

TWO RELIEF SCULPTURES FROM SHANAISHA, SWAT: A NEW APPROACH

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The site of Shanaisha is situated about six kilometres south of Saidu Sharif and about nine kilometres south of Mingora Mengchili of Hiuen Tsang (Stein 1921: 6 & Dani 1983: 14) in district Swat. It lies just off the metalled road of Marghuzar and very close to the village known as Kukari at the foot of Tarkana mountain. The valley is watered by Saidu or Marghuzar *Khwar* (stream).

This site of invaluable archaeological wealth was explored initially in 1926 by Sir Aurel Stein (Stein 1929: 73, 1930: 43 fig. 34, Pl. 7) and revisited some thirty years later by G. Tucci in 1958 (Tucci 1958: 313). During Stein's visit, this site was marked as Buddhist ruins on the survey map and was later on shown in the survey of Pakistan map too (One inch sheet 43 B/6 Second edition, 339777 (Survey 1926-7).

In 1989 the first excavation campaign was conducted by the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, under the leadership of Mr. Nazir Ahmad Khan, ex-curator of the Swat Museum (Rahman 1993: 7). In 1990 a joint archaeological investigation carried out by the Department of Archaeology University of Peshawar, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Abdur Rahman (Professor and former chairman of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar) and the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan. Mian Said Qamar was (then the deputy director) was deputed at the site as representative of the Government (Rahman 1993: 7).

Stein (1926) marked the site fairly well preserved while Prof. Tucci (1958) found the stupa greatly damaged. He was also told that from it many sculptures had been dug out and sold in the underground market by treasure hunters (Taddei 1998:171).

It is interesting to note that two preliminary reports on the same excavation were published by Mian Said Qamar and Muhammad Ashraf in 1991 and Rahman in 1993 (Qamar and Ashraf 1991; Rahman 1993).

M. Taddei reviewed both the reports on Shanaisha and questioned different aspects of the excavation reports because of many contradictions in the texts (Taddei 1998). The conflicting views expressed in both of those reports have created much confusion.

The aim of this paper is not to criticize their preliminary excavation reports of Shnaisha but to highlight the importance of and give due place to two rare sculptures found during the proper excavation of the site (pls. 1 & 2). The sculptures under discussion are now the pride possession of Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, University of Peshawar¹. They are on display and are objects of interest for all visitors.

The first is a cult image (pl. 1) recovered during excavation of 1990. According to Professor Abdur Rahman the image was recovered from cell No 2 (Rahman 1993: 20), but it is described as cell

No 1 by Said Qamar (Qamar and Ashraf 1991: 185). To Rahman it is a standing image of Śiva Mahādeva (Rahman 1993: 32-33 pl. XXVIIb²) but to Mian Said Qamar it is a Bodhisattva (Qamar and Ashraf 1991: 188, pl.13). Both the excavators placed the cell (in period II) approximately dated from 4th to 5th century AD. The material according to Qamar is sandstone (Qamar and Ashraf 1991: 188) but to Rahman it is brownish schist (Rahman 1993: 32) while to Taddie it is another variety of schist (Taddei 1998:179). Actually the material of the image is mica schist with a pedestal made of marble. Such marble is available in the vicinity. The measurement of the pedestal given by Abdur Rahman is 0.30m x 0.40m in height and width and 0.60m in length and the slot on the pedestal is 0.80 x 0.15 x 0.45m (probably in cm) (Rahman 1993: 33). But the actual size of the pedestal is 73cm in length, 53cm in width, and 32cm in height, while the cavity is 46cm in length, 15cm in width, and 9cm in depth.

The standing image is 130cm in height with an 81cm width (but because of the oval shape its size varies). While the thickness of the image near the broken legs is hardly 6cm.

This image slightly damaged is shown in a standing position, holding a spear (upper top missing) in the right hand and a *kamandalu* in the left. His gesture and the handling of both the objects are very bold and at ease. The *kamandalu* is in the form of a flower basket with crisscross decoration. The back portion of the head (found separately) has the forehead and nose missing. His eyes are half closed. He wears a (much-damaged) three-peaked crown, under which locks of his princely hair can be seen above the temples.

He wears ear pendants, a pearl necklace, amulets, a bracelet, armlets, and bangles and the upper part of his body above the waist is naked. The armlets and bangles are frontally marked by a four petalled rosette visible to the viewers. The dress consists only of an Indian *dhoti* marked on the front by parallel ridges while held together at the waist by a belt studded with a pearls pattern. The end of the belt falls the front from a buckle, one making a loop and the other one an undulating line between the legs in the shape of a four petalled rosette.

The muscular figure is shown carved upon an oval block of stone. The feet are missing. The figure stood upon a heavy marble pedestal, decorated with lotus petals on the top margin and two lions one on each corner. Between these lions, there is a large six petalled flower. Two human figures are facing the flower. Kneeling and touching the flower, they are also holding some object in their raised right hands while their left hands are resting on their thighs.

It is a rare piece and probably first example in Gandhara when an ascetic Bodhisattva was placed for worship.

It cannot be a Śiva Mahādeva as claimed by Rahman (Rahman 1993: 33), because the image is wearing a crown and therefore the possibility of this sculpture being Brahmanical in character does not arise. A short *dhoti* is already found on rock carving in Swat. The image is Buddhist in character and may represent Bodhisattva Maitriya. This view has already been supported by Mian Said Qamar (Qamar and Ashraf 1991: 188), Filigenzi (Filigenzi 1997: 628) and Taddei (Taddei 1998:177). The most interesting feature of the Shanaisha excavation is that it has produced a large number and a great variety of Bodhisattvas. It appears that the beginning of the Bodhisattva worship started in period II and surprisingly Buddha images are only confined to the Corinthian capitals and

different reliefs. No single piece of the individual Buddha is reported from the Shanaisha excavations. The predominance of the Bodhisattava images described in the Shanaisha excavation clearly suggests the worship of Bodhisattava. As far as the Bodhisattava worship is concerned, this phenomenon was not new. The cult of Bodhisattva seems to be an early introduction in the Swat region as suggested by the statement of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hian (Beal 1981: 31-2). A separate shrine was built over the debris (layer 8). This could also be the first shrine of the Bodhisattava in Gandhara, hence the importance of this piece. Abdur Rahman mentioned elsewhere (Rahman 1995:71) that the shrine is certainly not contemporary with the stupa, for a layer of cultural debris, which covers the paved floor of the stupa, passes under it.

Stylistically the pedestal row of lotus petals and the lions with woolly wig like manes may recall the pedestal decoration of the Damkot piece which is a terracotta plaque of the Buddha of 6th century AD (Rahman 1968-9 title cover of the *Ancient Pakistan*, Vol. IV)³.

From the same site another green phyllite pedestal of Bodhisattva Maitriya depicts lions being fed by amorini (Rahman 1993: pl XXVIa and b). The rendering of feeding is naturalistic and typically Hellenic. The movement and activeness of the entire depiction recalls Chinese paintings. However the one under discussion (Rahman 1993: pl. XXVIIIa) is timid, lifeless, non-naturalistic and non-active. This one is local in style and the material is marble.

Bodhisattva figures recovered from this level with seats are the early phase while Bodhisattva Maitriya (Śiva of Rahman) is the last phase. This has Brahmanical influences which start in 6th century AD and continue upto 10th century AD.

The second extremely interesting relief registration No. 9 (Pl. 2) in green schist measuring 27x35cm. It depicts a seated figure holding a scroll in both hands.

Actually the excavator rightly pointed it out to be a Roman functionary (Rahman 1993:28 pl. XLIa⁴) but its due place has not been properly highlighted. Neither its importance nor its significance has been realized.

The relief panel is found in two broken pieces whose left side is also missing. This fragmentary relief depicts a moustached figure seated on a chair with feet resting on a footstool under a smart vine tree, comprised of only three leaves, and a spiral tendril. He is reading message/instructions from a papyrus scroll. To his right are two youthful figures listening to him attentively. They are dressed in short knee-long tunics with semi wavy pleated skirts. They hold daggers in their left hands, while their right hands are resting on their right cheeks showing a gesture of attention to the seated figure. All of the three figures are bare footed which indicates a royal court.

This piece supports the idea that it was the semi-foreign school of Gandhara which introduced for the first time western rationalism into the narrative scene (Buchthal 1945: 3).

To some, the classical influence in Gandhara is not the result of Alexander's Indian campaign or Greek kingdoms in Bactria or the Indus, but is due to the Roman influence. They are introduced by the Roman merchants and soldiers by bringing small objects to Gandhara. (Buchthal 1945: 4). Politically, Gandhara was never part of the ancient world. Alexander was not more than a hostile invader. As far as Romans are concerned, Gandhara never knew them as enemies or conquerors.

The chief aim of Roman policy in the east was the safety of the trade routes. Roman art reached Gandhara through peaceful traders and caravans (Buchthal 1945: 23).

Many art-historians and archaeologists describe Roman influence on Gandhara in the form of toga scenes on the sarcophagus. They have no direct evidence, but this sculpture clearly suggests a direct Roman influence.

In the east the reading style was to place the scroll flat before the reader, but here the reader holds the scroll vertical. This gesture along with the dress, scroll, chair, footstool and vine scroll is clearly Roman. The standing figures' dresses, hairstyle, and snail shell curly hair suggest the Roman style. To ensure the safe custody of this important message, the messengers are equipped with daggers shown on their left handled vertically. They are probably foreign visitors or they have brought some message for a local ruler or probably a pro-Roman ruler in Gandhara.

Notes

- ¹ The Museum was opened to the general public in 1998.
- ² Also by Farooq Swati 1997: 15, pl. 55.
- ³ Also see Taddei 1998: 181.
- ⁴ Also by Qamar and Ashraf (1991: 187, pl. 29) and followed by Farooq Swati (Swati 1997: pl. 42)

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