

A COLOSSAL BODHISATTVA HEAD IN THE PESHAWAR MUSEUM

Juhyung Rhi

A *bodhisattva* head on display in the Peshawar Museum (accession number 2860; old number 1879) is an extraordinary piece in many ways (Figure 1). Although the body is entirely missing, the huge head alone measures 52 cm high. Since stone statues of this size in Gandhāra were invariably made in the standing pose, the *bodhisattva* head must also have been part of a standing image. Its original would have reached well over two meters high excepting the halo and the pedestal, possibly bigger than two colossal standing figures of the Buddha (Sidhāratha) in the Peshawar Museum.¹ The hair flowing down to the sides covering the ears clearly indicates that the figure represents a *bodhisattva*. It is worth noting that the piece is the sole extant example as a *bodhisattva* on this scale, although we have several images or heads of the Buddha comparable in size.² It is made of finely polished dark brownish schist, a material commonly used for such colossal statues in Gandhāra. The stone is so distinctive that it must have been quarried at a special location, yet unknown, and dressed for making colossal statues at a limited number of—if not one—workshops.

Not only in size and material but also in visual style does the *bodhisattva* head exhibit remarkable affinities to the two standing Buddhas in Peshawar. Particularly in the facial type the resemblance is greater with one of the two Buddhas that is currently placed in the right side of the central hall of the museum (Figure 2). The Buddha has a moustache while the *bodhisattva* does not, and probably because of this, the upper lips look slightly different. In the Buddha the irises are marked, and the eyelids are somewhat more drooping.³ Despite these minor differences, the two faces are almost identical, and the resemblance is more conspicuous when compared with the other Buddha (Figure 3), which is clearly distinct from the two—although the three images may well be classified in the same stylistic group. The *bodhisattva* and the Buddha were obviously made in the same workshop, and quite possibly by the same hand. The *bodhisattva* was excavated at Sahri-Bahlol mound C in the 1911-12 season (Stein 1915), and the two Buddhas were discovered at Sahri-Bahlol mound B two years earlier (Spooner 1914). This indicates that a workshop probably located not far from Sahri-Bahlol supplied the images to two separate monasteries surrounding the town.

One is naturally curious about the identity of the *bodhisattva*. The hair of the *bodhisattva* head consists of wavy curls, and on its top a chignon protrudes prominently. This may resemble the chignon of what is commonly identified as Maitreya *bodhisattva* (Rhi 2006). But in such images the hair is usually decorated with jewel strings; furthermore they invariably hold a water bottle in the left hand. With the head alone, it is hard to make judgment on this problem.⁴ However, a much smaller *bodhisattva* image of the same type in Lahore Museum (Figure 4) provides a clue for visualizing the missing part of the *bodhisattva* head in Peshawar. The Lahore *bodhisattva*, which lacks the halo and the lower part below the ankles, is only 46 cm high, which is even smaller than the Peshawar head, and must have been used for a different function.⁵ Yet its head is identical in form to that of the Peshawar. The Lahore *bodhisattva*, which is known to have originated at another mound called Dhamami around Sahri-Bahlol, was no doubt produced at the same workshop if not by the same hand. One can imagine easily that the Peshawar head had the same bodily shape and attire.

The Lahore *bodhisattva* is dressed with a *dhotī* and a *shawl* in a usual manner. But the way the drapery folds are executed is quite extraordinary, virtually unseen in any other extant examples.⁶ The *bodhisattva* wears two necklaces. The central portion of the longer necklace is decorated with components of flat and simple design, not a prominent jewel often in the form as if coveted by two monsters as is the case with the majority of Gandhāran *bodhisattvas*. The most notable feature for us

would have been the left hand, which usually holds a distinctive attribute such as a water bottle or a garland, but unfortunately both hands are missing. When the left hand is broken away, the trace is often left where an attribute was carved in attachment to the body; but one finds no such trace around the left thigh. The position of the left arm seems rather high to have held something in a usual manner. Yet it would be odd that the left hand hung down without holding anything. It seems difficult to clarify further about this unusual *bodhisattva* type without any other examples, which are utterly unknown. In any case, the *bodhisattva* constituted a type distinct from other conventional types we are familiar with (Rhi 2006).

Since our knowledge in the chronology of Gandhāran sculpture is extremely rudimentary, we cannot fix the dates of the Peshawar head and the Lahore image any more precisely than the presumption that they must have been made some time during the first century of the Kaniṣka era—along with the two colossal Buddhas from Sahri-Bahlol mound B—although this itself could be subject to questioning. In stylistic sequence, the two Peshawar Buddhas most likely predate numerous examples of decadent types from many sites of Sahri-Bahlol and Takht-i-Bahi, even if they may not belong to the earliest stage of Gandharan Buddhist imagery. Interestingly enough, there are few *bodhisattva* images that stylistically parallel the two Buddhas or those that could have preceded them. Given this, the Peshawar head and the Lahore image may mark one of the earliest types created among Gandharan *bodhisattva* images and produced only in small numbers before the familiar Maitreya types and the so-called Avalokiteśvara types were established (Rhi 2006). Whether it represents the *bodhisattva* Siddhārtha or Maitreya remains a question, which should be explored in consideration of more extensive materials on a separate occasion.

Notes

1. Although the close-up shots of the faces are reproduced in Figure 2 and 3 of this paper, for the full views of the two Buddhas see: Ingholt 1957, pls. 210 and 214; or Spooner 1914, pl. XXIIb, c. They measure respectively 260 cm (Peshawar 2857, with a halo and a broken pedestal) and 210 cm (Peshawar 2858, with a pedestal but without a halo) high. For one of these two Buddhas, Francine Tissot (1990, 746) remarks, “The proportion of the standing Buddha of Sahri-Bahlol are five heads for one body.” If the same proportion applies to the Peshawar *bodhisattva* head, its original height would have reached around 250 cm.
2. Besides the two Buddha referred to above, see for example a Buddha head from Sahri-Bahlol mound B (Peshawar 3143; h. 45.7 cm; Inghot 1957, pl. 271), an unpublished Buddha head (gift of Harold Dean, most probably from a mound in Sahri-Bahlol or Takht-i-Bahi; Peshawar 2861), and a standing Buddha from Takht-Bahi (Lahore old no. 2; h. 225 cm without a halo and a pedestal).
3. The cheeks of the *bodhisattva* head may look slightly more swelling, but this is partly due to distortion in photography.
4. Had the *bodhisattva* originated at the same site as the two Buddhas, one would have been tempted to view them as part of the seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya *bodhisattva*. But they obviously came from different contexts. As regards the *bodhisattva* head, even its approximate finding spot in the monastery is unknown. An excavation report by Aurel Stein simply presents a photo without any remark in the text (Stein 1915, fig. 19); nor is found any reference in his report in the Frontier Circle Annual Report (*ASIFC 1911-12*). We have utterly no information regarding where it was installed and how it was used.
5. It is said to have been unearthed from inside a stupa, but this is probably not its original placement.
6. An extremely similar image is in a private collection in Japan (Figure 5). Except that it is twice larger (h. 97 cm) and in different stone, gray schist, it incredibly resembles the Lahore *bodhisattva* even in details such as drapery folds and the way the limbs are broken. Without more positive evidence, I cannot but have reservations about this piece—which was first known in 1980s, the decade when numerous interesting pieces began to appear in the market—in including it in a serious scholarly discourse.

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Fig. 1: *Bodhisattva* Head. From Sahri-Bahlol Mound C. Peshawar Museum.

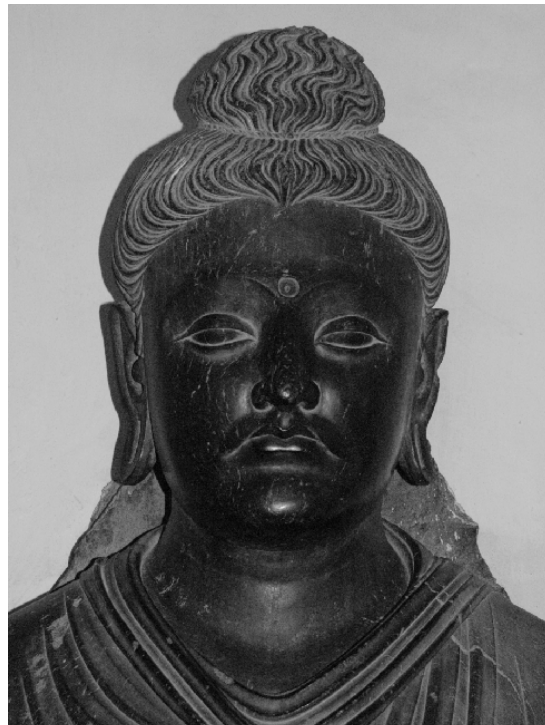


Fig.2: Buddha. From Sahri-Bahlol Mound B. Peshawar Museum.

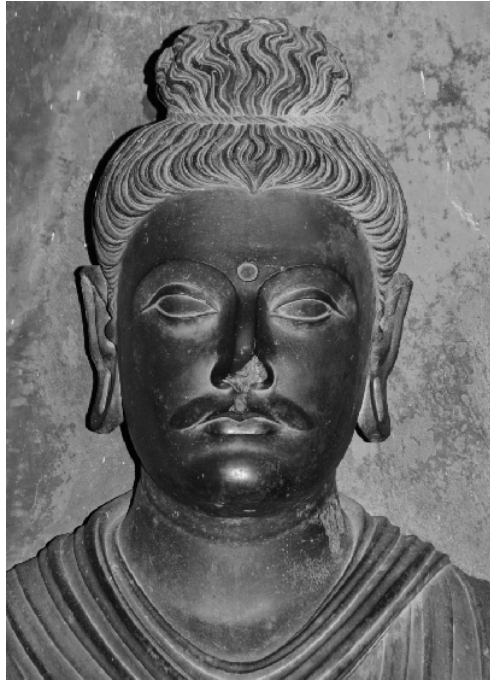


Fig. 3: Buddha. From Sahri-Bahlol Mound B. Peshawar Museum.



Fig. 4: Bodhisattva. From Dhamami Mound at Sahri-Bahlol. Lahore Museum.



Fig. 5: *Bodhisattva*. Private Collection, Japan. (After Kurita Isao, *Gandharan Art*, II, pl. 1)