

# ANCIENT PAKISTAN

Volume XXIX – 2018



Research Bulletin of the  
Department of Archaeology  
University of Peshawar



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Volume XXIX – 2018

**EDITOR**

Ibrahim Shah, PhD

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Research Bulletin of the  
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR  
Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa  
PAKISTAN

Email: [ancientpakistan@uop.edu.pk](mailto:ancientpakistan@uop.edu.pk)

ISSN 0066-1600

Year of Publication 2018

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## **EDITOR**

Professor Ibrahim Shah, PhD  
Department of Archaeology  
University of Peshawar

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Printed in Pakistan by M.Z. Graphics, Peshawar

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# Bhamāla Excavations 2015-16: A Preliminary Report

Abdul Hameed, Shakirullah, Abdul Samad and Jonathan Mark Kenoyer

**Abstract:** The World Heritage site of Bhamala is located on the right bank of the Haro River. This important Buddhist establishment was for the first time excavated by Sir John Marshall in 1930-31. Field investigations at the site were resumed in 2012-13 by the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University (Mansehra), in collaboration with the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (hereafter KP) and the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA). The said institutions continued their field work till 2016 with financial support of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of KP. Preliminary reports of the work of the first two seasons (i.e. 2012-13 and 2014-15) have been published in *Frontier Archaeology* (volumes 9 and 10) (Samad *et al.* 2017a, b). The present report focuses on the discoveries made during the field work of 2015-16 season.

**Keywords:** Bhamala, Taxila, Parinirvana, Stepped Cross, Haro River.

## Introduction

The Taxila valley, heartland of the Gandhāra civilization, is known today as one of the most important ancient centres of Buddhism. Owing to its central position on the trade route connecting the Iranian and Graeco-Roman worlds of Central and Western Asia with South Asia, it was a region that received cultural influences from many directions (Vogel 1953:124). Archaeologically rich, the Taxila valley encompasses sites ranging from prehistoric times to the Colonial period. Sir John Marshall conducted excavations in different parts of the valley for 21 years. In addition to larger urban centres such as Bhir Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh, Marshall also focused on smaller sites. One of them was Bhamāla – a small but important Buddhist monastery (Figs. 1, 2), located on the right bank of the Haro River in the Khanpur valley (an offshoot of the Taxila valley). Here Marshall (Marshall 1951a:391-92; 1960:171) unearthed a stepped cross stupa that remains to this day as one of the most important and best preserved. Work at the site was discontinued after excavating for a single season (i.e. 1930-31).

## Review of Previous Investigations

The Buddhist establishment of Bhamala was for the first time excavated by Sir John Marshall in 1930-31. His excavations revealed a good number of architectural remains. These include the unique

stepped cross stupa surrounded by 19 subsidiary stupas and chapels on the eastern and northeastern sides of the site, which have been discussed in our previous work (Hameed *et al.* 2017a; Samad *et al.* 2017c).

Another important Buddhist architectural complex that was partially exposed by Marshall is the monastery located on the easternmost corner of the present mound overlooking the Haro River/ Khanpur reservoir. As usual, this monastery comprises a large court of cells in front and a kitchen, assembly hall and refectory in the rear. The monastery does, however, exhibit some exceptional features. These include a broad verandah along the western side of the court of cells, extra cells on the northwestern and



Figure 1. General view of Bhamāla site overlooking southeast

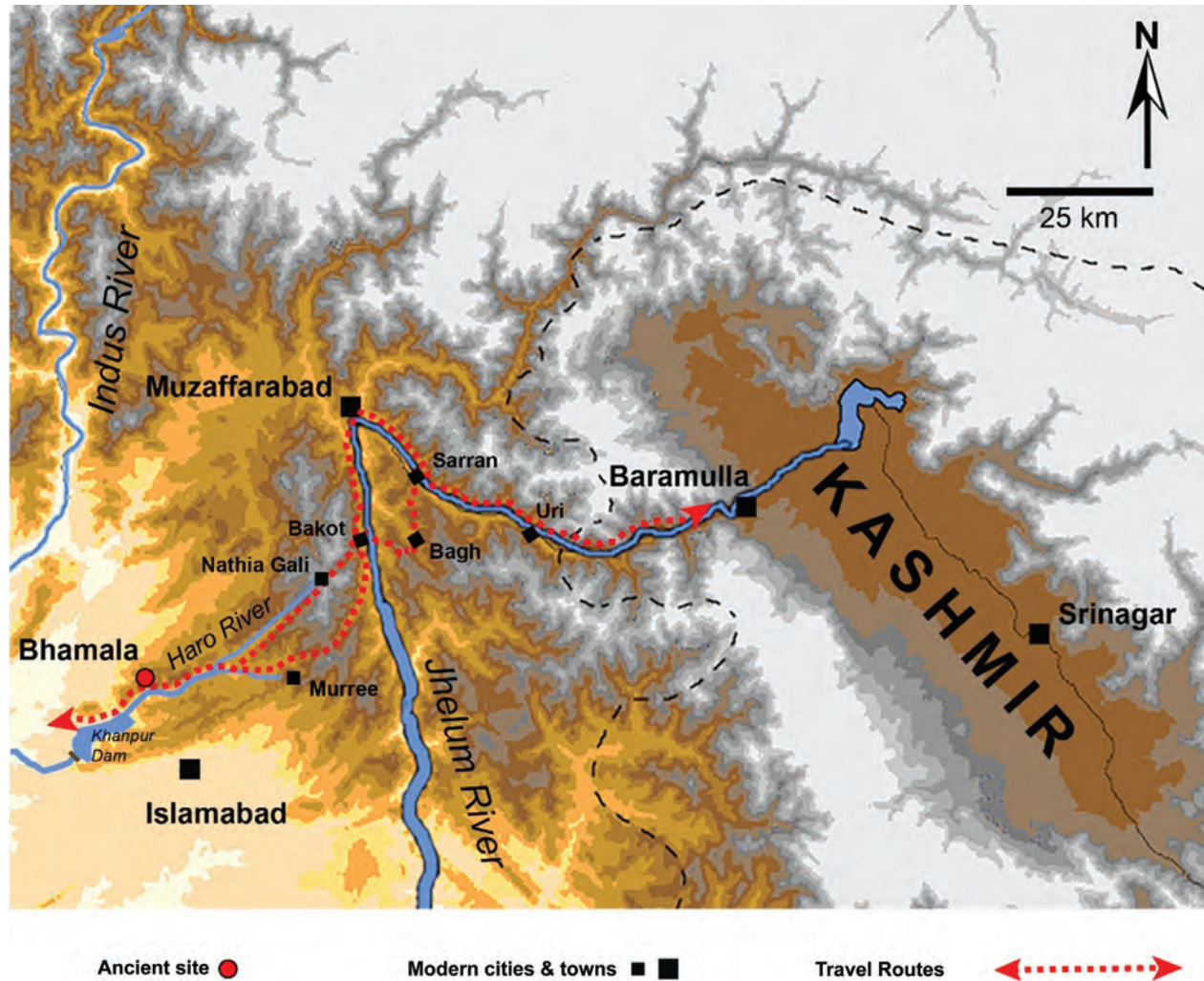


Figure 2. Map showing ancient passes connecting Taxila with Kashmir

southwestern corners, and a flight of steps leading to an upper storey located in the kitchen instead of a chamber in the court of cells. Marshall thought it possible that a wooden flight of steps once existed in this area but has decomposed with the passage of time. Had this not been the case, it would have been inconvenient for the monks living in the upper story to cross over the court of the cells and pass through the kitchen to reach their chambers (Marshall 1951a:394-95). Added interesting feature of this monastery is the buttresses on the exterior side that Marshall declared to be watchtowers. One of these buttresses is on the northeastern corner, while the second one is in the centre on the northern side. Marshall's excavations at the site also revealed many important artefacts

including the stucco sculptures, copper coins, terracotta tiles, pottery and iron objects (Marshall 1951b).

As mentioned above, Marshall considered the ruins to the west of the site not worth labour due to their eroded condition. However, our three seasons of excavations brought to light some remarkable discoveries in this area including a chamber accommodating the largest and earliest colossal size *Parinirvāṇa* statue of Buddha and another stupa (Stupa B) flanked by chapels (Fig. 3) adorned with stucco images.

We resumed excavation at Bhamāla in 2012-13 (Samad *et al.* 2017a) as a long-term project jointly conducted by the Directorate of Archaeology



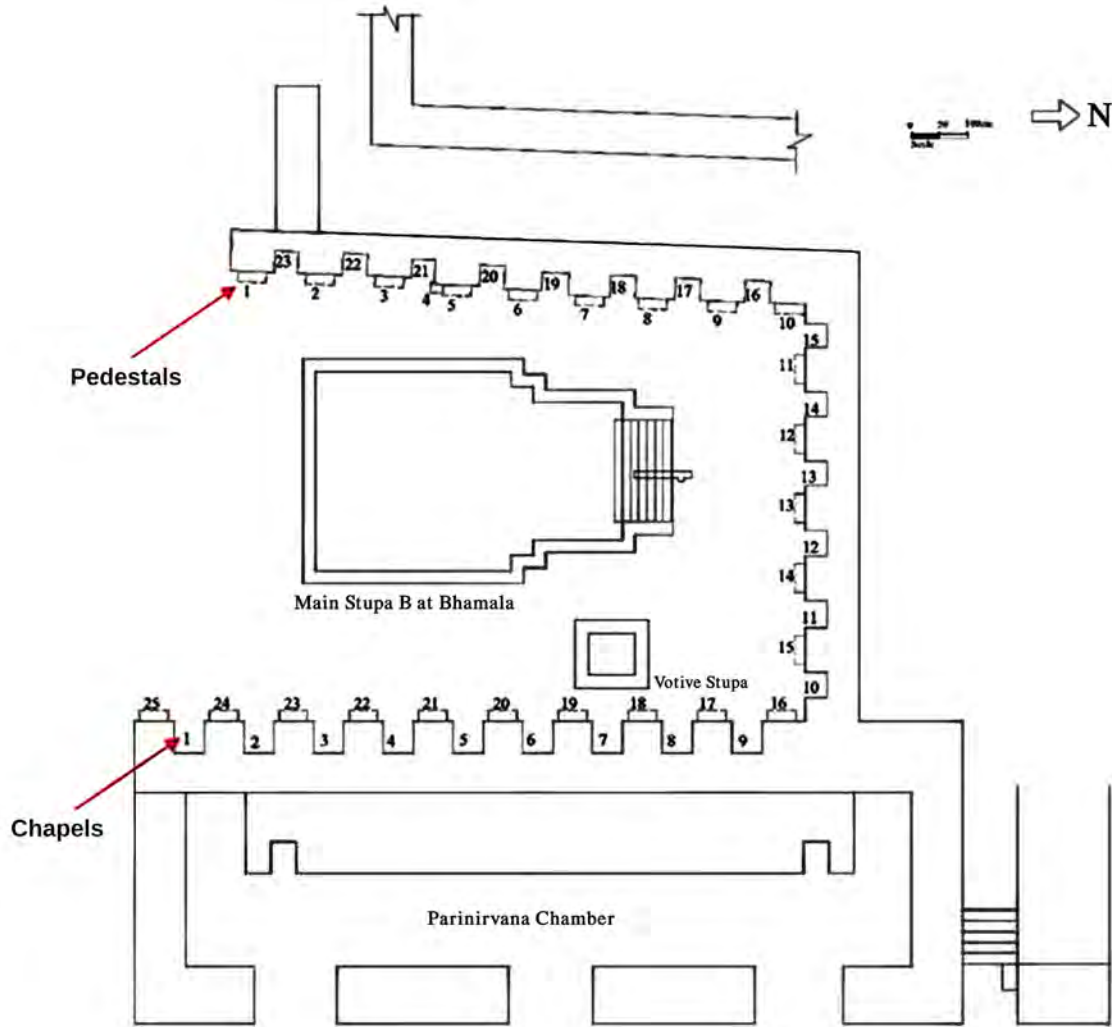


Figure 3. Main stupa B at Bhamāla surrounded by chapels and a subsidiary stupa

and Museums, Government of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This site was selected because even after the passage of 80 years, it remained well-preserved and because Marshall's report was brief and left many questions unanswered.

Our first field season at Bhamāla began on 15 December 2012 that lasted until 20 January 2013. Due to limited funds, time restrictions and unfavourable weathering conditions, it was decided to follow the excavation plan originally laid out by Marshall (Marshall 1954: pl. 114) with minor changes to the area number allotted by him (Samad *et al.* 2017a: fig. 1). However,

a Harris Matrix (Harris 1975) was utilized to record precisely relational aspects of features and artefacts as they were exposed. A total of 13 trenches (A/I, A/II, A/III & A/IV in area A; C/I to C/VI in area C; G/I and J/I & J/II) were partially excavated during the first season. Of these, area A and J had not been previously excavated by Marshall, while the remaining areas had been partially excavated by him. During the 45 days of excavation, a significant number of artefacts including fragmentary terracotta sculpture, a seal, coins, metal objects and pottery. This limited scale excavation thus paved the way for further investigations at the site in the following years.

Realizing the rich archaeological potential of

Bhamāla, excavations at the site were resumed in 2014-15 with the generous funding of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This enabled us to excavate for five months. Having the luxury of time, it was decided to conduct the work in a more systematic manner. Thus, a topographic survey was made (Fig. 4) and a gridding system (Fig. 5) was developed prior to digging. After having prepared the contour map and grid plan of the site, specific lot numbers were allotted to each trench located within the circumference of the mound. Each of the said trenches was allotted with 50 unique lot numbers to avoid any duplication. Having completed the pre-excitation exploration, a total 46 trenches were selected for excavation during the 2014-15 season. Of these, L/48, L/49, L/50, M/47, M/48, M/49, M/50, M/51, N/47, N/48, N/49, N/50, N/51, O/47, O/48, O/49, O/50 and O/51 were in the monastery. The remaining were located to the west of the main stupa and include P/45 & P/26 on the northern side of the *Parinirvāṇa* chamber, Q/25 & Q/26 also on the northern side of the same chamber, R/24 & R/25 on the north-western side of the chamber, S/24, S/25 & S /26, T/25 & T/26, U/24, U/25 & U/26 on the south-western side of the chamber, U/27

& U/28 on the southern side of the chamber U/29 & U/30 on the southeastern side of the chamber, V/27 & V/28 on the southern side of the chamber and V/29, V/30 & V/31 on the southeastern side of the chamber. In addition, excavation was also continued in the four trenches (bearing Marshall's old numbers A/I, A/II, A/III & A/IV) laid out the previous season in the *Parinirvāṇa* chamber.

Apart from hundreds of valuable antiquities (i.e. terracotta/stucco sculptures, copper coins, and metal objects), the second season of field work at Bhamāla saw the discovery of some rare objects and features in the history of the Buddhist art and architecture in Gandhāra. These rare findings include traces of the earliest monumental *Parinirvāṇa* statue of Buddha in kanjur stone (Fig.6) (Samad *et al.* 2017b: fig.6-9).

#### Excavations at Bhamāla during 2015-16

Excavations at the site were resumed in 2015-16 with the primary aim of exposing the partially excavated structures found during the previous season. These include Stupa B with chapels on its eastern, northern and western flanks as well as the cells in the monastery area. A total of 41 trenches were opened during this season. Of these

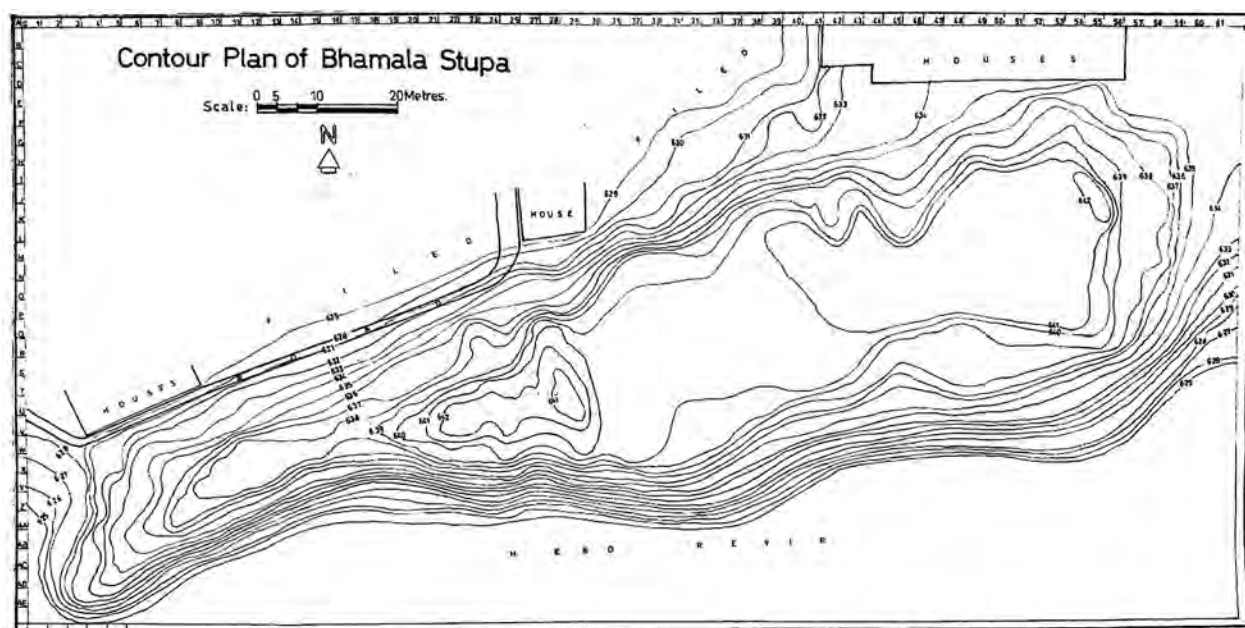


Figure 4. Contour map of Bhamāla (by Nazir Ahmad)

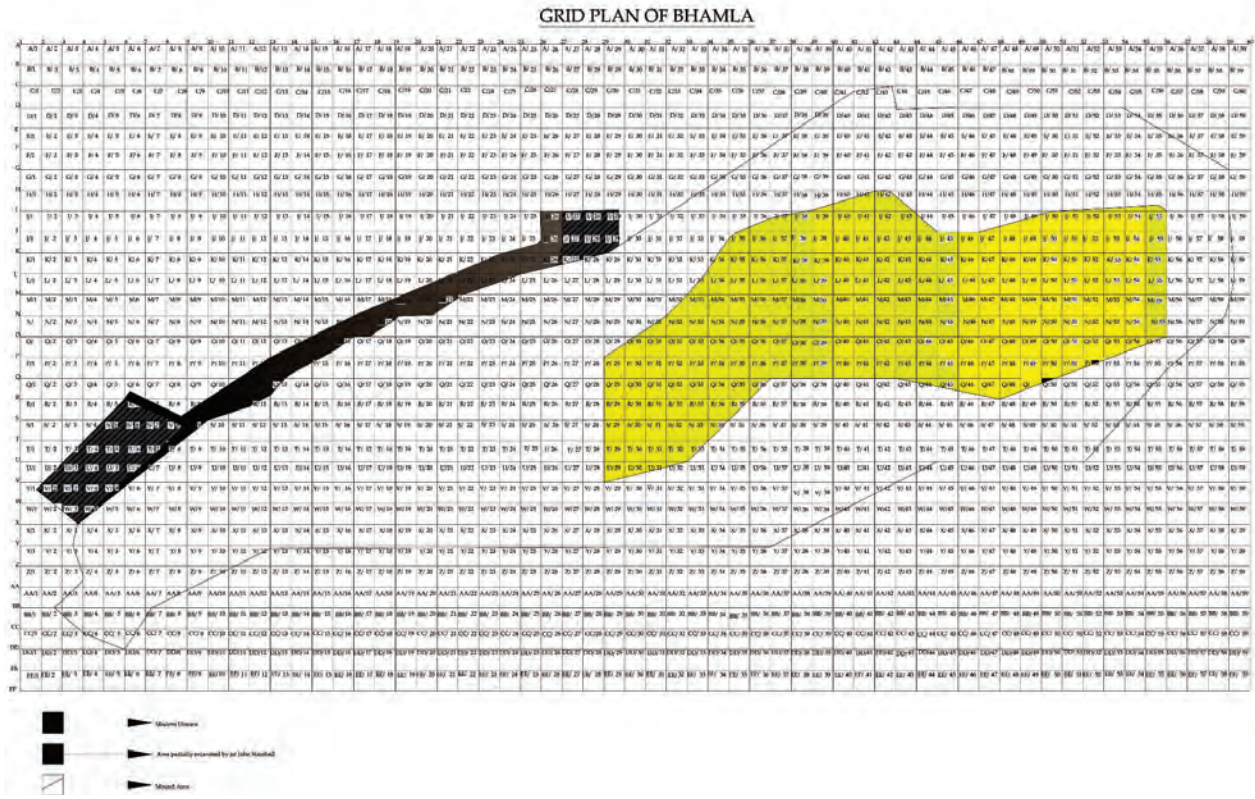


Figure 5. Grid plan of Bhamāla site (prepared during 2014-15 season of excavation)

22 trenches (L/48, L/49, M/48, M/49, M/50, M/51, N/47, N/48, N/50, N/51, O/47, O/48, O/49 & O/50 [in the monastery area] and R/25, S/25, S/26, T/25, T/26, U/26 & U/27) had been partially excavated in the previous season. The remaining 19 trenches were opened during this season (J/49, J/50, K/46, K/47, K/48, K/49, K/50, L/50, L/51, P/48 & P/49 [in the monastery area] and S/23, S/24, T/23, T/24, U, /23, U/24, U/25 & V/26 [in the stupa area]). The excavations were very productive in terms of artefact discoveries which include fragmentary stucco sculptures, 71 copper coins, one silver coin and hundreds of metal objects. Following are the details of archaeological discoveries made during 2015-16 at the site.

**Stone platform in the Monastery area**

An important structural remain exposed during this season work at Bhamāla was a square platform with a flight of three steps on its southern side. This structure was exposed on the western side of

the bathroom inside the water tank. It is surprising that this platform (Figs. 7, 8) was neither drawn by Marshall nor mentioned in his report, while other structural remains lying much deeper than this, for instance, the water tank and the flight of two steps on the eastern and western sides of the water tank, are clear in his plan drawing. There could be two reasons as to why this platform could not be recorded. Firstly, Marshall, after exposing traces of the water tank, may have only followed and cleared the edges of the tank to get an outline for his plan drawing. Secondly, he may have excavated only the southern part of the water tank up to its floor/bottom level, leaving the platform located on the northern side of the water tank unexposed. The latter seems more plausible as, during the current excavations, it was revealed that only the northern part of the water tank was undisturbed.



Figure 6. A view of the monumental Parinirvāṇa statue at Bhamāla overlooking south

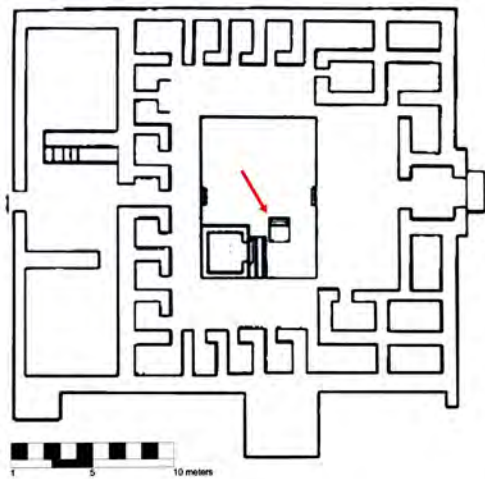


Figure 7. Stone platform exposed inside the depression at Bhamāla in the monastery



Figure 8. General view of the stone platform at Bhamāla overlooking north

## Main Stupa B

During the second season (2014-15), excavations were extended on the western side of the *Parinirvāṇa* chamber where a second group of monastic structures was exposed. These include Main stupa B, which is flanked by image shrines on its eastern, northern and western sides. Stupa B is quite different from the main stupa exposed by Marshall. This one is roughly rectangular in plan and has a flight of seven steps on its northern side. It closely resembles the Kuṇāla stupa near Sirkap, excavated by Marshall (Marshall 1951a:348) as well as the stupa at Jinnān Wāli Dheri, excavated by the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan. The newly discovered stupa at Bhamāla has chapels on its east, west and northern sides. No traces of chapels were found on the southern side. It has also been noticed during the current field work that the southern side of the stupa had been damaged by illegal diggers who, in an attempt to reach the relic casket, made a deep cut into the centre of the stupa from the southern side. The stupa has three major parts including the base, lower drum and upper drum, each of which is entirely coated and decorated with stucco plaster. The lower drum of the stupa is also decorated with a stucco Buddha seated in meditation pose and three *Parinirvāṇa* scenes (Figs. 9-11). The stucco Buddha images are separated by Corinthian pilasters.

## The Subsidiary Stupa

Apart from the chapels and pedestals, stupa B was also surrounded by a subsidiary stupa (Fig. 12) traces of which were exposed on the eastern side of the main stupa, right in front of chapel no. 7. The remains show that the subsidiary stupa was erected in the form of square terraces. A lower square terrace made of dressed lime stone and traces of stucco plaster can be seen on some portions. The lower terrace of the stupa measures 1.75 x 1.75 m, while the upper one is 1.08 x 1.08 m. The upper square terrace was entirely coated with stucco plaster and has cornice moulding at eastern side. A small umbrella of the subsidiary stupa was found in the debris on the southern side.

## The chapels

Enclosing the stupa court with rows of chapels is typical of Buddhist architecture. Sometimes these chapels were arranged in a circle immediately



Figure 9. The Mahaparinirvana Buddha facing north, found attached to the drum



Figure 10. The Mahaparinirvana Buddha facing north found attached to the drum



Figure 11. Traces of Mahaparinirvana facing east, found attached to the drum of Main stupa B on the eastern side



Figure 12. Traces of subsidiary stupa exposed in front of chapel 7



Figure 13. Court of stupa B at Bhamāla surrounded by chapels



Figure 14. Pedestal No. 5 at Bhamala accommodating the stucco standing figure

around the main stupa, as we see at Jamal Garhi and Dharmarajika. At some places, they were built in a quadrangle that was sufficiently large enough

to enclose not only the chief edifice but also all the subsidiary structures grouped around it. The court of Stupa B (Fig. 13) at Bhamāla also has such chapels on its eastern, western and northern sides. Traces of 24 chapels were reported during the last two seasons of excavations at the site. Of these, the nine on the eastern side of Stupa B were found to be in a better state of preservation. These contained stucco sculptures of seated Buddhas either in meditation or preaching pose, flanked by other deities and devotees. The chapels on the eastern side (nos. 1-9) are larger in size, measuring 73 cm in width by 84 cm in depth. In addition, traces of a votive stupa were also exposed on the eastern side of Stupa B in front of chapel numbers 7 and 8.

#### **Pedestals supporting the seated and standing stucco images**

Outside the chapels were standing images of the Buddha resting on pedestals. A total of 24 pedestals excluding pedestal number 11 were documented. These pedestals are made of stone blocks and covered with lime plaster. With few exceptions (pedestal 5, which is the smallest in size and height, and pedestal 10, which is of L-shape) (Figs. 14, 15), all of the pedestals were approximately of the same size and shape measuring 70cm (L) x 30 cm (W) x 35cm (H). Traces of standing figures, mostly feet but occasionally feet with lower drapery (most probably Buddha images) were reported from pedestal numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 15, 19, 21, 23, 24 and 25. Two pedestals (nos. 16, 17) on the north-eastern corner of the courtyard, were



Figure 15. Pedestal No. 10 at Bhamala exposed on the north-western corner of the courtyard of Main stupa B

found supporting seated Buddha images. The best-preserved figure was found on pedestal No.1 (Fig. 16), which is the first pedestal to the south of the last chapel (i.e. chapel no. 23). These pedestals are located between the chapels, thus the figures on the pedestals could be placed/attached to walls between the chapels. Apart from the pedestals, a slightly projected platform was also exposed attached to chapel number one. This platform probably supported a seated figure, the fragments of which were reported on the floor level.

As compared to other excavated sites, the courtyard of stupa B at Bhamāla shows the most extensive use of stucco images to adorn the sacred area. Whether it was the drum of the stupa or the chapels, or the pedestals between these chapels, no space was left vacant. Such an extensive use of stucco images was not seen in Taxila region sites including Jauliān. Following are the details of the stucco images.

### Stucco objects

Recent excavations at Bhamāla unearthed 248 stucco fragments of both sculptures and architectural elements. Of these, the former includes heads, arms, legs and other fragments of Buddha, Bodhisattva and other worshipers. While the last type comprises pilasters, flowers and leaves fragments. It may be noted that this number does not include the stucco figures found attached to the structures i.e. Main Stupa B, chapels on the eastern side of the said stupa and the stucco fragments on the pedestals. With the inclusion of these, the number of the stucco objects would be more than 300.

The fallen stucco sculpture fragments excavated at Bhamāla were shifted to Peshawar Museum after detailed documentation. While those found attached to the structures i.e. Main Stupa B, chapels and pedestals were left behind in their original positions after necessary conservation and restoration. The first category includes heads and body fragments. Of these the former being in better state of preservation are worth mentioning.



Figure 16. Pedestal No. 1 at Bhamala accommodating the best-preserved stucco standing Buddha

### Stucco heads

Unlike the terracotta images reported from Bhamāla, the stucco figures which decorate Main Stupa B and its surrounding chapels and pedestals seem to have better resisted the ravages of rain and sun as well as the pressure of the wrecked walls. Our excavations at Bhamāla yielded the second largest quantity of stucco figures after Jauliān. The most extensive quantity of stucco objects reported during the current excavations at Bhamāla include heads, which owing to their better preservation, survived for much longer time. Like other sites (e.g. Jauliān), (Foucher 1921:23) most of the body parts at Bhamāla were made of the (course mortar) fixed against the walls. But the heads were separately made using finer and more durable material. Holes (Fig. 17) prepared in the neck of the headless figures were obviously meant for fixing heads in them with or without a stick

embedded in it. Thus, it is easy to understand that the body of the figures was crushed into powder by the weight of the debris or disintegrated by the infiltration of rain water.

The stucco heads found at Bhamāla during the recent excavations include those of monks, devotees, Buddha, Bodhisattvas and some deities. In addition, the figure of animal most probably lion (Fig. 18) (BML-0116, pl. XLI) was also



Figure 17. Stucco Bust from Bhamāla with hole in the neck to set the peg



Figure 18. Stucco lion head from Bhamāla, hair locks represented with dots

unearthed. A brief account of the selected heads is given as under:

### Buddha heads

Of the registered stucco heads, 28 were clearly identified as those of the Buddha. The most common hair styles used by the artists of Bhamāla are the Greek wavy treatment, the so-called ladder-mode of the head proper and the snail-shell *ushnīsha* having close resemblance with those reported from Jauliān (Foucher 1921: pls. IVb, Xa). The snail-shell curls are likely to be represented by granulation (small balls) and the ladder-mode must be the straight vertical lines. On some of the Buddha heads the locks are indicated only by dots (Fig. 19). The ears show pendulous lobes enlarged by heavy earrings before attaining *nirvāṇa*. Occasionally, the forehead still retains traces of *urna*. The long eyes are sometimes more than half-closed. Almost all the faces show heaviness of the lower jaw, which according to



Figure 19. Stucco head of Buddha from Bhamāla, hair locks represented with dots



Foucher (1921:25) is one of the characteristics of Gandhāra School of the Buddhist art.

### Bodhisattvas' head

The excavations at Bhamāla yielded very few stucco heads, which can be attributed to Bodhisattvas on the bases of their elaborate head dresses (Fig. 20) (BML-363, 376, 380, 438, 443, 456). Like those of the Buddha, the Bodhisattva heads were also found in the fallen debris of chapels and upon pedestals around Main Stupa B. The size of the heads shows that these were not attached to the stupa and were rather placed on the pedestals or in the chapels.

### Monks' head

The monks head reported from Bhamāla (BML-409, 442, 492), can easily be separated from others due to their shaven heads and facial expression. All these heads were unearthed in the fallen debris of the chapels to the east of Main Stupa B. This indicates that these monk figures were originally

placed inside the chapels along other devotees flanking the central Buddha figure, which can still be seen in chapel nos. 7 and 9.

### Head of Devotees

Heads of both male and female devotees were found in the debris around Main Stupa B, which



Figure 20. Stucco Bodhisattva head from Bhamāla with elaborate headdress



Figure 21. Stucco head of a devotee from Bhamāla

were used to decorate the chapels. Traces of such figures (in standing position) can still be seen *in situ* in chapels (Fig. 21), located to the east of the stupa.

### Head of Deities

Among the deities, head of Satyr (Fig. 22), one of a class of lustful, drunken Greek gods, is worth mentioning. The stucco head of Satyr is represented with pointed ears, broad flat nose, moustaches, beards and free flowing locks having close resemblance with the stucco head of Satyr reported from the Apical Temple D in



Figure 22. Stucco head of Satyr from Bhamāla



Figure 23. Chapel on the eastern side Stupa B adorned with stucco Buddha image surrounded by double haloes

Sirkap. According to Ladislav Stanco, the basic characteristics of Satyr are accompanied by the expression of terror that has taken hold of his face at the thought of his forthcoming sufferings. A further type that developed alongside this was that of young Satyr as seen in copies of the work of Praxiteles and his school from approximately the middle of the 4th century CE (Stanco 2012:95). In Gandhara region, Satyr appears with medium frequency. The best examples include the stucco heads in the British Museum, (Stanco 2012: figs. 28, 29) and the one that came from Sirkap at Taxila (Marshall 1951b:517). Of these, the last one is dated to the Parthian period by the excavator. While Ingholt dates it to the 2nd/3rd (240-300 or 300-400) century CE, which is very similar to the dates that have come from Bhamāla. Like the one from Sirkap, the Satyr from Bhamāla also retains the basic physiognomic features of Hellenistic Satyr. He has a broad flat nose and long pointed ears. The treatment of beard and hair may however imitate, the Roman Antonina-era deep drilling in its depth of execution and plasticity. The discovery of the Satyr's head from Bhamāla shows that Greek gods and goddesses had important place in the Buddhist art of Gandhāra during the later period.

As mentioned earlier, many of the stucco figures were found in their original positions either attached to the Main Stupa B or placed inside the chapels or on the pedestals. Such sculptures were not shifted to the Museum and were left at the site after necessary conservation and preservation. Among the stucco figures, which adorn the Main Stupa B, three represent the *Parinirvāṇa* scene while the remaining 15 are seated Buddha images in *dhyānamudrā*.

Most of the stucco fragments especially heads of the human figures bear close resemblance with those found from Jauliān and Mohṛā Murādu. One of them i.e. head of Satyr has close resemblance with that found at Sirkap from the Parthian strata. While the stucco Buddha images found from the eastern chapels, provided with double haloes (Figs. 23, 24), are very rare in Gandhara region (Hameed *et al.* 2017b).



Figure 24. Stucco Buddha image from Bhamāla with halo behind head and aureole behind the rest of his body

### Metal objects

Among metal objects recovered, the most extensive number (296) of registered artefacts are composed of iron/laminated steel and include 184 nails, six rods, 22 hooks, 56 door fitting, two knives, one chisel, a chain, a latch and 23 undetermined fragments. Such an extensive number of iron objects along with the thick ashy layers reported from the site make it very clear that these ancient buildings were provided with wooden ceilings.

The second metal category is that of copper objects. In this category are 83 coins, one bangle fragment, one nail, one rod, a finger ring and twelve undetermined copper pieces. The coins were examined by Professor Gul Rahim Khan (pers. comm. 2015) and, based on his analysis, include those of the Late Kushān and Sāsānian periods. According to him, the Late Kushān coins fall into the four major groups (for detail see Hameed 2018:96-7). Apart from these coins, other copper objects reported from Bhamāla during the

last two seasons include a copper ring, rod and other miscellaneous objects.

### Conclusion

The excavations at Bhamāla jointly carried out by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University (Mansehra), during 2015-16 were very productive. These excavations not only revealed hundreds of artefacts including terracotta and stucco sculptures, copper and silver coins, iron nails, door-fittings and hooks, and also a good number of structural remains including the stone platform inside the water tank exposed in the monastery area, the Main Stupa B with its surrounding chapels and pedestals as well as the partially exposed cells in the monastery area. Some of these discoveries, due to their unique features, are very remarkable. These worth-mentioning findings include stucco Buddha images surrounded by nimbus and areole (Figs. 22, 23), and copper and

silver coins. Based on analyses of the copper coins and the radiocarbon dates of the charred wood and charcoals collected from different stratigraphic units, we can re-establish the chorology of the site from third to fifth century CE, which was earlier proposed by Marshall from fourth to fifth century CE.

### Acknowledgements

We extend our thanks to the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums (KP) for providing financial assistance and logistic support, without which field work at the site could not have been resumed. Faculty and students of the Department of Archaeology (Hazara University) actively participated in the entire process of excavation; thus, the participating staff and students equally deserve to be thanked. We are also grateful to the field team namely, Nazir Ahmad (Draughtsman), Aamir Sajjad, Neelam Abbas, Shaista Sher, Sayed Gul, Muhammad Zahoor, Mehran Ashraf, Ehsan Javed (Archaeologists), Adnan (Site Supervisor), Hasnain Raza (Accountant) and Kashif (Photographer) for their hard work in making the project a success.

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## Contributors

**ABDUL HAMEED, PhD**

Lecturer, Department of Archaeology,  
Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

**ABDUL SAMAD, PhD**

Director, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums,  
Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar,  
Pakistan

**ABDUR RAHMAN, PhD**

Former Professor/Chairman, Department of  
Archaeology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

**AYESHA MEHMOOD MALIK, AR**

Assistant Professor, School of Architecture  
and Planning, University of Management and  
Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

**BRIAN E. HEMPHILL, PhD**

Professor, Department of Anthropology,  
University of Alaska, Fairbanks,  
Alaska 99775 USA

**GUL RAHIM KHAN, PhD**

Professor, Department of Archaeology,  
University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan

**JONATHAN MARK KENOYER, PhD**

Professor, Department of Anthropology,  
5240 Swell Social Science Building, 1180  
Observatory Drive, University of Wisconsin,  
Madison, USA

**LUCA MARIA OLIVIERI, PhD**

Director, ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission in  
Pakistan, 31-32 College Colony, Saidu Sharif, Swat,  
Pakistan (and Hagebergerstr. 47 10965 Berlin,  
Germany)

**MAMOONA KHAN, PhD**

Professor and Head, Department of Art and Design,  
University of Gujrat, Sub Campus Government  
Postgraduate College, Satellite Town, Rawalpindi,  
Pakistan

**MUHAMMAD ADRIS KHAN**

Research Scholar, Department of Archaeology,  
Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

**MUHAMMAD ZAHIR, PhD**

Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology,  
Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

**MUKHTAR ALI DURRANI, PhD**

Former Professor/Chairman, Department of  
Archaeology, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

**MUHAMMAD NASIR CHAUDHRY, AR**

Assistant Professor, School of Architecture  
and Planning, University of Management and  
Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

**RIFAAT SAIF DAR, PhD**

Director, Institute of Visual Arts and Design,  
Lahore College for Women University,  
Lahore, Pakistan

**SHAKIRULLAH, PhD**

Associate Professor/Chairman,  
Department of Archaeology, Hazara University,  
Mansehra, Pakistan

**SYED SAJJAD HAIDER, AR**

Assistant Professor, School of Architecture  
and Planning, University of Management and  
Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

ISSN 0066-1600