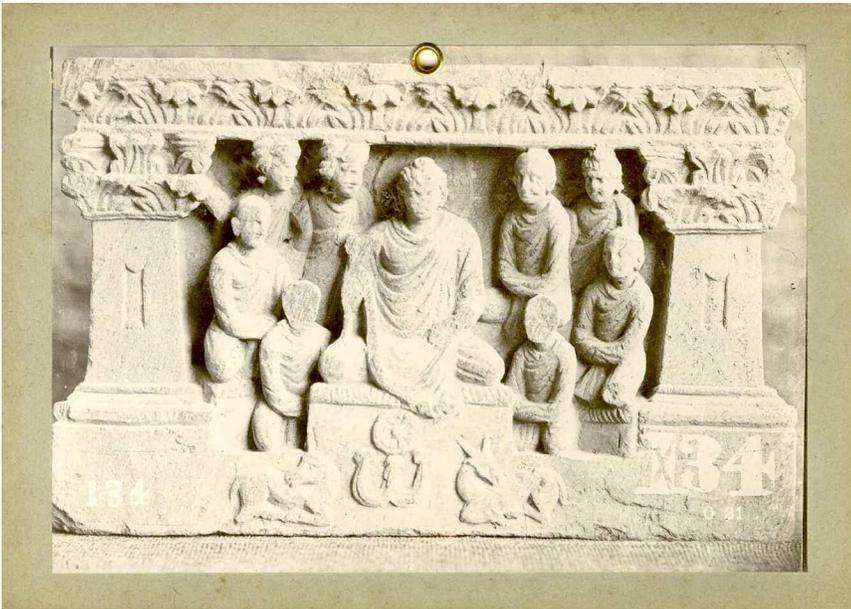


Fig. 6. *The Great Departure* (right). *The Exchange of Clothes*, b/w photograph, silver bromide - gelatin print / paper, Lahore, 1902 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, fondo Speciale "Museo Indiano."

*Fig. 7. The Attack by Māra and His Host, b/w photograph, silver bromide - gelatin print / paper, Lahore, 1902 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, fondo Speciale "Museo Indiano."*



*Fig. 8. The First Sermon, Turning of the Wheel of the Law, b/w photograph, silver bromide - gelatin print / paper, Lahore, 1902 ca. , Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, fondo Speciale "Museo Indiano."*

*Fig. 9. Death of the Buddha, b/w photograph, silver bromide - gelatin print / paper, Lahore, 1902 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, fondo Speciale "Museo Indiano."*





Fig. 10. Relief (fragment), stone, Sanchi (India), early 1st century A.D., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.

ceived an appointment as president of a national branch of an international institution. Pullè's shortage of knowledge on art and archaeology, however, was typical of most Italian scholars of his day.

Evidence that Pullè's colleagues were not very interested in the study of Indian art and archaeology can be found in a letter sent by Pullè on January 13, 1901 to Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, a respected Italian linguist. The founder of the Bologna Indian Museum tried to involve the latter in the Italian Committee of the Indian Exploration Fund. Pullè put together four names on a list, which he sent to Ascoli: Ascoli, Michele Kerbaker, Angelo De Gubernatis, and Emilio Teza. Though they would serve as representatives of the Italian Committee, none of them had confirmed their willingness to serve when Pullè sent the list. Pullè did not receive a reply to his letter. It is interesting to note that all of the scholars whose names appeared on the list were philologists and linguists. In spite of Pullè's endeavors, the efforts directed toward conservation and heritage by Lord Curzon in India at the begin-

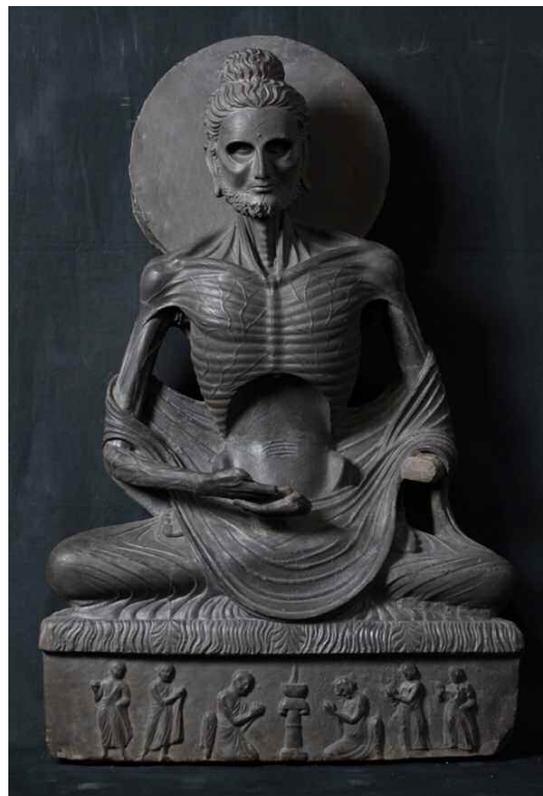
ning of the 20th century discouraged the collecting of artifacts from India (on this point, see Thapar 1989 and Lahiri 2001). So Pullè decided instead to dedicate himself to the gathering of photographs of monuments, as he did in Lahore.

In April 1903, following his return from India, Pullè displayed his photographic prints of Gandhāran art at the Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche in Rome. He also exhibited them for the general public at the people's university of Bologna, where he served as president. The original plates, however, are now lost.

Pullè also acquired a large set of photographs collected from Del Tufo & Co. Studio, an Italian photographic studio based in Madras and Bangalore. Together with the Lahore prints, which were displayed on the walls of the Museo Indiano, they showcase 7th and 8th-century Hindu religious monuments in Mamallapuram. Alongside them was a fragment of a relief from the Sanchi area [Fig. 10] and a plaster cast of the Fasting Śākyamuni taken from Lahore [Fig. 11]. The plaster cast, 8 executed by a student from the local School of Arts, was believed to represent the only likeness of the original sculpture apart from one owned by the king of

Siam.<sup>4</sup> By such means, Bologna became the unlikely home of one of the most valuable photographic collections of Gandhāran art.

Fig. 11. Fasting Śākyamuni, plaster with black polychromy, Lahore (Pakistan), 1902 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.



### Indian and Asian Artifacts

During the Hanoi Congress of Orientalists in 1903, the Ecole française d'Extreme-Orient organized an exhibition focused on Southeast and East Asian products and industries. According to records documenting the sale of his collection to the Italian state in 1904, it was at this time that Pullè began to acquire artifacts. At the same time, he also took his own photographs of the peoples and monuments displayed in the museum overseen by the Ecole française d'Extreme-

Orient. During his stay in Vietnam, Pullè also completed a set of anthropometric cards with measurements taken from native subjects at the Saigon Military Hospital, which provide some insights into his scientific beliefs.

Unfortunately, the surviving documentation from the 1904 sale identifies the objects in Pullè's collection only by number and geographic provenance (e.g., "ethnographic objects from Tonkin"). Only through repeated inquiries at the Museum of Palazzo Poggi and the Anthropology Museum of Padua University, where a relevant part of the artifacts are kept, was it possible to identify these objects with greater precision. At the Hanoi exhibition, it seems that Pullè collected crab- and tortoise-shaped metalworks and a couple of guardian lions. He seems also to have acquired some Chinese fashion garments, among them a Mandarin dress, which was shown at the exhibition.

During his time in India, Pullè visited local dealers and markets, from which he purchased artifacts that represented various scenes from Hindu mythology. In Darjeeling, Pullè bought some photographs of Himalayan people and Buddhist monuments from the Thomas Paar studio, along with some metalworks [Figs. 12-13]. In Uttar Pradesh he collected photographs of Islamic monuments built during the Mughal times, while in Rajasthan he collected several marble statues of gods [Figs. 14-16]. Due to the many layovers in local towns when traveling by railway, Pullè also acquired small statues of Hindu and Buddhist deities from different part of India. Last but not least, as Pullè wrote in a letter addressed to his colleague De Gubernatis, he obtained several manuscripts in Gujarat, which later became part of the Museo Indiano library collection. These and other Indian manuscripts, which are now kept in the Palazzo Poggi Museum in Bologna, remain largely unstudied, to the point that many of the languages have not even been identified yet.

This eclectic collection represents the original exhibition at the Museo Indiano when it opened in 1907. Just one year later, the Bologna municipality agreed to purchase eleven metal statues of Chinese Buddhist deities [Figs. 17-19] from the Pellegrinelli family. As Pullè later observed during a speech to mark his appointment as dean of the Faculty of Literature at the University of Bologna in 1910, such



Fig. 12. Lamp holder with Garuda, metal, Indian Himalayan Region, 1900 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.



Fig. 13. Votive Lamp (*sukunda*), brass, Indian Himalayan Region, 1900 ca., Bologna, Museo di Palazzo Poggi.



*Fig. 14. Ganesh, polychrome marble, Rajasthan (India), 1900 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.*



*Fig. 15. Gaja-Lakshmi, polychrome marble, Rajasthan (India), 1900 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.*

*Fig. 16. Surya, polychrome marble, Rajasthan (India), 1900 ca., Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.*





Fig. 17. *Buddha Man-la (Bhaiṣajyaguru)*, bronze, China, late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.



Fig. 18. *Bodhisattva Puxian (Samantabhadra)*, gilded bronze, China, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.

Fig. 19. *Bodhisattva Maitreya*, bronze, China, late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale.



acquisitions were tangible evidence of progress being made toward his main goal of creating a museum that could represent the arts and crafts of India and East Asia. Still, as it is clear from the creative but inaccurate registration document accompanying the Pellegrinelli collection, Pullè's lack of knowledge about the Chinese Buddhist pantheon simply underscored just how few scholars at that time were interested in, or capable of, supporting his efforts to study Asian art and archaeology—at least in Bologna. Among Pullè's students, only Luigi Suali, who would later become internationally recognized for his studies on Jainism and the life of the Buddha, would prove capable and qualified to take charge of assistance to the museum. Nearby, the only Asian collections of any note were those of Angelo de Gubernatis, a Sanskrit philologist, and Carlo Puini, a professor of Chinese language in Tuscany who collected artifacts chiefly to adorn his house. (The Puini Collection was transferred to the Milan Civic Collection in Castello Sforzesco in 1925-6.) Nevertheless, Pullè never stopped looking for suitable objects to enhance the Museo Indiano collection. Toward this end, he was aided by a bequest from a Bologna aristocrat and by loans and purchases from private collectors.

In the 1920s, the Museo Indiano acquired a collection of ceramic vases from China and Japan that had been bequeathed to the Bologna municipality by Count Agostino Sieri Pepoli. The museum also purchased some metal statues of Buddhist and Taoist divinities—now held in the Palazzo Poggi Museum—from a private collector whose identity is still unknown. A letter from Pullè to the dean of the University of Bologna, however, suggests the involvement of Raffaele Chiarini, a former infantry officer who had participated in the Italian contingent of the eight-nation military expedition to Beijing during the Boxer War in 1900. A letter

written after 1935 by a relative of Chiarini, now held in the university archives, also requests the return of a ceramic vase lent to the Museo Indiano by Chiarini, which was later returned. In the light of these clues, it seems plausible that the dean of the University of Bologna had authorized the purchase of the Chiarini collection on the recommendation of Pullè at some point during the first decade of the 20th century.

### Legacy of the Museo Indiano

During its brief life, the Museo Indiano increased and diversified its holdings. One small collection of African items was obtained through a private loan by another ex-soldier who had seen service in Libya. Pullè's maps of India, which continued to grow in number after his participation in the 1905 Congress of Orientalists in Algiers, when he entertained his colleagues with another lecture around Indian cartography, were moved from their original location in the "Cartografia" room (see Fig. 2) to a new location in the long hallway next to the museum chambers. Here they were placed in between the Agostino Sieri Pepoli ceramics and metal statues. Many other spatial arrangements within the Museo Indiano were also modified. The room which housed statues of Hindu and Buddhist deities was greatly enlarged over time, while a room once dedicated to ethnography was moved to make space for the "Cartografia" chamber. This rearrangement also provided space for the "Camera cinese" (Chinese Room), which was located adjacent to the "Camera indiana" (Indian Room). A handwritten map of the museum, depicted by Pullè himself in 1926, just before his retirement, shows these modifications [Fig. 20].

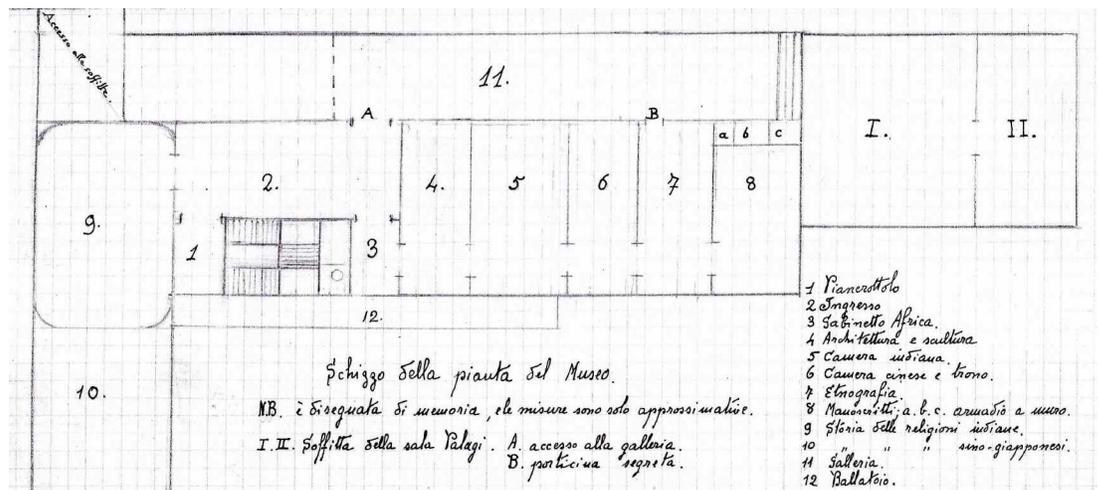


Fig. 20. Plan of the Museo Indiano di Bologna, 1926, Bologna, Archivio Storico Comunale.

Pullè's retirement in 1926 left a glaring void in the Museo Indiano. It was difficult to find anyone of sufficient expertise and diverse interests to succeed him as curator. By the time the museum closed its doors in 1935, its entire staff consisted of a single keeper from the Bologna municipality, who wrote the last inventory in 1936–37. It documents the fate of the artifacts as they were split among the University of Bologna, the city municipality, and the Pullè family. Attempts were made to find more suitable homes for the artifacts: Pullè's son Giorgio offered some objects to the Anthropology Museum at the University of Padua, while Fabio Frassetto, a professor of anthropology at the University of Bologna, explored a transfer to the Istituto di Antropologia. The Frassetto proposal was not acted upon.

In recent years, the Museo di Palazzo Poggi, which is run by the University of Bologna, and the Museo Civico Medievale, which is run by the Municipality, have set up small displays of artifacts from the old Museo Indiano in their permanent collections. The 2018 exhibition *I volti del Buddha* was an attempt to rediscover in a temporary exhibition the fate of Pullè's collecting efforts, from the photographs of ancient Gandhāran art and the plaster cast from the Lahore Museum to the Qing statues from the Pellegrinelli acquisition. But it is mainly through Pullè's large collection of photographs that the true scholarly value and distinctive traits of the Museo Indiano has emerged. The several hundred photographic prints, some made by Pullè himself during his travels through South and Southeast Asia, offer a tantalizing glimpse into European—and more specifically Italian—efforts to understand and interpret Asian history and culture at the beginning of the 20th century.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Luca Villa** is an independent researcher in the field of cultural history. He received his M.A. in Indian Philosophy at the University of Bologna and a Ph.D. in Indology and Tibetology at Turin University. After working together with different public and private institutions, he currently collaborates with Fondazione Del Monte and Fondazione Giovanni XXIII for the religious sciences, photographic inventories, and web-based projects. E-mail: <villagood@gmail.com>.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The photographs can be viewed online at: <[www.cittadegliarchivi.it/mostrevirtuali/l-indocina-e-l-india-del-primi-del-novecento-negli-scatti-di-francesco-lorenzo-pulle](http://www.cittadegliarchivi.it/mostrevirtuali/l-indocina-e-l-india-del-primi-del-novecento-negli-scatti-di-francesco-lorenzo-pulle)>.

<sup>2</sup> The collection can be viewed online at: <[www.cittadegliarchivi.it/pages/getDetail/sysCodId:IT-CPA-FT0073-0000061](http://www.cittadegliarchivi.it/pages/getDetail/sysCodId:IT-CPA-FT0073-0000061)>.

<sup>3</sup> The assignment concerned Lord Reay, in charge of the presidency, for his appointment as president of the Royal Asiatic Society in London; Sir Alfred Lyall (India), Hofrath G. Bühler (Austria), Hendrik Kern (Holland), Serge Oldenburg (Russia), Richard Pischel (Germany), Pullè (Italy), and Émile Senart (France).

<sup>4</sup> A restoration of the plaster cast, completed before the Bologna exhibition by a team from the Accademia delle Belle Arti of Bologna led by Prof. Augusto Giuffredi, was presented to an English audience during a conference, "Celebrating Reproductions: Past, Present, and Future," held from January 17 to 19, 2019 at the Victoria and Albert Museum.