

## An Iconographic Study of Women's Representation in Gandhara Civilization Art along with the Silk Road.



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**Abstract:** *This research employs an iconographic method to examine how women are depicted in the art of the Gandhara Civilization. The primary objectives of this study are to identify the symbols and motifs used to represent women in Gandharan art and to comprehend the cultural and societal values that are reflected in the artwork. The data for this qualitative research include images of Gandharan art in the form of sculptures and carvings on stones. These images were obtained from online resources, such as books and articles published between 2005 and the present. Although the research material on Gandhara is limited, the study helps to shed light on the status of women in Gandhara culture. The analysis of the data focuses on recognizing and interpreting the symbols and motifs in the artwork, taking into account their historical and cultural context, and understanding the broader cultural and societal values that are conveyed through the portrayal of women. For obtaining the secondary data, open-ended interviews of those people were conducted, who directly or indirectly linked with Gandhara research. The research concludes with a summary of the findings supported by the evidence gathered during the analysis. This study enhances the field of art history and provides a more comprehensive comprehension of how women are represented in Gandharan art.*

**Keywords:** Gandhara, women, iconography, iconographic analysis, civilization

### Introduction

The region of Northern Pakistan and Afghanistan was home to the Gandhara Civilization between the 1st millennium BCE and the 2nd millennium CE (Bin Naveed, 2015). Despite being ruled by different powers, Buddhism was widely respected and the local artistic tradition was influenced by the Indo-Greek style that emerged after Alexander's invasions into India (Bin Naveed, 2015). During this time, the Gandhara region was a

hub of artistic and cultural activity, and it produced a rich legacy of sculptures, manuscripts, and other artifacts. The representation of women in the art and literature of ancient civilizations is an important aspect of understanding the social, cultural, and religious norms and beliefs of the time. This study aims to examine the representation of women in the art and literature of the Gandhara Civilization in order to gain a deeper understanding of the role and status of women in ancient Gandhara society and the ways in which they were

represented in the artwork.

The research employed qualitative iconographic analysis, and feminist interpretation of the available artifacts and sculptures from the Gandhara Civilization. The study also explored the themes, symbols, and motifs associated with women in Gandhara art. This study tried to contribute to the understanding of the cultural and religious influences on the representation of women in the Gandhara Civilization and provide valuable insights into the social and cultural norms of ancient Gandhara society.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Conduct an iconographic analysis of the representation of women in the art of the Gandhara Civilization.
2. Identify the symbols and motifs used to represent women in Gandharan art.
3. Understand the cultural and societal values that are reflected in the representation of women in Gandharan art.

### **Research Questions:**

The research questions for this study are:

1. What symbols and motifs were used to represent women in Gandharan art?
2. What cultural and societal values are reflected in the representation of women in Gandharan art?
3. How did the representation of women in Gandharan art differ from the representation of men?
4. How did the influence of different cultures and religions impact the representation of women in Gandharan art?

### **Problem Statement:**

The representation of women in the art of the Gandhara Civilization is an important area of study that has yet to be fully explored through an iconographic analysis. Understanding the symbolism and meaning of the representation

of women in Gandharan art is crucial to gaining a deeper insight into the cultural and societal values of the time and understanding the role of women in Gandharan society. This study aims to conduct an iconographic analysis of the representation of women in Gandharan art by identifying the symbols and motifs used to represent women and understanding the broader cultural and societal values that are reflected in the artwork. This study's findings contribute to the art history field and provide a deeper understanding of the representation of women in the Gandhara Civilization.

### **Scope of the Study:**

This research has a specific focus on analyzing the iconography of how women are depicted in the art of the Gandhara Civilization, with attention given to the symbolism and meaning of the visual elements used in their portrayal. Additionally, the study examines the cultural and societal values that are conveyed through the representation of women in comparison to how men are depicted. The images utilized in the study were obtained from online sources such as books and articles published between 2005 and the present. Moreover, some open-ended interviews have also been included in the study from anthropologists and researchers in Pakistan who were directly and indirectly attached to the research of Gandhara.

### **Literature Review**

Gandhara an old civilization possesses social and cultural diversity. It encapsulates many vibrant and enchanting facts regarding the society of that time. That nominates the society, the heritage of knowledge and wisdom. The society of that time was influenced by many contemporary cultures, different values which were borrowed from different cultures, art in the form of sculpture-making, warfare strategies, and spiritual wisdom. This was because of the geographical location of Gandhara. The Silk route provided the utmost importance to that place.

To provide context for the discussion of the various influences on Gandhara Art, it's useful

to briefly explore the history of Gandhara and the contributions of different rulers during its existence. The region's art flourished from the 1st millennium BCE to the 11th century CE, with its peak occurring during the Kushan period. The term "Gandhara" may derive from the words "gandh," meaning "fragrance," and "hara," meaning "land," or from the name of the queen Gandhāri, who is mentioned in the Hindu religious text the Mahabharata (Saleem, 2013). During the period from 1300-600 BCE, the Vedic religion dominated the region, with the Rig-Vedas providing written texts about the religion and an emphasis on spiritual reasoning (Saleem, 2013). In the 6th century BCE, Gautama Buddha, the leader of Buddhism, was born as Prince Siddhartha and later became a spiritual teacher (Saleem, 2013). Despite his immense spiritual importance, he never allowed himself to be represented through physical objects and never wanted people to worship him as a god.

**Persian [Achaemenid Empire](#) (c. 600-400 BCE):**

The Persian empire had a significant impact on the Gandhara Civilization's culture, especially in terms of art and architecture.

**Greeks of [Macedon](#) (c. 326-324 BCE):**

The Hellenistic Civilization refers to the period of Greek and Macedonian influence in the Mediterranean and the Near East. Alexander the Great conquered the Gandhara region in the 4th century BCE, and Greek culture and language had a profound impact on the Gandhara Civilization's art and architecture.

**Kushans of Central Asia (c. 1st to 5th century CE):** The Kushan Empire was a Central Asian empire that ruled over the Gandhara region and other parts of India from the 1st century CE to the 3rd century CE. The Kushan Empire was known for its promotion of Buddhism, and many Gandhara Civilization artworks from this period depict Buddhist themes and imagery.

The Kushans rose to power and gained control

of Gandhara and other parts of present-day Pakistan. The Kushan period is considered the Golden Period of Gandhara, during which the region experienced significant cultural and artistic development (Saleem, 2013). The Peshawar Valley and Taxila are filled with ruins of Stupas and monasteries from this era. The Kushan king, Kanishka, was a great patron of the Buddhist faith and Buddhism flourished under his rule (Saleem, 2013). Many monuments were built to commemorate the Jatka tales, and Mahayana Buddhism became prevalent in the region. The art of Gandhara, particularly its representations of Buddha in human form, spread to other parts of Asia and attracted Chinese pilgrims (Saleem, 2013). Peshawar became the capital of a great empire that stretched from Gandhara to Central Asia and Buddhism was able to reach as far as the Far East.

**Invasion by the Huns (5th century CE):**

Around 450 A.D, the Hephthalite Huns invaded Gandhara and did not embrace Buddhism. Under their rule, Hinduism made a comeback, but the Gandharan Civilization declined. The Sassanids, with the help of Turks from Central Asia, toppled the Huns' power in Central Asia (Saleem, 2013), and Gandhara once again fell under Persian control in 568 A.D. When the Muslim Arabs overthrew the Sassanids, Buddhist Turks took charge of Gandhara and Kabul (Saleem, 2013). However, Taxila lay in ruins, and Buddhist monasteries were abandoned, while Hindu temples were abundant.

**Turkshahi and Hindushahi Period (c. 9th to 10th century CE):**

Following the Arab conquest of the Sassanid Empire in 644, Gandhara and Afghanistan faced pressure from Muslim forces. Despite their efforts, the Muslims were unable to extend their rule over Gandhara (Saleem, 2013). The region was initially governed from Kabul and Udhbadapura (Hund) under the Turkshahi dynasty, which held power for the next two centuries (Saleem, 2013). According to Muslim

records, the Hindushahi dynasty succeeded the Turkshahi around 870, with their capital also located in Udhabadapura (Saleem,2013). Under their rule, impressive temples were constructed throughout the kingdom, some of which remain well-preserved in the Salt Range of the Punjab. However, this period of expansion for the Gandhara kingdom coincided with the rise of the Ghaznavid Empire under Sabuktigin and later Mahmud Ghaznavi in Kabul (Saleem,2013). It is believed that the city of Kandahar in Afghanistan was named after Gandhara.

The representation of women in art and literature is an important aspect of understanding the social, cultural, and religious norms and beliefs of a civilization. The Gandhara Civilization is known for its rich legacy of sculptures, manuscripts, and other artifacts, and this study aims to examine the representation of women in the art of the Gandhara Civilization.

Studies on the representation of women in ancient civilizations have shown that the depiction of women in art and literature reflects the social and cultural norms of the time. In the case of the Gandhara Civilization, the art and literature produced during this time was influenced by the Buddhist religion and its cultural and philosophical beliefs. The Buddhist scriptures and texts such as the Jataka Tales (Himalayan Art Resources Inc.2023)., contain stories and narratives that depict the role of women in ancient Gandhara society.

The Gandharan region was a hub for ancient trade routes connecting the Mediterranean and South Asia, leading to a blending of cultural perspectives and artistic influences that shaped the representation of female figures and form in art (Assomull, 2013). The people of Gandhara were open to the portrayal of human figures and, as a result of these diverse influences, produced some of the finest examples of female body representation in Asian art (Assomull, 2013). This highlights the influence of geographic, economic, and religious

circumstances on the depiction of women (Assomull, 2013).

Studies have shown that the representation of women in Gandhara art and literature was diverse and that it varied depending on the period and context of the artwork. For example, some studies have shown that the representation of women in Gandhara art was influenced by the Greek and Roman traditions and that the female figures depicted in Gandhara sculptures were often depicted as idealized and ornamental. Many mythological figures, as well as couples, gods, demigods, celestials, princes, queens, male guards, female guards, musicians, royal chaplains, soldiers, and common people, appear in these scenes (Bin Naveed, 2015).

Aside from the Buddha, one of the most enduring elements of Gandharan art is the Bodhisattva, which is essentially the Buddha's state before enlightenment. Gandharan art contains different Bodhisattvas from the Buddha's previous lives, with Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya, Padmapani, and Manjsuri prominent (Bin Naveed, 2015). In contrast to the austerity of Buddha images, sculptures and images depict a high level of opulence, with variations in jewelry, headdress, loincloth, sandals, and so on, and the various incarnations of the Bodhisattva are noticeable from their clothing, postures, and mudras (Bin Naveed, 2015).

### **Research Methodology**

This study was qualitative in nature. The primary data sources for this study were collected from the art of the Gandhara Civilization obtained from online sources books, and articles published between 2005 and the present. The secondary data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire. To gain a better understanding of the societal position of women in Gandhara, archaeologists from Pakistan were asked to provide information through an open-ended questionnaire on the depiction of women in art and sculptures during the research.

## Data collection

For primary data collection images of the sculptures were collected from :

1. Asia Society. (2023). Gandhara: Narratives and Architectural Context. Retrieved from <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibit-sections/>
2. Kurt A. Behrendt, *The Art of Gandhara in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007) [https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

**Artwork** (selected for the study)

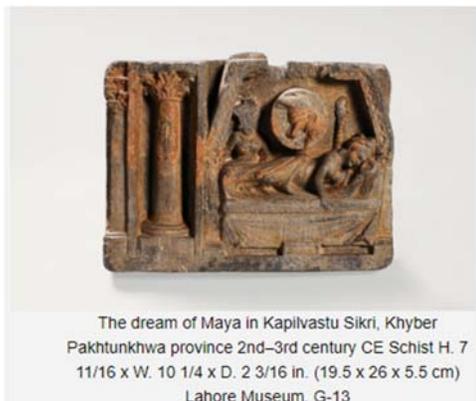


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Asia Society. (2023) <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibit-sections/>

Note: (Figures 1 to 4 have been retrieved from: <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibit-sections/>)



Figure 5

Figure 8. *Mirror Handle or Table Leg with Female Figure (Yakshi)*. Manufactured in western India; found in Pompeii, before A.D. 79. Ivory. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples (inv. 149425)



*Mirror Handle with a Standing Woman*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Stone. H. 4 3/4 in. (12.1 cm)

Figure 6



*Rondel with the Goddess Hariti*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, ca. 1st century A.D.  
Silver with gold foil, Diam. 3 1/2 in. (8.9 cm)  
Gift of The Kronos Collections, 1981 (1981.460.2)

Figure 7



*Dish with a Woman Riding a Marine Creature*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, Parthian style, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Schist, Diam. 5 1/6 in. (13.5 cm)  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.107)

Figure 8



*Dish with the Drunken Heracles Supported by Two Women, with a Lion at Left*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, Hellenistic style, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Schist, Diam. 4 3/4 in. (12.4 cm)  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.105)

Figure 9



*Dish with a Marine Creature and a Couple*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, Hellenistic style, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Schist, Diam. 4 1/2 in. (11.4 cm)  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.41)

Figure 10



1. *Dish with Apollo and Daphne*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara,  
Hellenistic style, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Schist, Diam. 4<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (10.6 cm)  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel  
Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.307)

Figure 11



3. *Plaque with Loving Couple (Mithuna)*  
Afghanistan (possibly of western  
Indian manufacture), 1st–3rd cen-  
tury A.D.  
Bone, 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (4.4 x 3.5 cm)  
Purchase, Dr. Kurt Berliner Gift,  
1998 (1998.348)

Figure 12

[https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

NOTE: Figures 5 to 13 have been retrieved from: (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007)

**Iconographic analysis** typically involves a

close examination of the visual elements of a work of art, with the aim of identifying and interpreting its symbolic and iconographic features. These above-mentioned selected pictures were selected for iconographic analysis. Moreover, interviews were also conducted from those people who were directly or indirectly linked with Gandharan research and other related projects to Gandhara. Their names and designations of the selected people for open-ended interviews are given below:

1. Dr Ijlal Hussain Director Silk Road Centre Islamabad
2. DG CPEC

### Data Analysis

Selected pictures of sculptures have been collected from the two authentic online sources:

1. Asia Society. (2023). Gandhara: Narratives and Architectural Context. Retrieved from <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibit-sections/>
2. Kurt A. Behrendt, *The Art of Gandhara in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007) [https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

These images were selected because of the presence of female figures in them. These females are goddesses, deities, queens, beloveds, and maids as well. All selected pictures have their own contexts, references, and significance. Every selected figure tells its story. These pieces of art have been analyzed one by one.

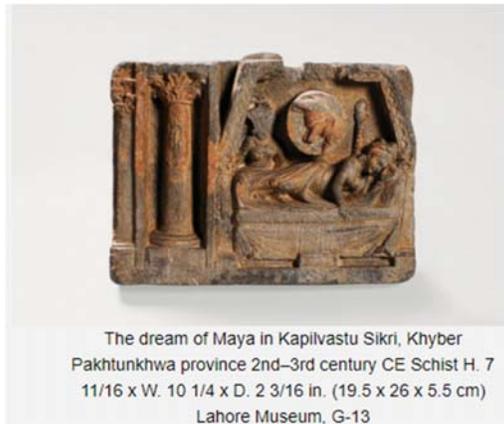


Figure 1: Asia Society. (2023) <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibit-sections/>

**Analysis Description:** In figure 1 Queen Maya’s dream is reflection through carving of the stone. Maya is sleeping and dreaming which is carved in form of halo where an elephant can be viewed. This sculpture likely depicts the miraculous conception of Prince Siddhartha, who later became the Buddha, in accordance with Buddhist beliefs (Asia Society, 2023). In the relief, the mother-to-be, Maya, is depicted sleeping while a maid attends to her. Maya reportedly dreamed that an elephant entered her womb through her side, and the halo around the elephant in the sculpture signifies its identification as the Buddha. This relief was probably originally placed on the square base of a votive stupa.

The crown on Maya’s head depicts her elevated status in society and her dream imparts the enlightened spirituality of the woman of that elevated rank. On the other side, a maid can be seen sitting with Maya’s legs, showing her status as a maid. The ornamental status of the Maya is very well depicted in this sculpture. This piece of art presents the followings traits which could be the part of that particular society:

1. Sacred character of mother
2. Dreams could be true
3. Elephant is a symbol of power and luck
4. Concept of rich and poor

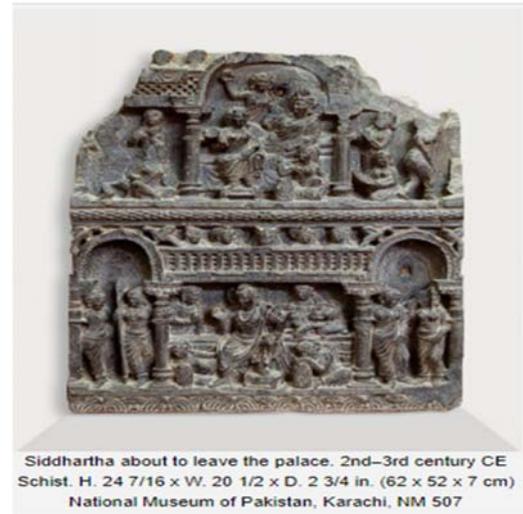


Figure 2 Asia Society. (2023) <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibit-sections/>

**Analysis Description:** In figure 2 we can observe 13 to 14 women who are performing different tasks. One lady is lying behind the Buddha, some are plying trumpet, some ladies are standing beside the columns. This piece of art does not seem very clear but the artist carved the breasts of the ladies very significantly that differentiate the male and the females candidly. This figure imparts many realities of the society, i.e.:

1. Women had significant place in the palace.
2. The dresses women wore were most prominently around their waists covering their legs and around their chests covering their breasts and one shoulder. This depicts the style of “Sadhi” which is famous in India and Sindh (Pakistan).
3. This carving plate is demonstrating a complete story regarding the Buddha whom is about to leave the palace and women are trying to make him pleased by using music, dancing, and even seducing him as the lying lady is symbolizing it,
4. Ladies were a prominent part of dance and music and tool for making love. Because when we observe another scene from the sacred place where all monks were

gathered around the Buddha then no female was there. We can see in this following picture:



Asia Society. (2023) <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibitions/>

As we have observed that the artists in Gandhara had prominently defined the female upper part to differentiate the two genders, So, we observe in the above picture that all are men who are present in the worship area.



Figure 3 Asia Society. (2023) <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibitions/>

In the following depiction, Siddhartha - who later became known as the Buddha - is depicted as preparing to abandon the luxurious lifestyle of his palace. As his wife and her attendants

slumber, he instructs his charioteer to prepare his horse for departure. (Asia Society, 2023). Another story is emphasizing through this image. Male and female figures both are there but females are at their home and sleeping and males are outside and demonstrating the power and strength by leaving all the worldly comforts and luxuries of the palace. This demonstration is not only inspiring that the Buddha leaves all the comforts for the attainment of grandeur and mental peace but on the other side is imparting the reality of the women who are not the active part of the outer societal life of that particular society.

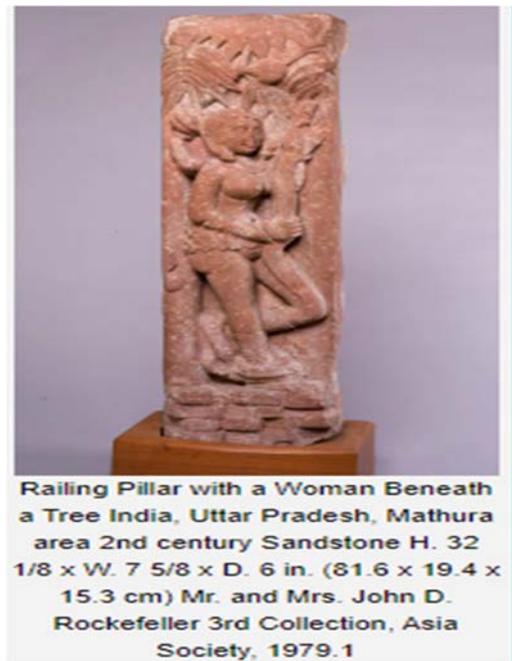


Figure 4 Asia Society. (2023) <http://sites.asiasociety.org/gandhara/exhibitions/>

This sculpture from Uttar Pradesh, featuring a common Indian motif of a woman situated beneath a tree, was frequently utilized as a scene separator in Gandharan friezes (Asia Society, 2023).

Again we can observe in this image 4 that a lady is standing beneath the tree. All her body parts have been delicately designed and carved skillfully. This is a railing pillar which could be touched and scratched easily. This type of designs can be observed in many artefacts in

Gandharan art where a half-necked woman and girls' bodies have been made by the artisans of that time. This picture or image also demonstrates that to draw female like this signifies the sex appeal that the males felt towards women at the time.



Figure 8. *Mirror Handle or Table Leg with Female Figure (Yakshi)*. Manufactured in western India; found in Pompeii, before A.D. 79. Ivory. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples (inv. 149425)

Figure 5: [https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

Figure 5 :

A dancing naked female sculpture with miniature males peaking from the sides of the hips, displaying the female and male genitals as well as the bosom, represent idealized bodies but also enlightenment by showing their bodies in the purest form. The men staring from behind could be observers of the dancing lady. The female's body is decorated in heavy ethnic jewelry which is a characteristic of the culture of Indian subcontinent. This piece was excavated from Pompeii thus this kind of art was appreciated throughout the regions although it may be seen as erotic or have negative connotations in modern context, but this type of art was popular for depicting the raw human form.



*Mirror Handle with a Standing Woman*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara,  
ca. 1st century B.C.  
Stone. H. 4 3/4 in. (12.1 cm)

Figure 6: [https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

Figure 7: Indian and Hellenistic artistic styles are used in the Mirror Handle to show a happy woman with styled hair, heavy jewelry and exquisite clothes draped around but she also has her bum crack exposed. The woman is dressed up and has an approaching body language. This could be the standard of beauty reminded to those that hold the mirror. The mirror handles in Gandhara art were luxury items and often decorated with intricate carvings and sculptures depicting various religious and mythological figures.



*Rondel with the Goddess Hariti*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara,  
ca. 1st century A.D.  
Silver with gold foil, Diam. 3 1/2 in. (8.9 cm)  
Gift of The Kronos Collections, 1981 (1981.460.2)

Figure 7: [https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

Figure 8: Rondals are round objects and the one above depicts the Goddess Hariti holding a child in lap. In Buddhism, the Hariti use to be a demoness that preyed on children but was transformed by the buddha after asking for forgiveness into a fertility giver and protector of children. This rondel is intricately designed with a floral pattern which were a popular form of motifs used for their aesthetic value or for symbolizing the cycle of growth and decay. The child she is holding has a mischievous look in his eyes to express his protectiveness of the goddess. She is a symbol of maternal love, fertility, and abundance. She is invoked by Buddhists for her protection and couples yearning for children.

- "Hariti." Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed February 28, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hariti>



*Dish with a Woman Riding a Marine Creature*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara,  
Parthian style, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Schist, Diam. 5<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (13.5 cm)  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel  
Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.107)

Figure8:[https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

Figure 9: Appearance of marine creatures offer multiple meanings for example they could symbolizes the power of the mysterious and vast ocean, represent cycle of samsara or rebirth but its depiction here with a woman that has a serene expression and the use of these long alligator or crocodile sort of creature that could be a serpent like creature known as Naga often

depicted in Gandharan art. or illustrate that these are for aesthetic value only. This Rongel is made of alloy so the item could not have been a luxury one.

- Marshall, John. "The Iconography of Gandhara Art." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1 (1926): 45-67.
- Rosenfield, John M. "The Art of Gandhara." In *Gandhara: The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan*, edited by David Jongeward, Elizabeth Errington, and Joe Cribb, 40-67. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011.



*Dish with the Drunken Heracles Supported by Two Women, with a Lion at Left*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara,  
Hellenistic style, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Schist, Diam. 4<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (12.4 cm)  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel  
Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.105)

Figure9:[https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

Figure 10: Heracles was the son of Zeus, the Thunder God. He was the strongest of Hero's and his famous stories were favorite retellings of the Greek. As Buddhism spread from central Asia the hero Heracles was adopted to represent Vajrapāni which means 'the one who wields the thunderbolt'. Vajrapāni is usually depicted with

wrathful appearance but here Heracles is depicted in an incapable state and requires assistance from the women. Heracles usually appears with lion skin to announce his strength, but the lion is standing to the side which could represent how in the intoxicated state his strength is suppressed or not with him at this moment. Only women are shown helping him which highlights their role as the caretakers. This extreme emphasis on how the women are helping the strongest of hero in his weakened state which clearly shows what their role is in society.

- "The Iconography of the Lion in Gandhara Art," by J. C. Harle, in East and West, vol. 25, no. 1/2 (March-June 1975), pp. 47-64.
- "The Lion in Gandharan Art: Its Symbolism and Iconography," by Prithvi K. Agrawala, in Indo-Iranica, vol. 24, no. 1/2 (1971), pp. 83-94.
- "Vajrapāṇi as Hercules," by Ronald M. Davidson, in Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 109, no. 3 (Jul.-Sep. 1989), pp. 411-413.



*Dish with a Marine Creature and a Couple*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara,  
Hellenistic style, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Schist, Diam. 4½ in. (11.4 cm)  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel  
Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.41)

Figure10:[https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

### [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

This Hellenistic style figure 11 depicts the utmost love for beauty and decoration of design and pattern. The influence of Greek is reflected through this small dish showing a couple. The image is not as much clear but tiara on female figure and arm's muscles of the male justify the mood of that particular society. Symbols and motifs in this figure 11 describe some features of the society of that time. These are:

1. Men are strong.
2. Females are delicate
3. Females are for love



1. *Dish with Apollo and Daphne*  
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara,  
Hellenistic style, ca. 1st century B.C.  
Schist, Diam. 4¾ in. (10.6 cm)  
Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel  
Eilenberg, 1987 (1987.142.307)

Figure11:[https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

This dish in figure 12 imparts two characters from Greek mythology: Apollo, the god of light and poetry and his beloved Daphne, a beautiful nymph, daughter of the river god Peneus (Chaliakopoulos, 2021). The concept of love derived from Greek mythology in Gandharan society. The people of the society considered that love pure and sacred because the carving on a small palm sized dish which was used to perform holy ceremonies and during worship activities. This figure demonstrates certain features of the society:

1. Influence of Greek mythology because of

the invasion of Alexander

2. Open declaration of love
3. Belief in hate and love relationship, because Daphne many times rejected Apollo's love.
4. Acceptance of gods and goddesses love in the society
5. Acceptance of the relationship of gods and goddesses whether it is illegitimate.
6. Sacred consideration of that sort of love in the society.



8. *Plaque with Loving Couple (Mithuna Afghanistan (possibly of western Indian manufacture), 1st–3rd century A.D. Bone, 1¼ x 1½ in. (4.4 x 3.5 cm) Purchase, Dr. Kurt Berliner Gift, 1998 (1998.348)*

Figure12:[https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Gandhara\\_in\\_The\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_of\\_Art](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/The_Art_of_Gandhara_in_The_Metropolitan_Museum_of_Art)

This figure 13 imparts the innocent true love and may be a bit sort of infatuation. A smile with shyness on both faces makes the image attractive and depicts the young love. A sense of relief also reflects from the image which is the indication of relief and comfort which both gender feel with each other. The sculpture very artistically carved showing male and female gender categorically; the male figure with naked arms and no cap or bun on his head which is usually depicted in the other sculptures of Buddha. The female figure is having clothes on her arms and ring in her ears. She also has bun on her head and also wearing a tiara. This figure

identifies certain characteristics of that particular society:

1. Childhood love
2. Depiction of female with beauty and elegance
3. Liberty to choose one's soul mate

#### OPEN ENDED INTERVIEWS

**Participant 1: Dr Ijlal Hussain** Director Silk Road Centre Islamabad.

*(He gave an elaborated and generalized answer of our three questions.)*

When we say Gandhara, we basically refer to the area around today's Peshawar and Charsadda. However, in its mature phase, Gandhara extended its boundaries over an area of about 200,000 square kilometers. In our world today, Gandhara stretched from the northern parts of Pakistan to southeastern Afghanistan. In today's Pakistan, the areas comprising Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Mardan, Swabi, Malakand, Swat, Buner, Shangla, Dir, Bajaur, Mohmand, Taxila, Chakwal, Attock, Rawalpindi, Islamabad and districts of Hazara, Kohistan and Gilgit Baltistan were included in Greater Gandhara. The Persian Achaemenids conquered Gandhara in the 6th century BC. Their invasion followed by that of Alexander opened the doors of Gandhara to immigrants from ancient Iran, Mesopotamia, Macedonia, China and Central Asia. Buddhism in Gandhara was established after the conquest of the Mauryan King Ashoka in ca. 260 BC. Buddhism flourished in Gandhara over a period of 1,000 years between the 3rd century BC and 8th century AD. The religion has a deep impact on the cultural development of Gandhara. The Silk Road network helped the spread of Buddhism to the lands far beyond Gandhara.

The Kushan rule in Gandhara took Buddhism to its heights. They helped creating thousands of monasteries and Buddhist institutions in Gandhara. That's the reason the heritage sites excavated in Gandhara are mostly religious in

nature featuring monasteries, stupas, scriptoriums and residential quarters for monks.

The heritage sites discovered in Gandhara do not say much about the everyday life of women during Gandhara times but it can be inferred from pieces of jewelry unearthed from stupas that the women of Gandhara were prosperous. Gandhara sculptures also depict powerful women figures such as Queen Maya and Yashodhara. These and other women figures signify affection, prosperity and fertility of women. Some figures also relate women to distraction and disease. The museums in Peshawar, Mardan and Taxila contain a number of such sculptures.

The life and status of women in Gandhara is a fascinating but neglected subject of research. However, the focus has been more on archeology and Gandhara art. There is a greater need for multidisciplinary research on various aspects including intangible culture of Gandhara. The role of women in Gandhara is a key area in this regard.

**Participant 2 : DG CPEC HEC Dr. Safdar Ali Shah**

1. How did the influences of different cultural and religion impact the presentation of women in Gandhara Art?

Gandhara Art flourished during 1st Century BCE to 6th Century CE in the Gandhara region (Present-day north-western Pakistan). It was primarily influenced by Hindu mythology, as Buddhism emerged from Hinduism—Buddha being a Hindu Prince before his enlightenment—and the Indus-Greeks who ruled in this area and influenced the local art and architecture, especially the sculpture. Since Gandhara region was at the cultural crossroads, other influences, like Iranian, cannot be ruled out.

Although Gandhara Art was primarily used for propagation of Buddhism as a faith, mythological and human figures, including deities, men and women, are portrayed in great detail. Female figures are more sophisticated compared to men which shows a degree of

respect for women. Items of toiletry in the museums also show propensity of Gandharan women towards make up and beautification. It may be kept in mind that Buddhism had a cadre of female monks or nuns—which shows their significant role and status in society—The Daughter of Emperor Asoka spread the new faith, as a nun, in Sri Lanka.

2. How presentation of women in Gandhara art is different from men?

They have elaborated. Dresses, with jewellery and sophisticated hairstyles.

3. What cultural values are reflected in representation of women in Gandhara?

Respect for women, especially the mother and wife. Buddha's mother, Queen Maya, is depicted with great respect. So, is his wife as a prince.

**Conclusion**

To conclude the debate, it could be assumed that the representation of women at that time was very distinct featuring the artwork of Gandhara. She was the mother, the wife, the beloved, the deity, and the goddess. She remained inside the home or palace. She did not have any distinct representation at monasteries and outside activities, and warfare affairs. She was the symbol of worship in the form of a goddess or a deity. She was an embodiment of true love, spirituality, and nobleness in the form of a mother. She was considered a sweetheart as a wife. She was a symbol of love, beauty, shyness, and sensuality as a beloved. When she descends from her rank then she becomes a maid, a dancer, and a singer. Men enjoy their liquor and drink in the presence of women depicted in their artwork. Gandhara is one of the oldest societies but it is the true representation of feelings, emotions, and longings of the two different genders through her artwork. Man always remained the same from the past to the present in all societal, religious, cultural, and domestic affairs specifically regarding women. Respect and love remained present all the time but

boundaries were also around the women.

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