

## **Preliminary Note on Some Gandharan Sculptures Depicting Warriors in their Native Costume- Study based on the Museum Collections**

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### **Abstract**

This paper treats the observation of various types of military costumes represented in the Buddhist Sculptures of Gandhara. Specimens of the military costumes vary from simple coat made of thick cloth or skin to highly defensive scale armour, helmets, gloves, and heavy boots worn by door keepers, soldiers, and princely figures. Although the Buddhist Art of Gandhara is always considered a religious art, yet the depiction of such armed personnel poses iconographic problems since the military costumes worn by most of the figures are not indigenous rather most of these are borrowed from different regions such as Greece, Central Asia and Persia. An attempt is made here to trace the routes of the military costumes exhibited in Gandharan sculptures housed in different museums of Pakistan.

*Keywords.* Military Costumes; Buddhist Art; Gandhara

The Buddhist Art of Gandhara flourished in the modern Peshawar Valley of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and extended to different parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It remained a religious art of Buddhist pantheon for several centuries and after a slow process of disintegration, ultimately vanished to exist due to various reasons<sup>1</sup>. The cultural history and artistic glory of Gandhara remained shrouded in mystery till archaeological operations carried out at several ruined Buddhist centers<sup>2</sup>, which fortunately revealed a rich harvest of sculptures, now housed in different Museums of Pakistan. On this basis, the art

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<sup>1</sup>The exact period of the downfall of Buddhism in Gandhara is a debateable issue. The archaeological investigation carried out in Swat valley proves that Buddhist temples and shrines were attracting pilgrims and worshippers from distant lands till 10<sup>th</sup> century CE and even later (Filigenzi, 2011; Olivieri, 2016 & 2017).

<sup>2</sup>Major collections of Gandharan sculptures have been found during the excavation of Takht-i-Bhai, Jamal Garhi, Sahri Bahlol, Malakand and Swat valley.

historians have proclaimed that Gandhara art was created for the promulgation of Buddhism and among its other purposes, the one was to provide a visual representation of Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, for the eyes of devotees (Ingholt, 1957, 17).

Apart from the statues of Bodhisattvas and royal donors produced in bulk by the artists of Gandhara, there is also the depiction of armed soldiers guarding the doors of city, relic shrine, and venerated objects, especially turban, alms bowl and wheel of law etc. These figures are variously interpreted as door keeper (*dvarapala*), attendants of Buddhist establishments, and soldiers dressed in the military costumes and carrying different kinds of weapons ranging from sheathed swords to long and short spears, javelin, bows and arrows.

The present study is therefore, focused on the identification of the costumes bedecking these armed figures. The preliminary investigation carried out in this regard reveals that apart from the Indian turban, *uttariya* and *paridhana*, there are also the depiction of Greek, Roman and Central Asian military costumes, bedecking the soldiers either from indigenous background or hired from foreign nations. As the land of Gandhara was ruled by many alien nations such as Indo-Greeks, Indo-Scythians, Indo-Parthians, Kushans and Kushano-Sasanians etc. therefore, the presence of mercenaries cannot be overlooked. Not only in those times but also in the later centuries professional soldiers and warriors were probably available to be hired for fighting on behalf of their master or safeguard their palaces.

It is yet to be determined that whether these soldiers were recruited by the native kings, or the alien monarchs commissioned them for the consolidation of their power owing to their extraordinary skills, or the foreign rulers sent them to India as a token of friendship. However, their depiction at guarding the doors of royal palaces, sacred edifices and relic shrines, suggest that they were specially trained for the accomplishments of such responsible tasks.

The variety of dresses wore by these armed figures are ranging from ordinary *uttariya* and *paridhana* to chainmail coat, scale armour, sleeved tunics and trousers etc. The scale armour was probably brought to India by the Greeks or Persians, as this purely defensive garment is made of the combination of leather, coarse fabrics and metallic pieces. Sometimes the base was of coarse fabric or leather covered by metallic (iron / bronze) pieces overlapping each other.

Few examples of scale armour found during archaeological excavations in Gandhara, especially from Sirkap, Shaikhan Dheri and Barikot provide enough

information for the practical use of such defensive costume in ancient Gandhara. The scale armour from Shaikhhan Dheri, which was the first example of its kind ever discovered from stratified deposit, was originally composed of single circular plate with small hole piercing the edge for lacing the elongated oval and triangular overlapping pieces (Allchin, 1970, Pl.1). Whereas, the fragments of coat scale found during the excavation of lower city Barikot (ancient city of Bazira) are iron plates, scales and plaques of varying shapes and size (Olivieri, 2011, figs. 6-12). Interestingly, the coat scales from Barikot and other Gandharan sites find direct comparisons with the Parthian and Partho-Roman material from Dura Europos (in Syria; see e.g. James 1938; Frisch & Toll, 1949).

On the contrary, the armour depicted in Gandharan sculptures is composed of two pieces; the upper vest or *cuisse* and the lower part in a kilt shape. Usually the vest was either made of coarse cloth or padded, while the lower part also made of coarse cloth or leather in a manner that leather straps over hanged and overlapped with the possibility of studded metal strips. A border was made by rolling and hemming of the base cloth, between the armour plates and body of the wearer.

Some scholars are of the view that Gandharan armour were of three types such as (a) classical type armour (b) Indo-Greek type armour and (c) Kushan type armour (Luczanits & Jansen [eds.] 2010, 197). Some of the selected Gandharan sculptures and relief panels included in the present study will show that armed figures in the army Mara and those guarding the city door of Kapilavastu<sup>3</sup>, as well as relic shrines and relic container. The enshrined turban of Buddha is bedecked with a variety of defensive costumes and their identification and interpretation can add something new to our knowledge about this ignored aspect of Gandharan Art.

## **Fig. 01**

### **Scene of Mara Attack**

Location: Central Museum, Lahore  
Material: Grey schist  
Size: 58 x 29.5 x 7.5 cm  
Reference: Luczanits & Jansen [eds.], 2010, Cat.163

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<sup>3</sup>The palace in which prince Siddhartha, who later became Buddha, was born



Fig. 01



Fig. 1a



Fig. 1b



Fig. 1c

This sculpture shows the scene of attack of Mara, the author of evil, king of death and god of the world of pleasure (Beal, 1875, 36). The soldier in the lower part of the panel from right side (fig. 1a), is wearing the same type of armour as in fig. 1b. The armoured vest is basically of scale armour type belonging to Persian design of fish scale on a leather base, fitted with metallic armoured plates. It has upward facing scales which give a strong protection against upward thrust by a spear or sword. The cuisse or kilt is of leather or thick cloth with rows of metallic plates, mounted one over the other. The plates are somehow connected sideways with each other by the help of half links of chain but actually not overlapping each other. Under all this, the soldier wears a tunic of thin cloth and ankle length long tight pants which might be made of leather. The overall look of the figure is of Tocharian soldier because the cap and cloth are prominently of east Bactrian region or of Tocharian of that time. The spear is of Turfan or western Chinese. A typical Tocharian design cap is also worn by him.

A foot soldier in the center of the panel (fig. 1c) wears only a knee long *paridhana* and a cloth wrapped under the breast. The shield of the soldier is the only significant thing. In contrary to the routine circular shields of India and Gandhara region, this shield is flat. On its upper end this shield has a lobe, on the front there are four metallic studs, the shields body is wooden, and the iron sheet is studded on the front. This shield is either of Roman or Egyptian type while the soldier may be a foreigner or spirit coming with the Mara.

The warrior figure depicted in fig. 1b, wears turban and a fish scale vest armour pointing upwards while the cuisse is made of rectangular metallic plates covered

leather base which relates to each other by half chain links. Although both the armour and sword are identical, but his turban and cloth trousers show that he does not share the same ethnicity with the others and can be placed in the Persian stock.

## Fig. 02

### Scene of Mara Attack

Location: Peshawar Museum  
 Size: Grey schist, 26x39x8.5 cm  
 Reference: Luczanits & Jansen [eds.], 2010, Cat.162



Fig. 2. Attack of Mara



Fig. 2a

This interesting relief panel represents Buddha surrounded by Mara and his forces on achieving Buddhahood by Prince Siddhartha. Mara and his comrades are dressed in military costumes and as can be visualized, the pair of soldiers flanking the Buddha on either side are bedecked with armour and Indian dhoti and turbans. The armour studded with fish scale at chest levels, also covers the shoulders of the figure, whereas, the lower part destined for the safety of the belly is made of padded leather. The cuisse is made up of a leather base with the long straps covering it, connected with the help of ties. For convenient movement the base garment is hemmed and rolled up. The two soldiers depicted in the extreme left and right of the panel also carry round shields.

**Fig. 03****Standing Door Keeper**

Location: Dir Museum, Chakdara

Reference: Dani, 1971, Pl. 79



Fig. 3. A standing soldier



Fig. 3a

It is the statue of a door keeper with an exotic side knotted hair, mustache and wears round shaped ear ornaments. The clothing of the upper part of vest leather is padded while rounded at the bottom. It has half sleeves and a square neckline. In those days for the purpose of extra protection, leather was hardened and then padded into the vest. In some cases, a thin layer of stones or bone wood was also used, however it was not always practiced. The cuisse has short leather straps overhanging and at a little distance they are connected by either straps or ties. The base at the bottom is rolled up and hemmed. Also, boots and shin guards are worn by the figure.

**Fig. 04****Skanda Kartikeya**

Location: British Museum

Size: 23.8x7.9x13.7 cm

Reference: Zwalf, 1996, Pl. 102



Fig. 4. Skanda Kartikeya



Fig. 4a

This standing figure of Skanda Kartikeya carries spear in right hand and cock in the left. He is wearing a padded vest and a simpler leather lamellar (overlapping) *cuisse*, hemmed casually while its lower ends are rolled up. Under the *cuisse* he is wearing *paridhana*. He also wears a turban of coiled cloth with raised fantail at the front and also carries a sword hanging by a loose belt with a circular front buckle.

### Fig. 05

#### Headless Soldier

Location: Private collection USA  
 Material: Gray Schist  
 Size: 52 x 26.7 cm  
 Reference: Kurita, 2003, 621



Fig. 5. A headless soldier



Fig. 5a

Here is an example of a detailed armour suit of a person of significance from Gandhara. The scale armoured vest is made finely while the upward facing scales give the impression of the armour of Persian royal house or the noble Cataphract. The armoured skirt or cuisse is of the style of Indian or Central Asian and made very finely with overlapped and over hanged leather scales with metal strips sewn over them in the center. The leather belt of the sword is decorated elaborately, and, on the chest, cross strap is with the similar design a medallion (with a rosettes motif) joins a cross strap in the chest's center. Under the armed dress the warrior is wearing a tunic and a North Indian dhoti, proving it to be a figure of an Indian prince or king wearing his royal armour.

### Fig. 06

#### Headless Guard / Warrior

Location: Peshawar Museum  
 Size: 18 cm  
 Reference: Ingholt, 1957, No. 561



Fig. 6. Head less guard / warrior



Fig. 6a

This statue is basically of a Greek or Macedonian foot soldier who is shown as wearing typical armour of early centuries BC. A solid breast plate is worn by this soldier comes down to the lower rib cage and a scale armoured cuisse (kilt) ending right above the knees. It seems that the breast plate is of solid metal, which may be one of the examples of an earliest soldier wearing plate armour. The cuisse is made up of leather or some other base material coarse cloth with armoured scales



fitted over it. It is hemmed and rolled up at the bottom edge of the base material to prevent the thighs of the soldier from being chaffed by the scales. A broader leather belt covers the space between the cuisse and breast plate and two ties keeps it in place in the front. The soldier is shown with a late classical period shield and a tunic of short length under the armour. Leather boots with shin guards are also worn by him.

### Fig. 07

### Skanda Kartikeya

Location: Private collection Japan  
 Size: Not Available  
 Reference: Kurita, 2003, Pl. 477



Fig. 7. Skanda Kartikya



Fig. 7a



Fig. 7b

It is a detailed helmet or re-enforced hat. Here in his soldier dress is Lord Skanda, with a rarest example of head dress that seems like a helmet of Indian / Gandharan origin. It has a vest of padded leather which has a square neckline and the cuisse is made of a coarse cloth that has leather straps sewn on it. The hemmed and rolled up lower side has double hemming. The cap or helmet in this figure is most significant because it is covered in double rows of metallic scales showing a clear idea of the kind of battle headgear used in those days.

**Fig. 08****Scene of Mara Attack**

Size: 67 x 85cm  
 Location: Freer Gallery of Art, USA  
 Reference: Kurita, 1988, Pl. 226

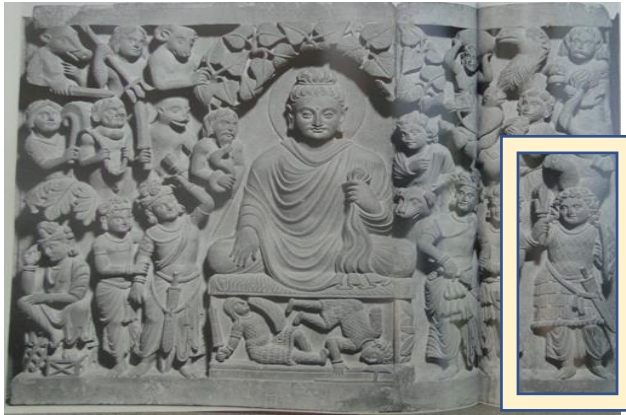


Fig. 08. scene of Mara attack



Fig. 8a

This Gandharan guard is wearing a coarse cloth a cuisse (kilt) and padded vest covered with broad straps of leather sewn in over hanged and over lapped manner. It has loosely hemmed and rolled up bottom end. A cotton or muslin North Indian dhoti is worn by the ground guard under his clothes. A typical Indian shield, which is a convex and round on the outer side is held by the soldier. The straight sword is of Persian/ North Indian style and the kilt has minimal pommel. While the classical Indian spear of the soldier has the head that is between a normal and a trident spearhead. The guard here is shown bare footed.

**Conclusion**

It is known from various examples of the armoured figures and statues of Gandhara that the armour worn by the Gandharan people was an amalgamation of different types of armour worn all over the known world of that time. As Gandhara was situated on the gateway of the Indian subcontinent, all the invasions, trade and migrations came through this way to and from the Indian subcontinent. subsequently, the Gandharan were the first to be affected from outside world and the first to pick ideas before the other Indian regions and kingdoms.

This is very much visible in the armour style of the Gandharan people. The general style of the Gandharan armour is Greco-Macedonian due to the Greek invasion hundred or more years ago. The construction is a mixture of Persian and Central Asian, while somewhat Chinese techniques are also used like stitching and using leather thongs and metal ties for scale armour. The use of leather for armour is also a foreign practice as leather was not used in India due to its obvious conflict with Hindu religious values.

So here it is to be concluded that the Gandhara style of armour does not represent a single area or ethnicity outside the sub-continent but an amalgam of different styles and techniques. Thus, creating its own unique style which has borrowed elements from different cultures and modified to suit the local climate and needs.

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