

Gandhara / Ghandhara (500 BC to 10 AD)

The two major ancient civilizations of the area which is now Pakistan, were the Indus Valley Civilization (Harappa and Moenjodaro) and the Gandhara Civilization (500 BC to 10 AD). Gandhara, being the easternmost province of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia, became a major power in the region. Its two cities - Pushkalavati, or present day Charsadda near Peshawar, and the capital Taxila, were the center of civilization and culture. Gandhara literally means perfumed. It was the name of a great civilization and kingdom in northern Pakistan. It was located in the Valley of Peshawar, the Potohar plateau, Taxila and on the northern side of the river Kabul. Its main cities were Peshawar and Taxila. Gandhara is the region that now comprise of Peshawar valley, Mardan, Swat, Dir, Malakand, and Bajaur agencies in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Taxila in the Punjab, and up to Jalalabad in Afghanistan and the whole southeast belt of Afghanistan adjoining those areas, including Kandahar (the name Kandahar is supposed to have originated from Gandhara). Ancient Gandhara is almost identical with the region of Pashtunistan (minus the western part).

Gandhara, which covered most of northern Pakistan, was a semi-independent kingdom with capitals at both Pushkalavati (now Charsadda) and Taxila. The Kingdom of Gandhara lasted from the 6th century BC to the 11th century AD. It attained its height from the 1st century to the 5th century AD under Buddhist Kushan Kings. After it was conquered by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1021 AD, the name Gandhara disappeared. In the sixth century BC, Pakistan became the easternmost province of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia, which was then at its height under Darius the Great. These areas along with Afghanistan came under the rule of the Achaemenians of Persia. Cyrus I who ruled from 558 to 530 B.C. founded the Achaemenian Empire. However, it was not until the third sovereign of the dynasty Darius I (r. 533-486 B.C.) who brought a large Indo-Pak territory under his rule. In the Behistan rock inscription, Gandhara is mentioned in the list of his subject countries. The Persepolis inscription clearly mentioned the Punjab as a part of the Achaemenian Empire. On the other hand his Nakshi Rostam inscription also refers to the Punjab as his conquered territory. So it is clear that the Indus Valley along with Afghanistan was conquered by Darius I. Herodotus also mentioned that of the twenty satrapies of Darius I, the twentieth division was in the Indo-Pak subcontinent.

During the rule of Xerxes, Gaudhara and Sindh are mentioned as hissatrapies. He too contained a contingent of Indo-Pak troop in his army, which took part in many battles. The control of Indo-Pak satrapies continued up to the time of Darius III [r. 336-330], but after that it had grown weak and the whole of north-western Indo-Pakistan was parcelled out into a great number of petty kingdoms. For over two hundred years the Achaemenians ruled over these areas, which affected every walk of life of local people. It is in this region that the Gandhara civilization emerged and became the cradle of Buddhism. It was from here that Buddhism spread towards east as far away as Japan and Korea. The Kingdom of Gandhara served as a center of education for students and scholars from all over south Asia and China. The propagation of Buddhism in Gandhara started from the town of Lahor (NWFP), which was a great learning center of Buddhism. Besides Lahor Shahbaz Garhi and Yaqubi were other important places where Buddhism flourished. The Greco-Bactrian rulers were unable to stop it due to the zeal of the people and devotions of its followers.

The Gandhara Scroll is one of several manuscripts recently unearthed in Afghanistan that contain the oldest known Buddhist writings to date. Their importance to history is akin to the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Scroll had been ritualistically interred in a terra cotta pot and buried in a Stupa over 2000 years ago. The Scroll is written in carbon ink on a birch bark support and dates from the 1st century BC. Scholars have long speculated that Gandhara, located in northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, was the area from which Buddhism flowed into east and central Asia beginning around 100 AD. Temples and shrines date back to the period and the region was near the Silk Road, providing the opportunity to travel and proselytize. But this theory was unsubstantiated because there was scant written evidence of Buddhists in the area. Buddhist monks went to China as missionaries, and probably went through Gandhara. The intriguing record of Gandhara civilization, discovered in the 20th century, are found in the archeological sites spread over Taxila, Swat and other parts of NWFP. The rock carving and the petroglyphs along the ancient Silk Road (Karakoram Highway) also provide fascinating record of the history of Gandhara. Taxila is the abode of many splendid Buddhist establishments. Taxila, the main center of Gandhara, is over 3,000 years old. Taxila had attracted Alexander the Great from Macedonia in 326 BC, with whom the influence of Greek culture came to this part of the world. Taxila later came under the Mauryan dynasty and reached a remarkably mature

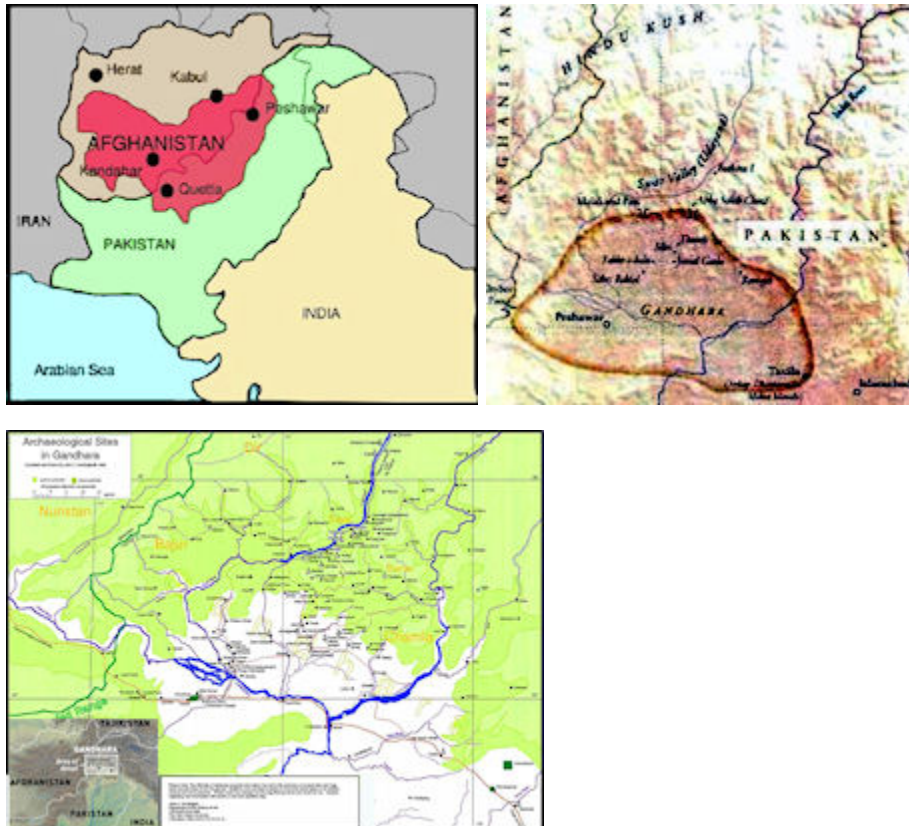
level of development under the great Ashoka. Buddhism was adopted as the state religion. During this time Taxila, Swat and Charsadda (old Pushkalavati) became three important centers for culture, trade and learning. Hundreds of monasteries and stupas were built together with Greek and Kushan towns such as Sirkap and Sirsukh, both in Taxila. The Gandhara civilization was not only the center of spiritual influence but also the cradle of the world famous Gandhara culture, art and learning. It was from these centers that a unique art of sculpture originated which is known as Gandhara Art all over the world. Today the Gandhara sculptures occupy a prominent place in the museums of England, France, Germany, USA, Japan, Korea, China, India and Afghanistan, together with many private collections world over, as well as a vast collection in the museums of Pakistan. Buddhism left a monumental and rich legacy of art and architecture in Pakistan. Despite the vagaries of centuries, the Gandhara region preserved a lot of the heritage in craft and art. Much of this legacy is visible even today in Pakistan. The very earliest examples of Buddhist Art are not iconic but aniconic images and were popular in the Sub-continent even after the death of the Buddha. This is because the Buddha himself did not sanction personal worship or the making of images. As Siddhatha Guatama was a Buddha, a self-perfected, self-enlightened human being, he was a human role model to be followed but not idolized. Of himself he said, 'Buddha's only point the way'. This is why the earliest artistic tributes to the Buddha were abstract symbols indicative of major events and achievements in his last life, and in some cases his previous lives. Some of these early representations of the Buddha include the footprints of the Buddha, which were often created at a place where he was known to have walked. Among the aniconic images, the footprints of the Buddha were found in the Swat valley and, now can be seen in the Swat museum.

When the Buddha passed away, His relics (or ashes) were distributed to seven kings who built stupas over them for veneration. The emperor Ashoka was later said to have dug them out, and distributed the ashes over a wider area, and built 84,000 stupas. With the stupas in place, to dedicate veneration, disciples then initiated 'stupa pujas'. With the proliferation of Buddhist stupas, stupa pujas evolved into a ritual act. Harmarajika stupa (Taxila) and Butkarha (Swat) stupa at Jamal Garha were among the earliest stupas of Gandhara. These had been erected on the orders of king Ashoka and contained the real relics of the Buddha. At first, the object of veneration was the stupa itself. In time, this symbol was replaced by a more sensitive human

image. The Gandhara schools is probably credited with the first representation of the Buddha in human form, the portrayal of Buddha in his human shape, rather than shown as a symbol. As Buddhist art developed and spread outside India, the styles developed here were imitated. For example, in China the Gandhara style was imitated in images made of bronze, with a gradual change in the features of these images. Swat, the land of romance and beauty, is celebrated throughout the world as the holy land of Buddhist learning and piety. Swat acquired fame as a place of Buddhist pilgrimage. Buddhist tradition holds that the Buddha himself came to Swat during his last reincarnation as the Guatama Buddha and preached to the people here. It is said that the Swat was filled with fourteen hundred imposing and beautiful stupas and monasteries, which housed as many as 6,000 gold images of the Buddhist pantheon for worship and education. There are now more than 400 Buddhist sites covering an area of 160 Km in Swat valley only. Among the important Buddhist excavation in Swat an important one is Butkarha-I, containing the original relics of the Buddha. Dhararaja, a title of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, in the middle of the 3rd century, erected the Dharamarajika Stupa, the oldest Buddhist monument in Taxila. The Dharamarajika Stupa contained the sacred relics of the Buddha and the silver scroll commemorating the relics. A wealth of gold and silver coins, gems, jewellery and other antiques were discovered here and are housed in the Taxila museum. Takht-i-Bhai is another well-known and preserved monument, a Buddhist monastery located on a rocky ridge about 10 miles northeast of Mardan. This structure dates back to two to five century AD and stands 600 feet above the plane. The feature, which distinguishes this site from others, is its architectural diversity and its romantic mountain setting. The uphill approach has helped in the preservation of the monument. The exposed buildings here include the main stupa and two courtyards in different terraces surrounded by votive stupa and shrines, the monastic quadrangles surrounded by cells for the monks, and a large hall of assembly. In one of the stupa courtyard is a line of colossal Buddhas, which were originally 16 to 20 feet high. The site's fragmentary sculptures in stone and stucco are a considerable wealth but its most remarkable feature is the peculiar design and arrangement of the small shrines, which surround the main stupa. These shrines stood upon a continuous sculptured podium and were crowned alternately with stupa-like finials forming an ensemble. The beauty and grandeur provided by the entire composition is unparalleled in the Buddhist world. Takht-i-Bhai had a wealth of ancient Buddhist remains. A long range of different sized Buddha and Buddhistavvas from Takht-i-Bhai fill

many museums. Some of the best pieces of Gandhara sculpture, now to be found in the museums of Europe, were originally recovered from Takht-i-Bhai. The Jinan Wali Dheri site, a Buddhist Monastic complex forming part of the series of the remains of the Gandhara civilization, was discovered during archaeological excavations in the Taxila district. It is one of the best-preserved Buddhist monastic complexes in the Taxila valley. Translations of the oldest existing Buddhist writings have changed how scholars believe the religion developed. Nineteen-hundred-year-old manuscripts from the Gandhara region offer a rare glimpse of the religion as it expanded from its native India around the first century AD. Written in the language called Gandhari, the texts are adding a new dimension to the Buddhist canons of ancient Sanskrit and the living traditions of Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan. Tradition purports that Buddhist texts form a single line of development from the Buddha: as the religion spread, the Buddha's teachings were heard by disciples, then retold word for word, generation by generation. The Gandhari texts indicate that this is not quite accurate. The multiplicity of different versions of the teachings from a very early period indicates that there may have been much more acceptance among Buddhists of presenting the teachings in their own way. The only previous Gandhari text was discovered in central Asia in 1892 and published by John Brough in the 1960s. No other manuscripts surfaced until 1994 when the British Library bought a collection of twenty-nine Gandhari scrolls with a mysterious history. The British Library purchased the scrolls at auction in the UK with no firm information about their provenance. The manuscripts were buried in spherical clay pots. The pots were buried in stupas, large mounds or stone structures that, among other things, hold sacred objects. Gandhara was one of the core areas of India's Maurya Empire in the fourth century BCE. Alexander the Great conquered the Gandhara region between 327 and 325 BC. He visited Taxila and crossed the Salt Range before reaching the Beas River, then sailed down the Indus to the sea and marched west across the Makran Desert in Baluchistan. His empire, however, was short-lived. In 321 BC, Chandragupta founded the Mauryan Empire, controlling Gandhara from his capital at Patna on the Ganges. His grandson, Ashoka, promoted Buddhism and built Buddhist shrines, known as "Ashoka Pillars" all over the empire. When the empire weakened around 180 BCE, Greeks from a kingdom established by one of Alexander's successors in Bactria (Northern Afghanistan) invaded and established several Greco-Indian states. The descendants of Alexander the Great's armies from Bactria (now Balkh, in northern

Afghanistan) built new Greek cities at Taxila and Pushkalavati. Greek aesthetic ideas and sculptural techniques fused with those of northern India, producing innovative and abundant art. The Bactrian Greeks ruled over the territories of Gandhara, central and southern Afghanistan and Pakistan. One of its rulers Menander also converted to Buddhism. The dominions of Menander appear to have comprised the central parts of Afghanistan, NWFP, the Punjab, Sindh, Rajputana, Kathiawar and Western Uttar Pradesh.



In modern Pakistan the Kalash people of northwestern Pakistan are unique in their customs and religion. Although surrounded by Moslems in all directions (Pakistan is essentially a Moslem state), they believe in ancient Greek gods and goddesses such as Zeus, Aphrodite, Hestia, and Apollo. Their language is principally a mixture of Sanskrit and Greek. They grow grapes and make wine (an illegal action in an Islamic country). In the 19th century British officers and scholars in India maintained a romantic belief that a lost tribe of Alexander's Greeks survived somewhere in Afghanistan. The movie "The Man Who Would Be King" starring Sean Connery was based upon that legend.

