

A Marvelous Buddha Sculpture in the Reserve Collection of Peshawar Museum (Pakistan)

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Abstract: This paper presents an investigation about a Buddha image in preaching posture which is preserved in the Peshawar Museum under the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums; Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan) and identifies as Collection of Sub-Regional Office, (S.R.O) Peshawar (former Federal Department of Archaeology & Museums). This Collection constitute more than one hundred individual Gandhara Buddha images from 1st century BCE to 4th-5th century CE representing as; Buddha heads, Buddha in different postures i.e. in Abhaya mudrā, dhyāna mudrā, and dharmacakra mudrā. The present research paper introduces the S.R.O Peshawar Collection and focuses on the iconographical study of remarkable preaching Buddha image in the same collection.

Keywords: Buddha image, Buddha image, Development of Buddha image, Gandhara, Mathura.

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Introduction

“Gandhāra” word for the first time appears in *Rigveda*, a collection of old Indian hymns dated back to around 2nd Millennium BCE, which describes the region located on the north-western frontier land of Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent¹. Presently this region is located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The name of this area is well described by Greek historians, such as Herodotus, Ptolemy and Strabo who record its name with little variation, such as *Gandarioi*, *Gandarae*, and *Gandaritis*². The Pali sources also mentions that Gandhāra was one of India’s sixteen *mahajanapadas*³. The Behistun inscriptions listing the 23 territories of King Darius-I (522-486 BCE) includes the land of Gandhāra along with that of Bactria and that of Sakas in Persian dominion⁴. The Kushans rule over Gandhāra, after Ashoka, is considered as a significant event in the history of this region, which is credited for the development of Buddhism in this region, well elaborated by the remains in its art and architectural

forms. Kushan support of Indian, Greek, Roman and Iranian skills in art works had a considerable impact on the art further developed the art of Gandhāra, located at the cross road of diverse cultures in the surroundings⁵. The Buddhist art of Gandhara is known for its earliest depiction of Buddha in human form. Highlighting the personality of Buddha, the art of Gandhara, represents him in various postures like, *Abhaya mudrā*⁶, *bhumisparsa mudrā*⁷, *dhyāna mudrā*⁸, and *dharmacakra mudrā*⁹. The Gandhara specimens are displayed in various museums and private collections all over the world. Moreover, a large collection is also kept in the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

History of the Old Collection of Gandhara Art

During British Colonial rule in Indian Sub-continent, Frontier Circle of Archaeological Survey of India was established at Peshawar in 1906 for the protection of monuments in the former North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)¹⁰. After the independence of Pakistan, Sub Regional Office (S.R.O) Peshawar was established by the Department of Archaeology and Museums on 3rd August 1972¹¹. In sequel of 18th Constitutional Amendment in April 2011, the administrative control of all the “Protected Antiquities” declared in term of Antiquities Act, 1975 by the Federal Department of Archaeology and Museums (located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province) including the storage of S.R.O Peshawar were transferred to Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar. The Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Peshawar houses a large number of registered antiquities, which were collected before and after independence of Pakistan from different sources such as: archaeological excavations/explorations, acquisitions, donations, and gifts. Beside this, it comprises a large number of objects confiscated by the local Police or customs authorities, while smuggling out of the country illegally. Despite the fact that strict legislation was provided since early 19th century by the British Indian Government and later on by the Government of Pakistan, the illegal trade and smuggling of precious antiquities seems very much existed since long. This collection is, no doubt, a very important collection of antiquities which have been remained un-attended by the researchers since long. Besides other antiquities, this collection includes a large number of Gandhara specimens that are unique and need special mention. One such specimen is that of the Buddha in *dharmachakra mudra*, which is the main focus of this paper.

Stylistic Features of Buddha Images

The Buddhist artists began very early to represent not only figures of Buddha, Bodhisattva and other Buddhist teachers and saints, but also episodes from the series of his former incarnations, the stories of which are told in the *Jatakas*¹². About the image of Buddha, C. Sivaramamurti¹³ has mentioned in the following words:

“North Western India has been a meeting place of many cultures, and the influences of the Greeks the wake of Alexander’s invasion has left a permanent impress on the sculpture in this area. The Greeks were superseded by the Scythians who in their turn with overcome by the Kushanas all to a greater or less extend in touch with Western art. The anatomy of the figures, the arrangement of drapery, the treatment of hair, the poses and attitudes of the figures all suggest this influences. The earliest representation of Buddha in human form which comes from the Gandhara are depicts him almost as a Greek youth (Sivaramamurti 1954: 6)”.

According to Huntington, the Korean Buddhist Canon number 281, *Tso fo hsiang hsiang ching*, (*Tathāgatha pratibimbapratisthānusamsasutra*), “Buddha spoken Buddha-image making sutra”, is

one of a number of Chinese translation of a detailed account of the measurements and proportions of Buddha images. These translations are all more or less closely related and in quite close agreement on the proportions. In his note on the Buddha's image, Waley also cites the vinaya of the Mula Sarvastivadins as stating that when "Anathapindaka asks if it is permissible to make images of the Buddha's earthly semblance", he is told that there is no objection. This text was translated in 170 C.E and is further strong evidence of an early tradition of images¹⁴. It is mentioned by Nirmal C. Sinha that in *Samyutta Nikaya*, also *Majjhima Nikaya* is related the story of disciple Vakkali who in his deathbed was most eager to see Buddha in person. Buddha came to him and said "O Vakkali why you crave to have like at this body of impure matter. Vakkali one who perceives Dhamma perceives me. One who perceives me perceives Dhamma". In the same Nikayas, Buddha is on record thus "One who perceives Pratiyasamutpada, perceives Dharma; one who perceives Dharma, perceives Pratiyasamutpada". In short Buddha said that his Teachings were important and not his Kaya (body). It was an injunction against adoration of the Master's image, this is, Buddha Rupa or image of Buddha¹⁵.

The significant features of the image of Buddha are elaborated by depictions of postures, stylistic elaborations in the representation of garments, and their detailed iconographical importance. Besides, these features represent the cultural diversity in local traditions, practiced among the Buddhist believers of Gandhāra region, developed between the first century BCE to fourth/ fifth century CE. The Buddha sculptures are generally considered to be the most customary images in Gandhāra Art. The hair style tradition follows the basic pattern of a bun (*uṣṇīṣa*) on the top of the head with the rest of the hair either pulled up into it or arranged in iconographical determined conventions, such as snail-shell curls. Similarly, the size and shape of the bun and the curvilinear treatment of the hairline, receding somewhat at the sides, seems to confirm the close relationship between the images from the northwest and Buddha and Jain images from the *Mathurā* region. In Gandhāra, no later than the 1st century is indicated as there is no evidence of the *kapardin* fashion having been used for images of the Buddha. In Swāt (ancient land of Uddiyana) in Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan) the low flat topknot seems gradually to have given way to one that was higher rising and bulbous. The high bulbous *jatāmukuta* is frequently secured by a band that displays a set jewel or square knot at center front suggesting influences specially associated with Hellenistic jewelry styles and perhaps high chignon fashion worn by the *Sakas* and *Parthians*. As elaborated by Schmidt,¹⁶ these hair bands are reminiscent of the types worn in Greece, Asia Minor and South Russia during the Hellenistic period. During the period of florescence, a somewhat reduced in size, rounded bun, generally referred to as an *usnisa*, became the conventionalized mode. For comparative analysis the images of Buddha discovered from Shaikhan Dheri and Swāt are however well comparable. It is further mentioned by the same writer that the figures that are later in date continue to display wavy hair similar to the examples from Shaikhan Dheri site although there is an increasing tendency toward fuller, fleshy and somewhat flattened facial features, such as those seen in an additional example from Takht-i-Bahī, district Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Iconographical Study of Buddha in the Posture of *Dharmachakra Mudra* in the Collection

The word "*mudra*" in Buddhist art designates certain significant gestures performed by the hands. In the posture of *dharmacakra mudrā*, both hands are brought together before the chest, the right with palm inwards and fingers curled is held above the left, which also keeps the palm hidden while its fingers touch the bottom of the upper hand, their tips perhaps thrust in a short way but with the thumb

usually quite visible¹⁷. The image of Lord Buddha in the posture of *dharmacakra mudrā* (Accession No. S.R.O 1036, Old I.D No. 19) preserved in the reserve of Peshawar Museum (identifies as Collection of Sub-Regional Office, Peshawar of former Federal Department of Archaeology & Museums) is an extraordinary piece in many ways (fig.1). This Buddha image with un-known provenance measures 42 cm height and 24.5 cm wide, in grey schist which is commonly available in Peshawar Valley of ancient Gandhāra region. Not only in size and material but also in visual style it exhibits remarkable affinities in style with the Buddha image (fig. 2) as mentioned by Sir John Marshall¹⁸ (PL. 89, fig. 124). The Buddha (fig.1) is seated in *vajrāsana* and in the gesture of *dharmacakra mudrā*, on a decorated lotus throne. The face of the Buddha image is in round shape, left side of the Buddha image from forearm and hands are partially chipped off and large halo is partially broken from right side. The wavy hair are combed backwards which runs into low round *uṣṇīṣa*¹⁹ with a cord at its base. The Buddha is carved beautifully with narrow forehead; *ūrṇā*²⁰ between the eye brows is also visible. The half close eyes, shady eye brows and lids are prominent. The aquiline nose, with blond nostrils and the elongated earlobes carved beautifully show the perfection in the execution by the sculptor. Its delicate lips and rather round edge chin are pleasingly beautiful. The shoulders of Buddha are shown broad while chest is wide; the arms are however, round and fleshy.

This Buddha image is shown in monastic robe leaving his right shoulder bare which is corresponding to Mathura style. This mode of wearing robe with the right shoulder bare was introduced in to Gandhāran art probably in the second century. The *uttarīya* covers Buddha's left shoulder and he also wears a *paridhāna*, the robe that covers both knees leaving right feet bare and in upward position which is spreads on the throne, toes and soles are well modeled, and hands are in preaching pose, all the fingers face inwards and thumb of the lower hand touch the bottom of the upper hand. The drapery folds seem chiefly in well rounded, ridges and terraces are flattened at the knees to form low strip. Throne is decorated with open lotus design with rows of up-turned petal leaves gracefully. The iconographical features of this Buddha image show close resemblance with the Buddha image depicted in the panel representing the Miracle of Sravasti (fig. 2) reported from Sahr-i-Bahlol (1912), and presently at Peshawar Museum. According to Marshall this image is a good example of characteristic of Gandhāra sculpture towards the end of the second century C.E, when art had become smug and complacent and the craftsmanship excelled.

The Buddha image, under the study (fig.1), bears close resemblance with a Buddha image (fig. 3) which is in the private collection, (Europe) as illustrated (Catt. No. 224) by Isao Kurita²¹. While carrying out comparison of iconographical features of both Buddha images with each other it is observed that; the face of later is oval in shape, the eyes are half closed, wavy hair combed backward are treated with top-knot becoming almost *uṣṇīṣa*, the mark of *ūrṇā* in the center of forehead is prominent, the monastic robe covers his body leaving right arm bare, the folds of drapery are in ridges and terraces, the halo which is a distinguished characteristic of Buddha image is shown prominently. The Buddha image, under study (fig.1), can also be compared with the Buddha in *dharmacakra mudrā* (fig.4) discovered from Dharmarajika Stūpa (Taxila), now in the Taxila Museum (Accession No. 324 Dh.16-237) and published (Catt. No. 89) by Muhammad Ashraf Khan²². This Buddha image is seated on an inverted lotus throne, whereas other iconographical features of this Buddha are almost akin to the Buddha image (fig.1) except the drapery depiction which is in higher relief across the chest. Between the knees and lying flat on the seat are a semicircular lower edge and thicker undulating fall of gathered drapery from the right forearm, where an edge of the back throw is drawn close and a small loop hangs beside it.



Figure 1: Buddha in *dharmacakra mudrā*, provenance unknown, now in Peshawar Museum Collection



Figure 2: Buddha in *dharmacakra mudrā*, (After Sir John Marshall, 1960: 96, Pl. 89, fig. 124)

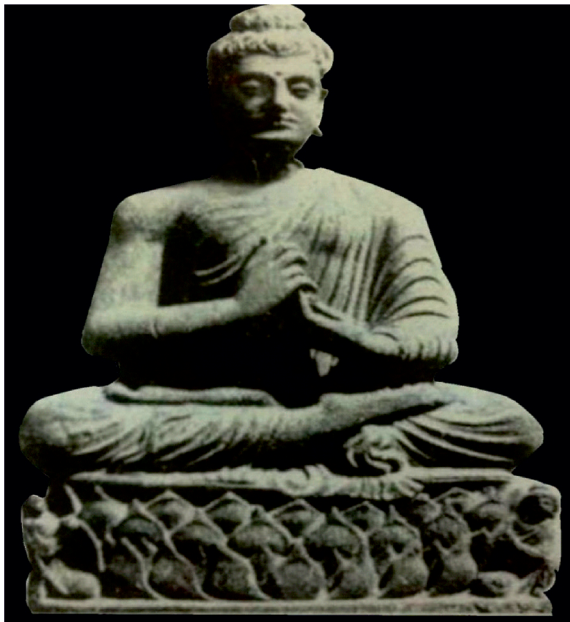


Figure 3: Buddha image in private collection, (After Isao Kurita, 1990: 89, Catt. No. 224)



Figure 4: Buddha in *dharmacakra mudrā*, (After Muhammad Ashraf Khan, 2005: 67, No. 324, Catt. 89)

Conclusion

This Buddha image in the posture of *dharmacakra mudrā* in the Peshawar Museum Collection, Peshawar (Pakistan) having un-known provenance is a master piece which is characteristic of Gandhāra sculpture. In stylistic sequence and iconographical details this image resembles with some other images with similar iconographical details discovered from Gandharān sites therefore it can be

associated from the Peshawar Valley in Gandharā, Pakistan. After comparative and stylistic study of this very significant sculpture of Buddha with other objects discovered from Gandhara we can suggest that this piece is datable towards the end of the second century C.E, when art became popular and the Gandhāra art was already at its climax.

Notes

1. Harald Ingholt, *Gandhara Art in Pakistan*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1957, p. 13.
2. Ihsan Ali & M. Naeem Qazi, *Gandharan Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum*, Hazara University, Mansehra, Khyber Printers, Peshawar, 2008, p. 1.
3. S. Dietz, Buddhism in *Gandhara*, in *The Spread of Buddhism*, ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, Leiden, Boston, 2007, p. 50.
4. Takayasu Higuchi, *Gandhara: Its Geography and History*, in *Gandhara Art of Pakistan*, Exhibition Catalogue, NHK, Japan, 1984, p. 210.
5. Abdul Samad, *Emergence of Hinduism in Gandhara, An Analysis of Material Culture*, PhD dissertation, Freie University, Berlin, 2010, p. 29.
6. Reassurance posture of Buddha
7. Calling the earth to witness posture of Buddha
8. Meditation posture of Buddha
9. Preaching posture of Buddha
10. Muhammad Rafique Mughal, *Heritage Management and Conservation in Pakistan: The British Legacy and Current Perspective*, In *Pakistan Heritage No. 3*, Hazara University, Mansehra, 2011, pp . 126-27.
11. Ahmed Nabi Khan, *Archaeology in Pakistan, Administration, Legislation and Control*, Department of Archaeology and Museums, Karachi, 1990, p. 28.
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17. Badshah Sardar, *A Catalogue of the Stelae Explored by various Archaeological Missions in Swat Valley*, *Journal of Asian civilizations*, Islamabad, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2003, p.123.
18. Sir John Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhara*, Cambridge Press, England, 1960, p. 96.
19. Protuberance over the head, one of the *lakshanas* of Buddha .
20. Circular dot on the forehead of Buddha, one of the *lakshanas* of Buddha.
21. Isao Kurita, *The World of the Buddha, Gandhara Art-II, Ancient Buddhist Art Series*, Japan, 1990, p. 89.
22. M. Ashraf Khan et al. *A Catalogue of Stone Sculptures in the Taxila Museum*, Department of Archaeology and Museums, Islamabad, 2005, p. 67.

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