GANDHARA SCULPTURE in the
WENTZ-MATZENE COLLECTION of the
MUSEUM OF ART, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, NORMAN
The Wentz-Matzene Collection of Oriental Art in the permanent collection of the Museum of Art of the University of Oklahoma is one of the finest collections of its kind in the southwest. The Gandhara sculpture in the collection has received the scholarly attention and care of two former faculty members of the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Henry S. Robinson and Dr. Donald G. Humphrey.

Dr. Robinson was formerly professor of classics and associate dean of the Graduate College. In 1959 he began a five-year term as director of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Greece. The text of this publication was prepared from notes on the collection sent from Athens by Dr. Robinson. His notes have been edited for the requirements of this brief introduction to part of the Oriental collection.

Dr. Humphrey was formerly assistant professor of the history of art in the School of Art of the University of Oklahoma. He is now director of the Philbrook Art Center in Tulsa.

For three years both men worked patiently on the cleaning, preservation and restoration of the sculpture. With the invaluable advice of James Roth, conservator of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art in Kansas City, Dr. Robinson and Dr. Humphrey succeeded in making a significant group of the sculptures available for exhibition.

Sam Olkinetzky, Director
Museum of Art

Cover: Fig. 8. Head of a Bodhisattva. Stucco. 8 1/8 inches.
GANDHARA SCULPTURE IN THE
WENTZ-MATZENE COLLECTION

by

Dr. Henry S. Robinson
Fig. 1. Head of a Buddhist Monk. Stucco. 8 inches.
Admittedly the art of Gandhara lacks both the finer qualities of Classical Greek art and the finer qualities of Medieval Indian art. The classical scholar will usually praise those pieces which most closely relate to the western development; the Indian scholar, those pieces which relate to the eastern development. Either viewpoint is limited, however. Any art as heterogeneous as that of Gandhara is bound to defy easy interpretation or understanding.

For the study of cultural interrelationship we could not seek a more richly varied field. Western sculptural idea and its attendant philosophic commitments were in some measure imposed upon eastern thought and religion. However, it must be kept in mind, as Ananda Coomaraswamy points out, that India did have a sculptural tradition prior to this western influence. This sculpture was largely of clay and wood. Consequently it is known to us today only in influence on later development.

Gandharan sculpture is in no sense a primitive manifestation. Nor is it a folk tradition. It is an expression of a group of people reflecting both occidental and oriental heritage. Because of this combination of ideas it is impossible to date the works on purely stylistic grounds. We can not even be sure whether the sculptors were Indian or Hellenic. The rulers were predominantly Greek or Roman while the majority culture group was Indian. Most likely both imported artisans and local artisans were employed and it is quite possible that variations in style on a single monument reflect more these differences than differences in time.

We must also be aware of the possibilities open in combinations to be derived from the two traditions. Both the Greco-Roman world and the Oriental world had complex and highly developed aesthetics. We often see in the Gandharan works the use of Indian iconography; that is, the elephant-like ears, the shell-like hair and the eyes in a semi-awake and semi-asleep arrangement. Yet such a work will often remain in spirit, Greco-Roman. Conversely, we find typical Hellenic features, typical Hellenic modes of dress combined with considerable Indian feeling.

While the sculpture lacks the purity of its origin styles, we can see in it a most significant combination of diverse idea—cast and west.

Cecil Lee
Assistant Professor of the History of Art
School of Art, University of Oklahoma
Fig. 2. Buddha in Meditator Stucco. 15 inches.

Fig. 3. Head of Buddha. Stucco. 8 3/4 inches.
In 1936 the late Lew Wentz of Ponca City, already a great benefactor of the University of Oklahoma, presented to the Museum of Art a considerable collection of Oriental art gathered, in the course of several visits to the Orient, by the late R. Gordon Matzene, a fellow Ponca Cityan.

A rather heterogeneous assemblage of Indian, Chinese and Japanese works of art, the collection is most noteworthy for some 115 pieces of Gandhara (Romano-Buddhist) sculpture in phyllite and stucco.

Works of sculpture in this style originated in ancient Gandhara (now part of modern Punjab in western Pakistan) and in Afghanistan. It seems highly probable that our collection was purchased from dealers in the Punjab, possibly at Peshawar. We have no evidence as to the original provenance of any of the pieces; but it is likely that the stuccoes, which comprise over 90 per cent of the collection, derive from one (or both) of two sources.

In the 1930's the French archaeological mission to Afghanistan was conducting its well-known excavations at Hadda. In and about the numerous Buddhist monasteries and reliquary mounds (stupas) of this site were found some 5,000 stucco sculptures which were gathered for protection in a large shed.

At a time when the French supervisors of the excavation were absent, Moslem iconoclasts succeeded in breaking into the shed and damaging much of the sculpture. Of the 3,000 pieces which could be salvaged, half were sent to the Musee Guimet in Paris; half to Kabul, where other iconoclastic depredations reduced the collection still further.

It seems highly likely that as a result of these disasters some fragmentary material found its way into the antiquities market and thence into the hands of numerous European and American collectors, including Andre Malraux, then traveling in the far east on behalf of the Nouvelle Revue Francaise, and Mr. Matzene.

It is certain that in the 1930's other excavations at the sites of ancient Buddhist monasteries in Swat (north of Peshawar) brought considerable quantities of additional stucco sculpture into the market; this source, too, may account for part of our collection.

After many years of neglect, the cleaning and preservation of the sculpture of the Wentz-Matzene collection was undertaken at the Museum of Art. A few of the stucco figures appear to have been exposed to fire and have become quite hard. Most of the stuccoes, however, are of relatively soft texture and in many cases weathering, to which figures were exposed in antiquity, has removed much of the fine outer coat, exposing the softer and coarser undercoat, which defies all attempts at cleaning.
The process of cleaning and the separation of mis-mated heads and torsos has increased the 105 pieces of the original inventory to 115; it has removed some poor restorations, and it has provided many delightful surprises as the charm of numerous heads has been brought to light from under the layers of mud and lime incrustation which had covered them.

The historical background for the development of the sculptural style of these figures lies in the cultural, economic and political relations between northwest India and Afghanistan on the one hand, and the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world on the other.

Such contacts go far back in time, but the first extensive contact between the areas came with the conquests of Alexander the Great, who reached the eastern limits of his empire in the very district of the Punjab where the Gandharan or Roman-Buddhist style later appeared.

Some scholars have long maintained that it was the style of Hellenistic Greek sculpture of the third and second centuries B.C. which determined the western character of the Buddhist sculpture of Gandhara.

Fig. 4. Warrior King. Stucco. 9 7/8 inches.
Fig. 5. Head of Buddha. Stucco. 6 inches.
More recently the term Roman-Buddhist has been offered as a more correct appellation for these sculptures than the earlier, Greco-Buddhist.

Stylistic criteria applied to the treatment of drapery and hair and to the principles of composition in relief sculpture indicate the Trajanic period (late first century after Christ) as the terminus post quem for the Gandharan and Hadda styles of sculpture.

Furthermore, the great iconographic innovation of the Gandharan sculptors, the rendering of the Buddha in human form, can hardly be considered to have occurred except at a time of change within Buddhism itself, which had begun as an aniconic faith. This change, the development of the new form of Buddhism known by the term Mahayana, or Greater Vehicle, was taking place during the first century after Christ.

Historical considerations make it clear that the ornamentation of the Buddhist monuments in this area must have continued, with some interruption due to the Sassanian invasion of the third century, until the late fifth century, when the invasion of the White Huns brought about the wholesale destruction of the Buddhist shrines and eliminated Buddhist worship from northern India with the exception of Bengal.

Very few dated monuments of Romano-Buddhist art are known, and they appear to belong to the earliest period, the second century after Christ. It is obvious from a casual examination of the known sculptures that great changes in style occurred between the second and fifth centuries; but as yet we have no external evidence on which to base a stylistic chronology.

The sculptures in stone (usually a dark greyish-black or greenish-black schist, or phyllite) come primarily from the western Punjab, the district of Gandhara, and include the few dated monuments.

It has often been supposed that the Gandhara figures in stone antedate the stucco sculptures such as those of Hadda; but the quality of some of the stucco heads certainly suggests that sculptors were working in stone and stucco contemporaneously.

On the other hand, there seems to be every reason for believing that stone was given up by the Gandharan sculptors and the less expensive stucco used exclusively long before the invasion of the White Huns.

The Museum of Art collection contains only six specimens of phyllite sculpture attributable to the Gandharan school. The stucco sculptures constitute the most significant part of the Wentz-Matzene Collection. These pieces, like most of the phyllite sculptures of the Gandharan school proper, were made exclusively as relief decorations for the walls of the monasteries and the faces of the stupas.

The reliefs vary greatly in depth. Some such as a Bodhisattva torso, (fig. 2.), are barely one-half inch in depth, are solid through and were affixed, presumably while the stucco was still moist, to the stuccoed wall-surfaced behind. Others, such as a torso, perhaps that of a warrior king from one of the Buddhist “jataka” stories, (fig. 4.), are made in similar fashion. Both figures are quite small, less than one-third life size.
Fig. 6. Head of a Barbarian. Stucco. 4 3/4 inches.

Fig. 7. Buddha. Stucco. 7 3/8 inches.
Other figures, of larger scale, however, were executed by a more complex procedure. Heads and bodies were prepared as hollow shells or masks, the thickness varying from about one-quarter to three-quarters of an inch, the back edge smoothed so as to form a neat joint with the wall surface.

Torsos—and even heads—which were not to project far beyond the face of the wall were filled with mud and were then apparently pressed against the still-moist wall stucco, adhering to it along the line of the smoothed edge of the shell.

In the cases of other heads, and some bodies, which were exceptionally large or heavy or were to project far from the wall plane, the shell, after it had dried, were filled with moist stucco and then applied to the wall, the core of damp stucco serving to provide a more solid bond with the wall covering. Occasionally wooden pegs were affixed to the wall and penetrated into the moist stucco core to offer still firmer support.

It is likely that some of the heads were made in a mould; but it is equally certain that even those which were so produced were touched up by hand after being removed from the mould. The hair treatment of many heads—differing greatly in style of execution and presumably also in date—is such as could only have been executed by hand.

The stucco sculptures were generally painted, as were the backgrounds to which they were attached. The colors used were, first and foremost, a bright red such as covers completely one of the seated Buddha figures in the collection. Red is used for lips, to outline the ears and nostrils, to outline the points of contact with the background. Black is used for details of eyebrows and hair. What was perhaps originally a dark blue appears sometimes for details of hair and head-dress.

The stucco sculptures, as noted above, extend to a much later date than the works in stone. Many of them, consequently, reveal a style quite remote from the classicizing form of the stone figures and reliefs. Yet not a few of the stuccoes—unfortunately not subject of accurate dating—recall quite clearly to mind the Mediterranean sphere.

A barbarian head, (fig. 5.), might easily have come from a second century Roman triumphal monument, as might many of the other heads with heavy ringlets of hair encircling the face, (fig. 7.), and another marked by less formal locks but possessed of a pensive charm are surely more western than Oriental, (fig. 8.).

Of impressive modelling is the torso of a standing Bodhisattva figure at least two-thirds life size, (fig. 10.). The head, unfortunately, is missing but we can perhaps visualize its appearance from a head of slightly smaller proportions, (fig. 5.).

What is perhaps the loveliest of all the heads in our collection is that of a monk with close-shaven face and skull, (fig. 1.). The western styles which had exerted its influence on the sculpture of northwest India had been highly representative and individualized, a style dominated by the Roman penchant for realistic
Fig. 8. Head of Bodhisattva. Stucco. 8 1/8 inches.

Fig. 9. Head of a Monk. Stucco. 3 inches.
portraiture. The Buddhist faith, on the other hand, was an almost mystic belief in which symbol and idea were far more important than fact and form.

The earliest of the Romano-Buddhist sculptures were, because of their western qualities, ill-suited to Buddhist belief. But here, in a head which may be as late as the fourth century, the calmness of visage and the faint hint of smile seem to suggest the contemplative life of the Buddhist ascetic and that mystical exaltation of spirit which, in this area so remote from Rome, the coldly representational style of Rome could not wholly subdue.

Fig. 10. Torso of Bodhisatva. Stucco. 26 inches.