

Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford



# The Geography of Gandharan Art

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## ABSTRACTS

**Dr Jessie Pons (Ruhr-Universität, Bochum)**

***Gandhāran Art(s): Methodologies and Results of a Stylistic Analysis***

The stone sculptures produced during the first centuries of the Common Era share features which justify the designation of ‘a Gandhāran art’: the predominant use of grey schist, the ubiquitous depiction of Buddhist subjects, as well as the aesthetic language, which results from the Indian, Iranian and Greco-Roman heritage of the region. Despite this indubitable homogeneity, local iconographic and formal differences can be identified.

This paper both addresses methodological difficulties associated with the stylistic analysis of Gandhāran art and presents a preview of the results of a doctoral research on the iconographic and formal variations of Buddhist stone sculptures from Greater Gandhāra, completed in 2011. In support of a large corpus of documented pieces (approx. 5000), this research provides an extensive characterisation of the many plastic languages which constitute what is commonly referred to as Gandhāran art.

In the first part, this paper discusses two methodological issues and invites to collectively reflect upon the following questions:

1. The correlation between physical geography, archaeological geography, and political geography. These layers do not always overlap and the discrepancies between these three Gandhāran geographies have often hindered the scholarly assessment of the artistic productions and of their various levels of relationship. Which geographical standards should be used when examining Gandhāran art and more specifically the localisation of production sites?
2. The development of a stylistic vocabulary to describe Gandhāran sculptures and characterise local variations. The work of F. Tissot, D. Faccenna and A. Filigenzi have largely contributed to the standardisation of descriptions of iconographies. Yet, one may question the extent to which a stylistic analysis which primarily relies on iconographic features captures the multiplicity of Gandhāran aesthetic expressions. Should norms in the definition of formal variations be developed?

In the second part, the paper will present some of the results of the doctoral research. In light of two illustrative case-studies, namely a group of sculptures excavated at Zar Dheri and another discovered at Loriyān Tāṅgai, the analytical framework which enabled the circumscription and the definition of the various aesthetic expressions, which may proceed from ‘major or minor schools’, ‘production zones’ and ‘workshops’, will first be expounded. The examination of sculptures from the two sites will subsequently provide an insight into three major issues: the emergence of so-called Mahāyāna imageries; the networks linking Buddhist centres across which artistic motifs and ideas were exchanged and disseminated; and local phenomena of cultural and religious interaction such as the depiction of Dionysian scenes.

By discussing both methodological issues and a selection of findings, this paper attempts to show how a traditional stylistic analysis which concentrates on the geographic logics underlying the variation of iconographic and formal motifs can promisingly contribute to the current issues of Gandhāran studies.

**Dr Satoshi Naiki (Center for Cultural Heritage Studies, Kyoto University)**

***Similarities and Differences in Gandharan Sculptures Among Regions***

Gandharan sculptures have been found not only in the ancient Gandhara region (the Peshawar basin of today), but also in other regions around it, such as the Uddiyana region (the Swat region of today) and the Taxila region. They have similar characteristics, so they have traditionally been lumped together as ‘Gandharan sculptures’. However, owing mainly to the series of excavations conducted by the Italian mission in the Uddiyana region, we have noticed the importance of considering the works separately among regions. So in this presentation, the similarities and differences seen on the sculptures among regions, especially between the Gandhara region and the Uddiyana region, will be examined. Attention will be paid to its stylistic features, technical features and, additionally, inscriptions on them. In the discussion of Gandharan sculptures, it is important to know periods in which works were made. In order to grasp their chronological positions, archaeological data obtained in excavations will be used in this presentation.

Gandharan sculptures found in the Uddiyana region and the Gandhara region have similar stylistic features in each period. However, they do not have similarity in technical features and inscriptions. It can be said that stylistic features were shared among sculptors in these regions, and indigenous sculptors in each region made sculptures with their own techniques.

**Dr Zarawar Khan (University of Swat, Kanju)**

***Sources of Acquisition for the Gandharan Buddhist Sculptures in the Former S.R.O. Collection of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, in the Light of Archival Documents***

The Gandharan Buddhist collection of the former Sub-Regional Office (S.R.O.) Peshawar, of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan which is now owned by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since 2011, consists of a variety of Buddhist sculptures either excavated from archaeological contexts or confiscated by different government agencies. Although some of the Buddhist sculptures in the collection are most important in terms of iconography and can rarely be compared to those housed in different museums of the world, yet these were ignored owing to many reasons. One of the issues related to the collection is its acquisition history which is confused. No reliable information on the collection is available except a computerized inventory register which only shows the name and measurement of an object without any detail about its acquisition history. Therefore this paper is an attempt to establish an acquisition history of the collection by studying the archival documents that have come through different sources such as the police stations, offices of the Custom Department and Judicial complexes.

**Prof Muhammad Ashraf Khan (Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad)**

***Fresh Researches Discoveries at the Badalpur Buddhist monastic Complex, Taxila Valley***

Taxila Valley is one of the highly important Buddhist Centres across the Indus on the east of Gandhara and is also included by scholars in the ancient Gandhara region in term of artistic influences. There are many important Buddhist monasteries and stupas in this valley including Jaulian, Jinnan Wali Dheri, Dharmarajika, Bhamala, Bhalar Tope, Giri, Piplan, Lal Chack, etc. all inscribed on the World Heritage List. It is the area where three important cities of the historic period i.e. Bhir Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh have been identified. The monastery at Badalpur is located in district Haripur of Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa in the greater Taxila valley. It was first visited by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1863 and was subjected to small scale archaeological excavations restricted to the main stupa area only by Natasa Aiyar of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1917. However, no scientific report of the excavations is available and only a random reference in some two paragraphs is available in Marshall's book *A Guide to Taxila*, where he refers to some finds including coins and sealings. This important site did not receive any attention after that until 2005, when the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, decided to excavate the site scientifically. Keeping in view the expanse of the site, the excavations that started in 2005 continued in the subsequent years until 2017. The excavation commenced by the Department stopped in 2008 for lack of further funding. However, the author while heading the Taxila Institute of Asian Civilisations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad managed to obtain funds through the Higher Education Commission (Pakistan) and National Funds for Culture Heritage, Ministry of Information, Broadcasting & National Heritage, Islamabad, and continued the research till 2017. The highly promising aspect of the excavations was that hundreds of coins, sealings, stone and stucco sculptures, metal objects, cult objects, miniature terracotta pots, large numbers of potsherds and bones were found. The most important discovery was that of a Buddha statue in red sandstone from Mathura – like the one that was found by Marshall earlier. It is in sitting position, cross-legged in *Abhaya Mudra*, with signs of wheel on his raised palm and both soles topped by a spiral shaped *ushinisha*. On the back is a peepal tree which is obviously broken on the top and it can be reasonably assumed that the scene clearly depicted the Buddha sitting under this peepal tree. Further, a Bodhisattva Maitreya was also found in schist stone and a beautiful model stupa in soft stone in grey colour. A large number of grinding stones have also been discovered. One of the unique and new concepts in the Buddhist art of monasteries is that instead of one, there are two monasteries. Apart of the main monastery compound, there is another relatively smaller monastic compound on the southern side of the main monastery with a water tank in the middle. The author has worked on this site since 2005 till 2017 and has now been able to sum up his findings. Through this paper, fresh knowledge about this important monastic complex will be shared with scholars attending the conference in light of some unique discoveries.

**Muhammad Habibullah Khan Khattak (Peshawar; former Director of Archaeology, Department of Archaeology & Museums, Pakistan)**

***Fresh Research on the Buddhist Monastic Complex of Takht-i-Bahi***

Takht-i-Bahi is one of the most imposing, gigantic, famous and the best preserved monastic complex in the greater Peshawar Valley and in the heart of the ancient Gandhara country. Yet it did not receive any reference in the accounts of any of the renowned Chinese pilgrims who visited Gandhara between 5th and 8th centuries CE, for reasons that are not known as yet. This omission should be more a matter of concern because it is in close vicinity to important towns of the time including Charsadda (Pushkalavati – the Lotus City) which remained the capital of Gandhara, Shaikhan Dheri equivalent of Sirkap (Taxila) on this side of the Indus and Siri Behlol, a major town suitable for meeting most of the requirements of this huge monastic complex. Our concern should be all the more because Takht-i-Bahi is also in close vicinity to major Buddhist establishments of the heartland of ancient Gandhara i.e. Shahbaz Garhi, Jamal Garhi, Siri Behlol, Chanaka Dheri, Mekha Sanda, Tareli, Sikri, Bala Hisar, Sar Dheri, Aziz Dheri, Sanghao, and Kashmir Smast, etc. It is also not very far from the ancient crossing of the Indus near Hund for onward journey to Taxila and mainland India, the route that has been taken by most of the travelers and invaders in the past. No palpable or acceptable notion has yet come forward with any tangible proof or even circumstantial evidence for this omission. Even the very name of the important world heritage site is controversial and questionable. The theory on which an edifice was built to justify the existing name of Takht-i-Bahi has already lost its very foundation. The archaeological excavations of the two so-called artificial wells or tanks on top of the hill, stated to have been dug for storing and thus giving the name to this monastic complex, proved to be the remains of two beautiful stupas instead of any well or tank.

The chronology of the huge complex has not been established on the basis of any systematic and scientifically conducted excavations. The renowned archaeologist Prof. Ahmad Hassan Dani had suggested the chronology of the site on the basis of constructional phases, without any proper study backed by any concrete and supporting documentary evidence or scientific analysis of the material used, and hence the chronology is open to valid questions. Then it is generally believed that only teachers, Buddhist monks, and students used to stay in the monasteries and the monks used to go out for begging alms and food to meet the dietary needs of the inhabitants of the monasteries. We have, however, found concrete evidence that apart from meeting the spiritual needs of the masses, these religious establishments had a huge built area where students receiving education used to reside; there were residences of the teachers and officials responsible for management of the huge complex who used to live on the campus along with their families; and there were proper arrangements for cooking and serving food to the monks, resident students and travelers etc. An effort will be made to share the fresh knowledge gained through archaeological excavations and realistic study of the surviving buildings through this paper.

**Dr Abdul Ghafoor Lone (Islamabad Museum)**

***Scope of the Buddhist ‘Workshops’ and Artistic ‘Centres’ in Swat Valley, Ancient Uddiyana-Pakistan***

Swat Valley, ancient Uddiyana, is one of the provenances of prime importance for tracing the history of Buddhist art and its emergence in the Indus-Oxus region. The ancient Buddhist art of the Indus-Oxus region has been the focal point of intellectual argument for more than a century and a half. Mainly researchers referred Buddhist Art of Gandhara due to the broad similarity in the theme and style of art pieces discovered from a wide area spreading from Indus in the East (in Pakistan) to the North West (northern Afghanistan) and part of Central Asia. Dr. Farooq Swati has brought to light typical features of the Buddhist sculptures from ancient Uddiyana, presently known as Swat and designated the prevalence of ‘Zonal Workshops’ in each sub-valley. Art zones were constituted of many zonal workshops in each sub-valley. Each zonal style was based in a particular geographical unit or sub-valley. Every style seems to have been the outcome of a few workshops having a common origin. Although fashioned by different hands they share some similar techniques and physical features.

Dr. Swati emphasized three distinct Zonal Workshops representing such styles, with the reservation that there could be more ‘Zonal Styles’ in the whole of the Swat valley. Study of the evolution of Buddhist art in ancient Swat, on the basis of workshops, is not precise, because Dr. Swati fixed the parameters of workshops on stylistic study and numismatic evidence. A solitary chronological reference sequence which may fix all Buddhist sites in Swat valley so far could not be anticipated. Chronologically Gandhara’s period of independent art production is usually dated from the beginning of Common Era until the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Archeological excavations carried out by Italian mission at Swat especially Barikot, Butkara-I, Panr and Saidu Sharif for the first time allow detailed insights into the beginning of flourishing of Buddhism within the region and in its art. Recurrence of styles at different sites in the frame of time and space can never be excluded. On a broader spectrum, the concept of workshops also needs to be reviewed in the light of political and artistic developments and changes in the region. Either these workshops remained active throughout the period i.e. 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. to 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. or survived for a specific period and were renowned as an Uddiyana style.

**Dr Pia Brancaccio (Drexel University, Philadelphia)**

***Regional Workshops and Votive Stupas in the Swat Valley: An Analysis of the Evidence from Gumbat, Saidu Sharif and Panr***

This paper explores a series of sculptural friezes once associated with minor Buddhist monuments such as votive stupas from the sites of Gumbat, Saidu Sharif and Panr in Swat. These friezes were brought to light by the archaeological explorations of Barger and Wright in 1938 and by the Italian Archaeological Mission during its last fifty years of activity in the region; they are now in the holdings of the Swat Museum, the Museo Nazionale di

Arte Orientale G. Tucci in Rome and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. A thorough re-examination of these sculptural remains with a special focus on the analysis of artistic patterns, carving techniques and stone types employed suggests the existence of a possible 'workshop' that operated at a regional level mostly on commissions of minor monuments at different Buddhist sites in Swat.

**Dr Alexandra Vanleene (Strasbourg)**

***Differences and Similarities in Gandharan Art Production: The Case of the Modeling School of Haḍḍa (Afghanistan)***

The expression of Gandharan Art, a sacred art in the service of the hagiography of the Buddha, varies according to the regions where it developed. Many grey areas still remain, in regard to dating, defining foreign and local influences, and understanding the operating mode of ancient workshops, and of the circulation of artists and models. Indeed, we can observe so many cases of diverse artistic influences, distinctive execution, and iconographic specificities, that it becomes problematic to properly apprehend and understand the evolution, exchanges, and interactions that make Gandharan art so alive and perennial.

As part of this workshop dedicated to the Geography of Gandharan Art, we are going to consider the case of the modeling school of Haḍḍa in Afghanistan, first through some eloquent examples of similarities between its artistic production, and those of other sites from the region. We will then examine cases of original and unique artistic expression, in particular the creation of three-dimensional modelled representations, becoming more and more detached from their support, and characterized by a strong Hellenistic heritage. We will also present some peculiar iconographic choices and examples of painting revealing various artistic influences. Lastly, before concluding, we will explain what the examination and analysis of the whole decoration of the monastic complex of Haḍḍa teaches us regarding the evolution of the Buddhist doctrine.

**Dr Stefan Baums (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich)**

***Place Names in Gāndhārī Inscriptions***

Many of the 1,121 Gāndhārī inscriptions currently known and assembled in the Dictionary of Gāndhārī corpus (Baums & Glass 2002- ; <https://gandhari.org/catalog>) contain place names indicating, for the main part, where a work of religious art has been dedicated. This kind of information is of great importance not only for our understanding of Gandhāran art, but also for the history of the Gāndhārī language, which is attested in a multitude of variants that should, at least partly, be based on dialectal differences. While some of the place names in Gāndhārī inscriptions are readily identifiable (for instance, Taksasila or Taksāila corresponding to Sanskrit Taksasilā and, indirectly, to Greek Tákila), the majority remain obscure both as concerns their geographic coordinates and often also in their linguistic derivation. In this connection it is particularly regrettable that many of the more recent discoveries of Gāndhārī inscriptions and manuscripts have reached scholarship through the art market and with unknown provenance, rather than through proper archeological excavation - every place mentioned on such an object could have been located if its origin had not been suppressed. In spite of this serious obstacle, and hoping to remedy it, in this paper I present findings from a complete survey of the epigraphical toponymy of Gāndhārī, placing names on the map where possible, assigning them to language families where feasible, and grouping the rest by phonetic similarity. I illustrate the importance of such a systematic survey with a recently reunited Buddha image and halo that I could show to be from the same stūpa, even though all other aspects of their shared toponym remain unclear.

**Dr Jason Neelis (Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario)**

***Making Places for Buddhism in Gandharan Sacred Geography - Stories of Past and Present Births in Images and Texts***

This paper will address how Gandharan artisans and scribes refer to and construct sacred geographies through narrative domestication of the past and present births of the Buddha and other figures. Similarities and differences between visual and literary cultures are understood in relation to an impetus to appropriate and situate stories in the hybrid milieu of Gandhara. I will propose that the reception of foreign (to South Asia) elements facilitated the process of making a place or home for Buddhism in Gandhara.