

Decorative Motifs on Pedestals of Gandharan Sculptures: A Case Study of Peshawar Museum

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Abstract

Gandhara is famous for its art and architecture. Peshawar Valley laps a considerable number of Buddhist monasteries which yielded narrative reliefs from the life of Buddha and individual sculptures of Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Peshawar Museum houses a copious collection of Gandharan sculptures. These sculptures have been artistically adorned with decorative motifs of both indigenous and foreign cultural elements. Most intriguingly, pedestals are provided with narrative scenes as well as individual motifs to enhance the beauty of Gandharan stone sculptures. This research paper will reveal an analysis of decorative motifs on pedestal of Gandharan sculptures of Peshawar Museum.

Keywords: Gandhara, Peshawar Museum, Pedestals, Decorative Motifs

Introduction

Gandhara is spanning over an area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Taxila valley which lies in northern Punjab, lower Indus valley and whole of Kashmir. Actually the region of Gandharan is triangular in shape about 100km in east and west and 70km in north and south. An extension of Gandhara art crossed the geographical barriers and extended up to Eastern Afghanistan, Uddiyana, and Balkh, Swat valley, Dir, Buner, Bajaur and Peshawar valley to Kashmir (Khan et al 2005: 07). While according to the recent research, the cultural influence of Gandhāra even reached up to the valley of the Jhelum River in the east (Dar 2007: 54-55).

Literature Review

In the western aspects of Gandhara sculptures (1945) H. Buchthal mentions Greek as well as Roman cultural influences on Gandharan sculptures along with their native symbolism on Gandhara art.

Gandhara (1985) by Francine Tissot focuses on the geography, art and architecture and political history of ancient Gandhara. It also mentions the ornamental elements in detail. A catalogue *narrative* reliefs displayed in Taxila Museum by Muhammad Bahadur Khan also throw lights on the history of the region.

Saifur Rehman Dar (1998) in his monograph titled *Taxila and the western world* has given an archaeological profile of Taxila Valley. The monograph also mentions the nomenclature of Taxila, co-relation of Taxila and classical world, sources of Hellenism, Temples in Taxila, Numismatic evidences of Greco-Roman influences, Toilet trays, Alexander the Great, Aramic and Kharoshti inscriptions.

A catalogue of Gandhara, stone sculpture in the Taxila museum volume II (2005) by M. Ashraf Khan co-authored Mr. Mahmood-ul-Hassan and A.G.Lone deals with pictorial representation of narratives panels, architectural fragments, and Buddhist and non-Buddhist sculptures. While Sadeed Arif (2014) has given a detailed account of foreign cultural influences on Gandharan sculptures.

Catalogue of Decorative Motifs on Pedestals

The motifs of pedestals have been classified into following two categories:

- Floral Motifs
- Narrative Faunal Motifs
- Narrative Scenes

Floral Motifs

(Fig. 1-4, Pl. 1-2)

1. Acc. No. PM 02855, Provenance: Unknown, Dimension: 155x61 cm

A Buddha in *Abaya mudra* with halo behind his head. He is standing on a decorated pedestal with three flowers separated by floral ribbons encased in a plain fillet, rectangular dentils with bars and a linear row of acanthus leaves running above the dentils. The central rosette has eight ribbed petals and sepals. It is flanked by two lotuses on each side with their complete floral details i.e. sepals (outer most whorl), petals, stamens (male reproductive whorl) and pistil.

2. Acc. No. PM 02813, Provenance: Ghaz Dheri, Charsadda, Source: Exc. 1903, Dimension: 20x16cm.

A stone sculpture of Buddha in *Abaya mudra* accompanied by two naked devotees. They are seated and standing respectively on the left side of Buddha in *Anjali mudra*. The sculpture is broken from the upper side. The pedestal is embellished with eight petalled flower fringed by two geometric flowers on each side. Left portion of the pedestal is decked with leafy branches in filleted frame facing right.

3. Acc. No. PM 02791, Provenance: Sahri Bahlol, Source: Exc. 1909-10, Dimension: 52 x 27 cm.

Buddha is standing on right side, holding something in his left hand and escorted by two persons on the left side. A devotee on extreme left side is badly smashed. The filleted pedestal is ornamented with a thick leafy scroll and topped by filleted saw-tooth pattern.

Narrative Faunal Motifs

(Fig. 5-7, Pl. 2)

1. Acc. No. PM 02750, Provenance: Sahri Bahlol, Source: Exc. 1911-12, Dimension: 64x35cm

Bodhisattva Maitreya in meditation pose wearing necklaces, ear pendants, armlets, bangles and an ornamented turban is seated under the bunch of lanceolate leafy branches. Its pedestal is decorated with a narrative scene. On left side a naked man holding a stick and plough in his hand with a humped bull facing right. Two standing and one seated devotee in *anjali mudra* are present on right side with an open portable fire stand in between.

2. Acc. No. PM 02756, Provenance: Takht-i-Bahi, Source: Exc. 1907-08, Dimension: 47 x 85 cm

This is a broken fasting Buddha with pedestal further elaborated with a narrative scene. Buddha in reassurance pose is attended by four attendants, three on right and one on left side. Rest of the two men are busy with a cart pulled by two humped bulls. Two other horned cows are seated on right side. Pedestal is further decorated with lanceolate and lobate leaves. The panel is completed confined within two Corinthian pilasters with an elaborated capital of acanthus leaves.

3. Acc. No. PM 01075, Provenance: Takht-i-Bahi, Source: Exc. 1907-08, Dimension: 30 x 33 cm

A sculpture with seated Buddha but badly damaged. Lower portion of the throne is decorated with Bodhisattva accompanied by four attendants. This narrative scene is confined within two lions wearing heavy jewelry.

Narrative Scenes

(Fig. 8-16, Pl. 3-5)

1. Acc. No. PM 01077, Provenance: Takht-i-Bahi, Source: Exc. 1907-08, Dimension: 30 x 30 cm.

A broken sculpture with visible sandals of Bodhisattva Maitreya. The lower part or pedestal is sheathed within two Corinthian pilasters topped by the capitals decorated with tuft of acanthus leaves. A linearly running fillet is closing the panel from upper (saw-tooth design) and the lower side. A stupa is flanked by two female devotees on left side and two male attendants on right side.

2. Acc. No. PM 03094, Provenance: Takht-i-Bahi, Source: Exc. 1912, Dimension: 59x20 cm.

Buddha is standing in slightly tilted posture on the pedestal and holding something in his left hand. There is a halo behind his head. The pedestal is decked with a narrative scene in which Buddha is seated in *Dhyani mudra* (meditation pose) within an arch and attended by two female devotees on both left and right side. Two Corinthian pilasters are confining the whole scene.

3. Acc. No. PM 03138, Provenance: Nil, Dimension: 86 x 57 cm

A seated Buddha in *Dhyani mudra* wearing heavy drapery. The facial features are quite prominent on his face i.e. pointed nose, thin lips and protruding eyes. The pedestal is embellished with two images of Buddha in reassurance pose. The Buddha on right side is attended by four female devotees; two in *Anjali mudra* and the rest are holding something in their hands. In between two images of Buddha five devotees are present; three in *Nimasty* pose. On extreme left side a female attendant is standing. Both of the Buddhas are shadowed by two branches with lanceolate leaves.

4. Acc. No. PM 03013, Provenance: Nil, Dimension: 16x86 cm.

Panchika and *Hariti* are seated on a pedestal with four naked kids. The lower portion is embellished with game scene. Three games have been depicted in this narrative relief including boxing, riding and wrestling. Each of the players is attended by several viewers individually. On extreme left side, four spectators are standing. Whole of the scene is encapsulated by two Corinthian pilasters on each side.

5. Acc. No. PM 01060, Provenance: Takht-i-Bahi, Source: Exc. 1907-08, Dimension: 20x27 cm

A relief with the feet of Bodhisattva Maitreya is visible. Its pedestal is beautifully adorned with a Buddha in *Dhyani mudra* is seated on a throne and attended by six female devotees who are wearing heavy drapery, headdresses and ear pendants. All of the devotees are standing in *Anjali mudra*. Two Corinthian pilasters are closing the whole narrative scene.

6. Acc. No. PM 02987, Provenance: Sahri Bahlol, Source: Exc. 1912, Dimension: 150 x 49 cm.

Bodhisattva Maitreya in standing wearing heavy jewelry including ear pendants, necklaces, armlet, fillet around the hair and thong sandals. The pedestal is decked with a cross-legged seated Buddha in reassurance pose. He is further accompanied by six disciples in *Anjali mudra*. Among them, three on left side are females and three on right side are males. Females are dressed in heavy drapery and wearing headdresses and ear pendants. Buddha is shadowed by tree branches.

7. Acc. No. PM 00026, Provenance: Takht-i-Bahi, Source: Exc. 1907-08, Dimension: 17 x 37 cm.

A broken sculpture with seated Buddha. The pedestal is in the form of draped throne with two pilasters on each side which are further elaborated with two rows of tangential pearls. The pilasters are topped by a wavy pattern. Two pilgrims are revering the portable fire stand. The fire stand comprised of a base, shaft and a bowl with flaring flames.

8. Acc. No. PM 02794, Provenance: Takht-i-Bahi, Source: Exc. 1907-08, Dimension: 12x36 cm.

A pedestal with two sections separated by a Corinthian pilaster. Both of the portions are depicting a stepped passage leading towards the Sala caves which are in the form of arches. The right cave is empty with two bearded and one clean shaved devotee. In another cave on left side, Buddha is seated in *Dhyani mudra* and two attendants are pouring a fluid upon it.

Conclusion

Peshawar Museum accommodates a copious collection of Gandharan sculptures. These sculptures are artistically ornamented with decorative motifs both in the main theme as well as on pedestals. Some relief panels have been produced in the form of sections and each portion

depict different narratives from the life of Buddha. The decorative motifs incorporated in Gandhara art belong to indigenous and foreign cultures for the enhancement of its beauty.

The decorative motifs implied in Gandhara art are of different categories such as architectural motifs, floral motifs, faunal motifs, ornamental (jewelry) and some miscellaneous motifs.

Lotus flower is the most intriguing element in Gandhara art which is basically an Indian decorative feature. Persepoliton pilasters, lion and roses are the part of Persian culture. Greek cultural elements are majorly used in Gandhara art such as acanthus leaves, vine scrolls, garland bearers or simple garlands, drinking/dancing/loving scenes, Doric, Ionic and Corinthian pilasters etc. Another common feature of Greek mythology is nudeness which has been majorly applied in Buddhist art. Besides this, numerous Greco-Roman god and goddesses have also been assimilated in it.

The recovered sculptures throughout Gandhara have the similar ornamentation but with regional variations. Some decorative motifs such as Corinthian pilasters (Jinan Wali Dheri, Ballar Tope in Taxila Valley) different types of arches (Julian, Dharmarajika in Taxila Valley), Greco-Roman god and goddesses (Dharmarajika in Taxila Valley) are used in Buddhist architecture i.e. monasteries especially around main and votive stupas.

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Plate # 1



Fig 1, Standing Buddha



Fig 2, Pedestal with Floral Motifs



Fig 3, A Standing Buddha and Devotees with Floriated Pedestal
(Photos by Researcher)

Plate # 2



Fig 4, Pedestal with Floral Motif



**Fig 5, Bodhisattva with Narrated
Pedestal**

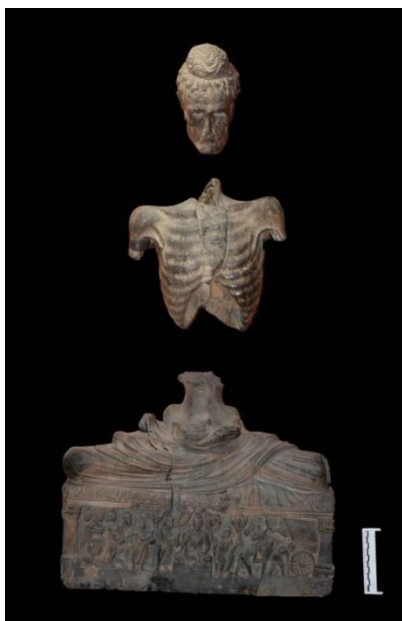


Fig 6, A Fasting Buddha Narrated



**Fig 7, Two Lions on Pedestal
Pedestal (Photos by Researcher)**

Plate # 3



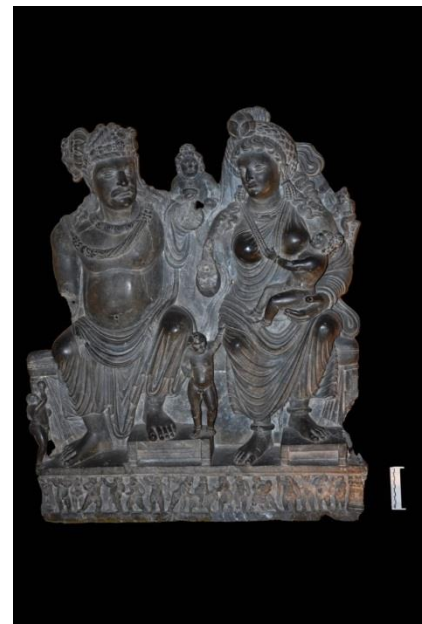
Fig 8, Stupa Flanked by Devotees



**Fig 9, Narrative Pedestal with
Buddha Seated in an Arch**



Fig 10, Two Buddhas with Devotees



**Fig 11, Game Scene on the Pedestal on Pedestal
(Photos by Researcher)**

Plate # 4



Fig 12, Pedestal with Buddha in Dhyani Mudra and Female Attendants

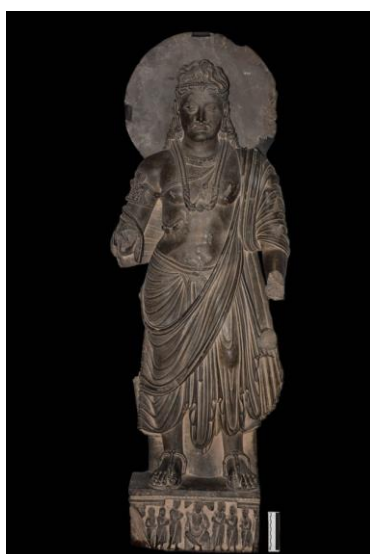


Fig 13, Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya



Fig 14, Pedestal Buddha and Devotees

(Photos by Researcher)

Plate # 5



Fig 15, Pedestal with Portable Fire Stand and Two Attendants



Fig 16, Depiction of Two Caves with Buddha and Attendants
(Photos by Researcher)