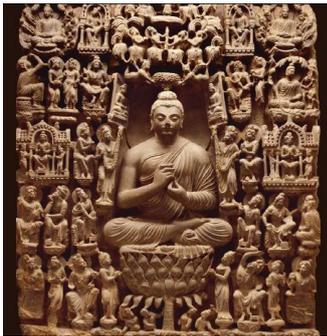


PRESS RELEASE



Vision of a Buddha Paradise, 4th century AD, schist, Lahore Museum, Pakistan

Buddha's Paradise – Treasures from Ancient Gandhara, Pakistan

6 September 2009 – 3 January 2010

The great Paradise stele (illustrated above), a major work in the exhibition on Buddhist art from Pakistan, provided the inspiration for the title of this show. The teaching Buddha sits on a throne in the centre of this enchanting, richly detailed schist relief. He is surrounded by a multitude of holy beings: a paradisaical world full of harmony, order and peace. The visitors to “Buddha's Paradise” will discover a diverse Buddhist culture which once – from the 1st to the 5th century – flourished in all its splendour and radiated far into China and Japan.

Gandhara was situated at the foot of the Hindu Kush on what is now the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Today this area of Peshawar and the Swat Valley is headline news: a war zone, a place of terrible suffering for millions of refugees. Gandhara seems a remote region, an impenetrable, ungovernable, mountainous land. Yet once, when the so-called silk roads were still the most important trade routes between Asia and Europe, it lay at the “centre” of the world. In 327 BC Alexander the Great conquered Gandhara to secure for himself what was then seen as a place of vital strategic importance.

With Alexander, Mediterranean culture came to Gandhara and thanks to a continuous exchange between East and West it was conserved over centuries. This is why Gandharan art at first sight seems strangely familiar, reminding us of Greek and Roman antiquity.

The second important influence came from India where the historical Buddha had lived in the 5th/4th century BC. Around the time of the birth of Christ the first representations of Buddha were created, roughly at the same time as those in Mathura in India. For the first time the “enlightened one” was shown as a human figure and not, as before, in the form of symbols. So the early sculptures from Gandhara are among the oldest Buddha representations in the world.

The great flourishing of Buddhism in Gandhara came during the reign of the Kushan king Kanishka I (c. 127–150). Large cities and numerous monasteries were built. The once splendid monasteries were decorated with enthralling narrative reliefs. Nowhere in Buddhist art have sculptures represented as many episodes from the life of the Buddha in such a vivid way as in Gandhara: his birth, his “Great Departure”, his life as an ascetic, his enlightenment and his entry to Nirvana.

The sculptures, mostly carved from greyish-blue schist, radiate calm and solemnity. Powerfully sculpted figures in deep meditation, finely detailed reliefs, but also monumental Buddhas and rock-cut reliefs, are all typical of Gandharan art. The largest of all Buddha figures, the colossal statues of Bamiyan in Afghanistan – once proud testimonies to late Gandharan culture – were destroyed in 2001 by the Taliban.

Excavations of urban areas provide evidence of the far-reaching trade relations of Gandhara. The luxury goods made of gold which are shown in the exhibition clearly reflect a thriving economic and cultural exchange. Gandhara was a melting pot. Nowhere is this revealed more than in Gandharan art which displays multifaceted religious and cultural influences.

The exhibition has been organised by the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany. It has already been shown in Bonn and Berlin and after Zurich will travel on to Paris. It includes 250 artefacts: apart from a very small number of exhibits from museums in Paris, Berlin and Stuttgart, all the works shown are from museums in Pakistan. They have never before been exhibited in the West and some of them are from new archaeological excavations. The Pakistani museums greatly hope that this exhibition will show another side of this strife-torn region: Gandhara’s history is full of riches, tolerance and cultural diversity.

Organisation

The exhibition has been organised by the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn

Patrons and Sponsors

The exhibition is under the patronage of UNESCO.

The exhibition is supported by Novartis and the Parrotia Foundation.

Opening and «Lange Nacht der Museen»

The opening of the exhibition will be public and will take place on Saturday 5 September from 5pm. In parallel there will also be a children’s opening. As part of the “long night” of Zurich museums, on that day the exhibition will stay open until 2am.

Catalogue

«Gandhara. Das buddhistische Erbe Pakistans»
Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der BRD, Bonn (Hrsg.)
384 Seiten, über 400 Farb-Abbildungen, 24,5 x 28 cm, Klappenbroschur
CHF 48, EUR 29. ISBN 978-3-8053-3956-8

“Gandhara. The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan”
Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn (ed.)
384 pages, more than 400 colour plates, 24.5 x 28 cm
CHF 48, EUR 29. ISBN 978-3-8053-3957-5

Accompanying Films

Gandhara – The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan

This film describes the search for the heritage of Gandhara, the lost kingdom which once controlled the Great Silk Road. The rulers of Gandhara, the Kushan kings, were the first to make Buddhism a state religion and they supported its principles of pacifism and tolerance. Today the heritage of Gandhara is in danger. Peshawar, the city on the Kyber Pass, possesses the largest collection of Gandharan artefacts in the world but it is at the same time the hub of an illegal art trade that operates worldwide. In the Swat Valley, one of the most beautiful landscapes of Pakistan, hundreds of rock images are preserved in remote places, but because of the war they are more and more subject to wanton destruction. The film draws attention to an iconoclasm which is hardly noticed in the West; but its scale is no less than that of the destruction of the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2001.

A film by Ulrike Becker
Duration: 29 minutes

3D Reconstruction and Simulation of the Monastery Takht-i Bahi

This film is a didactic introduction to Gandharan history and architecture. For this exhibition the structure of one of the best preserved monasteries – today’s World Cultural Heritage site Takht-i Bahi – was analysed and reconstructed in a computer animation.

A production of RWTH Aachen Centre for Documentation and Conservation, Prof. Dr. Michael Jansen,
Directors: Georgios Toubekis / Konstantinos Toubekis
Duration: 24 minutes

Programme of Events

Lange Nacht der Museen:

Saturday, 5 September 2009, 5pm
Opening of the Gandhara exhibition
From 7pm: «Lange Nacht der Museen»

Klangkunst:

Tuesday, 8 September 2009, 6.30pm and 8pm
Concert by the Zürcher Kammerorchester in the Museum Rietberg
Advance booking: Museum Rietberg or ZKO Billettkasse 0848 84 88 44,
(Mon–Thur 11 am–5pm), billettkasse@zko.ch, www.zko.ch

Lectures:

Thursday 17, 24 September, 1 October 2009
«Gandhara – Frühe Kunst am Hindukusch»
Lecture series (in German) at the Volkshochschule Zurich. Booking: www.vhszh.ch

Wednesday 30 September 2009, 7.30pm

«*Birkenrinden aus Gandhara: Die weltweit ältesten buddhistischen Handschriften*»

Lecture (in German) by Dr. Ingo Strauch in collaboration with the department of East Asian art history of the University of Zurich
Vortragssaal Park-Villa Rieter, admission free

Sunday 18 October 2009, 11am

“*Gandhara: The Kushan Pantheon and its Representation on Imperial Coins*”

Lecture in English by Robert Bracey, London, in collaboration with the Verein Hellas, Zurich.
Vortragssaal Park-Villa Rieter, admission free

Guided Tours and Workshops

- Guided tours every Sunday at 11 am, Wednesday at 6 pm, Thursday at 12.15 pm.
Service for the blind and the visually impaired: the Museum Rietberg offers tactile guided tours for blind and visually impaired people. Eleven artefacts from this exhibition are included and these also have Braille labels.
- Artworks in dialogue – Interactive guided tour for adults (www.rietberg.ch)
- Private guided tours by appointment (Tel. +41 (0)44 206 31 11 / 31)

Information and Contact

Further information and download of photographs on www.rietberg.ch

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Opening hours:	Tues - Sun 10 am - 5 pm Wed and Thurs 10 am - 8 pm
Holidays:	closed on 24/12 and 31/12 Open on 25/12 and 1/1 10 am - 5 pm
Admission:	adults CHF 16 reduced CHF 12 up to the age of 16 free
Public guided tours (in German):	Sun 11 am Wed 6 pm Thurs 12.15 am
Guided tours in English:	+ 41 44 206 31 11 / 31
Access:	Tram 7 (direction Wollishofen) to the «Museum Rietberg» stop (4 stops from «Paradeplatz») No parking; disabled parking available.
Events:	www.rietberg.ch

Railway offer

By train to Museum Rietberg: www.railaway.ch
20% reduction for train tickets, transfer and admission.