

Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford



The Rediscovery & Reception of Gandharan Art

*The fourth workshop of the **CARC Gandhara Connections Project** generously supported by the Bagri Foundation and Richard Beleson*

24th – 26th March, 2021

The workshop will be held online using Zoom and Spatial Chat (details and instructions will be provided to those who have booked a place). It will also be recorded and made available on the Gandhara Connections webpages (www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections).

Abstracts

DAY ONE History of Archaeology; Sources and Contexts

Dr Elizabeth Errington (Former project curator, British Museum)

Reconstructing Jamalgarhi: The Archaeological Record 1848-1923

The archaeological legacy left by 19th-century British excavations in Gandhara has often been seen in a purely negative light. Partly this is due to the fact that before the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India, reports of official excavations were randomly published by different government departments and are now difficult to access. But these reports are a valuable source of information for reconstructing the sites, despite the limitations of archaeological practice at that time.

Jamalgarhi was the first Gandhara site in the Peshawar Valley to be investigated. Following its discovery in 1848, it was excavated in 1852, 1873 and 1918–23. The records of the 1873 excavation are especially informative and have been used extensively here to identify the sculptures and gain a clearer idea of the site.

Dr Rafiullah Khan (Taxila Institute, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad)

Archaeology in the Princely States of India: The Indian Political Service, the Walis of Swat and the Barger Expedition (1938)

Archaeological work in the Indian subcontinent, till 1947, may be generally seen in two different administrative as well as political contexts, namely British administered areas and the princely states. Quite sufficient historiographical and critical studies have so far appeared regarding how archaeology was viewed, done and administered in these different but simultaneously interconnected frameworks. The present study aims to explore and analyse the archaeological expedition led by Evert Barger to the Swat State in 1938. Swat was embedded to the Political Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral which was constituted in 1895, after the successful operations of the Chitral Relief Force.

This paper, in the first place, discusses formative developments with respect to the Barger expedition, such as the idea and proposal of work in Swat, its justification and the approval granted by the Provincial Government, Political Administration at Malakand and the Swat State authorities. It is followed by a delineation of the terms of reference and all through the expedition's work their ultimate fate. Furthermore, it is shown that the initial good pretensions of investigating Gandhara art in a scientific manner were just to camouflage the real intentions: a hasty collection of Gandhara sculptures and other valuables. Finally, all this was, arguably, made possible in the paradoxical situation inherent in the concept and phenomenon of princely autonomy and imperial paramountcy.

Dr Kurt Behrendt (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Finding Contexts for Gandharan Sculpture

This paper is an attempt to trace the impact of Gandharan sculpture from its inception through time and across Asia. Remarkably, Gandharan art was recontextualized in the greater Buddhist world, and over time was remembered and given new meanings. The initial reuse and the export of actual Gandharan sculptures rapidly gave way to copies of Gandharan images, narrative formats, and iconographies. Even the idea of the first true portrait of Shakyamuni goes back to a sandalwood image from Udayana (Swat) that was copied in China, and which then went on to become important in Japan long after Gandhara lay in ruins. Padmasambhava, who purportedly brought esoteric practices to the Himalayas, also hailed from Udayana. It is probably not coincidental that late Gandharan bronzes remain under worship in Tibetan monasteries even today. With the archaeological discovery of Gandhara in the nineteenth century, Buddhist communities again embraced its imagery. Notably, fasting Buddha images, based on the one excavated at Sikri, began to appear in devotional contexts in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and India. While beyond the scope of this paper, Gandharan sculpture housed in museums across the world continue to impact modern Buddhist imagery. For communities in the 21st century, the discovery of early Buddhist texts in Gandhara again highlights the importance of this ancient tradition.

DAY TWO Provenance and Collection History; Constructing the Gandharan Legacy

Prof Muhammad Ashraf Khan (Taxila Institute, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad)

The Sukker Collection of Buddhist Sculptures: History of Discovery, Issues of Their Provenance and Chronology

Dr Zarawar Khan (University of Swat, Kanju)

Gandharan Stucco Sculptures from Sultan Khel (Former Khyber Agency), in the Collection of Peshawar Museum: A Study in Three Parts

Since its inception, the Peshawar Museum in Peshawar has acquired thousands of valuable antiquities, especially Hindu and Buddhist sculptures discovered either in the archaeological excavations or gifted and donated by the military and civil servants of British India. Among the latter group, there is a collection of Buddhist stucco sculptures exhumed near the great Shpola stupa of Khyber Agency, by the officers of Garrison Engineer. The collection ultimately reached Peshawar Museum after a series of corresponding letters between the Political Agent of Khyber and the Archaeological Survey of India, Frontier Circle, Peshawar. A set of those letters preserved in the Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Peshawar, adds new data to the provenance and acquisition history of the collection and sheds light on the unsuccessful efforts made for the preservation of Shpola Stupa during the British period. The present study aims to establish the provenance of the collection in the light of archival material, its catalogue and results of XRD and EDX analysis.

Dr Andrew Amstutz (University of Arkansas, Little Rock)

Buddhist Art, Italian Museums, and the Exhibition of an Ancient Past for Pakistan

In 1956, Pakistan's National Museum in Karachi inaugurated a new exhibit of Gandharan sculpture to commemorate the 2,500th birth anniversary of the Buddha. This exhibit in Karachi roughly coincided with another beginning, that of the first excavations of the Italian Archaeological Mission to Pakistan, which was part of the long-term Pakistani-Italian collaborations in the excavation and preservation of Gandharan artefacts. Taking these developments in the mid-1950s as a starting point, this paper analyzes the temporary exhibits and popular publications about Gandharan art in both Pakistan and Italy from 1956 to 1964. My paper begins to address what the study of the exhibition of Gandharan art in early post-colonial Pakistan can contribute to larger historiographical debates over the politics of the ancient past in modern South Asia, as well as to scholarship on the reception of Gandharan art. My paper suggests that Pakistani curators and some public intellectuals publicized ancient Buddhist material culture to make sense of Pakistan's recent creation as a religious homeland in the mid-twentieth century and to imagine global ties for the new republic in the 1950s and 1960s. In turn, both Pakistani and Italian museums exhibited Gandharan artifacts to engage non-specialist audiences in the interpretation of the distant past.

DAY THREE Constructing the Gandharan Legacy

Dr Michael Falser (Heidelberg University)

From Colonial Archaeology to Transregional Pilgrimage: Gandhara's Buddhist Heritage Revisited

When the first director of the British-colonial Archaeological Survey of India, Alexander Cunningham, published his 1871 study *The ancient geography of India*, he recontextualised the north-west Indian traces of ex-Gandharan sites along the pilgrimage route of the Chinese monk-traveller Hwen Thsang from the seventh century CE. Ever since did Western experts, from the French Orientalist Alfred Foucher and ASI's next director, John Marshall, onwards, unearth and explain archaeological sites of Gandhara, such as the famous Takht-i-Bahi monastery in today Pakistan, through ancient ritual circumambulation practices of ancient Buddhist monks and pilgrims. However, this combined package of archaeological evidence and re-imagined spatial religious practice also migrated, as this contribution will investigate, into the twentieth and twenty-first century heritage sector. As secularized sites to venerate the Gandharan legacy in areas where Buddhism in reality ceased to be practised, colonial museums in British India set the stage for performative heritage experiences. Today, newly emerging interest groups from Japan to South Korea reinvent Gandhara's ancient sacred space by reconnecting their recent nation state identities back to deeper Buddhist roots. The result is a new hybrid format of transregional pilgrimage to and globally shared inheritance practices of the Gandharan legacy.

Dr Shaila Bhatti (National College of Arts, Lahore) (read by P. Stewart)

Stories of Gandhara: Antiquity, Art and Idols

The presence of Gandhara sculptures in many iconic museums in the west is a stable celebratory act of the artistic skill of an ancient civilisation of the east. But what happens if the focus is on a collection outside the west? Then what stories can be told? The central focus of this paper will be on the Gandhara collection at the Lahore Museum, Pakistan through which I aim to tell three different stories. Each story has its own understandings, appropriations/rejections and relationships with the collection, organisation and display of the sculptures at the museum as influenced by larger cultural contexts. By examining the discourse formed around these ruins/art/idols I hope to bring forth larger socio-political, religious and cultural issues in which the Gandhara sculptures of the Lahore Museum have been imbricated in the past and present.

Through an anthropological prism, I will firstly explore how the discovery and display of Gandhara pieces during the colonial period established a proximity between the colonizer and colonized through a civilizational and artistic connection between the east and west. However, this iconic familiarity was disrupted by Partition at the end of colonial rule and the collection was subject to new ideologies, histories and appropriations. The second story then

dives into the postcolonial re-display of the Gandhara collection as an identity marker with historical depth and rootedness, whilst recently being used to counter the terrorist image of Pakistan by enrolling it for cultural tourism in the nation. And lastly, the third story adds to the official narrative the voices of a myriad of individuals who visit the museum collection but also those other interests in Gandharan objects to provide a sense of the cultural politics and memory in wider society.

Dr Helen Wang (British Museum)

Gandhara in the News: Rediscovering Gandhara in The Times

This presentation will trace the rediscovery and reception of Gandhara as seen in *The Times* newspaper. Gandhara is mentioned about 150 times in the 136 years between 1878 and 2014, by different people in different ways.

Dr Shailendra Bhandare (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

Art of Deception: Perspectives on the Problem of Fakery in Gandhara

Early colonial exploration of Gandhara was prompted by tracing Alexander's footprints in the area. The reception of Gandharan Art in early twentieth century revolved particularly around it being 'L' Art Gréco-Bouddhique'. The 'hellenizing power' of both these themes resulted in a lot of interest in Gandharan objects that were essentially viewed and studied on the one hand, for being 'pan-Hellenic' and on the other, through the paradigmatic lens of being 'syncretic'. Both attitudes meant that Gandharan art was received, directly or indirectly, not only as an important artistic school but also as 'exotic' in terms of its nature and style, being highly valued by collectors. This in turn created a demand for Gandharan objects far more than its market might cater for, and thus a stimulus for making fakes of Gandharan objects including coins, seals, and sculptures. My paper will offer perspectives into this phenomenon, its origins in the colonial period and its continuation to the present. It will explore techniques, grades of sophistication and the history of such objects with some salient examples. Since the 'exoticization' of Gandharan objects can also be seen as an orientalising and colonizing project, I would argue that understanding fakery as a trope in studies of Gandharan Art is also a means to 'decolonize' it, with reference to its understanding and appreciation.