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This gray schist Buddha (India, Gandhara, 2nd-4th century) can be seen in the exhibition *Asian Orientations: Treasures from Honolulu's Oriental Art Society*, July 9–August 18. The Cobey Black Collection

## Seated Buddha

Gandhara, from Taxila, Pakistan or Swat

2nd-3rd century AD

Grey Schist

Gift of Cobey Black, in memory of Brigadier General Edwin F. Black,  
1986 (5491.1)

The Buddha, who lived in the 6th century B.C., was not depicted in human form until the Kushan dynasty, 1st -3rd centuries A.D. There were two main geographical centers under the Kushanas, one comprising the ancient region of Bactro-Gandhara (Northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan), and the other at Mathura, in Northern India. In Mathura the indigenous Indian visual tradition predominated. In Gandhara, which lay close to the trade route across India from the Roman Empire to China, there were stylistic influences from the classical Greco-Roman world. The subject matter and iconography of the images are, however, entirely Indian.

Buddha images may be identified by a number of iconographical signs. Principal among these is the *ushnisha*, a bump on top of Buddha's head which is interpreted as a receptacle for his supernatural wisdom. In the Gandharan style, the *ushnisha* is generally concealed by wavy hair fashioned in a classical topknot, as seen here. On the Buddha's forehead is the *urna*, which originated as a tuft of hair between the eyebrows, and symbolizes the wisdom of insight.

**Gandhara** is the ancient name of a region in northwest Pakistan bounded on the west by the Hindu Kush mountain range and to the north by the foothills of the Himalayas. In 330 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered this region and, together with the Indo-Greek kings that succeeded him, introduced classical traditions that became an important part of Gandhara's artistic taste over the next seven centuries. This contact resulted in the establishment of overland trade routes through the Parthian empire and Indo-Greek cities like Ai-Khanoum in northern Afghanistan. Starting about 50 B.C., this trade dramatically increased with the introduction of ocean routes employing monsoon winds to cross the Arabian Sea. These sea routes supplied an expanding overland trade network that passed through Gandhara and continued on to Central Asia and China. Gandharan control of the high mountain passes vital to this international commerce made the region wealthy; the resulting cosmopolitan elites became some of the most powerful Buddhist patrons in all of South Asia.

Synthesis of foreign styles with Indian forms is typical of the multi-ethnic character of Gandharan taste.

Second- to the first-century B.C. luxury goods found in ancient fortified cities constitute some of the earliest remains from Gandhara attesting to contact with the Mediterranean world. Typical of this production is a stone dish (1987.142.307), which likely had a domestic religious function. Carved into the face is a representation of Daphne turning to look back at the approaching figure of Apollo, a composition that reveals the artist's familiarity with Hellenistic motifs and narrative structure, and perhaps even the story itself. Related in format is a silver roundel depicting the goddess Hariti (1981.460.2), a protector of children, only in this instance the linear treatment of drapery is stylistically akin to imagery of the Parthian empire. As is typical of many Gandharan compositions, Hariti wears jewelry and sits on a throne that has clear South Asian origins; this synthesis of foreign styles with Indian forms is typical of the multi-ethnic character of Gandharan taste.

Buddhism probably reached Gandhara as early as the third century B.C.; by the beginning of the second century B.C., archaeological remains begin to appear. It is not until the first century A.D., however, that this new religion received significant local patronage. Typically, a Buddhist center was comprised of monastic housing adjacent to a public sacred area that had at its center a stupa (a solid domed structure) containing relics of the Buddha. A reliquary in the Museum's collection (1987.142.70a,b) has an inscription that records its donation by a local prince, Indravarman, who in 5–6 A.D. brought relics of the lord Shakyamuni in procession and established them in a deep depository. The inscription tells us that he did this to earn merit for named members of his extended family and himself as well as to secure the happiness and welfare of his kingdom. The physical presence of the Buddha's holy relics were the primary focus for Gandharan lay and monastic veneration. These sacred areas empowered by relics served the local population and were vital centers of pilgrimage; over time, they attracted donations that often took the form of sculptural imagery. Some of the earliest examples are brackets with volutes that would have been attached to the drums of stupas to support garlands of flowers; a mid-first-century A.D. garland holder with a winged celestial

emerging from acanthus leaves (1987.142.213) can be directly compared to the Hariti plaque in terms of date and Parthian stylistic affiliation. Also from around the first century A.D. is a stair riser with marine deities or boatmen (13.96.21) that shows connections with Greco-Roman art of the Mediterranean. The artist focused on the anatomy, though in a rather free manner; the figure on the far right is quite accurate, while the second from the left, with its exaggerated lumpy abdominal muscles, is more approximate.

Following Alexander's invasion, Gandhara's early history is characterized by political instability as successive groups took control of the prosperous region; they included the Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Parthians, Scythians, and ultimately, in the first century A.D., the Kushan dynasty, which captured this area as well as much of north India and northern Afghanistan (ancient Bactria and Nagarahara). Most of the major Buddhist centers of Gandhara were founded during the second century A.D. under powerful kings like Kanishka (99.35.3024). Relics remained central to devotional practice and stupas came to be embellished with narrative reliefs that recounted the Buddha Shakyamuni's miraculous life and emphasized his physical presence at the site. For example, a schist sculpture (1980.527.4) depicts Shakyamuni teaching the first sermon to five ascetics who become monks and establish the monastic order. The Buddha reaches down to set the wheel of the law in motion; by this time, the wheel was a well-established symbol of the Buddhist teachings, or *dharma*. Shakyamuni's death is the subject of another panel in the Museum's collection (L.1993.69.4), in which lay followers and monks are shown gesturing in grief. The Buddha's last convert, Subhadra, seated with his back toward us, is the only one who appears calm as he realizes that Shakyamuni has broken free of the cycle of rebirth and has reached nirvana.

The narrative tradition rapidly gave way to independent images that were better suited to devotional practices. One of the earliest examples is a small bronze Buddha (2003.593.1) that can be dated to the first or second century A.D. based on similarities with Roman portraiture in the time of Nero. The Buddha sits in a yogic posture and holds his hand in the *abhayamudra* (a gesture of approachability). Traces of gold in his robe and serrated radiating halo indicate that originally this figure would have had quite a different appearance, one that would have equated his enlightenment with light streaming out from these reflective gold surfaces. Such devotional imagery became immensely popular and by the third century the sacred areas came to be populated with images of buddhas and bodhisattvas executed in schist. Maitreya (13.96.17) was a prominent subject—readily identifiable by his north Indian princely garb rendered in a classical style and by the water flask held in his left hand. Maitreya is an enlightened bodhisattva who resides in Tushita Heaven waiting for the next Buddhist age, when, like Shakyamuni, he will be reborn on earth to spread the *dharma* as the next Buddha. The popular appearance of Maitreya marks a shift in Buddhist practice that emphasized the veneration of bodhisattvas; however, the Buddha's relics remained the primary devotional focus throughout the Gandharan tradition.

The third to mid-fifth centuries witnessed an incredible surge in the patronage of Buddhist sacred areas and monastic institutions and most of the extant Gandharan

architecture dates to this period; this includes the sites of Taxila as well as the massive monastic institutions of Takht-i-Bahi, Sahri Bahlol, Jamal Garhi, Ranigat, and Thareli. The use of stucco largely replaces schist as the medium for sculpture, perhaps in response to the need to embellish these rapidly expanding centers. Stucco imagery, such as a head of a Buddha that is likely from Taxila (13.96.4), could be rapidly executed, molds could be employed, and the finished product was readily painted. Often such stucco imagery exhibits a spontaneous exuberance not seen in the more laboriously produced schist sculpture; a door guardian, or dvarapala, being a good example (1991.132).

Toward the end of this intense period of patronage in the fourth to mid-fifth centuries, monumental images of buddhas and, to a lesser extent, bodhisattvas appear. A torso of a massive bodhisattva, which originally would have stood more than ten feet tall, gives us a sense of the sophistication and quality of work being done in this late period (1995.419). The naturalistic treatment of the musculature and the drapery attests to the longstanding Gandharan taste for classical forms, even though such imagery had largely gone out of fashion in the Roman world. Stone sculptures of this scale are quite rare as such large pieces of schist were not readily available nor were they stable; this rock type easily broke along bedding planes. In this instance, the extensive losses have left us with little more than the figure's torso. Because of these limitations, most monumental images were done in clay, with stucco being used for the hands, feet, and heads (1977.191). Some of these Gandharan figures would have been more than forty feet tall.

About the middle of the fifth century, Gandhara was conquered by groups of people often identified as the Huns or Hephthalites, thus bringing this major period of Buddhist patronage to a close. Still, a handful of objects attest to an ongoing Buddhist presence in Gandhara during the following centuries. A late sixth-century Buddha (1981.188ab) is a good example of the perpetuation of Gandharan-style images. However, important adjacent Buddhist communities continued to thrive in the Swat valley, Kashmir, and Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, sculptural production seen in the Kabul valley of Afghanistan follows the artistic tradition originally established in Gandhara. Like the monumental Gandharan torso, the sculpture found at Afghan sites such as Hadda, including a head of a bodhisattva (1986.2), is quite naturalistic. Still, the inset garnet eyes and elaborate hairstyle are elements not seen in Gandhara, but rather are an expression of Afghan taste. Ultimately, however, the stylistic roots of Buddhism in north India are reflected in another head from the site of Hadda (30.32.5) that takes on the formal stylized features of Gupta-period images found in the Ganges River basin. The taste for classical forms eventually fades and by the eighth century, with the coming of Islam, the Buddhist tradition comes to an end in Afghanistan.

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