

Textiles of Ancient Gandharan Civilization with Special Reference to Bed Linens

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Abstract

The study was conducted to observe the use of textiles in the daily life of ancient Gandharan people. The relief panels and sculptures of Gandhara depicted their taste for upholstery and mattresses. Beautifully decorated bed sheets and pillows were commonly used by them. The cultural links between the present and past could be easily bridged by studying the salient features of Gandharan textile items of daily use. Moreover, the beautiful motifs used in their bed sheets can be an asset for future designers.

Keywords: Ancient Gandhara Civilization, Art, Textiles, Embellishment, Buddha

Introduction

The panels of Gandhara art are beautifully adorned with different types of bed linens including bed sheets, pillows, mattresses and draperies. The use of pillows was in vogue in Egypt as early as 2055 B.C. as attested by the mummified corpse provided with stone and wooden headrests (Seath et.al, 2006). It is evident that the natives of Gandhara not only used different types of pillows and bed sheets, but they also embellished them with tussles and embroidery. Some of the sculptures show thick textile materials like woolen seats, pillow covers, and bed sheets decorated with floral motifs (see Zwalf 1996: Plates 141, 142, 157). About the use of textile in ancient India, the literary evidences show that the people were familiar with the art of weaving (Srinivasan, 1997). Similarly, the Vedic literature also mentions different kinds of woolen blankets of Gandharan origin and are referred as “Kambalas” (Yacopino, 1987). Silken, cotton and linen clothes of Gandhara are also mentioned in old literature (Agrawala, 1953).

Although many types of mattresses, having different styles and textures were used historically depending on the place, season and environment. However, in Gandhara, mostly rectangular mattresses were in use, made of cotton, wool, silk or leather. Oval or round mattress and cushions are virtually unknown in Gandhara. They were stuffed with different materials like cotton, wool, rice husk, stray chaff, down feather, cotton tree wool (sumbal) gudar (rags). In Gandharan sculptures, we see a curious trend, sometimes the cushion or mattress is covered with the bed cover but on other occasions the mattress is placed over the bed cover. The reason probably is that sometimes the bed sheet is very

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fragile and expensive; therefore, the mattress is placed on top of it to protect it and sometimes the mattress is expensive, so the cover is placed on top of it. The construction of the Gandharan mattress is such that the stitching has a zig zag design on their standing edges. The mattress is usually not quilted but very tightly filled even in the case of bird down or raw silk which were used by the royalty even before Kushan Shahi period.

Methodology

The research methodology adopted for the present work included study tours to archaeological museums of Pakistan for the collection of relevant data. While published catalogues of Buddhist sculptures of Pakistan and those housed in the Victoria and Albert and the British Museums were also studied.

Discussion on Various Narrative Relief Panels

Although hundreds of Buddhist narrative relief panels produced by the artists of ancient Gandharan civilization shows the depiction of a variety of furnishes embellished with textiles such as bed covers, pillows, textile sheets etc.; however, selected art pieces from different collection of the Museums in Pakistan and abroad and those laying in private collection are reproduced in the forthcoming paragraphs of the present work in order to reach to a proper conclusion.

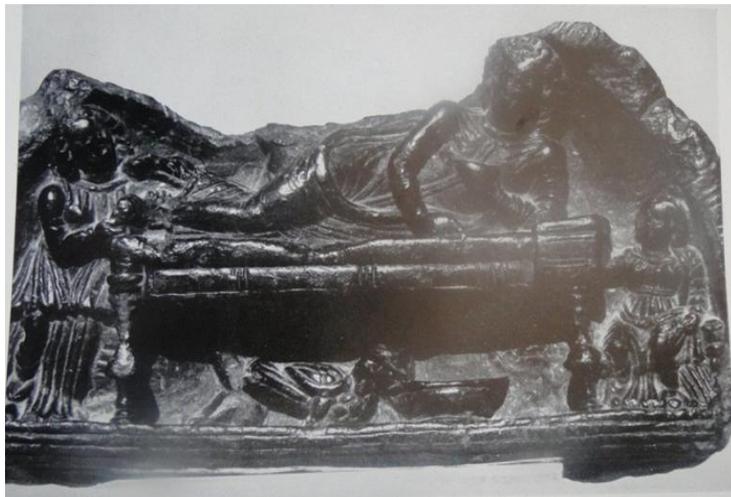


Fig. 1: A princely figure resting on couch. After Faccenna and Taddei 1964.
(Courtesy of ISMEO)

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: Saidu Sharif in the collection of Miangul Aurangzeb, Waliahad of Swat,
Size: Not recorded
Reference: Faccenna and Taddei 1964, Pl. CDLVI

A rectangular panel is showing a princely figure resting on a mattress couch with two female attendants. Beneath the bed there is a bowl and a bird drinking from it. Here we can see a mattress placed on a simple wooden bed displaying clearly the type of rope weaving of the bed. The lathe carved legs of the bed are also visible. It's a typical bed which is still used in the Indian subcontinent especially places associated with Gandhara. The rope used for weaving the bed seems to be made of rice husk or dwarf palm leaves which are still used for this purpose. Another candidate for this rope is animal hair or cotton.

The mattress is the most simple and undecorated without any bed cover and bed sheet. The indentation in front shows that it must have been filled with a soft material that is why it has indentation where the lying body has exerted its maximum weight. The pillow here is of the comparatively flatter type and single as shown in most of the reliefs of that era.



Fig.2: The death scene of Buddha. After Zwalf 1996.

Object: Narrative relief panel
 Location: British Museum
 Material: Grey schist
 Size: H. 23.8 cm, W. 35cm, D. 8.4 cm
 Reference: Zwalf 1996: Pl. 231

A rectangular relief panel showing the death scene of Buddha.

The dead body of Buddha rests on couch and pillow, surrounded by mourning figures. The bed sheet has been draped on the bed in a very pleasant way although it has no ornamentation. However, the center has been box pleated to acquire a decorative

look. At each side of this drapery, we can see the usual semicircular horizontal folds, which is so typical of the Gandhara period. Over the bed is a hard mattress, which seems to be of at least five inches in thickness and must be stuffed with hard material because the mattress has not changed its shape even from the weight of the lying figure. It is possible that this stuffing is of shredded old rags and discarded wool and cotton pieces as this type of stuffing is still widely used by people of lower income. The pillow is similarly hard and over stuffed in the picture and may have been made of similar stuffing. Pillow is placed at an angle of 30⁰ under the head with its orientation facing away from the body.



Fig.3: The scene of leaving the palace life by Bodhisattva Siddhartha.
After Zwalf 1996.

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: British Museum
Material: Schist
Size: H 26 cm, W 46.7 cm, D 6.5 cm
Reference: Zwalf 1996: Pl. 173

A rectangular relief panel showing the departure of prince Siddhartha from the royal palace.

He and Princess Yashodhara are shown over a mattresses flat bed/ divan. The musician figures are shown sleeping while Siddhartha is giving his crown/ turban to an attendant figure. In this relief panel an embellished bed sheet is placed underneath the mattress hanging to full side of the bed while the mattress is placed over the bed sheet. From the look of the mattress we can say that it has soft filling, but the thickness of the mattress seems to be more than the normal mattress. The pillow is similar in fashion and

may have been of the same kind of stuffing which can be either cotton or silk as this was the prince's bed. The stitching line of the pillow is prominent at the exposed side of the panel.



Fig.4: The scene of leaving the palace life by Bodhisattva Siddhartha.
After Zwalf 1996.

Object: Narrative relief panel
 Location: The British Museum
 Material: Green schist
 Size: 15 × 27 cm
 Reference: Zwalf 1996: Pl.174

This rectangular relief panel is also showing the scene of the departure of Prince Siddhartha from the royal palace. In this relief panel bed sheet is placed underneath the mattress hanging below the bed side. The mattress apparently has soft filling, but the thickness of the mattress seems to be more than the normal mattress. The pillow is similar in fashion and may have been of the same kind of stuffing which can be either cotton or silk. Stitching line of the pillow and mattress are prominent at the exposed side of the panel. The bed sheet is hidden behind the lying musicians. Only a part of bed sheet is visible at the right side between the heads of the sleeping girls. It shows that bed sheet is embellished and decorated with geometrical pattern.



Fig.5: The death scene of Buddha. After Kurita 1988.

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: Victoria & Albert Museum
Material: Gray schist
Size: H 53 cm, W 48 cm.
Reference: Kurita 1988: Pl. P4-482

The panel illustrates the death of Buddha and mourning figures. The corpse of Buddha is placed on a thick mattress with a pillow placed beneath the head. The mattress does not have any kind of bed sheet or bed cover. The most amazing thing is the presence of two cylindrical pillows underneath the head of the Buddha. The bolstered heads at the sides of both the pillows are also visible. At lower part of the bed we can see plain drapery with semi-circular lines of draping folds while at the extreme left vertical drapery is depicted, which has a kind of frill at its inner side at both head post and foot post.



Fig.6: The scene of leaving the palace life by Bodhisattva Siddhartha.
After Kurita 1988

Object: Narrative relief panel
 Location: Private collection Japan
 Material: Green schist
 Size: H.18 cm
 Reference: Kurita 1988: Vol-1, P1-142

The panel portrays the event of leaving the palace by Prince Sidhartha. He is shown stepping down from bed while Princess Yashodhara and all attendants and musicians were sleeping. Here the pillow is visible under the head of the Princess. The pillow is rectangular in shape and a bit larger than the other pillows. It is evident that pillows were widely used in the Gandharan civilization. Instead of mattress, we see a heavily decorated quilt on the bed. The motif on the quilt is geometrical. The most interesting part is the depiction of fringe at the extreme right of the bed cover descending vertically along the bed sheet.



Fig.7: The scene of the dream of Queen Maya. After Zwalf 1996.

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: British Museum
Material: Grey schist
Size: 9 × 38 cm
Reference: Zwalf 1996: Pl. 142

It is a long rectangular relief panel and show two scenes. The first one from the right side is the story of the dream of Queen Maya in which she saw a small elephant entering to her womb. While the left portion of the panel illustrates the interpretation of the dream, in the right half of the panel we can see lying figure. The bed sheet draped on the bed is of simple form without any decoration or folds, but it looks like that it is made of lighter material like silk. The lying figure has a single but heavy pillow underneath her head. Here the size of the pillow is extra ordinary large due to which the neck is a bit twisted. As one can see, both ends of the pillow are stitched to hold the stuffed material inside.



Fig.8: The death scene of Buddha. After Faccenna and Taddei 1964.

Object: Narrative relief panel
 Location: Probably in Italy
 Material: Green schist
 Size: 0.14 × 0.28"
 Reference: Faccenna and Taddei 1964, Pl. DXXXVIIb

This relief panel is also showing the death of Buddha and mourning devotees. The dead Buddha is lying on a mattress and pillow placed on couch (flat bed/ Divan). Here we can see a unique example of pinning the bed sheet on the wooden flank of the flat bed. It has been pinned at four different places in zigzag manner. The mattress is made of hard and thicker material and pillow is placed in slanting position at 45° angle against the head of the Buddha.



Fig. 9: Life of Bodhisattva Siddhartha in the royal palace. After Ingolt 1957.

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: Gai Collection, Peshawar Pakistan
Material: Gray schist
Size: H. 22cm
Reference: Ingolt 1957: Pl.38

In this relief panel we can see the prosperous life of prince Siddhartha in the royal palace. He is resting on high couch Divan and pillow, holding probably wine goblet and listening to the music played by musicians. The reclining figure has balanced him by placing his left hand on a thick pillow which later was replaced with the round shape or cylindrical pillows. The fringe at the corner of pillow is evident as well as the stitching line is also visible. The mattress seems to be concealed underneath bed sheet. The pattern of the bed sheet is not very clear, but the lower left end or edge of the sheet is decorated with fringe.

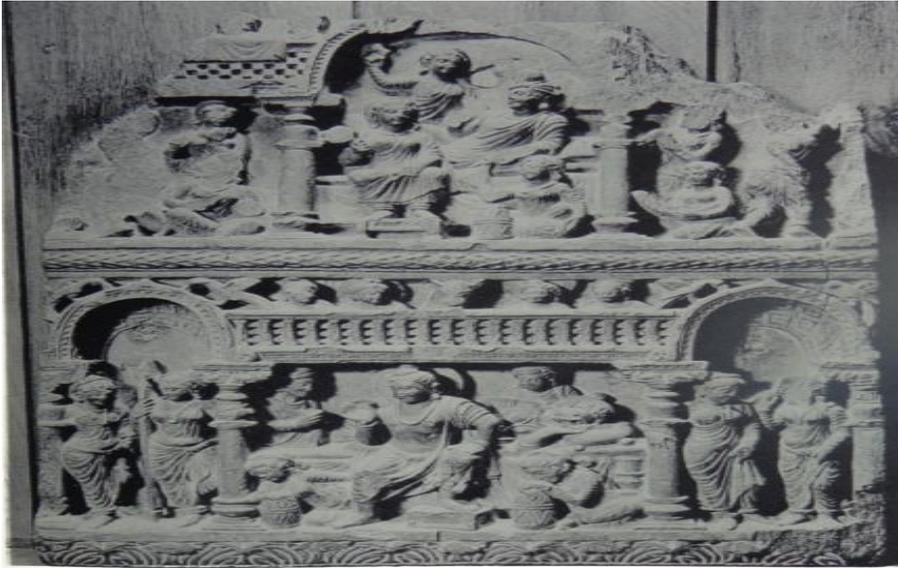


Fig. 10: The scene of leaving the palace life by Bodhisattva Siddhartha.
After Ingolt 1957

Object: Narrative relief panel
 Location: Karachi Museum
 Material: Gray schist
 Size: 62 × 52 × 7 cm
 Reference: Ingolt 1957: Pl. 39

This panel is divided into two parts by a projecting outward cornice. The upper register show prince Siddhartha's company with his wife Yashodhara in palace in a pleasant manner while the lower portion of the panel depicts the leaving of palace life by Siddhartha. In the lower part of the relief panel the Buddha is seen to be seated on his bed. His wife is shown as sleeping over a high pillow. The mattress is thick and fluffy. While in the upper part we can see the Buddha reclining against Pillow on a cushioned throne.

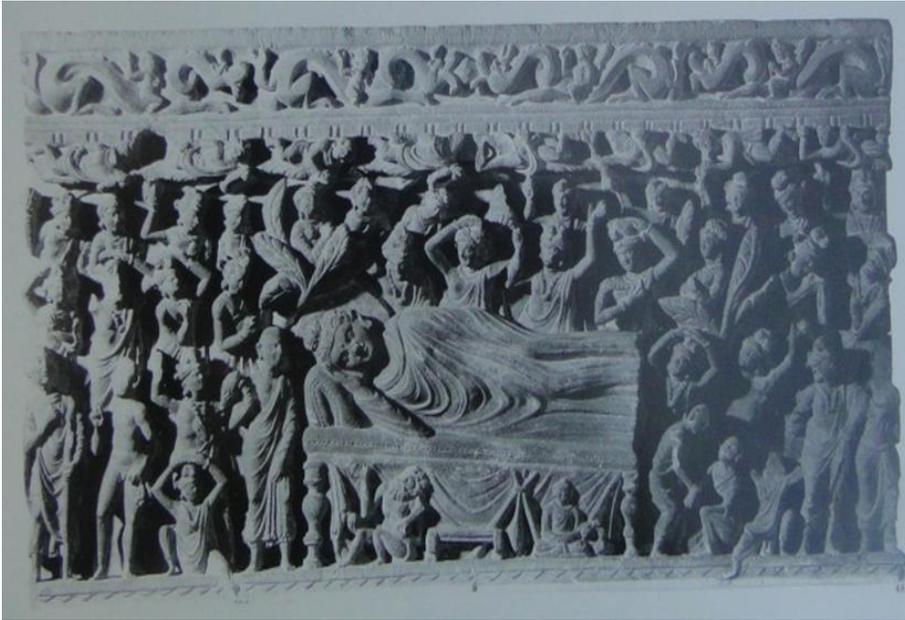


Fig. 11: The death scene of Buddha. After Kurita 1988.

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: Calcutta Museum
Material: Gray schist
Size: H 41 cm
Reference: Kurita 1988: Pl. P4-481

It is an interesting and highly decorated relief panel illustrating the corpse of Buddha on flat bed (couch) and surrounded by a crowd of mourning followers. An important example of pillow can be seen here. The pillow has been shown as double folded under the head of the Buddha. It can be derived from this panel that the material of the pillow is very soft that is why it can be twisted easily. The mattress looks like to be of hard stuffing. The decorative stitching line on both the pillow and mattress sides is also visible. While a simple cloth is draped from under the mattress to the ground with some visible pleating.



Fig.12: The coffin of Buddha. After Ingholt 1957.

Object: Narrative relief panel
 Location: Lahore No. 1111
 Material: Gray Schist
 Size: H 11½", W 13"
 Reference: Ingholt 1957: Pl. 143

The panel illustrates the coffin of Buddha on a couch placed before the mourning figures. Here we can see the coffin of Buddha placed on mattress having simple drapery hanging down under a thick mattress to give honor to the dignitary.

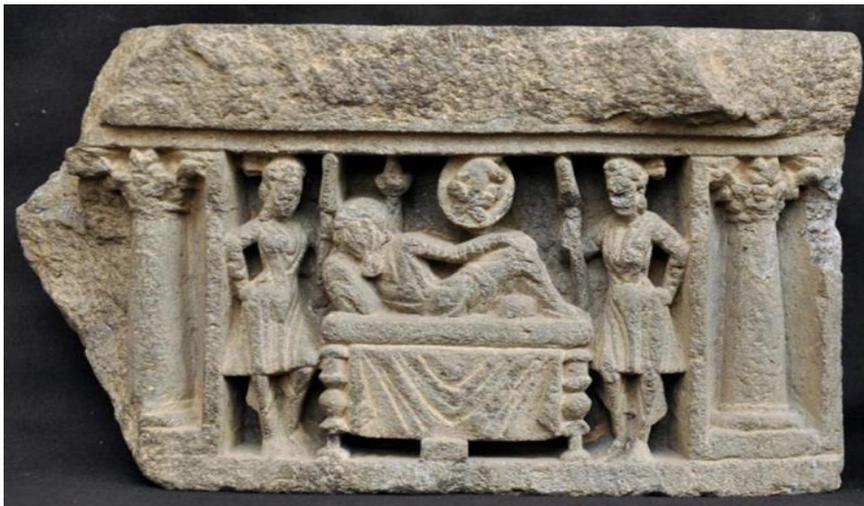


Fig.13: The dream of Queen Maya. Dir Museum Chakdara (Courtesy of the DoAM)

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: Dir Museum Chakdara
Size: Not recorded
Accession No.: DMC-710

This partially broken relief panel is showing the dream of Queen Maya in which she sees a small elephant approaching to her side. It is yet another example in which thick pillow and mattress are depicted. The pillow has shown to be used for reclining over a thick mattress by the Queen. The pillow appears to be double folded and thus possibly of a soft stuffing like silk/ cotton or bird dawn. The drapery placed under the mattress and falling in beautiful folds a little higher than the height of the bed. Here we can see bed sheet draped over the bed but under the mattress. The two lower ends of the bed sheet hang in semicircular folds, gradually advancing in bigger semi circles till end of bed sheet. Thin folds and turned ends suggest that it must be made of silken material although we cannot see any ornamentation.

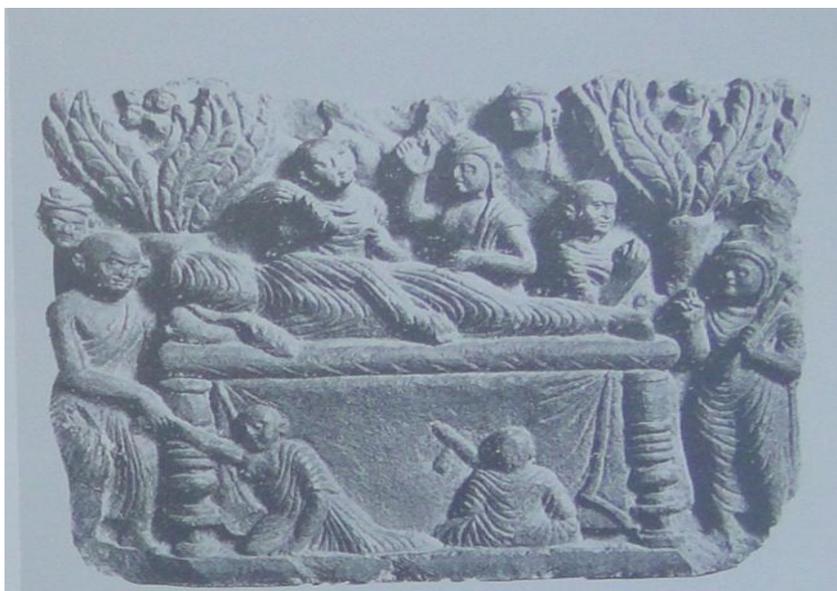


Fig.14: The death scene of Buddha. After Kurita 1988.

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: Not available
Size: Not recorded
Reference: Kurita 1988: Pl. 496

This beautifully carved panel shows the death scene of Buddha. The shrouded corpse is placed before the mourning followers under the shade of trees. A thick mattress stuffed with soft material is shown under the corpse while a low pillow is placed under the head of Buddha. While a simple cloth is draped from under the mattress with visible hemming at the edges.



Fig.15: The death scene of Buddha. After Kurita 1988.

Object: Narrative relief panel
 Location: Private collection Japan
 Material: Gray schist
 Size: H. 32 cm
 Reference: Kurita 1988: Pl. 487

In this panel the Buddha's death scene has been depicted. The Buddha is lying on a low bed with a very thin mattress. However, two pillows can clearly be seen under the head of Buddha. The lower one is thicker and larger in size than the upper pillow. The seam lines are also visible at the side of both the pillows.



Fig.16: The death scene of Buddha. After Kurita 1988.

Object: Narrative relief panel
Size: Not recorded
Reference: Isao Kurita 1988: Pl. 483

The panel shows the death scene of Buddha and mourning followers. It is an excellent example, which shows the use of mattress and pillow. A thick mattress, confirming to the length and width of pillows are placed under the head of Buddha. We can see the decorative stitching on the mattress and pillow sides. The way it is done shows that a zig zag lace has been used to conceal the stitching line and to give a decorative look to the mattress. Fringes at the lower corner of both the pillows are also prominent. The drapery hanging is plain but long enough that it almost touches the ground. The top of mattress is covered with a bed sheet that only covers the upper surface of the mattress and is visible. The way it has been shown, it seems to be made of fine material.



Fig.17: The death scene of Buddha. Peshawar Museum (Courtesy of DoAM)

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: Peshawar Museum
Size: 26 x 34 cm
Reference: Accession No. PM-02826

Another example of the Buddha's death scene is represented in this panel. The dead body of Buddha is placed on a thick mattress and pillow surrounded by mourning monks and by followers. The mattress is thick with comparatively softer stuffing with

seam edges visible at the sides. The pillow is of simple rectangular shape with visible seam stitches on its sides. The bed cover is placed on the mattress which is tucked in between the mattress and the bed draped at a hands height from the floor. The bed sheet is quilted and decorated with geometrical designs. The way sheet is draped, shows that it must have been made of silky and fine material. Although it looks ornamented, the motif is not so conspicuous.



Fig.18: The death scene of Buddha. Peshawar Museum (Courtesy of DoAM)

Object: Narrative relief panel
 Location: Peshawar Museum
 Size: Not recorded
 Accession no. PM-2826

Square narrative relief showing the death scene of Buddha. The corpse of Buddha is laid on a thick mattress with head supported by a pillow placed on a high couch. Mourning figures are shown behind the corpse as well as in front of the couch. A beautifully decorated bed sheet is placed underneath the body and over the mattress. It seems to be made of lighter material i.e. silk or cotton. It also has bands of vertical designs running through the width of the sheet. Although it is hidden behind the bodies of mourning figures but what can be seen depicts that it's a combination of floral and geometrical design. Rosette motifs, alternated with segmented triangles are more prominent motifs.



Fig.19: The death scene of Buddha. After Kurita 1988.

Object: Narrative relief panel
Location: Private Collection Japan
Size: Not available
Reference: Kurita 1988: Pl. P-498

It is a rectangular relief panel showing the corpse of Buddha laid on mattress and pillow supported by a high couch and surrounded by mourning figures, under tree foliage. The bed cover showing under the mattress has flower and leaf patterns on it in alternating stripes, but the geometrical designs are absent here. The bed cover is most probably a quilt with a possibility of applique work.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the people of Gandhara decorated their beds with beautifully embellished pillows, bed covers and draperies. They knew the art of quilting and made elegant quilts to adorn their beds. Motifs mostly used for quilting were a combination of geometrical and floral designs. In addition to quilting, they have also used applique work to decorate their bed covers. They also made their living comfortable with the use of soft mattresses and pillows.

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