

## **Major Forms of Architecture in Ancient Pakistan As Depicted In Gandhara Art**

### **Historical Background**

Gandhara was one the janapadas (states) of ancient South Asia comprising of northwestern parts of present Pakistan. It consisted of two capitals namely Takshasila (Taxila) and Pushkalavati Charsada) on the either sides of river Indus. After the occupation of the Indus valley by Achaemenians in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE the independent existence of Gandhara as a sixteenth janapada (state) was no more mentioned in the ancient literature of South Asia. From the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the 5<sup>th</sup> AC Gandhara was successively invaded and ruled by foreign invaders except an interval of one hundred and thirty years from BCE 320 to 190 under the Mauryan rule. For one thousand years Gandhara had been experienced diversity of cultural traits. However, one of the greatest event happened in the history of Gandhara was the introduction of Buddhism which transformed the whole outlook of the country. Gandhara art was by product of this period. Although, Gandhara art deals with the life of the Buddha, however, it throws much light on the cultural life including architecture of the time. A variety of architectural forms are depicted in the reliefs and sculptures of Gandhara art. The remains of a number of ancient sites (originally cities) have been excavated but unfortunately no complete form of architecture has survived. This archaeological deficiency is supplied by Gandharan sculptures and reliefs. From the earliest time when man was overwhelmingly dominated by the forces of the nature, he had been looking for a shelter from the extremes of weather and for the protection from his enemies. Both these needs were supplied by nature; cave offered the first shelter and protected places. But the human mind is always in search of a change for better. This change took expression first in crude tents of animal skins, dried and stretched over wooden poles. Then, the first hut of twigs plastered with mud was thought of, designed and built, architecture was born.

The Buddhist art of Gandhara presents an impressive array of buildings ranging from the most primitive hut to the highly sophisticated palaces and citadels. But a vast majority of these sculptures reveal secular architecture. An outstanding feature of this architecture is the employment of foreign elements. In fact Hellenistic cultural impact has always been a striking element of Gandharan civilization. Its influence particularly on architecture may be seen, among other things, in the wonderful and pleasing Indo-Corinthian columns and capitals. Persepolitan capitals marking Iranian influence on the arts of Gandhara may also be observed. The major forms of Gandharan secular architecture therefore may conveniently be grouped into followings:

- i. Cities,
- ii. Forts and citadels,

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## 1. Cities

The sculptures and reliefs of Gandhara art present best examples of architecture including gateways of various cities identified as Kapilavastu, Rajagriha, Sravasti, Kusinagara etc. None of these cities is situated in Gandhara.

Why are then these cities depicted in Gandhara sculptures? The reason is not far to seek. Gandhara art in spirit revolves around the story of Gautama, alias Siddharta, son of Suddhodana, chief of Sakya clan which had its capital at the city known as Kapilavastu. It was here that Gautama was born at Lumbinivana (literally Lumbini Forest) in c.567BC. The site, later marked by the Rummindei Pillar inscription of A oka, lies 5 to 6 km inside the Nepalese border (85° 11' N. Lat., 25° 58' E, long) near Padar<sup>i</sup>. Having become Buddha (i.e. Enlightened), Gautama went around in the Ganges valley pursuing a rigorous programme of mass conversion to his newly founded order, leaving behind, his memories during the course of his peregrinations in the cities mentioned above, till he died c.487 BC, aged 80, at Kusinagara<sup>ii</sup> (Kusinara), modern Kasia in the Gorakhpur district (India). He never visited Gandhara. Even his religion did not make much impact on this region before Ashoka (c.268 to 232 BC) dispatched Majjantika to Gandhara for the propagation of Buddhism<sup>iii</sup>. And yet we find that Gautama's life storey and the legends that surround him are meticulously detailed in Gandhara art.

It seems that in the two centuries preceding the rise of Gandhara art early in the Kushan period (1st cent. AD), Buddhism struck deeper roots in Gandhara and came to be looked upon as a native faith. Stories are then invented to show how Buddha himself came flying in the air to this land on certain occasions. This essentially Gandharan form of Buddhism, dubbed as Mahayana by Buddhists, in which, unlike earlier traditions, images of the Buddha could also be produced, paved the way for creation of distinctive art, now called Gandhara art, reflecting contemporary architectural and artistic traditions in typically Gandharan morphology. It is this morphology that we came across in the stories associated in reality with the Gangetic cities (mentioned above) related in Gandhara art. Thus "Queen Maya's Dream", associated exclusively with Kapilavastu --- Nepalese city, is, in Gandharan reliefs, given an architectural setting in which nicely carved Corinthian capitals, perhaps unknown to the sculptors of Kapilavastu, play a significant role. Similarly the scenes "The Urn carried into Kusinagara" (fig.1) and "Distribution of the Relics" (Fig.2) or "Buddha at city-gate" from Shnaisha (Fig.3) all reflect cultural milieu of Gandharan cities such as <sup>iv</sup>Taxila, PushKalavati, Peshawar, Gangudher etc.

An idea of what Gandharan city externally looked like may be obtained from their representations in our panel reliefs. But, unfortunately, the reliefs do not throw much light on the internal lay-out. This deficiency is however amply supplied by references to cities in ancient literature of which Milinda-Panha (Questions of Menander) composed in Gandhara is very pertinent in that it gives a graphic picture of an ancient city: "*fine and regular, measured out into quarters, with excavated moats and ramparts about it, with stout gate houses and towers, with market places, cross-roads, street corners and public squares, with clean and even main roads, with regular lines of open shops, well provided with parks,*

*gardens, lakes, lotus ponds and wells, adorned with many kinds of temples of the gods, free from every fault and standing in all its glory.”* .

This description appears to hold good for early Gandharan cities and, shorn of its superfluities, the standard plan of an early city may be summarized as follows: it is surrounded by a moat or moats and further protected by a wall (prakara) running all around. The plan is rectangular, usually square, with gate (dvara) or gatehouses (dvarakotthaka) in the middle of each side, the gateway being approached by a bridge across the moat. Four main streets from the four gateways led to the centre of the city, which is laid out in quarters.

Ruins of ancient cities abound in Gandhara; but no city, with the possible exception of Taxila, has been fully exposed. For the requisite information therefore we once again fall back on the sculptures. It may be kept in mind that no Gandharan sculpture gives a full view of any city, nor was there any need to do so, for the sculptors never aimed at depicting an entire city. Only relevant portions are shown. These include city walls, gateways, palaces, balconies, towers, bastions, etc.

### **Forts and Citadel**

These are in general represented by crenellated walls, towering bastions, and projected gateways. An interesting example of projected gateway may be seen in the panel relief “Distribution of the Relics” (Fig.2). The gateway is flanked by two rectangular tapering towers. A broad horizontal band interrupted only by the actual doorway runs across the whole facade of the gateway complex dividing each of the towers into the upper and lower zones. The band consists of a plain cordon in the middle flanked by notched narrow fillets. The lower has large lotus petals (only three are visible) around the base in the lower zones and three triangular holes (arrow-slits) so placed as to mark the angles of an inverted triangle in the upper.

The doorway stands upon a stepped platform and opens under a projected cornice supported by two semi-circular pilasters. It comprises a double moulded wooden frame and is shut in this case. Each of the two leaves of the doorway is divided in two large panels by a horizontal piece of wood. All this, i.e. the towers and the doorway, is superimposed by a flat roof decorated on the front side with a row of saw-tooth designs. The roof is supported by projected brackets--- three upon each of the towers, and twice as much upon the doorway. The overall plan of the gateway shows a tripartite building. This plan became a model for all sculptors.

Fig.1 shows an almost identical concept--- a tripartite rendering of a gateway complex. The relief depicts the scene of “The Urn Carried into Kusinagara”. The concept of one doorway flanked by lofty towers having firing-slits is further elaborated by the inclusion of two portions of the city wall and a balcony overlooking the doorway in this relief. The actual doorway, open and leafless in this case, stands upon a moulded base within a rectangular frame which supports a broad cornice decorated with a row of acanthus leaves. Flanking the doorway are two armed guards.

Each tower, square in section, rises from a lotus base and is divided into three zones by incised pairs of horizontal lines. Of these the lowest zone is plain, the middle one has two triangular slits, while the upper most zone shows traces of a balcony in addition to an arrow-slit. The towers have battlements on the top, similar battlements and triangular slits are visible in the city wall behind the towers. Just behind the gateway, at a higher level, is a projected balcony supported by seven brackets. On the front side the balcony is decorated by a running pattern of diamonds in the lower and a row of sunk triangles in the upper register.

Fig. 4 shows an even more elaborate form of the tripartite scheme. It has been suggested that the relief is incomplete. "This panel is perhaps to be completed on the right with a city gate, another guard in a niche. But neither is the so-called "guard" holding a lance, as asserted by Ingholt,<sup>v</sup> nor could the niche be as tall as the city wall, taller in fact than even the towers, as the case undoubtedly seems to be. But let us first of all see what the panel has got to tell us.

The panel shows that all the essential features of a tripartite gateway complex--two towers and one gate are present, but the traditional pattern, in which the gate is shown in the middle of two flanking towers, is so changed as to place the towers on the left side and the gate on the right. The Torana type gate is very unusual in Gandhara and must be the result of contacts with the interior parts of India. Nor is this type of a gate suitable for defense purposes. The man standing in the gate, who appears more like a donor holding a round object---perhaps a flower basket---in both hands, looks inquisitely at somebody (not shown in the panel) standing outside. A similar view may be seen in a panel found at Shnaisha (Fig: 3). The right side of this relief is damaged but the subject matter is quite clear.

On the right is Buddha (head damaged) in *abhayamudra* standing close to a round city tower. He is approached by a person wearing princely garments. The posture adopted by this person, with his body slightly bent at knees and with a scarf held in both hands making a loop on his front side (*jholi phailana in Urdu*), suggests that, in all humility, he is requesting the Buddha to enter the city. Behind this person another man, probably an attendant stands in the doorway holding in both hands something which looks more like a basket of flowers, to be showered upon the Buddha or to be presented to him.

We can now turn to Fig.4 and try to complete the scene. We have already got a man scantily clothed in his *dhoti* holding perhaps a basket in his hand, standing in the *Torana* type gate. Apparently his position is that of an attendant. He is evidently following his master---the princely figure of the Shnaisha relief. This identification solves the problem regarding the reconstruction of the whole scene. When complete the entire scene consisted of (from left to right) two towers, *Torana* type gate and two more similar towers, an attendant, and a princely figure making a humble request to the Buddha to enter the city. Thus the addition (in the missing portion) of a suppliant princely figure, a Buddha in *abhayamudra*, and two towers in the background would complete the scene.

The most characteristic feature of this relief is its ornamentality. Not only the *Torana* type gate cannot fulfill the purpose it is required to do, even the chamfered corners of the towers, not to speak of the rest of them and also the city

wall, are filled with unnecessary arrow-slits and crosses, weakening thereby the whole structure.

The square towers which were the hallmark of our reliefs so far are, in some cases, found together with their round counterparts. Fig. 5 represents such a case. The relief depicts the story "Ananda Asks a Casteless Girl for Water" and shows a girl drawing water from a well situated outside the city wall. In the background may be seen two towers standing side by side---square in the extreme right---marked with one arrow-head. Similar arrow-heads may be noticed on the heavily crenellated city wall and also on the round tower just behind the right hand of the girl. The cornice above the gate shows a row of split acanthus leaves. Above it and between crenellation are human heads as if watching the incident.

A similar gate with a decorated cornice may be seen in the relief depicting "The Buddha Enters Raragriha" (Fig: 6). Towers are missing. But the existence of a double story building behind the gate is suggested in the balconies at a higher level than the gate. Another relief "Sumagadha and the Naked Ascetic" (Fig: 7) depicts the inner side of the entrance of the house. The roof is supported by slender Corinthian columns. The most ornamental example of a city gate is to be seen in another relief, "Chandaka and Kanthaka Return" (Fig: 8). Noteworthy is the highly decorated plinth upon which the whole structure of the gate stands. It is so high to make it inconvenient for the animal to smoothly pass through the gate. Above the gateway is an unproportionately heavy balcony (or balconies), almost half as much high as the door itself. The front side of this structure is decorated by a frieze of four petalled flowers, while the roof, marked by a chain pattern, is supported by five tiny Corinthian columns. A row of rectangles mark the parapet above a wide empty zone. Between the columns are four human busts, inquisitive ladies perhaps watching the incidence. Chandaka has returned bringing back with him the royal umbrella, the turban and horse, but not Siddharta.

#### **Concluding remarks:**

The study and analysis of small number of sculptures and reliefs of Gandhara art referred above reveals that the sculptors seem to have picked architectural elements from the contemporary existing cities, forts and citadels to depict the events from the life of the Buddha. As the cities are shown by depicting fortification walls the remains of which however, except Taxila nowhere survive. Similarly, citadels are marked by imposing gateways set in the wall as well forts are displayed. Besides this, crenellations, battlements and fire slits point out the understanding of the strategy of war. Moreover, it seems certain that Gandharan architects and masons were well aware about the architectural devices and techniques. So far as the masonry is concerned the reliefs and sculptures do not clearly depict about the actual mode of construction. Of course, the remains certainly speak of stone rubbles and diaper masonry.

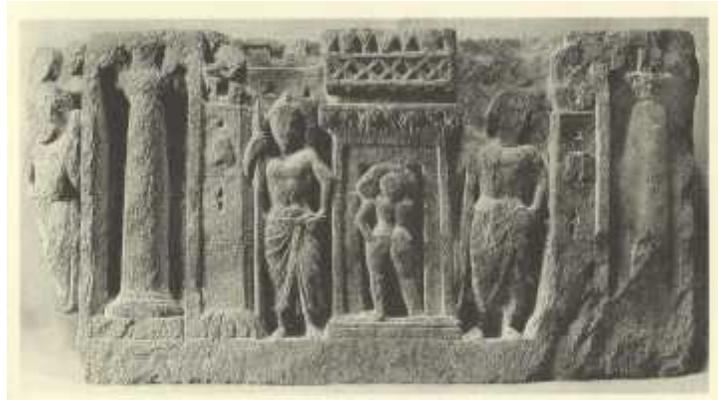


Fig. 1 The Urn Carried into Kusinagar

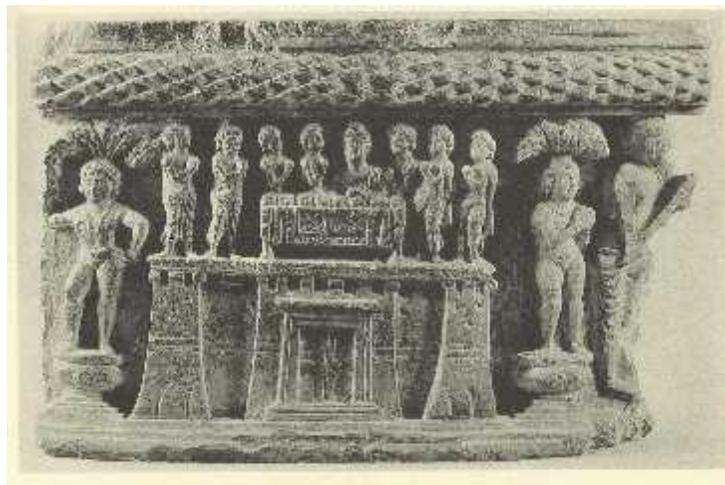


Fig. 2 Distribution of Relics



Fig. 3 Buddha at City gate



Fig. 4 City wall



Fig.5 Anand Askes a Casteless Girl for water

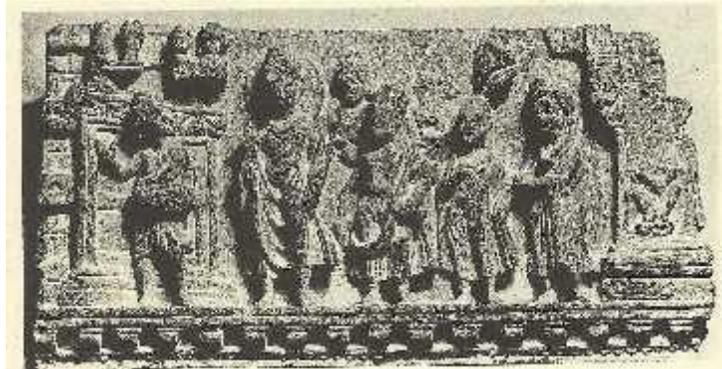


Fig. 6 The Buddha Enters Rajag iha



Fig.7 Sumagadha and the Naked Ascetic



Fig. 8 Chan aka and Ka haka Return

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## **Illustrations**

Fig.1. The Urn carried into Kusinagar. Lahore, No. 48

Fig. 2. Distributions of Relics. Peshawar, No. 1973 (ibid: 152)

Fig. 3. Panel Relief from Shnaisha depicting Buddha at city gate. (Rahman 1993: No. XXX1Xa)

Fig. 4. City wall. Lahore, No. 1073. (Ingholt: No. 464)

Fig. 5. Ananda asks a Casteless Girl for water, No. 2169 (Ingholt: No. 91)

Fig. 6. The Buddha enters Rajagriha, Lahore, 1182. (Ingholt No. 91)

Fig. 7. Sumagadha and the naked ascetic, Karachi, formerly Lahore Museum, Nos. 2124 and 1601, from Sikri. (Ingholt: no. 116)

Fig. 8 .Chandaka and Kanthaka Return . Lahore, No. 116. (Ingholt , No. 51)

## **End Notes And References**

<sup>i</sup>. R. C. Majumdar, *The Imperial Unity of India*, (edd), repr, (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1980), 365.

<sup>ii</sup>. Ibid, 28.

<sup>iii</sup>. V. A. Smith, *Ashoke: The Buddhist Emperor of India*, repr, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1964), 44.

<sup>iv</sup>. T. W. David Rhys, *Milindapanho: In Sacred Book of the East*, (London: Oxford Series, Eng, trans 1890), 208-9.

<sup>v</sup>. Herald Ingholt, *Gandhara Art in Pakistan*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 172.