

Stories of Gandhāra: antiquity, art and idol

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Then they attacked the British for the way they treated Indian antiquities. This was really too much, but I kept my anger. All their museums grew out of British care – what of all that Lord Curzon did? Schools, universities, museum – all British – all created by the British. And look at the Lahore museum[sic], how it has deteriorated – neglected – since they took over.

(Bolitho 2007:64)¹

Whilst researching for his biography on Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, Hector Bolitho recalled the above post-lunch attack by the Editor of the *Sind Observer*, the Governor of Sind and Pir Pagaro on the departed colonials, deeming it highly unfair considering all that the British had bestowed upon the Indian Empire. For our purposes here, Bolitho's paternalistic concern for the rapid 'deterioration' of the presumed wealth colonialism left behind as inheritance – education, cultural modernisation, and archaeological discoveries, in the newly established Pakistan of the 1950s, is interesting. If we pick up on the latter then what were these antiquities and museums that were lovingly 'created' by the British and now maltreated by Pakistanis? In this paper, I shall investigate this accusation by telling three stories of re-discovery and reception around one colonial collection and museum – namely the Gandhāra collection at the Lahore Museum (Figure 1).²

Beginning with museums, institutions like the Lahore Museum are mid-nineteenth century colonial introductions to India that aimed initially to visualize the culture, history, economic products, and manufactures of India through material evidence that was assessed in terms of expansion, trade, but also social and cultural evolution (Bhatti 2012). The Lahore Museum was set up as a museum of the Punjab and one collection that has been central to its development from the beginning, in terms of acquisitions and prestige, has been the Gandhāra collection (Figure 2). But this link between the two is not only of collection and display but a coincidence of their parallel histories of discovery and establishment in mid-nineteenth-century India. It was in 1852 that examples of Yusafzai sculptures, as they are referred to in early Lahore Museum reports,³ were first re-discovered and re-interpreted⁴ by the colonials (Abe 1995: 70), and in 1856 that the Lahore Museum was founded to house and display these initial artefacts.

1 My gratitude to Naeem Dilpul for inadvertently providing me with this quotation by sharing portions of the book.

2 I would like to make clear that I am not interested in purely archaeological museums in Pakistan such as Taxila (1918) or Peshawar (1907) that were connected explicitly to the archaeological explorations in their vicinity during the early twentieth century, as part of Lord Curzon's revival and modernization of the Archaeological Survey of India and its activities in the sub-continent under John Marshall (Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, or ASI, 1902-1928). Museums like the Lahore Museum were older repositories of Gandhāran objects and their role in the story of 're-discovery' is as important. See Bhatti 2012, for an in-depth history and ethnography of the Lahore Museum.

3 For example, Baden-Powell 1868.

4 I avoid calling this discovery and interpretation as the Gandhāran objects had previous lives (Hoskins 1998) that were ignored because of a lack of understanding or archaeological record to support a definitive modern interpretation.



Figure 1. The Lahore Museum. (Photo: author.)



Figure 2. The Gandhāra Gallery at the Lahore Museum. (Photo: author.)



Figure 3. (a) Sikri Stūpa in the Gandhāra Gallery at the Lahore Museum. (b) Detail of panel of the Sikri Stūpa. (Photos: author.)



Figure 4. Jātaka of *The Dream of Queen Maya* in the Gandhāra Gallery at the Lahore Museum. (Photo: author.)



Figure 5. Display Case exhibiting sculptures of bodhisattva/the Buddha in various poses in the Gandhāra Gallery at the Lahore Museum. (Photo: author.)

Today, the gallery is dominated by the Sikri Stūpa (Figures 3a and 3b) that sits in its centre, lit from below to illuminate the relief-work on the drum with a descriptive note on a stand for those interested to learn more. One side of the gallery tells the life-story of the Buddha as depicted in the *jātaka* ‘scenes’ (Figure 4) executed in stone relief – from pre-incarnation to enlightenment and finally death. Other cases in the gallery hold statues and busts of bodhisattva and Buddha in various poses (Figure 5) with the most prized being the ‘Fasting Buddha’ (Figure 6). The Buddha image dominates the gallery and is available for close inspection in the eight sculptures on open display along the western wall (Figure 7). Stucco and terracotta heads (Figure 8) provide some colour in what is otherwise a heavy gallery of grey schist and



Figure 6. 'The Fasting Buddha' on display in the Gandhāra Gallery at the Lahore Museum. (Photo: author.)

dark wood. In order to better understand these artefacts and the various meanings they have held in the past and generate today, we need to go back to a time when, as the so-called 'founder of Gandhāran Studies' Alfred Foucher, stated: '... the oldest known Buddhas are those which we have encountered in the "House of Marvels," as the natives call the museum of Lahore' (Foucher 1917: 117-18, cited in Abe 1995:74).



Figure 7. An Open Display of Gandhāra in the Gandhāra Gallery at the Lahore Museum. (Photo: author.)



Figure 8. Stucco and terracotta heads from Gandhāra on display in the Gandhāra Gallery at the Lahore Museum. (Photo: author.)



Figure 9. The building popularly known as Tollinton Market, Old Anarkali, Lahore that was the site of the 1864 Punjab Exhibition and Lahore Central Museum (1864-1894).

From Yusafzai to Graeco-Buddhist sculptures at the museum

Museums in colonial India were set up to illustrate, as Markham and Hargreaves note,⁵ India's '...oriental manner and history ... peculiarities of art and nature' (Markham and Hargreaves 1936: 5). The idea was to create 'knowledge for the self' with museums acting as an 'artefactual census' (Cohn 1996) for Company officers to learn from visually. So, what is the story for Gandhāran objects in Lahore? The exact nature of the early Lahore Museum collections is not clear but a memorandum of 1863 entitled *The Local Museums of the Punjab*, by the physician Dr H. Cleghorn, calls them 'chiefly antiquarian' (*Home Proceedings* 1863: 5). Following the Durbar of October 1864, after the Industrial Exhibition it was decided to renovate the building as the new location for the Lahore Central Museum (Figure 9), with the first half containing Raw Produce and Natural History and an annexe of antiquities (Baden-Powell 1868). During this time, district-level officers were asked to cooperate in the expansion of museum collections, in particular antiquities that were considered the most important of the acquisitions, and so donations by officers such as F.H. Cooper of carved friezes and fragmentary sculptures from Yusafzai are recorded (Baden-Powell 1868). Such additions expanded the museum materially but created dilemmas of space and expertise as well as categorization and display of these 'antiquities' as no clear idea existed. Museum 'curators' possessed interest but lacked subject knowledge and so relied on conjectural interpretation as B.H. Baden-Powell, then 'curator' of the Lahore Museum, commented (Baden-Powell 1869: 520):

The great bulk of the sculptures are ... purely ornamental ... others again endless repetitions of Buddha, surrounded by his pupils – standing – seated – in the attitude of teaching and so forth... And these, if described by competent persons, would possibly throw some light on the history of Buddhism.

This inadequacy of knowledge did not prevent the Yusafzai collection from being prominently highlighted and slowly becoming 'interesting' and 'valuable' to colonial officers.⁶ But it was with the arrival of John Lockwood Kipling in 1875 to head both the Lahore Museum and Mayo School of Art that the Yusafzai sculptures became both archaeological evidence and artistic representation of a higher form of art. Kipling's presence was fundamental as he transformed the Lahore Museum from a material storehouse into an organized museum with sections that promoted his interests, including colonial art education and mixed equally, if not more, with craft reformation in India couched in the socialism of the British arts and crafts discourse.⁷ Kipling was passionate about countering the influence of industrialization on local crafts and employed the museum to visualize ideal 'models' and 'samples' that would educate Indian craftsmen, students, and the public on traditional skills and aesthetics.⁸ To this end the Yusafzai antiquities for Kipling were doubly potent as they represented firstly, the skills of past Indian craftsmen and secondly, for the colonial self, aesthetics of an ancient civilization linked to the west through Hellenic characteristics.

The significance of this collection for Kipling can be further gleaned from his description of the museum in a guide meant for British officers and tourists that he co-authored with the colonial administrator T.H. Thornton in 1876 entitled *Lahore as it Was*. In this guide the museum is described as a 'must see' site for all visitors to the Punjab, and for the reader particular attention is given to '... the chief and most valuable possessions of the museum' – namely the sculptured remains from Yusafzai – whose

5 At this time Sydney Markham was Empire Secretary of The Museums Association and Harold Hargreaves former Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India.

6 Ibid.

7 Led by the likes of British craftsmen and designers such as William Morris and Owen Jones with various proponents in India including George C.M. Birdwood who championed Indian crafts that were made within traditional small-scale village settings as outlined in his *The Industrial Arts of India* (1880).

8 Letter from J.L. Kipling, Principal, Lahore School of Art, to the Secretary to Government, Punjab, dated May 27, 1875 (1875:466), Government of Punjab, Home Department Proceedings, June 1875, No.2, 462-466. Punjab Secretariat Archives.

value lay in ‘elucidating the obscure early history of the Buddhist faith’ (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 79). The museum section of the guide provides details on some sculptures but largely attempts to interpret the sculptures within a treatise on art, world histories, and western civilizational hierarchy. The entrance hall is stated to have some ancient pillar bases founded by Alexander Cunningham, then Archaeological Surveyor to the Government of India, near Shah-ki-Deri, which are said to show traces of Greek influence and so ‘... belong to the series of Graeco-Buddhist sculptures’ (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 75-76). Next, the connection to the other Alexander – the Great – is charted out as well as exploration of the Yusafzai country and tribes, their ancestry and land occupation acknowledging that ‘... the district is thickly strewn with antiquarian remains ...,’ and so ripe for future excavations (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 77).

Kipling and Thornton state that ‘...all [sculptures] refer to Buddha, presenting him as a saint or teacher, or relating some incident of his life’ (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 78). And this led them to compare some of the smaller compositions to the sculptured groups on continental cathedrals, noticing that the former ‘...work is frequently firmer and the human figure is drawn with more freedom and variety than in much medieval work’ (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 78). Interestingly, this appraisal with western religious art is immediately turned into differentiation when associating with Hindu sculpture as Kipling and Thornton identify (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 78):

All [Graeco-Buddhist sculptures] are essentially different in style and character from the normal type of Hindu sculpture, which is easily recognized even by superficial observers. Generally, it is monstrous and unnatural, for the confusion and mysticism of Brahmanical ideas have resulted in the creation of a mythology which seems to defy plastic representation.

The human form was singled out for analysis and stated to be truthful and ‘never monstrous’ holding ‘greater purity’ and precision due to the visible Greek influence on the sculptors who studied life forms, whereas Hindu Art was unnatural and hideous ‘... even in compositions where the human form seems to be constructed of bolsters, beads and sausages’ (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 78).⁹ The Hindu pantheon was not judged alone, an inter-Buddhist image hierarchy was also set up with likeness raised to the Ajanta frescos, but again the Yusafzai work was praised as higher due to ‘... firmness, precision and knowledge’ (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 78).

The distinction and distance between Hindu and foreign-influenced sculptures enabled Kipling and Thornton to easily appreciate the Yusafzai sculptures due to their classical influence from the Greeks and realist western art. However, this interpretation is surprising given Kipling’s penchant for championing Indian aesthetics against foreign influence in modern India, but if we stick a little longer with the guide, we learn that even the pure was deemed polluted as ‘... these works hardly need to be placed in juxtaposition with pure Grecian art to show that their authors, like the rest of the Eastern world, were but imperfectly Hellenized by the Macedonian conquest. The fixity and repose of the Eastern mind are not easily disturbed’ (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 79). So, the impression of western civilization is traceable but corrupted in the East with the sculptures showing signs of hybridity and syncretism, which deteriorated further during Kipling’s own time: ‘Greece herself became orientalised. And now the faint traces of her hand and mind on these sculptures – a few coins, and some vague traditions still linger in the Yusafzai valley – are all that remain to remind us of the supreme effort of the Macedonian power’ (Kipling and Thornton 2002 [1876]: 79). This ambivalent assessment that Kipling exhibits in the guide is perhaps his way of differentiating between admiration of ancient Indian art that is connected to him through Hellenic conquest and a present in which this art has degenerated, but ultimately his views remain ambiguous.

⁹ See Mitter 1992, for various interpretations and discourses around Hindu art during the colonial period.

Beyond the guide musings, in the actual museum Kipling remained interested in knowledge production and dissemination of his Yusafzai collection and this is nowhere more apparent than in the infamous fictional encounter, although its reality base cannot be denied, between the Tibetan Lama and Lahore Museum Curator scribed by his son Rudyard Kipling in *Kim* (1912).¹⁰ This meeting of two 'keepers' of knowledge in the Lahore Museum is significant as it allows the idolatrous ascriptions given to the Yusafzai sculptures to be outright removed and replaced with positivist knowledge that is shared by the Curator with the Lama. The western lens of the Curator eventually helps the Tibetan Lama interpret the objects in the museum to assist him on his onward pilgrimage. This inequity of meanings gives modern representation and interpretation the upper hand and lends credence to the colonial discourse as providing 'real' knowledge about Buddhism that even devotees of the Buddha were blind to.¹¹ What this fictional meeting illustrates is that in relation to other collections the Yusafzai antiquities were revered and prized owing to assumed formal links with European aesthetics. However, it was also the 'magical quality' (Abe 1995: 65) of the museum space that allowed a 'supernatural' essence to surround the antiquities, whereby fragments, heads, and pieces of sculpture were re-contextualized and re-ordered according to a western taxonomy and imagination, but in terms of interpretation, theories of art/aesthetics, history/civilization, and race were all being mixed to produce ambivalent or opposing accounts and experiences.

The museum then became a site where visual knowledge about Buddhism's past could be fixed materially and delineated to scholars, officers, and the public alike, however, in the realm of early western scholarship it was not so easy to pin down as conflicting agendas existed. In fact, the Yusafzai sculptures were being deciphered less to learn about India and more to indulge in a re-discovery of the colonial/western selves' past. The sculptures were not symbolizing a mysterious or exotic other but seen to be a missing part of western art history that needed to be reclaimed intellectually and physically and this was being bolstered by the rise of classical archaeology as a modern mode of scientific enquiry in India. This 'disciplined' approach also led to the Yusafzai sculptures now being termed 'Graeco-Buddhist Art' by the linguist G.W. Leitner after his exposure to the Lahore Museum collections in the late nineteenth century (Abe 1995). However, as Stanley Abe examines through his discussion of various orientalist – scholars and archaeologists such as Alfred Foucher, Edward Bayley, Vincent Smith and James Fergusson – interpretation was not straightforward and colonial discourse's engagement was marked by an 'unstable splitting' (Abe 1995:69). This multi-pronged approach to understanding Gandhāran art included finding the origins for the appearance of the Buddhist image, to shifts between orientalist views on Indian creativity and originality, to modern colonial knowledge firmly stating that all artistic worth was an extension from the west and stances in-between. But this decipherment was never totalizing and a definitive account of the extent and type of influence Greek contact had on Gandhāran stylistics remained elusive, as it does even today (Abe 1995). Despite various attempts through archaeology, the museum, and colonial discourse to construct an uncontested narrative around the Graeco-Buddhist Art, it was tenuous, and the situation can be best described in the words of Stanley Abe who writes that it was a '... discourse that "discovers" an unknown naturally blank object, Gandharan Art, and inscribes it with the signature of classical Greek episteme of the west, while in the same motion, effacing all trace of authorship' (Abe 1995:70).

Back to the Lahore Museum in the latter part of the nineteenth century where collections continued to grow, especially the Yusafzai sculptures that kept benefitting from findings of the Archaeological Survey of India under Alexander Cunningham and the 1878 Indian Treasure Trove Act, which aimed to retain Indian Antiquities within India; the latter enabled over 800 duplicates and new sculptural

10 See Abe 1995 and Bhatti 2012 for an analysis of this encounter for art history and colonial anthropology/museology.

11 Within the colonial discourse on Gandhāran Art, Tibetan Buddhist Art was seen as a degenerate form of Gandhāran Art revealing the presence of an intra-Buddhist representation hierarchy implicitly associated with knowledge and aesthetics.

examples to arrive at the museum.¹² Once again, this appetite for discovery, display and interpretation caused a glut in the number of artefacts, with the museum having little idea of how to accommodate these profuse riches. Suggestions were made to send duplicates to the Indian Museum in London but Kipling preferred sending casts, exhibiting a manifest possessiveness in recognition of the value of authenticity for the museum and its collection.¹³ In 1884, the Industrial Arts, Museums, and Exhibitions Resolution No. 239 was drafted to re-organize Indian museums with the purview to promote trade through Indian industrial art. This mission that the Lahore Museum now had to follow was not new, as it was cited as an exemplary museum in this regard under Kipling, but again this did not mean that non-industrial art collections suffered; they were being continually added to and in 1891-1892 Gandhāran sculptural fragments arrived following Aurel Stein's visit to Ranipat in Yusafzai.¹⁴ Aurel Stein's own success as an archaeologist in the region between Gandhāra and Central Asia in part is owed to his time in Lahore between 1889 and 1899 under the tutelage of Kipling; Stein was fascinated by the collection at the museum, which inspired him in his early archaeological expeditions (Abe 1995). The tours that archaeologists like Stein embarked on were fecund and reaped ample material that was sent back to museums, however, unsystematic excavations in the field meant it was difficult for those in the museums to order and date what had been amassed. And so, despite the allusion to modern science, casual excavations created difficulties for museum acquisition, display, and interpretation.

Nearing the end of the nineteenth century many things changed for the Lahore Museum; weakening colonial rule and voicing of new political and cultural ideologies would eventually lead to new stories also being formed around Gandhāran art. But in 1893, J.L. Kipling retired and the Lahore Museum got a new home in the Jubilee Institute, its current location (see Figure 1). In Kipling's last annual report,¹⁵ he outlined plans for the re-organization of the museum's collection, in particular the Buddhist antiquities and specifically the positioning of the Sikri Stūpa (see Figure 3a) that was to be fixed on a drum of brickwork to ensure the relief work was visible at eye level (see Figure 3b); and it remains so until today. Most of the collections were moved after Kipling left but his ideological influence and material additions remained iconic in the history of the Lahore Museum, especially for the Gandhāra collection as he ensured that original sculptures would remain in the museum's possession and inspire many future archaeologists who were initial explorers in this field as well as those interested in history and culture among the Indian elite. One example of the latter is the account of Syad Muhammad Latif Khan Bahadur (Latif 2005 [1892]) on Lahore, which was meant to be a guide to the city for the 'young reader'. Latif was Extra Judicial Assistant Commissioner of Gurdaspur, a Fellow of Panjab University and a Member of the Bengal Asiatic Society, and in his account of Lahore and its museum he confirmed the importance of the Gandhāra collection by placing it at the foremost among the '... antiquities of the region ... [with] the Græco-Buddhist sculpture of Yusafzai valley [taking] the first place from their great numbers as well as from their high artistic and historical value' (Latif 2005[1892]: 273). Latif further demonstrated not only the influential quality of the colonial discourse around Gandhāran art among elite Indians, but its dissemination and acceptance when he provides an aesthetic reflection of the Gandhāran sculptures whose affinity to Kipling's own thoughts stated earlier is unmistakable (Latif 2005[1892]: 369):¹⁶

The faces and profiles carved in soft micaceous sandstone, though not the work of Greek artists themselves, are all, in their detail and character, Greek. They almost all refer to Buddha representing him as a sage, a king, a hermit, a recluse, a teacher, a mendicant, or describing some

12 An extract from Mr Ferguson to the Secretary of State dated August 11th 1878. In Home Proceedings, General Department, No. 157, July 1878. Punjab Secretariat Archives.

13 In addition, for Kipling, this was one way to save on freight costs and also give practice to students at the art school in carrying out work in clay and plaster modelling.

14 *The Report on the Lahore Central Museum for the Year 1892-1893* (1893). Oriental and India Office Collections V/24/3047 V/24/3048. 15 Ibid.

16 Latif met with Kipling when he visited the Lahore Museum and his account on the city of Lahore contains a large section on the Gandhāra collection as well as numerous illustrations.

incident in his life. The simplicity and faithfulness with which the human form is delineated, and the spirit, freedom and variety displayed in the design, present a strong contrast to the normal style of Hindu sculpture. The essential difference to be observed is in the purity and vitality of style and accuracy and truth with which the details are rendered. The scenes of actual life and living movements are portrayed with fidelity to nature, and exhibit no mean dramatic power on the part of the artists.

After Kipling, the Lahore Museum's collections experienced modernization attempts and periodic reclassification in accordance with the idea of creating a public museum. To this end a new management committee was formed and lectures devoted to scholarly subjects were delivered, including archaeology. This was backed by the second Museums Conference held in Madras in 1912, where discussions stressed the need for visual education of the public through archaeological collections that excelled in provisioning a history of Indian civilisations.¹⁷ In light of this the Lahore Museum utilized its Gandhāra collection to produce two publications: a catalogue of the Buddhist sculptures in the museum, for 'intelligent visitors' and a more popular *The Buddha Story in Stone* by H. Hargreaves (1914), which was also translated into Urdu.¹⁸ In 1929, new galleries were added to the Lahore Museum including one for the Gandhāra collection which was always kept as one of the main galleries throughout. Lionel Heath, who followed Kipling as Curator, in his departing article *The Lahore Museum in 1929* iterated the vital role of the museum in retaining valuable collections in India, which might have otherwise '... left the country to enrich foreign museums or private collections'.¹⁹ This affection for and connection to antiquities such as the Gandhāra collection was now firmly instilled in the museum with even Indian curators with their 'second-sight' (Prakash 1992: 70), reaffirming this stance. Sita-Ram, who was the first Indian Curator of the Lahore Museum, emphasized the need to create space for historic, archaeological, and artistic education.²⁰ Perhaps these stances could only be sustained within the confines of the museum in India and the colonial centre, as the institution allowed for the confusion and contestation that existed around the origins, history and aesthetic positioning in western art discourse to be absent in the displays, only evidencing the uncontrolled and extempore acquisition of Gandhāran objects. However, with the twentieth century underway this control of the museum's four walls was fading as new voices and interpretations were beginning to pervade the dominant narratives around Gandhāran sculptures as others – Indians and colonials – were arguing for a very different story to be told.

Voices were being raised for the rights of Indian subjects and agitations took place in the demand for self-rule, and all of this also impacted the cultural sphere where there were moves against foreign influence, power, rule, ideologies, and goods. In relation to Gandhāran art, which had so far been theorized in colonial discourse as being explicitly linked to the west and its classical aesthetic to a greater or lesser degree, reversal was now under way as Alfred Foucher noted: 'At present, owing to aesthetic bias or to nationalist rancour, it is the fashion to make the school of Gandhāra pay for its manifest superiority by a systematic blackening of its noblest production' (Foucher 1917: 136-37, cited in Abe 1995: 80). This seemingly new bias emphasized the superiority of Indian arts – both industrial and art *per se* – and its ideals that were now aligned with debates around the creation of Indian nationalist aesthetics and the constitution of not only a modern Indian art but also homemade goods in the *Swadeshi* movement. There were many strong proponents behind this modern revival of Indian aesthetics including art educators, ideologues, and historians within and outside of India such as the British art educator Ernest Binfield

17 See the *Report of the Museums Conference Held in Madras* (1912: 2). Punjab Secretariat Library, U.9.

18 *Report for the Working of the Central Museum, Lahore, for the Year 1913-1914*. Punjab Secretariat Library, E.52.

19 Reprinted in the *Lahore Museum Bulletin* 7/1 and 2:19-22 (1994).

20 *Report on the Working of the Central Museum, Lahore, for the Year 1935-36* (1936). Oriental and India Office Collections V/24/3047 V/24/3048.

Havell,²¹ whose work at Madras and Calcutta Art Schools created shifts in the discourse around Indian art education and aesthetics, whilst the Sinhalese metaphysician cum philosopher of Indian art Ananda Coomaraswamy²² made it his mission to educate the west about Indian Art. In their publications, both Havell (1920) and Coomaraswamy (1908; 1927) respectively called for a rejection of colonial aesthetics, reversal of the interpretation scale, and reinsertion of Indian spirituality to create a nationalist art, an Indian Art. This advocacy was not just anti-imperialist and anti-western but also an explicit reaction against the history, art, and culture of India as projected by the imperial archaeologists thus far. Both Havell and Coomaraswamy rejected the interpretations of archaeologists such as Alexander Cunningham and James Fergusson as denigrating of Indian Art as inferior and proposed the reinsertion of the Indian ideals of art contra the domination of the archaeologists and their interpretation of material evidence along western concepts of history and art. In a 1908 lecture entitled *Influence of Greek on Indian Art*, Coomaraswamy stated (Coomaraswamy 1908):²³

... [I] have come to believe that the influence of Greek on Indian Art, however extensive at a certain period, was ultimately neither very profound nor very important. It is the concentration of attention upon the effeminate and artistically unimportant work of the Gandhāra school that has given undue prominence to the Greek influence... The main difficulty so far seems to have been that Indian Art has been studied only by archaeologists. It is not archaeologists, but artists, or at any rate students of art rather than of archaeology, who are best qualified to judge of the significance of works of art considered as art, and to unravel the influences apparent in them. No artist, familiar with the true genius of Indian art, could suppose that the work of the Gandhāra school was the real foundation of Indian figure sculpture, or that Indian art could have been founded on such a decadent Graeco-Roman basis.

It is here that one gets a geographical and ideological re-location of the Buddha image's origin in India to Mathura (Abe 1992), and other Buddhist centres such as Sanchi and Amarāvati as part of this indigenous revival that saw Gandhāran art as having emerged out of and influenced by Indian aesthetics rooted in Hindu ideals and not an aberration from it through its adoption of classical Greek stylistics, as Coomaraswamy points out (ibid.):

It would be idle to deny that the Gandhāra and the Amarāvati sculptures exhibit the results of the strongest classical influence. The Greek influence at Sānchi Barāhat, and Mahābodhi is much less evident. It is, however, true to say that the early schools are compounded of Assyrian, Persian, Hellenistic and Indian elements. The point is not that classic influence was absent, but that it was itself decadent, and at best un-Indian, and that nearly all that is good in later Indian art is there in spite of it.

Implications of this resonate even today in postcolonial South Asia in terms of the positionality of Gandhāran art in the subcontinent's history – art or otherwise – but such assertions did not find their way to disturb the mode of representation and interpretation of the Gandhāran objects in the Lahore

21 Ernest Binfield Havell was Superintendent at the Madras School of Art from 1884 to 1894. He then moved to Calcutta and on 6th July 1896 joined the Government School of Art and was principal from 1896 to 1905. In Calcutta he championed Indian art ideals as a corrective to the British art education that was based on the western art ideals. With the help of Abanindranath Tagore he foregrounded Indian styles of art appreciation and education and this would lead to the foundation of the Bengal School of Art and eventually the development of the modern Indian painting.

22 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, born in British Ceylon, was greatly influenced by the work of E.B. Havell, and at the beginning of the twentieth century changed careers to reclaim Indian art from its misinterpretation by colonial art educators and the west generally as delineated in his extensive publications and lectures. Coomaraswamy became first Keeper of Indian Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1917, later becoming a Fellow for Research in Indian, Persian, and Mohammedan Art in 1933.

23 Read at the Fifteenth International Oriental Congress, Copenhagen, August 1908.

Museum; instead this was resolutely announced with the violent colonial departure in the shape of Partition in 1947 for northern and eastern India.

New beginnings – postcolonial Gandhāran art

Pakistan emerged as a new nation on 14th August 1947, but for the Punjab the story was one of splitting and severing of a united self.²⁴ Not only were people being violently separated from their families, homes and land, the Lahore Museum's collections after ninety-one years were to be split between India and Pakistan. The antiquity and art collections were especially sought after by the new nations for their identity and heritage symbolism. However, unlike the clear-cut boundary on the map, ground realities were less organized and it is unclear what the division of objects was based on. What is clear is that objects did migrate to India as they now reside in Le Corbusier's designed Government Museum and Art Gallery in Chandigarh, India. It is stated that about forty percent of the collections were deaccessioned and transferred on 10th April, 1948, which included Gandhāran sculptures that are now exhibited in one of the museum's seven permanent galleries; the collection is entitled 'Gandhara Sculptures' and is separate from the section on Indian sculpture. Here I cannot go further into how these sculptures have been utilized in postcolonial India, but the gallery separation itself alludes to the marginalization of Gandhāran art in India since the pre-independence construction of Indian art making it difficult for the sculptures to be incorporated into the national narrative, whilst they remain too valuable to simply abandon.²⁵

Although this split left the Lahore Museum physically decapitated and '... deprived of its history and objects' (Rehmani 1994: 3), in London Gandhāran antiquities were on display as part of the *Exhibition of Indian Art: Chiefly from the Dominions of India and Pakistan* at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1948.²⁶ In planning this exhibition the original focus was a survey of nearly five-thousand years of Indian Art, however, following 1947, the academy reluctantly included Pakistan in the title. At this time the British Government played down any nationalistic associations for either India or Pakistan, but the lopsided involvement of Indian scholars, artists and the Indian Government versed in the logic and importance of the nationalistic need for an Indian art and aesthetics, along with the victory of self-rule and the political birthing of liberated India, all lent themselves to push the focus predominantly upon establishing Indian art as 'fine art' on the international platform contra earlier aesthetic discriminations of the Victorian era and firmly placing it with the realm of world art as an art history that extended back to 2,400 BC. And so, craft and art representing European influence, association, or interpretation such as Gandhāran art was side-lined in the exhibition with a few pieces displayed on the periphery in the Small Room as *Gandhara Sculpture and Minor Antiquities*, preceded by a much larger and central exhibition of *Gupta and Medieval Sculpture* in Gallery 3 and *Kushan Sculpture: Sculpture from the Amravati Stupa* in Gallery 2.²⁷ Gandhāran art was thus eclipsed by examples of Gupta, Amarāvati, and Mathura Buddhist art,²⁸ representing a reversal of the colonial tenets of Indian Art, judgement, taste, and hierarchy. This recovery meant that Gandhāran art was now doubly disconnected firstly, from the Indian Art canon, and secondly, with the relegation of these sculptures as from Pakistan and so given a peripheral place in the exhibition plan. Gandhāran art in this last act of colonial culture, fell from its civilizational peak as well as becoming incommensurable for Indian art, whilst Pakistan remained unable to lay claims as it was devoid of a nationalist historiography of art or culture, as yet.

24 For a feminist reading of the violence of Partition and the difficulty of recalling in oral history see Butalia 2000.

25 See further Himanshu Prabha Ray's paper in the present volume.

26 My thanks to Gemma Sharpe for helping me out by sharing her copy of this catalogue amongst other readings during Covid-19.

27 See *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Art Chiefly from the Dominions of India and Pakistan 2400 BC to 1947 AD (1947-1948)*.

28 *Ibid.*, especially the Introduction.

Back in Pakistan the need of the hour was to consolidate and imagine the new nation post-partum (Anderson 1991) – its ideology, identity, history, and cultural roots. Once again, the museum was ideal for visualizing and disseminating these in a civilizational chronology leading to the natural birth of a nation, and a hopeful step took place in 1950 with the construction of the National Museum of Pakistan in Karachi. But Pakistan’s official nationalist rhetoric from its birth has glossed over its internal cultural intricacies and diversities preferring instead to romantically monumentalize its emergence by attaching itself to the sub-continent’s Islamic history and culture that begins with the arrival of Arab traders in the seventh century, rising with the Mughal Empire, and culminating with the advent of Muslim nationalism that is seen as the final step in the creation of Pakistan. In this filtered timeline of nationalist historiography, Muslim heritage and Islam are purified of foreign influence and attack, so civilizations like Gandhāra are incorporated as pre-Islamic and not directly incorporated into the national ideology and culture. As Homi Bhabha states: ‘In “foundational fictions” the origins of national traditions turn out to be as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are movements of exclusion and cultural contestation’ (Bhabha 1990:4). However, this imagining was delayed in the case of the Lahore Museum, as post-partition it was in a ‘dormant’ phase (Rehmani 1994) characterized by total neglect and disorder both physically and organisationally. Gallery floors were said to be cluttered with piles of objects as recalled by a local resident – Ejaz Ali – who as a teenager remembered going to the Museum and cataloguing objects strewn in a haphazard manner, including Gandhāran sculptures and fragments.²⁹ It was only in 1965, that the Lahore Museum grabbed the attention of a bureaucrat – B.A. Kureshi – who intervened to renovate and refurbish the Museum. There was some further de-accessioning but overall objects of historical and cultural significance were retained to enhance the Museum’s conversion into a ‘cultural and historical museum’ (Qureshi 2000) centred around antiquities including the Gandhāra collection.

One lack that has beset Pakistan since its inception has been the formation of a cultural policy with each decade almost having its own guiding principles on national culture handed down either by military dictators or politicians. Ayub Khan promoted his cultural censorship in the 1960s, then came Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s nationalization and Islamic socialism of the 1970s, followed by Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamic conservatism that replaced Pakistan’s secular vision, which for arts and culture meant a period of ‘cleansing’ non-Islamic forms and replacing them with pure Islamic aesthetics. Since then, there have been periods of democratic rule interspersed with Musharaff’s military-cum-autocratic reign but again no real gains towards an ostensible cultural policy at a national level. The Gandhāra collection at the Lahore Museum has endured and survived these various regimes with their varying degrees of control on cultural representation, interpretation and nationalism; even the moment of radical cleansing during Zia’s era did not manage to displace or disavow it as non-Islamic. This presence is also due in large part to the inconsistent investment and attention given to museums by the authorities in Pakistan, allowing the Lahore Museum to retain a representational democracy of the nation’s true complex history and heritage that is elusive in other nation-building projects. So, what are the contemporary museum stories around the Gandhāra collection?

The Lahore Museum today employs its colonial heritage to promote itself as a cultural icon in terms of national patrimony, believing itself to be Pakistan’s premier cultural institution of rich cultural heritage (Rehmani 1999) and staking out a regional and global positioning that is aided greatly by collections such as Gandhāra and its masterpieces such as the ‘Fasting Buddha’ (Figure 6). And it is precisely the Gandhāra collection that allows Pakistan to extend beyond its own borders. For example, in 2002/3 there was the touring exhibition called *The Art of Gandhara, Pakistan* that travelled to Japan. This exhibition was to commemorate fifty years of diplomatic relations between the two nations and strengthen ties, creating peace initiatives and bi-lateral cooperation. And more recently on 2009-2011, there was

²⁹ Interview with Ejaz Ali by the author, 30th October 2002.

another touring exhibition of 200 objects loaned for the first time to museums in the European cities of Berlin, Zurich and Paris, and then to the US for one exhibition in New York, by the Lahore Museum and National Museum, Karachi. The exhibition travelled variously named³⁰ and displayed previously unseen Gandhāran art pieces from Pakistani museums. However, this was not all, rather the exhibitions had a more political underlying purpose, which was to counter the image in the west of Pakistan and Afghanistan as iconoclastic cultures following the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001. This was achieved by the inclusion of the 3D reconstruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in the empty spaces left by the Taliban destruction. Adding this more contemporary re-construction of heritage alongside the Gandhāran pieces acted as a step towards reclaiming lost world heritage and re-connection of the civilizational link between this part of the world that was rendered a barbaric terrorist hotspot once again with the west. Within the Lahore Museum itself there are regular visits from tourist groups, academics, dignitaries, and increasingly Buddhist monks from South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Japan who come specifically to see the Gandhāra collection and discuss opportunities for cultural exchange and fund-related programmes as well as religious pilgrimage/tourism. These cultural re-connections make the Gandhāra collections a highly valued cultural capital that means it simply cannot be ignored by the museum or the state, and so by default gains inclusion into the national body by providing historical depth to Pakistan's origin, inheritance, and comparative religion without disrupting the larger Islamic ideological framework. This presence of Gandhāra collections within Pakistan is vital for the nation as a type of salvage heritage that quietly contests the singular narrative of Pakistan's past and heritage yet allows its heterogenous past to remain alive and exist for a possible future that can be built on cultural pluralism.

Unlike the fate of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 (Flood 2002), the Gandhāra collections in Pakistani museums have never suffered but today are being overtly employed by the state and international cultural organizations to counter Pakistan's image on the world stage, particularly the recent essentialized linkages with terrorism following the events of 9/11. In 2005, President Musharaff was keen to promote a soft image of Pakistan through culture and tourism and recently the same has been echoed by Imran Khan. During such moments the government has formed alliances with international heritage organizations such as UNESCO to implement programmes centred on developing cultural/religious tourism. Both in 2002 and 2019 projects aimed at promoting a positive image of Pakistan abroad through a re-presentation of archaeological sites and antiquities in museums including the Lahore Museum, especially its Gandhāra collection, have been formulated.³¹ Ultimately, these are part of a larger World Bank interest in developing a Buddhist Tourist Circuit across South Asia with the Lahore Museum, as in the past with Alfred Foucher or Aurel Stein, being the first port of call on the discovery trail. Whether this culminates in anything constructive or if there is any impact of such heritage tourism on the museums, archaeological sites, and society in Pakistan is yet to be seen. However, recognition on the international stage of this move towards seeing and promoting Pakistan and Gandhāra through a touristic lens has reached far, with even the UN General Secretary António Guterres noticing, who during his visit to Pakistan in February 2020, commented that the nation had moved from 'terrorism to tourism,' indicating that in his opinion the baggage of 9/11, which Pakistan had been carrying in

30 *Gandhara: The Buddhist Legacy of Pakistan. Legends, Monasteries, and Paradises* at Gropius Museum, Berlin; *Buddha's Paradise: Treasures from Ancient Gandhara* at the Museum Reitberg, Zurich; *Pakistan: Where Civilizations Meet: 1st-6th Century AD Gandharan Arts* at the Guimet Museum; and *The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan: Art of Gandhara* at the Asia Society in New York.

31 At present (6th-16th October 2021) UNESCO, World Bank, Planning and Development Board Tourism Department, Government of the Punjab, and Punjab Tourism for Economic Growth conglomerate are holding a ten-day cultural programme called *Gandhara: Roots and Routes* that involves indoor and outdoor activities at the Taxila Museum. Indoors there are exhibitions including one under the erstwhile name alongside a photographic exhibition that is part of joint activities with local research institutions such as CD2, focusing on the links between Gandhāra and Jainism, with visits to sites such as Sirkap and Mohrā Morādu Site, a panel talk, and craft stalls on the lawns of the Taxila Museum.

global politics, media, and popular sentiments since the beginning of the twenty-first century was being transferred to a new arena.³²

At a local level Buddhist heritage is also being re-appropriated for these exact reasons, with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) showing an active resurgence in field archaeology and educational improvements at both Taxila and Swat Museums, funded by Italian and Swiss governments respectively. In April 2020, the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums in KPK planned to hold a *Festival of Gandhara* in order to attract international tourism, particularly religious tourism, as well as making Buddhists around the world aware of the Buddhist heritage in the province.³³ Parallel to the tourism is the promotion of KPK as a place ‘where every stone has a story’, that is the ‘cradle of civilisation’ and ‘melting pot of cultures’,³⁴ which is centred, once again, around efforts to counter the international image of the province as a Taliban stronghold and at the national level inflicted with tribal militancy. For such international promotion, activity, and re-education of local society and culture the remnants of the Gandhāra civilisation in museums or in-situ are pivotal. Previously, the artefacts and sites would have been targets for iconoclastic acts or neglect but now, at least officially, are being protected and re-appropriated for more secularist and economic endeavours. Coupled with this official interest around Gandhāra, are private initiatives such as the Gandhāra Research and Resource Centre in Taxila, which aims to bring life back to Gandhāra heritage by making archaeological sites culturally and religiously active again. In the past they have invited Buddhist monks to perform religious rituals and festivities and in 2019 invited Korean monk, Dr Neung Hur, to be an artist in residence at the centre (Figure 10) as well as lead a Buddhist Peace prayer at Bhamala Stūpa (Figures 11,12). All such efforts are seen as part of a Gandhāra ‘renaissance’, however, this time western cultural hegemony and art history is not manipulating Gandhāra but Pakistan itself by revitalizing its spiritual roots as a heritage of the world that is not only used for tourism but is re-activated by the religion itself. Once again, the Gandhāran objects are involved in the act of reincarnation but they themselves continue to remain silent, yet changing and playing roles being ascribed to them by the many ‘devotees’ that attend to them.

Decoding the sculptures – some local impressions

Gandhāran art, then, continues to be resistant, ambiguous but valuable, which makes it difficult for Pakistan to include or exclude from its cultural fabric. Similarly, the Lahore Museum’s collection has been doused in a myriad of changing discourses since its colonial rediscovery as told above, but it is also varyingly discoursed about on a daily basis by the visitors at the Lahore Museum. Many local visitors to the Gandhāra Gallery are amazed by the skill and beauty of the sculptures, with some simply visiting to see the Fasting Buddha, others revel in the stories they tell about Buddha, as usually it is the first time they have encountered them.³⁵ Many visitors are enchanted by the stories in stone that they get to see through the visual representation in the sculptural fragments on display, even though they may not be able to situate them within their own idea of history or culture, but through the objects on display are able to learn about the Buddha’s life and message. Equally, students often relate the collection to Buddhism as mentioned in their social science curriculum and are thrilled at being able to see the real objects and not just text-book representations. Others enjoy deciphering the iconography and relating aspects to memories of their culture or hometowns through a local particularization of the depictions in the sculptures; and so, they understand them less as antiquities but as everyday stories of life. This connectivity and attraction to the Gandhāran objects for some is a point of aversion and negative

32 <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1535044>> (last accessed 17th February 2022).

33 <<https://pk.mashable.com/festivals/1488/four-day-gandhara-festival-to-celebrate-buddhist-heritage-in-pakistan>> (last accessed 17th February 2022).

34 These were some of the taglines used in the promotional material at the time. However, the festival never took place owing to Covid-19 restrictions.

35 See Bhatti 2012 [2005], 2021 for more ethnographic research on visitors at the Lahore Museum including the Gandhāra Gallery.



Figure 10. Korean monk, Dr Neung Hur, artist in residence at the Gandhara Research and Resource Centre in Taxila. (Photo: courtesy of the Gandhara Research and Resource Centre, Taxila.)



Figure 11. A Buddhist Peace Procession led by Dr Neung Hur at Bhamala Stupa. (Photo: courtesy of the Gandhara Research and Resource Centre, Taxila.)



Figure 12. A Buddhist Peace Procession led by Dr Neung Hur at Bhamala Stupa. (Photo: courtesy of the Gandhara Research and Resource Centre, Taxila.)

reaction, not because of the subject matter but form – there are simply too many *bhut* (idols) in the museum of an Islamic nation – and so it prompts them to question the objects’ relation to their identity; the gallery, then, is a visual excess of idols and an ill-defined cultural space for them. At times this has led to some visitors simply rushing through or even slapping the sculptures on open display as a form of disgust or foolish bravado. Such actions or revulsions cannot be taken to be definitive, as one imam was seen bringing his *madrassa* students to the gallery in an attempt to teach them lessons on comparative religion. There is then no singularity of viewership and visitors on the whole delight in being able to see such curious objects with which to make their own stories, which they can re-tell outside the museum to inspire others to visit, and to see for themselves the person called Buddha and his life in stone.

Foreign visitors to Pakistan have declined sharply since 9/11 and seem unlikely to return with the resurgence of the Taliban administration in Afghanistan at the time of writing, but a small trickle is ever present and their own encounter with the Gandhāra collection at the Lahore Museum is usually couched in the ideals of colonial ideology, western art historical canon, and western civilizational connections. William Dalrymple’s visit to Lahore Museum, whilst in the city for the Lahore Literary Festival in February 2020, resulted in him tweeting close-up black and white photographs of some sculptures from the Gandhāra Gallery on his Twitter account that were reminiscent of the colonial eye and its search for a specific set of aesthetics.³⁶ Dalrymple’s de-contextualizing eye devours the Gandhāran sculptures for the finesse of form and glistening, at times chipped, ethereal representation and poses as captured by his technological rendering. Yet, despite recent tweets containing re-edited images from both Lahore and Peshawar Museums alongside those from the Mathura Museum, in an attempt perhaps to offer some context within the historical debates around Gandhāran art in the constitution of Indian art in

36 <<https://twitter.com/dalrymplewill/status/1377126035724988420?lang=en>> (last accessed 17th February 2022).

the early twentieth century onwards, the images belie such academic discourse and create a romantic aura harkening back to an era where one can imagine the workings of an enchanted colonial imagination and its will to own this Indian culture.

In contrast to Dalrymple's excavated images is a recent artistic engagement with the partitioned Gandhāran objects from the Lahore Museum that are now part of the Government Museum and Art Gallery in Chandigarh (see above) by Pakistani artist Seher Shah, who works and lives in Brooklyn, New York. Shah produced ten polymer photogravures for her 2019 exhibition, *Argument from Silence*, as part of the group show *Homelands: Art from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan*, held at the University of Cambridge's Kettle's Yard (Figure 13).³⁷ Through the prints on display, Shah employs the Gandhāran sculptures to critically respond to the history of the collection itself, by incorporating elements of erasure, re-writing and re-telling of narratives that reflected upon, and emerged out of, the larger regional conflicts between India and Pakistan. With names such as *Field Measurements*, *Weight and Measure* or *Fragments and Bodies*, Shah's visual contemplations were multifaceted, with the

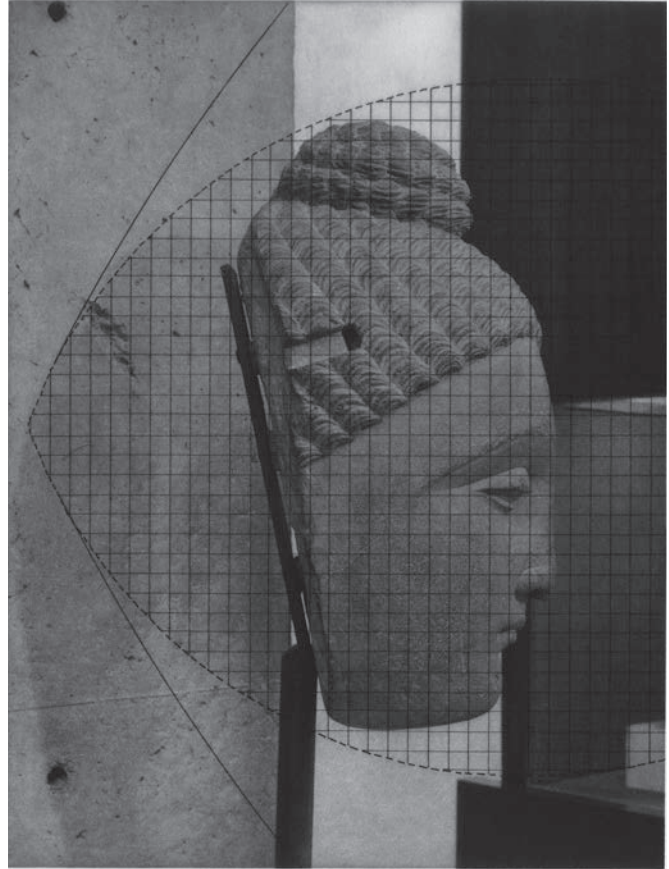


Figure 13. *Field Measurements*. Seher Shah's exhibition *Argument from Silence* as part of a group show: *Homelands: Art from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan* held at the University of Cambridge's Kettle's Yard in 2019. (Photo: copyright Seher Shah.)

cold concrete slabs of Le Corbusier's modernist museum in Chandigarh contrasted against the full, curvaceous, robust, almost breathing, beauty of the carved fragments and pieces of the Gandhāran sculptures exhibited in the museum, which in turn are superimposed with graphical imprints alluding to time, grids, and positivist science. These layers in the photogravures collapse ideas of measurement, archaeology, art, history, identity, and nationhood to query not only the evidences, justifications, and narrations of the past, but also the present in South Asia. This contemporary artistic rendition of the split Gandhāra collection persuasively rummaged into complex questions of creating and writing South Asia's history and culture in a temperate manner, where there have been many moments of ideological violence and fragile existence meted out upon the nations themselves and their subjects and objects that remain unnoticed, silenced, and absent from dominant narratives. The weight of this history's fragments, injustices, and conjectures are evident in the dark tonality of the black and white prints, that are reminiscent of the heavy grey schist stone of the Gandhāran pieces. They ultimately leave one seeking answers to the silences of the past and present for the South Asian nations and the role of their institutions of history, such as museum collections with objects like Gandhāran art that have the capacity to still be ambivalent – of the self but not.

³⁷ I would like to thank Chris Moffat for referring me to this exhibition and sharing excerpts from the catalogue, and my gratitude to Seher Shah for allowing me to use an image from the show.

Maybe the silences or the silencing of the Gandhāran sculptures and art have enabled the many contesting stories that have evolved and revolved around the Gandhāra collection generally and in the Lahore Museum as, so far, the collections have been always spoken for and not allowed, or able to, tell their own stories, just silently waiting for the day when they can raise their voice and opinion. Until then, future stories will continue to emerge around them as new discoveries continue to be excavated by Pakistani archaeologists, such as the 500 artefacts unearthed in 2016, including the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* sculpture at the Bhamala Buddhist complex; or are stumbled upon by locals who either preserve or destroy them, as was the case for the smashing of a 1,700 years old life-size Buddha statue in Takht-i-Bāhī on 17th July 2020. In this instance construction workers building a home were caught on video that went viral on social media, which led to widespread condemnation with the five suspects facing charges for breaking the antiquity laws of the province. Others stated that this was not an act of iconoclasm but an attempt to separate Pakhtun identity from Buddhist identity, yet the FIR report (crime report) indicated that it was a case of removing un-Islamic images thought to bring bad-luck to the new house and its family, even leading to the owner being condemned with a divorce! It seems many rediscoveries and re-interpretations remain around Gandhāran art/artefacts within and outside of museums and having heard so many stories along the way one can only wonder how Hector Bolitho would react to the current situation of antiquities in Pakistan's museums and beyond, and what story would he write.

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