

## A Note on Some Cultural Objects from District Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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**Abstract:** Modern town of Charsadda was the capital of ancient Gandhara where a series of historical events occurred. This city played a vital role in the emergence of second phase of urbanization in South Asia. Charsadda witnessed the vistas of Achamanid to the post-colonial periods on its soil. Less in number the antiquity found through archaeological investigation however, more found accidentally which helped scholars to understand the past culture of Pushkalavati. The paper deals with certain cultural objects that were found from different villages such as Khanmahi, Sardheri and Charsadda city.

**Keywords:** Charsadda, Pushkalavati, Gandhara, Bala Hisar, Khanmahi

### Introduction

The modern town of Charsadda or the ancient city of *Pushkalavati* (Lotus City) lies on Lat: 34, 1453 (348'43.080"N) and Long: 71, 7308 (7143'50.880"E) with Alt: 282 m. some 18 miles to the north east of Peshawar in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, province of Pakistan. Charsadda has been the first capital city of ancient Gandhara (Ali, 1994: 1) lying on the junction of Swat and Kabul rivers in the Peshawar Valley, which is accessible from several routes. One of the important routes is connecting Balkh (Bactria) with India (Wheeler, 1950: 48). Pushkalavati is mentioned by the Greek historian Arian in the context when Astes, the king of Pushkalavati was subjugated by Hephastion, a Greek general of Alexander of Macedonia (Dani, 1965: 1; Cunningham, 1872: 47). In Charsadda the remains of two important cities Shaikhan Dheri and Bala Hisar have been exposed systematically.

Charsadda was mentioned by M.A. Court, a French officer in the services of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in 1826, with the name of Ashtnagar or Hashtnagar (Court, 1836: 479-80). In 1863 General Cunningham visited Charsadda and identified it with Pushkalavati (Cunningham, 1872: 90), the Pali form of Pikkalaoti, which was the origin of the Greek name Peukelaotis. (Cunningham, 1871: 90). Later, H.W.B. Garrek,

under the instructions of General Cunningham started digging in and around Bala Hisar, a raised archaeological Mound. About the same time Lieutenant Martin, R. G. deputed by the Government of the Punjab as he was commanding Sapper and Miners Company. Later on Mr. L. White also worked in Palatu Dheri in 1883. In succeeding years H.A. Dean made topography of the district (Marshal, 1902-03: 142).

Charsadda has been surveyed where a number of important archaeological sites have been unearthed. Likewise, excavations at certain sites have also been conducted that produced amazing result about the socio-cultural history of the then society. However, some more cultural objects have recently been discovered by a private owner that I am going to present for highlighting further the importance of this region. The objects reported from the sites of Khanmahi, Sardhadherai and Charsadda city. We are thankful to the owner for allowing us to photograph them. The finds are comprised of stone, terracotta, gold, ivory and stucco objects presented to scholarly world for academic interest.

## Stone Objects

### ***Fire Bowl (Figure 1)***

It is a small pedestal pot with everted rim with 13 x 14 x 6 cm size, made of green Phyllite and is reported from Khanmahi. The outer body of the pot is executed with double incised lines. A short stem integrates the base where a low projecting square socket has been provided for fixing. Such fire pots have been practiced during different events in rituals especially in Greek temples.

### ***Toilet Tray (Figure 2)***

A broken shallow stone toilet tray in green Phyllite with 16 cm dia. is reported also from Khanmahi. It has been divided equally into two halves. The upper half contains a carved image most probably of a crouching dragon or Ketos sea-monster in profile, which is however missing, only the twisting tail of the supposed animal is visible. The lower half is decorated with carved petals of a sunflower. The perimeter and diametrical divider decorated with carved loops encircling solid dots. The tray has incised double lines at base on the backside. These common flat palettes in round are mostly influenced with western and Hellenistic art (Stanco, 2000: 137) which are mostly reported from Sirkap-Taxila (Dar, 2006: 211).

### ***Relief Panel (Figure 3)***

A rectangular schist slab measures 18 x 9 x 4 cm, is another object reported from Khanmahi. The scene is divided into two parts by a persepolitan pilaster, enclosed in a rectangular frame. On the left Buddha is depicted seated in Dhyanamudra under a chaitya arch on a decorated pedestal (Faccenna and Filigenzi, 2007: 73. pl. 38). Same type of pedestal is also on display in the Peshawar Museum catalogue/Acc. No: PM\_02811. Both shoulders of the image of Buddha are covered with wavy folds of the drapery. The face is damaged and the head has a spherical halo behind with knotted hairs. Right end of the arch shows a

hanging cone like design whereas the left side missing. The curvature of the arch is decorated with saw tooth or denticulate designs. The right register of the panel depicts a defaced standing figure probably in *Anjalimudra*, wearing a turban and dhoti, inside the chaitya arch. The curvature margin of the arch is also decorated in denticulate form. There is square hole showing that it was fixed on wall surface. The end of the panel also shows a broken persepolitan pilaster enclosed within a frame, of which only the capital is partially preserved. In the Peshawar Museum collection, a similar pedestal shows the Naga Elapatra scene whereas, here the pose is depicted with meditation (Ali and Qazi, 2008: 237). Such pedestals in Gandhara are very common in schist material.

### ***Human Hand (Figure 4)***

Fragment of a hand with 7x5x3cm size in schist is too reported from Khanmahi, probably it was a part the image in *Abhayamudra*, which is now broken at the wrist and engraved with *chakara* or lotus impression. The hand shows two incised lines at the wrist, one at the palm and three lines at the division of the fleshy fingers.

### ***Lingham (Figure 5)***

Stone linga measures 6.5 in length and 5cm in dia. is reported from Charsadda city. This cylindrical shafted linga has a rounded top executed in prominent lines which forms a common feature of lingham. In the present example, the middle shaft and the round top has been erotically formed with lines which is smooth and polished. The front side of the lingam shows a straight vertical line from top to the base and two sloping lines produced from the top at each direction to mark its feature prominently, creating the actual shape of the *phallus* a symbolic representing Siva. There are two incised lines visible on the base of the shaft whereas the lower portion has been left rough which was most probably fixed in yoni. From Gandhara many example of lingas have

been reported in different material. Particularly from Kashmir Smast-Mardan (situated to northeast of Charsadda) a five feet linga in marble found which was fixed with smaller size lingas (Khan, 2006: 60).

### Stucco Objects

#### *Buddha Head (Figure 6)*

A cracked stucco head, probably of Buddha with 15x10.5cm size came from Khanmahi. The head is provided with an *ushnisha* on top, while both the ears are broken too. The nose is chipped and a crack visible at the forehead as well. The eyes are shown half open and the mouth smiling. The head is probably fixed to a stucco bust of figure.

#### *Lion faces (Figure 7)*

Some broken stucco faces of lions have been reported from Khanmahi. Similar faces have been found from Taxila (southeast of Charsadda) in major collection.

- a. A damaged face of a lion (11x10cm) with wide opened eyes in staring position, showing the nostril cavity a prominent one at nose tip. The traces of mane at forehead also are traceable.
- b. In this example (10x7.5cm), the oblong nose with wide opened eyes seems with eyebrows ridges. Left eye of the face is chipped off with fleshy chicks.
- c. This example of lion face (8x7cm) with wide opened eyes in solid above which are the prominent brows ridges. Nostrils are concave, below which the mouth is considerably stretched wide. The left ear of the lion face is intact and the right one is missing.
- d. In this example, the lion (6x6cm) face is bulging or projecting outwards with round solid eyes gazing at front.

### Gold Objects

#### *Pendant (Figure 8)*

A gold pendent piece with 4x3.5cm size produced in gold & red carnelian is reported from Sardhderai. A hoop on the top is provided for hanging. The hoop is connected with crescent ornament containing a red carnelian glass/stone fixed in gold frame of which ends are added of roundels. From the middle of crescent bust of a lady is suspended probably the image of Demeter in repousse (Dar, 2006: 215). The image is having wide-open eyes, long and combed hair lined on back. Her garment covers the whole bust, above which she is wearing a necklace and ear rings.

### Terra Cotta Objects

#### *Bull Figurine (Figure 9)*

A stylised bull figurines (11x10x6.5cm) clearly showing the pronounced hump at neck is reported from Sardhdherai. The figurine is slightly damaged at several places whereas, two pierced eyes with solid dot at forehead has been applied to the head. Short ears at each side are visible. The prominent saddle at back, tail at hind portion and legs are complete and a twisted rope has been also applied around the neck. Such kind of example have also been reported from different sites of Charsadda like Balahisar and Shaikhan Dheri in considerable numbers.

### Ivory

#### *Ferule (Figure 10)*

This ivory ferule (8.5x4.5cm) found from Charsadda city, represents male head wearing an elaborate serpentine headdress with conical top. The shaven face has prominent moustaches, open eyes and closed lips. It is probably part of Malacca cane stick which usually topped with ivory objects.

### Conclusion

Charsadda is archaeologically a very rich region

where the antique seekers deliberately damaging the sites by digging the antiquity out to get some earning in the market, unaware of the loss they are causing the archaeological sites and antiquity. Understanding the peril of archaeological antiquity from the sites steadily waning in the district Charsadda this effort is made to publish the private collection, as we have seen that most of precious object travelled abroad without recording. Besides, the green Phyllite objects toilet tray and fire bowl indicates some notions towards the exchange of material that the green Phyllite material mostly used in Swat (ancient

Udhiyana) whereas the linga example clearly indicates that in Gandhara the other non-Buddhist cultures also were existing shoulder to shoulder.

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Figure 1. Fire Bowl of Green Phylite



Figure 2. Toilet Tray with Sea-Monster



Figure 3. Relief Penial with Buddha in Meditation Pose



Figure 4. Hand with Chakra Impression Raised in Abhayamudra





Figure 5. Linga with Prominent Feature in Stone



Figure 6. Male Head Probably Buddha Image

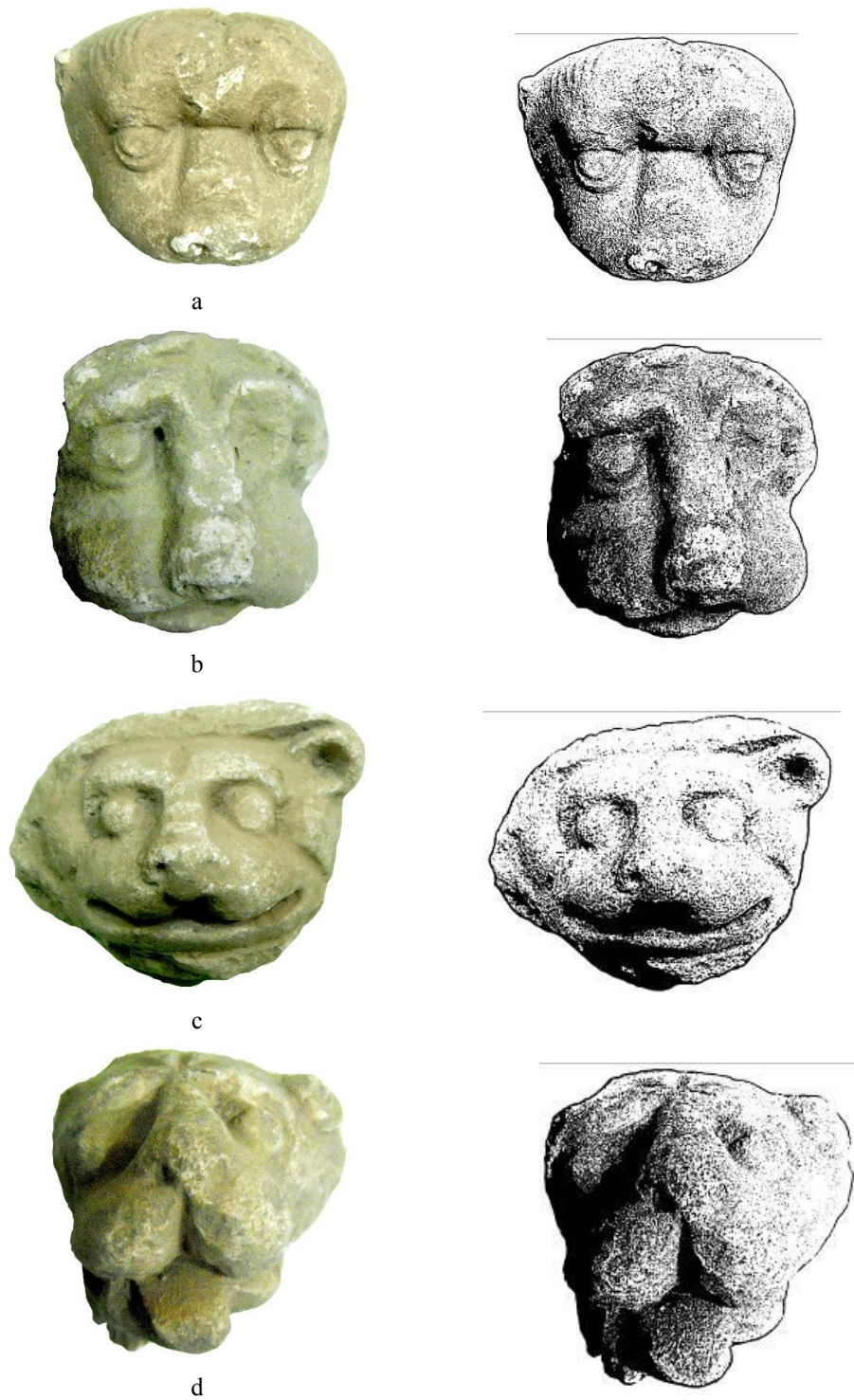


Figure 7. a to d, A series of Lion Images in Different forms





Figure 8. A Pendant with Lady Image in Repousse



Figure 9. Bull Figurine with Pronounced Hump & Saddle at Back



Figure 10. Ivory Ferulle, Moustached Image