

Heritage in Stone An Analytical Perspective on Gandharan Art and Archaeo-Tourism Potential at Taxila Museum

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an analytical investigation of Gandharan art, with a particular emphasis on the ornate patterns found in stone sculptures held at the Taxila Museum. The investigation, which draws on archaeological data from key Gandharan sites such as Peshawar, Swat, Mardan, and eastern Afghanistan, investigate show artistic motifs including floral, geometric, and figurative elements reflect a synthesis of Hellenistic and Buddhist cultures. These decorative features, such as lotus, pipal and foliate designs, not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the sculptures but also convey philosophical religious and cultural implications. The research highlights the enduring influence of Gandharan art, its cross-cultural influences with regions like the Gangetic valley, and its demand to modern scholars and tourists alike. Additionally, the paper critically measures the existing challenges fronting heritage conservation in Pakistan, highlighting the need for corresponding strategies to protection archaeological sites. It supports sustainable archaeo-tourism as a means of both preserving cultural heritage and promoting regional development.

Keywords: Gandharan art, Archaeo-tourism, Regional development

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is amongst the countries of the world which are blessed with rich cultural heritage (Khan and Hasan 2003: 55). Pakistan is an ancient land that cradled Indus and Gandhara civilizations (Malik 2008: 13). Gandhara stands out uniquely in the history of Pakistan from historical, geographical, political, religious, and cultural point of views (Khan and Lone 2004: 7). Gandhara valley is located on the Northwestern Region of Pakistan (Allchin 1982:313) which remained a stronghold of Buddhism from 3rd century to 5th century BCE (Kakar 2008:38). *Takshashila* (Taxila), *Pushkalavati* (Charsadda near Peshawar), and *Udabhadrapura* (Hund near Attock) were ancient capitals of the region. Taxila, one of the most important components of the Gandhara civilization is located East of the Indus River, about 30 Kilometers from Pakistan's capital, Islamabad (Khan et al 2005: 13).

Regveda, the oldest document of the Indo-Aryans, describes earliest literary references to the Gandhara region (Zwalf 1997:15). According to Ramayana, Bharata founded the city *Takshashila* and named it after his son *Taksha*, who was its first ruler. It was later shortened as *Taxila* by Greek (Parker 2012:295) which was the capital of Gandhara (Prasad 1977:72). Mahabharata had been recited at this place for the

first time. Jataka stories of Buddhist literature also state Taxila, the capital of Gandhara Kingdom, which was known as great epic of learning (Marshall 1960:10). Taxila was conquered by many great rulers in the past. In 327 BCE Alexander conquered Taxila, and then Taxila came under the rule of Mauryan dynasty where it touched highest glory under great Asoka (Nadiem 2003: 11-12).

Taxila is amongst the well-known archaeological sites of the world and UNESCO declared it a world heritage site (Khan and Lone 2004:15). Taxila remained center of Buddhism, the world-famous Gandhara sculpture and the center of learning and culture. The site between the 5th century BCE through the 2nd Century CE include numerous historical buildings, settlements and monasteries and shows architectural influences for the length of its role as a Buddhist training center. The richness and variety of the famed Gandhara sculpture attracts people's attention. There are many images of Buddha found from the area in stone, terracotta and stucco and numerous panels portraying important stages of the Buddha's life. It remained as cradle of learning of Gandhara art of sculpture, architecture, and education and played a core role in the spread of Buddhist philosophy (Mailk 2008: 13). Buddha philosophy was officially known as Buddhism and its doctrine spread rapidly all over the sub-continent (Askari 2000: 19). Taxila museum has a large collection of masterpieces, where the sculpture and other antiquities, from colossal to miniature, present improvident beauty and entrance artistry.

The style of art associated with the Gandhara school, exhibits a blending of Bactrian, Graeco - Roman and Indian concepts (Dani 1999:359). The Gandhara art that flourished in the North- West Region of Pakistan, from sixth century BCE to fifth century CE, left an everlasting imprint on the cultural milieu of Pakistan. Hundreds of stupas and monasteries were erected in Gandhara at valleys like Peshawar, Mardan, Dir, Bajaur, Buner, Taxila, and Eastern Afghanistan. The sculpture and other antiquities discovered at these places are the masterpieces of Gandhara art (Khan and Lone 2004:7). The Gandhara art is as fascinating to the scholar as layman. Gandhara was a wonderful area for artists as well as architects. Artists of that time produced marvelous pieces of art on stone, terracotta, clay and stucco etc representing various scenes from Buddhist mythology. Sculptures excavated from the area showed the important episodes like the dream of Queen Maya, Buddha's birth, his renunciation of palace life, his sermons, and finally his death (Rehman 1989:68).

Potential of Archaea-tourism in Pakistan

Pakistan has many amazing archaeological heritage sites in addition to its natural resources. Since the pre-colonial era, archaeological investigations have been conducted all over the nation, uncovering thousands of heritage sites from the prehistoric to the British era. Six of these locations have been added to UNESCO's World Heritage List because of their universal historical, artistic, and architectural significance. Among them is the historic city of Mohenjo Daro, which is situated in Sindh's Larkana district. The city is a singular example of ancient civilization, and in terms of town planning, it is unmatched by modern civilizations. Additionally, the Thatta monuments on Sind's Makri Hill have been designated as World Heritage Sites. These monuments comprise Muslim tombs and mosques associated with the four local dynasties who ruled the region. In the Punjab Province, the Lahore Fort & Shalamar Garden (Lahore) and the Rohtas Fort in Jehlum have been placed on the list of UNESCO as world heritage sites. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Buddhist Complex of Takht-i-Bahi in district Mardan has been placed on the list of UNESCO. In addition, the entire Taxila valley administered by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Punjab provinces has been declared as World Heritage site based on criteria III and IV of UNESCO. While 18 sites so far including Badshahi Mosque, Wazir Khan Mosque, Harappa, Rehman Dheri, Rani Ghat, Chaukandi Tombs and the Ashokan Rock Edicts in Mansehra and Mardan are now on the tentative list of UNESCO.

Geography of Gandhara

Gandhara has been a significant region since the early historic period of South Asia. Besides its emergence and growth as an artistic and cultural center, the uniqueness of Gandhara lies in its location because it related to all important towns of ancient India. Gandhara, known as the holy land of Buddhism, was a center of Buddhist religious practices (Siddiqui 2011: 66). The word Gandhara is said to be the combination of two Sanskrit words Gand means fragrance and Hara means land therefore, literally it stands for the land of fragrance (Ali and Qazi 2008:1).

Gandhara civilization comprised of the region between North-West of Pakistan and the mountainous regions of Afghanistan. Its main center was the Peshawar valley, the Pothowar plateau, and the Kabul River valley. Gandhara civilization can be divided into Gandhara Proper (core region of ancient Gandhara) and Greater Gandhara (the region beyond its geographical boundaries) since the 1st century BCE. Ancient Gandhara was cent red around the Peshawar city and was surrounded by natural boundaries. Barren plains open from the basin surrounding Peshawar to the South., Hindu Kush Mountains and Khyber Pass lay in the West, high foothills in the North while Indus River makes its Eastern border. Greater Gandhara is comprised of a much wider territory that includes regions from Kabul to Islamabad and Udayana which centered on Swat valley (Behrendt 2007:3).

History of Gandhara

Pakistan is amongst the countries of the world which are blessed with rich cultural heritage (Khan and Hasan 2003: 55). Gandhara had remained an important territory during its ancient times. Many rulers and kingdoms had trials on Gandhara to subjugate it. The political history of Gandhara can be traced through numismatics, inscriptions and the external records of the region (Zwalf 1997:14).

Gandhara is also refer to in historical sources dating to the 6th century BCE during the reign of Cyrus II and Darius I, when it formed a part of the Persian Achaemenid empire (Askari 2000:17) in the behistun inscription (528-19BC) of king Darius, the people of Gandhara are mentioned as subject who fought against the Greeks as the soldiers of Xerxes in 480BCE and 479 BCE (Khan & Lone 2012: 3). Gandhara remained the part of Achaemenian empire till it was conquered by Alexander (Dar 2007:2).

The conquest of Gandhara by Alexander the Great in 327-326 BCE, established the region's ties with Greece. For a brief period, it remained under Alexander's armies but after his death, his successor Seleucus ceded it in 305 BCE to the founder of the Maurya dynasty Chandragupta Maurya (Khan 2007:14). Following the death of Chandragupta's grandson, Ashoka the Mauryan Empire in India turn down speedily and Gandhara came under the influence of foreign invaders.

History of Taxila valley

Traces of earlier periods of settlement at Taxila go back to the first millennium BCE. However, its prominent period of history belongs to the second phase of urbanization in the Indo-Gangetic plains which was primarily caused by the introduction of iron technology. According to Sir John Marshall, the Ramayana story tells us that Taxila was founded by Bharata, son of Kaikayi and younger brother of Rama, who fixed two of his sons as rulers in the two cities: Taksha in Takshsila and Pushkala in Pushkalavati (Dani 1999: 40).

The Mahabharata draw connection between the great snake sacrifice of King Janamejaya of Hastinapur and conquest of Taxila. In Buddhist literature and Jatakas, Taxila is considered a centre of learning and the home of world-famous teachers. The Jains literature made the most extravagant claim regarding to the

age of Taxila. According to them, over million years ago Taxila valley was visited by Rishaba, the first of Tirhamkaras, and footprints of the saint were preserved and devoted for holy purpose by Bahubali, who placed a throne and “wheel of law” (*dharma chakra*) over them (Marshall 1960: 10).

Early historic period of the Taxila begins with the conquest of the region by the Achaemenian Empire of Persia (Khan et al., 2005: 18). Achaemenian Empire was established by Cyrus the Great in 558 BCE and the Persian brought Gandhara under their rule in 518 BCE. So Taxila also became a part or satrapy of the Achaemenian Empire. The rule of the Achaemenian dynasty lasted till the reign of Artaxerxes III (404-359 BCE). The Achaemenian introduced satrapal system of government later this system became prevalent in the history of Northern and Western India (Marshall 1960:11). During the Achaemenian period Aramaic was used as the medium of communications. In order to assemble the growing needs of the empire and to flourish the trade activities they implement the coin currency in their empire (Khan and Shaheen 2015:70).



Location map of Taxila valley

<https://www.google.com.pk/search?q=taxila+valley+map&biw=1242&bih>

History and Location of Taxila Museum

The Taxila museum has a large collection of masterpieces, where the sculpture and other antiquities, from colossal to miniature, present improvident beauty and entrance artistry. It is a site museum is situated about 34 kilometers North-West of Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. The archaeological museum was established to the collections of antiquities by the efforts of Sir John Marshall in 1918 (Khan and Lone 2004: 7). In 1918 the foundation stone of Taxila museum was laid by Chelmsford, viceroy of India. This construction was completed in 1928, and the museum was opened for general public. The original plan of Sir John Marshall for museum construction could not be completed as he was retired from the post of Director General of Archaeological survey of India in 1928. However, the northern gallery was constructed by the government of Pakistan in 1998.

Greek style was adopted for design of the museum and Sir John Marshall arranged the galleries. Artifacts are arranged subject wisely in the wall showcases and, on the table, showcases placed in the middle of the halls of the museum galleries. Entrance of the museum opens in the main hall; a replica of the stupa from Buddhist monastery of Mohra Moradu placed in the middle, catches the sight. An archaeological map of Taxila explaining the overall scheme of Taxila valley is logically placed in the main point of the museum.

Archaeological Heritage in Broader Term

The definition states that Charter Heritage is a broad term that encompasses both natural and cultural context. Sites, structures, historical landmarks, landscapes, a range of living things, cultural customs, lifestyles, knowledge, and experiences are all included. It maintains and transmits to future generations the evolution of civilizations, identities, and processes. It welcomes changes because it is dynamic. This flexibility of heritage allows cultures to grow and live. It can be said that the cultural development of every community is important in heritage as it is the base for the development of present and future (Sivalio ~gluand Berköz, 2012: 928–940).

Statement of the problem

The current study focuses on the potential for archaeological tourism in the area as well as the decorative patterns found in the Gandharan period stones kept in the Taxila Museum. Even though academics have studied decorative patterns in stone art, many aspects are still not recognized. The goal of this research is to examine those unknown details that are crucial to piecing together a true and thorough history of Gandharan art. Furthermore, the study highlights the unrealized potential of archaeological tourism by highlighting these rich artistic traditions and the historical significance of the Taxila valley.

Significance of the Research

The subject is crucial to the study of Gandharan art. In addition to discussing important archaeological sites in the Taxila valley, this study aims to provide insight into the complex decorative patterns and different kinds of stones used in Gandharan sculptures. In addition to recording artistic details, the study has a deeper goal: to contribute to the preservation of our decreasing customs, cultural legacy, and the essence of archaeological tourism, which is either disappearing or being misrepresented in many destinations. Such research can serve as a reminder of the importance of our past in a time when rapid development often overwhelms historical legacy. When handled properly, archaeological tourism not only helps preserve historic locations but also introduces tourists to the myths, values, and aesthetics of past eras.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Current research will be of descriptive and analytical nature. Taxila museum and Archaeological sites will be visited several times for collection of relevant data. Data will be gathered from the Taxila museum and the reserved collection. The primary source of research would be all the books related to that topic, Articles, Journals, Conference Papers and Newspaper Articles. The secondary source would be collected materials through excavations of archeological sites reports of national and international scholars, departments, institutions and organization.

Comparative Study and Conclusion

The current research focused similar decorative art was also observed in the stone sculptures excavated from Gandhara at valleys like Peshawar, Swat, Mardan, Dir, Bajour, Buner, and Eastern Afghanistan and

kept in various museums around the world, the current study concentrated on decorative patterns in Gandhara stone art that is on display at the Taxila Museum. The sculptures and other antiquities discovered at these places are the masterpieces of Gandhara art (Khan and Lone 2004:7). Sculptures excavated from the area showed important episodes like the dream of Queen Maya, Buddha's birth, his renunciation of palace life, his sermons and finally his death. These sculptures were fixed on the stupa base, stairs drum, dome and harmika (Khan 1993:7).

Gandhara was an important Centre of art. The school of art that developed here is known as Gandhara School of Art (Thorpe 2012:13). It is a universal art and very common in the region of Gandhara. Gandhara became a sacred place and pilgrims and monks from Tibet, China, Central Asia, India and Korea used to come to see these Holy places and influenced the local culture (Ksakar 2008: 38). Different decorative patterns were used in the stone art of Gandhara to enhance the beauty of the sculptures.

The decorative patterns found in Gandharan stone art were the subject of recent studies. The sculptures' beauty was enhanced using decorative patterns in Gandharan stone art. In addition to using a decorative pattern for decoration, Gandharan art also incorporated religious fervor. In addition to their artistic use as decorative patterns in stone art, lotus, pipal, and sala trees have significant religious meaning in Buddhism. Although the use of acanthus in art has Greek roots, it is a flower that is frequently used in decorative designs, particularly in Gandharan and Egyptian art. When the Greeks invaded Gandhara, they blended their own artistic values with the local religions, cultures, and customs instead of destroying them.

It was obvious that the Gangetic valley, the center of ancient Hinduism, was not isolated from Gandhara. The adoption and exchange of religious ideas became easier by the two regions' shared political, cultural, and economic connections. Floral and foliate motifs, the four-petal wild rose, the vine, garlands, and flowers with five or four petals are additional decorative patterns. This demonstrates how natural objects, particularly flowers, influenced the artists of that era. Hexagonal patterns, sawtooth, carinated arches, and rosette decorations on the brackets are used to adorn some panels. Their knowledge of geometric shapes is demonstrated using this kind of ornamental pattern. The concept of adding human and bird figures to arches, balconies, windows, and cornices is common in Gandharan art, which is amazing and fascinating. In recent times, these intricate designs and the rich cultural layers they reflect have drawn increased interest not only from scholars but also from cultural travelers. Archaeological tourism in Gandhara has grown, as visitors from around the world come to explore the remains of monasteries, sculptures, and ancient cities. These sites offer an immersive experience into the blend of Greek and Buddhist aesthetics and stand as important landmarks of human heritage, further emphasizing the enduring appeal and historical significance of Gandharan art.

Pakistan is in urgent need of approaches that are effective enough to be sought after for the officials of regions gainfully. Approaches are required for both uncovered and unexplored areas of the country. The issues of Archaeological goals are assorted rather than the issues of tourist spots that are standing tall. Cases of MohenjoDaro and Taxila can be taken; thus, these goals can be considered as a logical examination of the official's methodologies on a fundamental level, in utilitarian and similarly as in practicing old strategies. It moreover doesn't have the information about overpowering discipline on people making hurt to antiquated depends.

Another reason is that open structures are destroyed or crushed because of incidents. Legacy is being destroyed because of unplanned formative endeavours. Presently constructed structures show no relationship to history or legacy. Some unaffected portions of landmarks are so dilapidated and neglected that they have also lost their historical and legacy significance. For tourists, residents, and conservators alike, their essence has become inconsequential. The combined efforts of organizers, legacy authorities, archaeologists, conservators, and fashion artists are necessary to preserve destinations. The administration

structure demonstrates the traditionalist practice, showing that these methods are widely used in Pakistan to protect selected sites.

PLATES OF STONE ART OF GANDHARA IN TAXILA MUSEUM



Half-opened Lotus

Sketch by Researcher

Pl. no. 01: Hand with lotus flower
(Labelling courtesy Domenico Faccenna)



Open lotus with Reverse Petals

Sketch by Researcher

Pl. no. 2: Fragment with lotus flower
(Labelling courtesy Domenico Faccenna)



Branch of Pipal

Sketch by Researcher

Pl. no. 03: Fragment of a canopy of Pipal leaves
(Labelling courtesy Domenico Faccenna)



Branch of Sala

Sketch by Researcher

Pl. no. 04: Fragment with foliage of Sala tree
(Labelling courtesy Domenico Faccenna)

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