

Analysis of Wali-e-Swat Collection: A Preliminary Study

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The present paper is a preliminary study of a large collection of Buddhist sculpture donated to the Swat Museum by Miangul Abdul Haq Jehanzeb, the last Wali or ruler of the now defunct Swat State (Rome 1999:55). Archaeological research of the early twentieth century exposed rich cultural past of the Swat Valley. This fascinated the Wali, who started collecting sculptures depicting the life-story of the Buddha as well as secular scenes set in the contemporary cultural and natural environment.

The donation consisted of as many as 264 pieces of sculpture, collected unscientifically as loose finds from various places in the valley without any knowledge of its context and chronology. As such, a bulk of important artefacts remained out of the fold of academic research. The present author picked up this collection for her Ph D research and made an effort to trace its history, classify it on its art-style, analyse its content and workout its chronology by correlating it to the already established sequence of the Buddhist period in the valley (Swati 1996: 1-3, 242ff., 35ff.). Buddhism has been the prime motivating force for multifarious artistic activities, which were piously employed as meritorious services for propagation of the religion.

Second half of the first millennium BC witnessed the rise of Buddhism in northern India that spread to the surrounding countries in due course of time and played a vital role in shaping the lives of the people of those regions. During the third century BC when the Mauryan Empire was established, the Indus region (the entire territory of Pakistan) also came under its fold. Gandhāra (the modern Peshawar and Mardan Divisions) and Uḍḍiyāna (the present Malakand Division) were important more or less independent states (Beal 1906: 118; Swati 1997: 1; Stein 1927). Aśoka, the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya (founder of the Mauryan Dynasty), made Buddhism dominant religion in Gandhāra as revealed from his rock-edicts at Shāhbāzgarhī in Mardan, and Mansehra in Hazara (IGI 1991:13).

Swat has been a central valley in ancient Uḍḍiyāna where Buddhism prevailed for over a millennium. According to Fa-Hian, a Chinese pilgrim, in the fifth century AD there were about 500 Buddhist monasteries in the region, belonging to the Hināyana School (Legge 1965: 28). In the seventh century AD another Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang recorded 1400 Buddhist monasteries with strength of 18,000 priests, but all the monasteries were desolate and ruined (Beal 1906: 120). In ancient Tibetan literature Swat is mentioned as Orgyan or Urgyan, which has always been a sacred place for the Tibetans, because it was the birthplace of Padmasambhava, the second Buddha and the founder of Tibetan Buddhism (Tucci 1958: 279).

The literary accounts and the concentration of archaeological remains in the Swat Valley explain the presence of a viable environment for Buddhism to thrive over here. Hundreds of stupas were erected and decorated with sculptures out of religious zeal for centuries. The artisans and their sponsors devoted their skill and resources to venerate the religious taste of the devotees by establishing sculptural workshops near stupas at a particular locality. In due course of time all localities situated in a particular sub-valley might have flourished under and trained by a parent artisan or workshop. This may be one of the reasons that workshops active in each sub-valley had their own distinctive features (Swati 1997: 1). Some scholars suggested chronology of the art on the basis of material used for its execution. In this regard, they have presented hypotheses according to their own experience. This, however, is controversial and needs a scientific probe.

Although, scholars have suggested the date of the beginning of Gandhāra art, yet it poses difficulties because of the absence of any authentic source of information. Each of them has given his own opinion regarding its beginning and decline. A. Foucher pushed the beginning of the art back to the first century BC

and its flourishing and decline periods to the second century AD (Lohuizen-de-Leeuw 1949: 76). He confined the life span of the art too short. Other scholars extended its decline to the 5th century AD (Marshall 1960), but new research has changed the old theories. Scholars of the 19th and early half of the 20th century made an effort to establish the chronology in the light of available sources of information, but advanced methods and techniques facilitated scientific excavations and extended an advantage to scholars to re-address the problem. Careful examination of scientifically excavated material from Butkara-I, Butkara-III, Saidu Sharif and Shnaisha in the main Valley while Andān Dheri, Chatpat and Chargaṭ in the Adinzai sub-valley has set more solid footing for establishing the chronology of the art.

Archaeological evidence shows that the stupa of Butkara-I was built in the late third-early second century BC (Errington 1999). Votive stupas no. 14 and 17 contemporary of the Great Stupa-III of the first decade of the CE preserve the original decoration containing sculpted columns, capitals and figured cornice, which on the bases of excavated context can be dated to the late period of the first century BC or the beginning of first century AD (IsMEO 1982: 41).

The style and material of the sculpture from the Wali's collection are studied in perspective of the Gandhāra sculpture scientifically excavated in the Swat valley and other sites in the valleys of Peshawar and Taxila, an important centre of Buddhism (Marshall 1960: 16). The preliminary study of the present collection indicates three evolutionary stages: the primary one was started and practiced in the Śāka Period, the second was practiced in the Kuṣāṇa Period, and the third one was in vogue in the Kuṣāṇo-Sāsānian and Kidara Kuṣāṇa Period.

The first stage of the Buddhist art in Swat started from the Śāka Period. The Buddhist missionaries to Swat constructed stupas precincts and shrine to fulfil their religious needs. The establishment of Stupa-I at Butkara-I (IAMSPDE: 1982) and stupa shrines Butkara-III seem to be among the earliest Buddhist religious buildings undertaken in the region (Swati 1997: 8). It was the constant cultural flow from India that was not only responsible for founding Buddhism in the valley but also maintained and strengthened it through religious and political ties (Swati 1997: 8). The learned Buddhist monks and nuns were deeply involved in the making and dedication of many images to monasteries (Rhi n.d: 210). When the Buddhist philosophy was in search to find a way for adoring the Master (the Buddha) and the propagation of the new faith, the Hellenistic ideals (Rice 1965:149) mixed with indigenous ones (Errington 1992) provided its foundation to construct a distinct Buddhist artistic tradition for the whole of Uḍḍiyāna that may be referred to as the Uḍḍiyāna style (Swati 1997: 8). Being under the control of religious elites, the artist, therefore, could not work freely. Secondly at this early stage artistic tradition was begun without any precedent, therefore, the hesitation and in-experience of the artists are observed as crude execution of the figures (Faccenna 2003: 294; Figs. 6,14). Caitya entrance, after the Indian fashion, satisfied the need and the taste of the monks (Swati 1997: 8; Cf. Fig. 2, Pls. 2 & 3). The Bactrian sculptors were fond of including architectural details such as columns and capitals of Greek origin in their composition (Rice 1965: 131). The Corinthian columns, acanthus leaves and horseshoe arches of the Indian fashion separating the different scenes, were practised from the beginning (Faccenna 2003: 297; Fig. 2). In the early stage columns were round and slender (Lohuizen-de-Leeuw 1949: 104; Fig. 1).

Archaeological context suggests that Buddhist art in Swat started during the Śāka period as the Great Stupa-I at Butkara-I, built in the third century BC, indicates (Faccenna 2003: 277). Contemporary to the Great Stupa-III, cornice of the votive stupas no. 14 and 17 preserving original decoration, as referred to above, can be dated to the first century BC or beginning of first century AD (IAMSPDE 1982:41). This is also revealed by the artistic activities of the Buddhist period at Taxila. Thirdly the land of Gandhāra was on the main trade route from Central Asia and China to India that played a vital role in beginning the Buddhist art over here. According to AL Basham it was not the Greco-Bactrian heirs of Alexander but trade with the west, encouraged by rising prosperity of Rome, that this school emerged with strong western influence (Basham 1954: 368).

This art continued to flourish under the Parthians on the land they liberated from the Greeks, who had deeply influenced the local culture (Ghirshman 1954: 266-7). The Greek and Parthian traits thrived side by side as seen in Swat in the Parthian rule. During this period, with the exception of excellent specimens, the reliefs show a schematic composition with stress on frontality, figures are rather stiffly organised over various flattened planes with drawing like attention (IAMSPDE 1982: 41; Figs. 3, 4). There is always balanced composition with more prominent figures, forcefulness with simplification of the body volume bringing focus on certain significant parts, i.e., head eyes, legs and the hands and enlarging the other (*Ibid.*; Fig. 4; Cf. Swati Pl. 6; Swati 1997: 37). Other panels reveal a different artistic sensibility of rather crude execution (Fig-5). The open treatment of eyes, round and staring at the outset, (Marshall 1960: 17-35) as well as moustaches (Lohuizen-de-Leeuw 1949: 104) are typical features of this stage (Figs. 3, 4; Cf Faccenna 2003: 292-93; Figs. 8, 9 Cf Swati Pl. 6, 1997: 37). The Western and Central Asian influences go side by side. Frontality and rigidity of the figures are the Parthian influence (Fig. 4) and the three quarter view is the Hellenistic inspiration (Fig. 6; Rice 1965: 159). The dress at this stage is Indian *dhoti* and shawl (Fig. 4) and Scytho-Parthian, long and short tunic with trousers and soft boots (Fig. 6; Swati 1997: 9). Drapery folds are in schematic lines on a broad flattened body (Figs. 4, 5). The execution of the Buddha figure was in vogue right from the beginning (Figs. 3, 4; *Ibid.*). The figure of the Buddha takes on a rigid form, slender, angular arms held out triangle-wise, garments marked by parallel grooves running in abstract linearity (Figs. 3, 16, 17 Cf Faccenna 2003: 303-4). At this stage the figure of the Buddha is often seated in *abhaya* and *dhyāna mudrās* and rarely standing (*Ibid.*).

Small reliefs were in vogue in this 'import period'. The artists restricted themselves to small genre-pieces as free sculptures were not yet executed largely at this stage. Small oblong reliefs used as decoration at the beginning of the Gandhāra art were rather a common practice (Lohuizen-de-Leeuw 1949: 107). In the Hellenistic imported art these are mostly tableaux from classical mythology or from ordinary daily life; little domestic scenes, men and women at drinking bouts and feasts, etc., are also depicted (*Ibid.*). Reliefs with secular scenes were prepared for decorating stupas (Figs. 1, 7).

At the outset of Gandhāra art drinking, dancing and erotic scenes were a favourite theme due to the Greek and Parthian secular art (Marshall 1960: 33). Scenes of drinking, dancing and music when occur together have an erotic aspect, while others are ritualistic (Zwalf 1996: 11). The sculptors gave these drinking and merry-making scenes sober and holier touch by putting lotuses instead of wine cups in the hands of revellers (Marshall 1960: 33). These drinking and revelry scenes appear on stairs, in the doorway motifs of *catiya* arches, friezes and jambs and lintels (Zwalf 1996: 11). But in our case the drinking and revelry scenes are depicted on the cornice pieces where the couples are separated by vine leaves (Figs. 8, 9). The male figures have a beard and moustaches while the female figures have wreath headdress and ear-pendants. All the figures are in three-quarter view. Even in the Buddhist art of Swat some sexual scenes are depicted here are not shown elsewhere in Gandhāra (Faccenna 1962-64).

In the first and second centuries BC, the Buddhists suspended garlands on the brackets (*nagadantas*) at regular intervals around the base of the dome of stupas (Marshall 1960: 21). These winged figures carry offerings as worshipping spirits (Zwalf 1996: 60). The practice of suspending garlands on these brackets (*nagadantas*) also referred to as stupa-pegs started in Gandhāra and confined to early stupas (Marshall 1960: 21; Foucher 1914: 56-59, Figs. 10-22). Many such pegs have been discovered from Chatpat, Butkara-I, Pāṇr, and Saidu in Swat and various other Buddhist sites at Taxila (*op. cit.*). In the present collection figures of the stupa pegs (Figs. 10-15) have pointed chin, which seems to be the Parthian influence. The figure in Fig. 10 probably a female wearing an elaborate headdress and *sāṇī* is playing a stringed instrument (guitar). The male figure in Fig. 11 is crude and is playing double flute. In Fig. 12 the figure has a lotus flower in his left hand while in Fig. 13 the female figure holds a flywhisk in her right hand. After the schematic and stylistic analyses, all of them fall in the Scytho-Parthian period.

The second stage of the Buddhist art in the Swat Valley started in the closing decades of the first century AD, probably AD 80-90, as indicated by archaeological context. At this stage it reached its maturity only when it had evolved a distinctive style and character of its own and when its sculpture had developed their technical skill and power of imagination sufficiently to give worthy expression to the tradition and ideals of Buddhism (Rehman 1991: 152-63; Marshall 1960: 63). The Buddhist art of Swat reached its maturity at this period, although the archaic style still continued till the end of the first century AD (Figs. 16, 17). The Scytho-Parthian influence over the physical features of the figures is still visible (Swati 1997: 11, Fig. 17, 18). The schematic composition, frontality and stiff figures with bulky body of the early period now changed into natural mobility and flexibility (Figs 19, 20). Execution of the figures became more refined (Fig. 16) and waved or curly hair was elaborately done (Zwalf 1996: 70). The full volume of the body does not obtrude under the drapery (*Ibid*). The drapery falls more freely billowing and became closely spaced parallel lines (IAMSPPDE 1982:40; Swati 1997:12; Ingholt 1957: 26, Fig. 19). The figures wear Scytho-Parthian as well as the Indian dresses and jewellery (Figs. 17-22).

The Indo Persepolitan columns of the early period were abandoned. The reliefs were decorated above by some floral motives (Fig. 23). The imbalance is also observed in the depiction of the scrolls of capitals that extended to the fillet of the panel (Fig. 20). The Corinthian pilasters with a flat shaft and a figure on it are later examples (Marshall 1960: 54).

At this stage the Buddhist iconography of religious repertory was fully developed and the sculptor had a vast subject of carving. Flaming shoulders of the Buddha Sakyamuni in miracle of Saravasti and to subdue the *nāga* of Uruvilva was executed during the Kuṣāṇa period (Rosenfield 1967: 200, Fig. 24). Before, the throne of the Buddha used to be simple, but since the Kuṣāṇa period onward it was essentially decorated (Ingholt 1957: 29). Besides seated, standing Buddha figures were also found (Figs. 19). The European poses depicted in the relief panels were added in this period (Rosenfield 1967: 200, Fig. 25, left figure). From the beginning of the Gandhāra art till the start of its golden age only *abhaya* and *dhyāna mudrās* were used while *dharma cakramudrā* appeared at this stage (Lohuizen-de-Leeuw 1949: 108).

The third stage includes Kuṣāṇo-Sāsānian and Kidara-Kuṣāṇa period. During this period the workshop of Swati sculpture became well advanced to produce almost any style current or past in the Indus region (Swati 1997: 14). Background detail at this stage is almost finished and much attention is paid to realistic depiction of the figures, their magnification and actions (*Ibid*; Fig. 26). Various forms of *mudrās* were introduced in this period (Figs. 27,28, 29). The halo became larger (Fig. 21) and decorated with incised lines. The European pose of the Buddha, introduced during the Kuṣāṇa period continued. The pose legs crossed below the knees occurring on a complex panel is seen as late as this stage (Zwalf 1996: 70; Fig. 25). The drapery folds became dense flat terracing with less rounding at the edge, greater recourse to flatted strips and low narrow rounded ridges or rib-like strings (*Ibid*, Fig. 30). Drapery became more thin and transparent (Fig. 31). Other features are prominent chin on the longer head, narrowing of the eyes under the pronounced upper lids; their edges, eyebrows and lips can be sharp with wave or curled hairstyle (*Ibid*, Pls. 178,188,194). The bases of the pilasters are moulded and tapering (Fig. 25). In the relieves as a requirement of the scene other architectural details were also included, e.g., gate of the city and balcony (Fig. 32) as compared to the Queen Maya's dream, the marriage procession and renunciation of Sidhārtha. Empanelled Corinthian pilasters separate the scenes (Fig. 32).

In the later phase of this stage, Brahmanical ideas dominate this art, which was depicted in the form of *Garuda* taking away the *nāginīs*. *Garuda* is the vehicle of the god Viṣṇu and enemy of the *nāgas* and *nāginīs* (Tanweer 1998: 22-26; Fig. 33).

The stylistic analysis of the Wali's collection in the historical perspective shows the evolution of the Buddhist art of Swat. The changes occurred in the style simultaneously with the rest of Gandhāran art

centres. The artist of Swat was skilled enough to absorb cultural or artistic canonical changes and reflect them amicably in works of his atelier.

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Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11

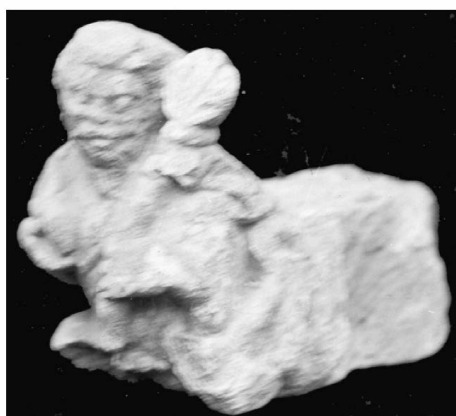


Plate 12



Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15



Plate 16



Plate 17



Plate 18



Plate 19



Plate 20



Plate 21



Plate 22

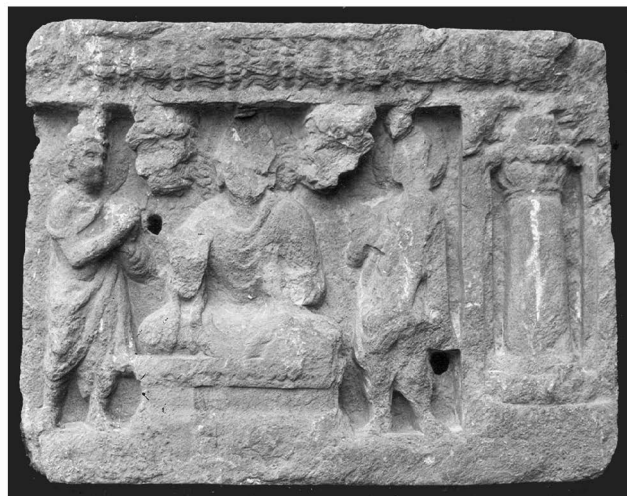


Plate 23



Plate 24



Plate 25



Plate 26



Plate 27



Plate 28



Plate 29



Plate 30



Plate 31



Plate 32



Plate 33

