

Terracotta Heads From Ancient Gandhāra

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Gandhāra is a land that remained from a very early period an area of great turbulence, interface and a place for cross cultural activities. This land not only entertained to absorb, amalgamate and assimilate influences from these aliens but native cultural impact could also be observed in different cultures and arts of the neighboring territories outside the Indo-Pak subcontinent. The artistic manifestations in form of the Buddhist art of Gandhāra reflects a cultural syncretism of both Indian and foreign inspirations. This art develop over a long period of several centuries and passed through different developmental stages and is depicted in different forms and executed in different types of materials. In the early art of ancient Gandhāra, like other materials, clay also remained an important medium for making cult objects. Some of the earliest among these objects coming from Gandhāra may represent mother-goddesses and some ritual objects probably come from Bhir Mound, Taxila (Rienjang 2010:203). Sometime stucco is cored with clay the tradition which continued for a very long period in this part of the world.

The various terracotta heads, which are the subject of the present paper equally represent some sorts of amalgamation in their style and features. These heads are said to have discovered a few years back in ancient Gandhāra and were brought to the Department of archaeology, University of Peshawar, for identification; the author was allowed to publish it for scholarly interest¹. They were mostly found intact showing an average size between 12-18cm. Its exact provenance was not disclosed to the author but on the basis of its styles and other features, apparently, they seems coming from two different workshops; one may be located in the region of Jalalabad or Hadda

and the other one may be in Gandhāra on Pak-Afghan frontier. It is also possible that all these were produced in the same workshop but executed by different artists keeping in mind the purpose, subject matter and requirement of its use. In the first workshop, one can place with utmost caution, the Nezak heads (figs. 1-11) and the second one is consisted of figures 12-16. Heads of the first group can be compared with those found in the area of Jalalabad, Ghazni and Akhnur. In some cases the hair is more voluminous compare to the contour of the face (Figs. 7-8) but generally this group of heads is very well executed. The most important and rare or unique pieces in this group are our figures 10 and 11, particularly the veiled head which represents a real master piece. She is represented with curly hair locks and the head delicately covered with a scarp rarely occurred in the Buddhist art of Gandhāra. The other examples, may not be exactly of the same type, is that coming from Hadda (Exhibition Catalogue 1963: no. 158) and the other one depicted in a relief panel found at Aziz Dheri (Nasim Khan 2010:). The execution of all heads included in this paper may have been occurred somewhere between 2nd – 6th centuries AD.

Fig. 1: Bodhisattva

The left side of his crown and partially his left forehead as well as hair is missing. The head shows a round chin and a closed mouth with a dimple between the chin and the mouth. The nose is pointed and the eyes with stretched eyebrows are half opened. The wavy hair is combed backwards. The head is worn above the forehead. The intact portion of the crown suggests that it is made of a large size turban probably with a jewel in its centre. The folds of the turban are arranged from front towards the back. The interesting element in this figure is

¹ I am very thankful to Prof. Z. Tarzi for his precious comments on these objects

the large and heavy hair compare to the contour of the face.

Fig. 2: Bodhisattva

The head is intact and represents one of the best examples of this series as far as the hair style is concerned. It is a soil incrustated head with an oval face showing a round chin and a closed mouth. The nose is sharp and pointed and the eyes are half opened. His right ear lobe is missing. The eyebrows are executed in the same manner as the previous example. The dense and bulky hair is combed sideways from the centre. The top of the head shows a tuft of hair which is arranged in a horizontal manner and having a knot in the middle. The straight hair or a piece of cloth covers the back of the head.

Fig. 3: Bodhisattva

The head shows a small face with a round chin, closed mouth and a pointed nose. The eyes are half opened and the hair is probably combed sides as to be judged from the visible part on the temples. The hair is shown with grooved wavy lines. The earlobes are partially broken. The head is covered with a heavy headdress having a flat top and a round brim. The lower border is shown in round with a grooved line in the centre which goes around the head. In front and above the forehead the hem of the crown passes through a barrel shaped gem, which seems stamped in the centre and in the front corners. Above the hem, the crown is decorated with round and other similar grooves. The upper edge shows a wavy design. A stucco head with almost similar headdress is preserved in Peshawar Museum (PM_02165).

Fig. 4: Bodhisattva

This is a damaged head missing from its top. The elongated face is shown with a round chin and a closed mouth; the lower lip is more fleshy compare to the previous examples. The nose is fleshy and pointed; the nostrils are small and narrow. The intact ear shows a long ear lobe and his elongated eyes are half opened.

Fig. 5: Bodhisattva

This is another damaged head with soil incrustation. The hair, the head dress and the ear are missing. The available portion of the head is broken at several pieces but they are cleverly set together by using a glove. The face is elongated and is shown with a pointed to round chin. The lips are shown tight and his nose is depicted sharp and pointed. The eyes are shown half opened as Fig.4.

Fig. 6. Monk

This is a shaven headed figure with his right ear and back of the head missing. The chin is round and the closed lips appear in slightly smiley mood. The nose is pointed and the eyes are half to fully open. The forehead shows wrinkles which are marked with grooved wavy lines, three in number. The shaven headed figures are commonly found in the Buddhist sites of ancient Gandhāra (see e.g., PM_02189).

Fig. 7

The head is soil incrustated but it still shows a black patina or a varnish resulted from its continuous use. The face is from round to oval shape having a round chin, closed mouth and a pointed nose. The eyes are half opened. The *urna* is marked in round and in relief in the centre and above the eyebrows. The top and the right side of the head are missing. The preserved hair to the left is shown in a curly round form which gives a shell shaped designs.

Fig. 8

This figure shows a small face and is marked with a bulky hair arranged in several locks of curved grooved lines. The top is missing. The head depicts an oval face with a round chin and a closed mouth. The nose, as seen in the previous examples, is pointed and the eyes are half opened. The grooves in the hair are soil incrustated while in some places of the face the black patina turns it into shiny spots. Arrangement of the hair over the forehead is very similar to the Peshawar Museum example (PM_02258) and probably of the Hadda example (Exh.Cat. 1963: 153).

Fig. 9

This aged figure of a man is a Greek style bearded head which shows an elongated face bearing a long beard shown with grooved wavy lines. The moustaches are also long and are shown with grooved wavy lines. The mouth is marked closed and the long sharp nose is symmetrically aligned. The face depicts low cheek bones and the sunken eyes are fully opened. The eye balls with iris or pupil are prominently shown. The direction of iris of the eye ball shows that the figure is slightly looking above. The forehead is depicted with four wrinkles marked with grooved lines; one small grooved line in between the eyebrows and the three other above. The front hair is combed downwards while on the sides it is drawn back. The hair is marked with wavy grooved lines. A stucco head probably of the same genre is preserved in the Peshawar Museum (PM_02138). The main difference is made by the diadem type of object around the head of the Peshawar Museum example.

Fig. 10

The head represents one of the best examples of the present series as well as the so far recorded stucco or terracotta heads found in the region. The way the scarp is carried by this female figure may be unique in its style (see Nasim Khan 2010: 124). She is represented with an elongated fleshy face having a round chin. The lips are tight and the nose is pointed. The eyes are half opened and each eye ball clearly is marked with an iris as it is the case with Fig. 9. The uncovered hair shows that it is combed sideways with probably more load of the hair on her right temple. The curly hair locks are artistically executed. The head is delicately covered with a scarf which covers most part of her right temple, ear and partially her right eyes. A similar veiled head of a woman was found at Hadda, Afghanistan (Exb.Cat. 1963: 158).

Fig. 11. Child

This is a head of a young child very similar to the one in stucco preserved in the Peshawar Museum (PM_02098) and that of the terracotta

one found at Tepe Khazana (Exh. Cat. 1963: 172). The face is marked with round chin, closed mouth, pointed nose and about opened eyes. The face shows black patina. The hair is in tri-tuff style. The hair on the temples is combed back covering the ears above the earlobes. The loose curly hair showing about seven locks fringes on forehead. Another head in clay with almost the same coiffure is preserved in the British Museum (Zwalf 1996: No. 626) and is identified as "laughing youth".

Fig. 12: Buddha

The *urṛiṛa* is broken. An oval head shows elongated face with tight and tortured lips having a dimple below and is marked with a grooved line. The nose is pointed and alas are stretched back turning the tip of the nose more pointed. The eyes are half opened and in between and above the eyebrows the bulbous *urṛa* is nicely placed. The wavy hair is combed back.

Fig. 13: Buddha

This is a damaged head and shows almost the same characteristics as Fig. 12 except the hair style shown. The hair is shown with a row of round depression with a matted technique.

Fig. 14: Buddha

Except the face, most part of the head is missing. The chin of the figure is rounded and the dimple below the lips is shown with a grooved line. The mouth is closed and the lips and the labial commissures are elongated. The nose is pointed and the eyes are half opened while eye brows are stretched towards the forehead. The *urṛa*, shown in bulbous form, is placed between the eye brows. The hair is combed backward from the forehead.

Fig. 15: Child

A round head of a young person; the proportion of the different parts of the face is disproportioned. It has small chin and closed mouth. The fleshy nose overshadows the slippery philtrum. The almost round half opened eyes are looking straight. The hair in

grooves and from the forehead to the cranium is shown in waves and is combed sideways from the centre covering the ears. It is shown in several locks but that on the back of the head is shown in grooves and is combed towards the shoulder.

Fig. 16: Man

This is a terracotta head probably of an aged but muscular man which depicted with a fleshy

throat, round chin and closed mouth. Due to his stretched mouth, the cheek bones are prominently marked. The nose is pointed and the eyes are fully opened and are marked with prominent iris shown in black. The pupils of the eyes are stretched towards his forehead. The wrinkles or muscles starting from the radix of his nose are shown with grooved curved lines. The short hair marked with grooves is combed sideways from the centre.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2





Fig. 3



Fig. 4

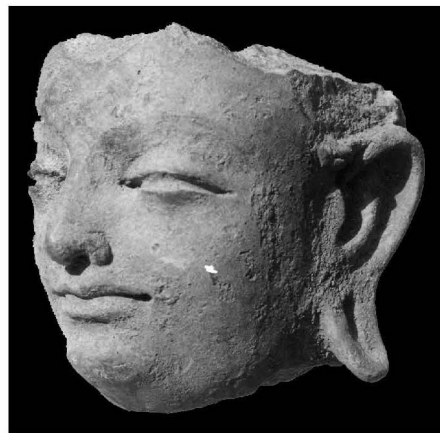


Fig. 5

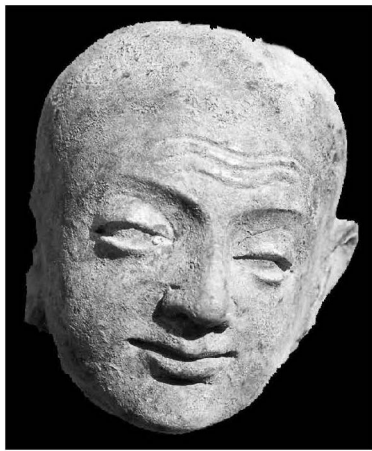


Fig. 6

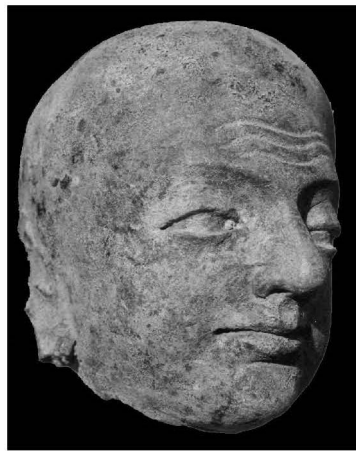


Fig. 7

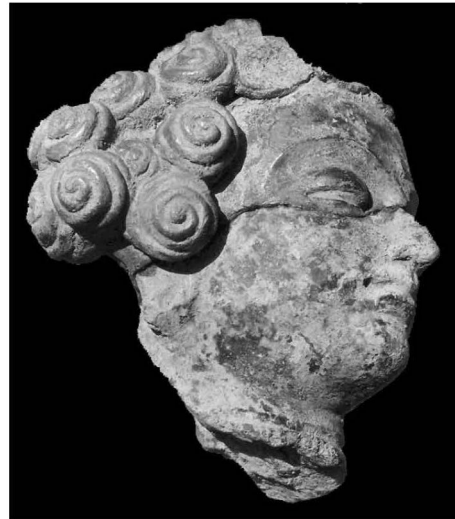


Fig. 8



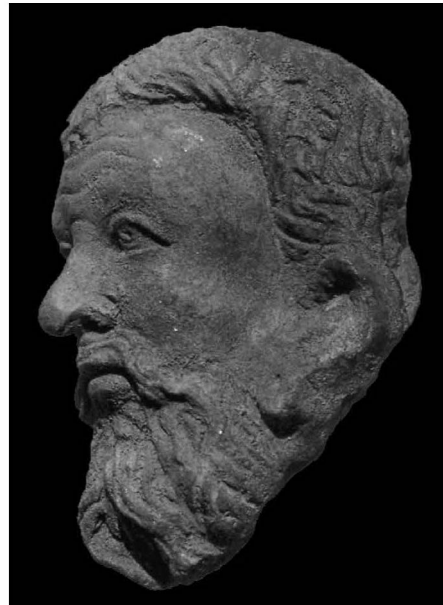
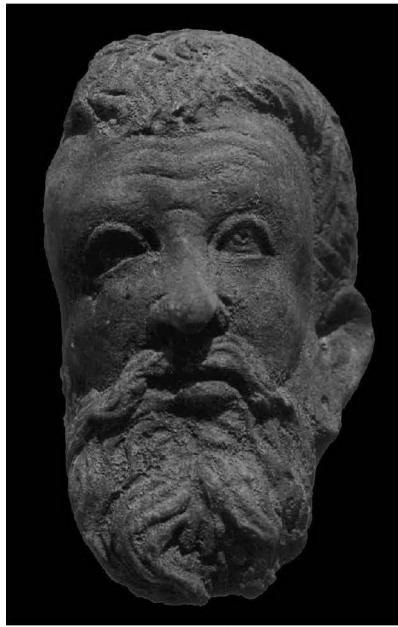


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

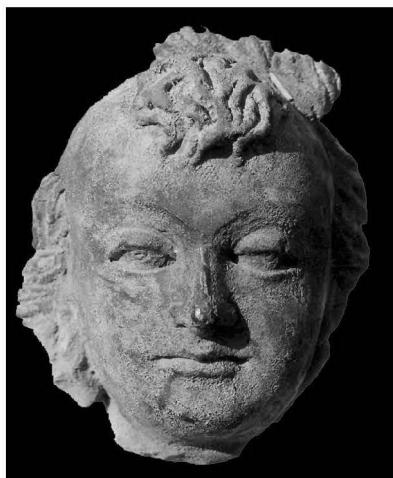


Fig. 11

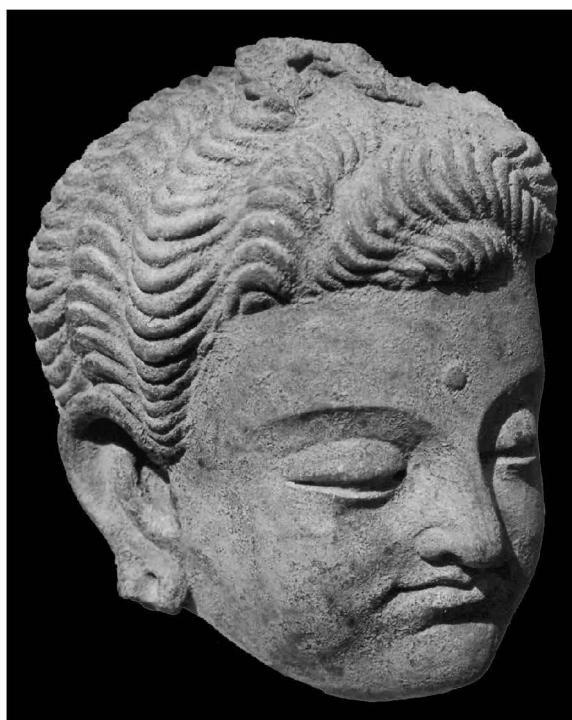
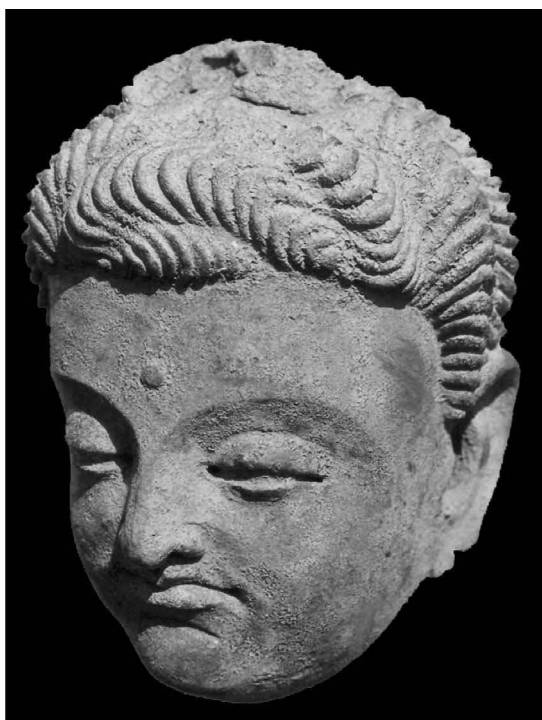


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

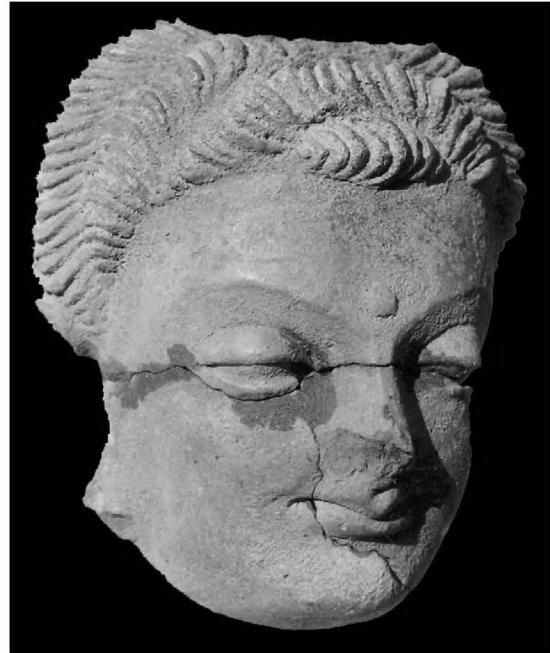
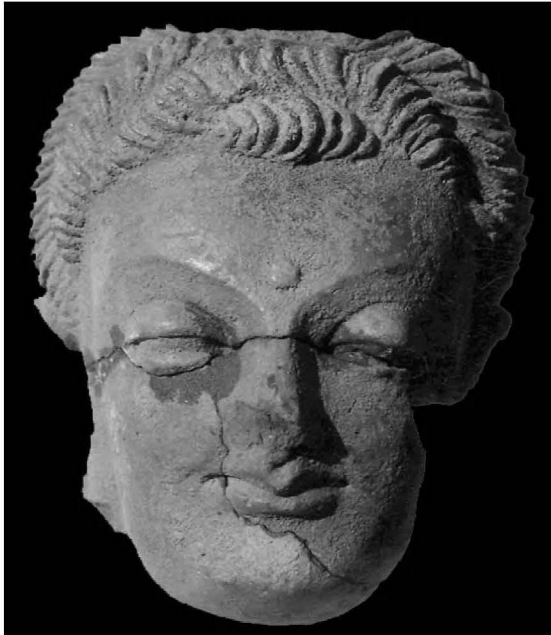


Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16