

# REVISITING TAXILA: A NEW APPROACH TO THE GRAECO-BUDDHIST ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD\*

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## Abstract

This study explores a new perspective on the archaeological record of Taxila in the Gandhara region through object-focused analyses and considering wider historical implications, in order to understand better cultural interaction in ancient Central Asia. The city of Taxila was a nodal point between 'East' and 'West', well-known for its so-called Graeco-Buddhist artefacts. These objects have traditionally been categorised according to ethnic and/or cultural criteria, which has led to incorrect interpretations of the archaeological record that still prevail today. This article presents a new analysis of the data to investigate how different cultural elements interacted in Taxila. The introduction gives a brief summary of the still prevailing approach of Graeco-Buddhist scholarship, and outlines the present study's aims. The next section presents an overview of the excavation, documentation and current interpretation of the Taxila site. The third and largest section contains six case studies from Taxila's archaeological record, aiming to provide concrete examples of the bottom-up approach that this study seeks to generate. The concluding section discusses the results in more general terms and presents new angles for future research.

## 1. Introduction

The region known as ancient Gandhara, across the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent (including modern-day Afghanistan, India and Pakistan – see Fig. 1), is generally considered to be the birthplace of so-called 'Graeco-Buddhism', which is the presumed syncretism between Hellenistic culture and early Buddhism from the 4th century BC,<sup>1</sup> and subsequently as the origin of what is commonly known as 'Graeco-Buddhist art', i.e. material culture from the Gandhara region that includes artefacts and architecture demonstrating Buddhist themes and iconography executed in what scholars have categorised as Greek/Hellenistic styles and techniques. The

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of historical and philosophical debates on this topic, see Boardman 1994; Foltz 2010; Wick and Rabens 2014; Mairs 2014.



Fig. 1: Map of the Gandhara region, with Taxila marked in red (digitised after Bussagli 1996).

term ‘Graeco-Buddhist’ was coined originally by the French scholar Alfred Charles Auguste Foucher, in his famous work *L’Art Gréco-Bouddhique du Gandhara*, first published in 1905, stating that all Buddhist art prior to any Greek influences had been aniconic (i.e. depicting parts of the Buddha’s life but not the Buddha himself), and that the first anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha were strongly influenced by Greek art and craftsmanship.<sup>2</sup> Foucher was especially interested in free-standing sculptures of the Buddha, which he described as ‘the most beautiful, and probably the most ancient of the Buddhas’ and he praised their Hellenistic style of execution and naturalistic representation of the human form.<sup>3</sup> Often referred to as a specific ‘Gandhara style’, sculptures, reliefs and smaller artefacts of this type have since been linked predominantly to the rise and influence of the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms in the region between the 2nd/1st century BC and the 1st century AD.<sup>4</sup> This dating was widely accepted by Foucher’s contemporaries and successors, such as Fenollosa, Cunningham and Marshall, and assimilated in subsequent scholarship. As a result, ‘Graeco-Buddhist artefacts’ have since been compartmentalised as unique in cultural and ethnic terms, based on their ‘Greekness’

<sup>2</sup> Foucher 1905; 1911.

<sup>3</sup> As cited in Marshall 1960, 10. See also Foucher 1911; Coomaraswamy 1913; Bussagli 1984, 323–31.

<sup>4</sup> Foucher was the first to suggest this dating, based on his perception of the artefacts’ Hellenistic styles, without consideration of their original contexts or find-spots (Foucher 1905).

as perceived by the 19th-century scholars who first excavated and studied them. Western scholars have since attempted to deduce a specific dating for the rise of this 'Graeco-Buddhist art' category, or in fact to 'fix the chronology of the Graeco-Buddhist school of Gandhara',<sup>5</sup> blaming the lack of exact data mainly on the construction and arrangements of ancient buildings in ancient Eastern literature and other textual sources for their inability to do so successfully.<sup>6</sup> There is an increase in current research that aims to revisit the Greek presence in Central Asia; insightful new studies have focused, for example, on epigraphical sources,<sup>7</sup> reappraisal of excavated Greek settlements in Eurasia and Central Asia,<sup>8</sup> and reflections on the possible exchange of ideas between Buddhist and Greek scholars who would have met at the crossroads between East and West that Gandhara had become.<sup>9</sup> However, the majority of these still approach the Gandhara region through what one might call 'Greek-tinted spectacles', choosing to focus on Greek settlements and influences by definition. Of course, the Greek presence in these regions certainly calls for close analyses and presents many interesting cases for comparative research; but it is likewise important to approach the available archaeological sources from this region taken as a whole, principally to avoid the danger of working within pre-fixed culture containers from the onset of any analysis, however unintended. Moreover, as Beckwith correctly points out, 'it is imperative that theories be based on the data', and yet especially in studies relating to Buddhist culture and its influences, frequently 'even dated, provenance archaeological and historical source material that controverts traditional views has been rejected because it does not agree with that traditional view'.<sup>10</sup> Beckwith here refers mainly to textual sources and the exchange of ideas, but as this article clearly demonstrates in the case studies below, this neglect or even rejection of factual data is also particularly true for archaeological interpretations regarding objects, buildings and sites that have previously been coined as 'Graeco-Buddhist' and are still predominantly considered in this way today. However, taking a bottom-up approach instead does not imply that we should neglect the question what constitutes 'Greek' – and what constitutes 'Buddhist' – altogether. On the contrary, factual data provide a solid base for considering how we should approach these important questions,<sup>11</sup> whereas a neglect of the data prove to be harmful to any subsequent interpretation.

<sup>5</sup> Vogel 1953, 130–33; Marshall 1975 I, 20–44.

<sup>6</sup> Rowland 1953; Vogel 1954, 184.

<sup>7</sup> See recently Mairs 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See recently Boardman 2015.

<sup>9</sup> See recently Halkias 2014; Beckwith 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Beckwith 2015, viii.

<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, the question especially of what constitutes 'doing Greek' instead of 'being Greek' as a core principle of the widespread Hellenistic and Roman world has been raised effectively

Taxila provides clear insight into the consequences of this trend. In order to study comprehensively what appears to be the continuous process of cultural interaction that marked this ancient city, the so-called 'Graeco-Buddhist' archaeological record itself needs to be re-examined in depth, rather than by association. This approach, in some way, aligns with important recent deconstructions and reinterpretations of traditionally regarded 'culture styles', such as Graeco-Persianism, Graeco-Scythian art and Roman 'Egyptomania'.<sup>12</sup> However, the premise here should not be to deconstruct existing views as a starting point – but rather to try and *reconstruct* and subsequently examine the actual available data first. Only by basing ourselves on conclusions taken from a comprehensive dataset will it be possible to present new interpretations and/or datings – and thus, if necessary, prove some of these still prevailing perspectives wrong, or expand existing findings. Moreover, only through such an approach will it become possible to contribute any substantial new insights to theories on how interactive cultural processes worked on a worldwide scale. A statistically viable dataset is required first as basis for such large-scale theoretical interpretations; especially for complex sites such as Taxila, this scrutiny and focus on the archaeological data is crucial to avoid misinterpretations. This article presents my first step into that direction by presenting its initial findings of re-examining the archaeological data from Taxila.

It should be noted that this research comes with various inherent problems: problems of heritage management today, but also, and in fact mainly, problems that still stem from the perceptions of the 19th-century scholars who first excavated these and similar Gandhara sites. Therefore, in an attempt to overcome such obstacles, this article focuses on specific case studies from the archaeological site of Taxila, and raises the question, by conducting empirical analyses of these examples of Taxila's still available archaeological remains, whether or not the prevailing compartmentalisation of the 'Graeco-Buddhist art' category is supported by the evidence of the actual material culture sources that have been preserved.

### **Taxila: History and Excavation**

The archaeological site of Taxila is located in the Rawalpindi district of the Punjab province in Pakistan (*ca.* 30 km from modern-day Islamabad). The name 'Taxila' (तक्षशिला *Takṣaśilā* in Sanskrit) means 'city of cut stone' and is generally used to refer to the succession of ancient settlements and cities at this highly

in recent studies: Pitts and Versluys 2015; Mol and Versluys 2015. The Research MA course 'Ways of Doing Greek' at Leiden University, chaired by First Naerebout and Miguel John Versluys, where the preliminary results of this study were presented in March 2016, provided a much-needed platform for discussions on the balance that is needed between data and theory in response to these big questions.

<sup>12</sup> See, notably, Versluys 2014; Meyer 2013; Pitts and Versluys 2015.

strategic East-West junction at the threshold of Central Asia. The earliest evidence of settlements found at the site can be dated to Bronze Age societies from the 2nd millennium BC, and the earliest evidence of city structure dates from the Persian conquest of the 6th century BC.<sup>13</sup> The early Buddhist *Jataka* stories mention Taxila as a capital of Gandhara from the 5th century BC and a prominent place of learning,<sup>14</sup> on which premises the existence of a university at Taxila from the 4th century BC onwards has sometimes been suggested.<sup>15</sup> Greek literary sources mention that Alexander the Great passed through Taxila with permission of its then king, Omphis, in 326 BC, describing the city as 'rich, prosperous and well-governed' (as documented by Strabo 15. 714–715), though very little archaeological evidence for this visit has been preserved.<sup>16</sup> In 321 BC, Chandragupta Maurya founded the Mauryan empire, which encompassed almost the entire Indian subcontinent. Taxila was made a provincial capital during Chandragupta's reign, but the city gained even more prominence under the rule of his grandson, Ashoka the Great (269–232 BC), who became an active patron of Buddhism and incited a great expansion of Buddhist teachings and material culture throughout the Mauryan empire, with Taxila as centre of Buddhist learning; in addition, Ashoka constructed new roads to connect Taxila with his second capital Pataliputra and encouraged the development and increase of a wide-ranging trade network in the area.<sup>17</sup>

The most substantial archaeological remains at the Taxila site are that of the city known as Sirkap, which was founded by the Graeco-Bactrian king Demetrius in 180 BC after his defeat of Ashoka's successors, but which was subsequently conquered and rebuilt by the Indo-Greek king Menander I in 130–132 BC. Sirkap/Taxila remained one of the capitals of the Indo-Greek kingdom, which spanned across the northwest of the Indian subcontinent including parts of modern-day India, Afghanistan and Pakistan, until the late 1st century BC, with a status equal to the cities of Sagala and Alexandria on the Caucasus.<sup>18</sup> The city was taken for a brief time by the Indo-Scythian and Parthian kingdoms, respectively, between the late 1st century BC and early 1st century AD, until it was conquered by the Kushan empire, of which it remained a prominent city until the late 4th century AD, when the entire area was overrun and destroyed by the invasion of the Huns.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Marshall 1975 I, 17–22; Dani 1986, 175–76.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas 1944; Marshall 1975 I, 16–19; Shaw 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Needham 1969; Kulke and Rothermund 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall 1975 I, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Bhandarkar 1969; Marshall 1975 I, 21–25; Falk 2006; von Hinüber 2010.

<sup>18</sup> The most detailed historical overview of the Indo-Greek presence at Taxila is still Marshall 1975 I, 17–48; a concise overview is Dani 1986, 175–76.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall 1975 I, 85; Kulke and Rothermund 2004, 75.

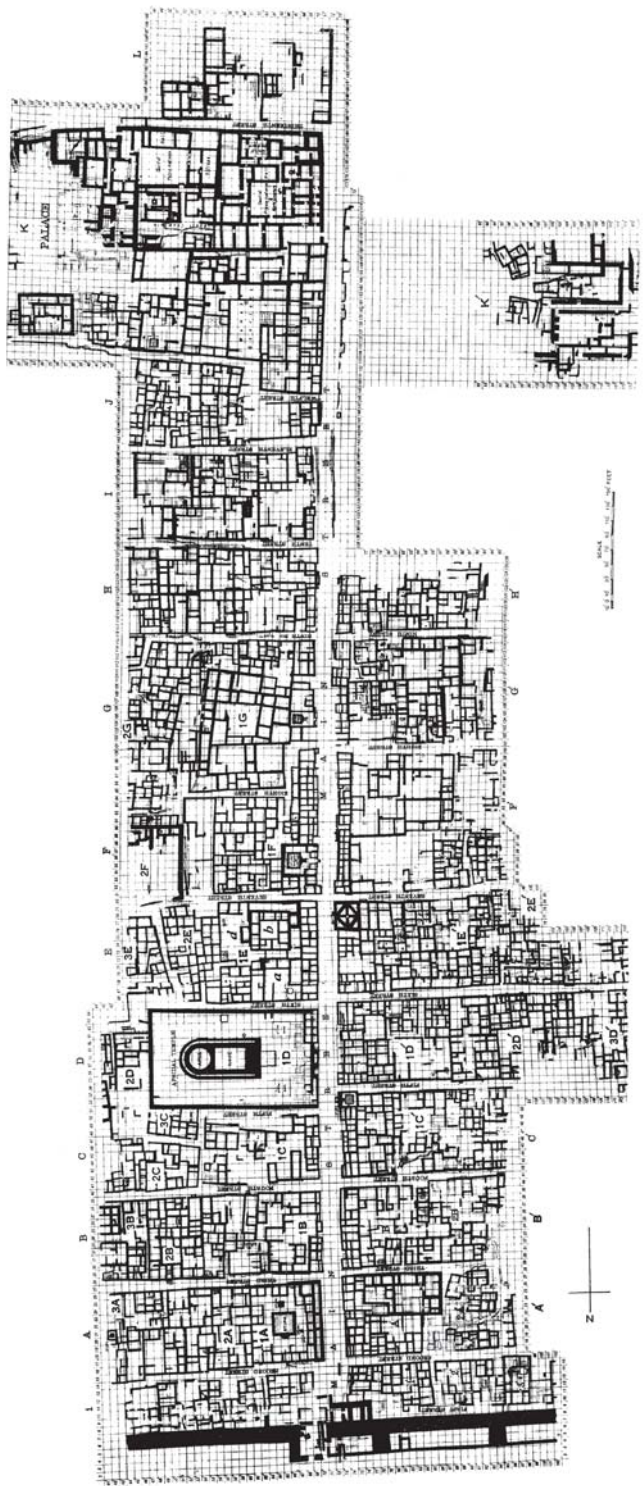


Fig. 2: Plan of the Sirkap excavation at Taxila (digitised after Marshall 1975).



Especially from the reign of Ashoka the Great, a strong Buddhist presence can be detected in the Taxila archaeological record, including *stupas* (early Buddhist sanctuaries shaped in the form of hemispherical burial mounts containing Buddhist relics<sup>20</sup>), and several temples, and this trend continued well into the period of the Indo-Greek kingdoms. As mentioned above, the Gandhara region is generally identified as the birthplace of 'Graeco-Buddhism', and as the origin of the earliest known anthropomorphic Buddhist imagery and material culture, with Taxila playing a particularly prominent role in this development because of its central role during Ashoka's rule. The archaeological record from the site evidences a wide range of finds that have been documented and categorised as belonging to a unique Hellenistic Buddhist style, mainly from the Sirkap excavation (Fig. 2).

The first excavations at Sirkap were undertaken by Sir Alexander Cunningham in the mid-19th century, who wrote several archaeological survey reports about his campaign between 1862 and 1884, with specific focus on numismatic finds and analyses.<sup>21</sup> Between 1913 and 1934 Sir John Marshall organised a more substantial campaign at Taxila, which included a full excavation of the Sirkap site; Marshall's detailed documentation and reports were supervised by the then (British) Government of India, but they were not published, apart from a brief intermittent guide to the excavation in 1918, until the 1950s, and then posthumously reprinted in the 1970s.<sup>22</sup> Coinciding with the publication of the Marshall's reports, the entire Taxila area, divided into 18 separately identified sites, was named a protected antiquity according to the Antiquities Act by UNESCO in 1975. In 2010, the Global Heritage Fund named the Taxila site as one of 12 archaeological sites worldwide to be most in danger of irreplaceable damage and loss due to 'insufficient management, development pressure, looting, and war and conflict', linked especially to recent iconoclastic destructions of Buddhist antiquities in Afghanistan and northern Pakistan.<sup>23</sup> Currently, only the structural remains of the Sirkap excavation remain at the site (Fig. 3); the majority of excavated sculptures, reliefs, smaller artefacts and architectural features have been removed from the site and sold to museums and private collectors worldwide since the early 20th century. Ongoing illegal excavations and looting, black market trafficking of antiquities and the current lack of sufficient site management and finances seriously obstruct any documentation of still *in situ* archaeological data today, along with the threat of conflict in the area.<sup>24</sup> Since

<sup>20</sup> See Mitra 1971; Harvey 1984, 67–94.

<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, Cunningham's reports have not been preserved or published; only his Numismatic Chronicles were published posthumously, with the title *Coins of Alexander's Successors in the East* (1970) dedicated to finds from Sirkap/Taxila.

<sup>22</sup> Today, only the publication from the 1970s is still available in print: Marshall 1975.

<sup>23</sup> Morgan 2010, 15–26.

<sup>24</sup> Bokova 2010.



Fig. 3: The Sirkap excavation (photographs: Bokova 2010).

Marshall's excavations in 1913–1934, no large-scale archaeological analyses or excavations have been conducted at the Taxila site to the present day.

Marshall's excavation reports remain the only academic documentation of the site to date. From the onset, it is evident that his approach to the campaign was strongly influenced by his interest in the 'Greekness' of the site: 'At that time [of the Taxila excavation] I was a young man, fresh from archaeological excavations in Greece and filled with enthusiasm for anything Greek, and in that far-off corner of the Punjab it seemed as if I had lighted of a sudden on a bit of Greece itself.'<sup>25</sup> And although he attempts to rationalise his 'illusion' through the site's historical associations with Greece, regarding Alexander's passage and the Indo-Greek kingdoms, he then continues:

But there was more to it than that. I felt then, and have never failed to feel since, that there was something appealingly Greek in the countryside itself: in the groves of wild olive on the rocky slopes, in the distant pine-clad hills below Murree, and in the chill, invigorating air that blows from the snow-fields beyond the Indus.<sup>26</sup>

Marshall went on to conduct his Taxila excavations from this predominantly Greek perspective; he arrived at the area with a predetermined notion of its 'Greekness', and with the clear intention to focus on that 'Greekness', which, as a result, became strengthened by his subsequent perceptions of the actual site. But this does not mean that his observations should be disregarded. Marshall notes how the Sirkap site is reminiscent of a Hippodamian grid-plan city, similar to the plan of the ancient city of Olynthos in Macedonia; it is organised around a main streets with 15 perpendicular streets and alleys over a 1200 m by 400 m area, within a 4.8 km long

<sup>25</sup> Marshall 1975 I, xv.

<sup>26</sup> Marshall 1975 I, xv–xvi.



enclosing wall.<sup>27</sup> The current site dates to the foundations of the Indo-Greek city (130 BC), which was built partially to replace the Taxila city of the Mauryan rulers. However, the presence of many Buddhist monuments that remained incorporated as part of the site, as well as the lack of any typically Greek building types, such as an agora, gymnasium or theatre, seems to indicate that Menander's city marked a more flexible transition rather than a reconstruction on a large architectural scale, at all. The many artefacts discovered within these ruins also appear to shed light on the city's past as a living and working human environment that was marked by interaction rather than any particular cultural dominance, as will be further explored in the next section.

At the same time, this feature constitutes the central issue with the site's documentation. Marshall's published reports do not record the original find-spots of the excavated artefacts; these data were recorded in his field notes from 1913–1934, which were almost entirely lost during the Second World War, and Marshall had to attempt to reconstruct a large part of his campaign data from memory as a result.<sup>28</sup> By that time, most of the excavated artefacts had already been sold to museums worldwide, making it impossible to reconstruct the conditions of the original 1913–1934 excavation. Partly as a result of this setback, for the simple reason that most of the data was no longer available, Marshall's reports do not focus on the find-spots or physical contexts of the artefacts from the Sirkap excavation, but instead categorise the objects individually and describe them according to specific cultural styles, separately from the site where they were discovered. This is also due partially to Marshall's original approach to the site; he regarded the physical environment of the Sirkap excavation as the source of the artefacts of interest that he describes in his reports, but not as a source of information about how these objects may have functioned within and as part of that city.<sup>29</sup> Marshall was the first to distinguish four masonry construction markers – 'rubber', 'diaper', 'semi-ashlar' and 'derived from semi-ashlar' – as chronological criteria for the dating of the site's architectural structures, using these masonry categories to single out four successive historical periods throughout the various excavations of the Taxila site, including Sirkap, from the 2nd century BC until the late 5th century AD.<sup>30</sup> His typology has remained the basis for studies about the site's architecture ever since.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Marshall 1975 I, 9–10.

<sup>28</sup> Marshall 1975 I, xviii.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall's documentation of individual artefacts is extensively listed in Marshall 1975 II and III, whereas the first volume is concerned with a wider historical overview of the site, and reflections on the 'art styles' recovered from it, without going into detail about the find-spots or physical context of the objects in question.

<sup>30</sup> Marshall 1975 I, 2–10 and typography supplement.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Fitzsimmons 2001; Rhie 2010.

It is therefore unfortunate that Marshall did not connect his analyses of the site's masonry categories and chronology to the original contexts and find-spots of the artefacts that were excavated and subsequently removed from the site; as a result, no first-hand documentation of their original part in the architectural chronology of the city has been preserved.

Instead, Marshall's predominant focus is on the cultural styles of artefacts, and he especially discusses the level of 'Greekness' that he perceives among these artefacts. He regards historical shifts as parallel to material shifts, and for this reason he generally dates objects that display recognisable 'Greekness' to the early stages of Sirkap as part of the Bactrian or Indo-Greek kingdoms, and objects that are less recognisably 'Greek' to the later period of Kushan rule.<sup>32</sup> While Marshall's observations on the wider historical and political transitions at Sirkap are both substantial and detailed, he approaches the objects excavated at the site according to his interpretation of their 'art styles' based on specific ethnic and/or cultural containers, among which his perception of an object's 'level of Greekness' is the determining factor. As a result, his approach automatically singles out the Indo-Greek period as a unique phase among the site's archaeological record; and the subsequent categorisation of its artefacts merely substantiates this self-sustaining interpretative circle. But this dating was not based on empirical data from the site, but rather on the specific perceptions of its excavator and the compartmentalisation he presupposed on the data as a result.

Nonetheless, Marshall's interpretative report of the Taxila archaeological record has not been conclusively challenged to date, partly for the practical reason of loss of data, and partly because his categorisations have persisted in object studies and museums worldwide ever since. As mentioned above, no substantial archaeological research has been undertaken at Taxila since Marshall's campaign, which is surprising seeing the site's important role in ancient networks of political transition, cross-continental trade and cultural contact. In the late 1970s a team from Kyoto University conducted surveys and some excavations that included parts of the Taxila site, focused on the archaeological evidence of early Buddhism.<sup>33</sup> Between 1980 and 1993 an Italian team conducted studies in the wider Gandhara region, including Taxila, focused on individual Graeco-Buddhist artefacts and their cultural connections to the rise of Buddhism in the region.<sup>34</sup> In 1986, UNESCO published a new guide about the site, which presents a summary of Marshall's campaign and a

<sup>32</sup> Marshall 1975 I, xvi, 23–35.

<sup>33</sup> Mizuno and Higuchi 1978.

<sup>34</sup> Faccenna and Taddei in *Memoirs and Reports, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* 43 (1993); and, more recently, Faccenna 2005.

concise historical overview of the region.<sup>35</sup> The Taxila site is featured as part of several individual object studies in archaeological journals from the 1950s,<sup>36</sup> mainly in the works of scholars of Buddhism on the documentation of the Buddha's life in Gandharan art, and it is usually mentioned briefly in historical or epigraphic studies of the Hellenistic Far East, in particular the Bactrian kingdoms.<sup>37</sup> However, these studies do not reappraise the site itself or the archaeological record as part of its original context.

Nevertheless, because a fairly large part of the known archaeological record from Sirkap is preserved in museums and archives worldwide, a reappraisal of the archaeological data is still possible. For this, it is crucial to be aware that the prevailing dating and interpretations of these objects still rely on Marshall's original perceptions and compartmentalisations, often unintentionally or simply by association. But when an attempt is made to let go of predetermined categorisations, and instead empirical analyses are conducted of the artefacts in question, a very different picture emerges. The Sirkap excavation yielded a remarkable variety of objects, as already noted by Marshall, but the predominant focus on the 'Graeco-Buddhist' style category appears to have led to significant misinterpretations of the data overall.

To overcome these problems, it is important to try and reconstruct finds from the site according to Cunningham's and Marshall's records, many of which have now ended up in museum archives or in the possession of private collectors. These finds include many sculptures, but architectural elements, reliefs, parts of buildings like columns and terracottas as well. In some cases, information about the original find-spots could also be traced in the records. Instead of Marshall's stylistic categorisations, this study focuses on different aspects when analysing individual objects first hand, including form (material properties), context (physical context and provenance), subject matter (theme/topic/content) and style (which, for the purpose of this analysis, is perhaps best defined as the technical execution of form and theme combined, whereby 'Hellenistic style' should be characterised as 'naturalistic', rather than as any specific cultural definition from the onset). These criteria were used to study the objects presented in the following case studies.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Dani 1986.

<sup>36</sup> Especially *Artibus Asiae*, *Pakistan Archaeology* and the *Journal of Central Asia*.

<sup>37</sup> For example, on *stupas* from Taxila: Fitzsimmons 2001; on the depictions of Gandharan Buddhism: Behrent 2004; 2006; Kurita 2003; Boardman 2015. On Greek epigraphy from the Far East, see Mairs 2014 (on Taxilan epigraphy, 99–123).

<sup>38</sup> These criteria were developed as part of the VIDI research project 'Cultural Innovation in a Globalizing Society: Egypt in the Roman World' at Leiden University. I owe an especial debt to the project leader Miguel John Versluys as well as to my colleague Sander Müskens.

### Case Study: The Taxila Archaeological Record

As mentioned above, one of the main difficulties related to the archaeological record of Taxila is the fact that many finds from both Cunningham's and Marshall's campaigns came into the possession of private collectors and have remained largely undocumented; a substantial number of these were eventually donated to museums throughout the world,<sup>39</sup> but the accompanying documentation is generally still very scarce and has left interpretive gaps. Often only 'Taxila' and/or 'Sirkap' are mentioned as origin, with no references to Marshall's reports and documentation. This seems to be due mainly to the abovementioned traditional focus on Graeco-Buddhist artefacts, especially in the West, regarding archaeology from the Gandhara region. Marshall's report, similarly, consists in large part of descriptions of Graeco-Buddhist artefacts and decorative architectural elements, emphasising their Hellenistic or 'Graeco-Roman' style and realistic anthropomorphic rendition,<sup>40</sup> and he states explicitly that he is indebted to Foucher's interpretations for recognising the 'iconographic and artistic interest' of Graeco-Buddhist artefacts.<sup>41</sup> For these reasons, it is often difficult to trace back objects that were originally described by Marshall in current museum collections. As a result, the dating and subsequent categorisation of the majority of objects known today have been based primarily on stylistic associations from early 20th-century scholars, and are still used today as the only source of reference. This first case study illustrates this issue particularly well (Fig. 4).

These three stucco heads of Gautama Buddha must have been part of full-body sculptures, now lost. The first is a photograph from Marshall's report, taken sometime between 1913 and 1934, but the current location of this head is unknown, as are its measurements.<sup>42</sup> The second head measures 20 cm × 11.4 cm and is held by the Metropolitan Museum in New York; its origin is unregistered, but because of strong 'stylistic affinity' it is presented as a sculpture from Taxila.<sup>43</sup> The third head measures 30 cm × 18 cm and is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; its origin is likewise unknown, but it has been categorised as 'probably from Taxila' based on its 'Graeco-Roman manner'.<sup>44</sup> This type of Buddhist sculpture especially is associated with the Taxila excavation and its Sirkap phase, in reference to the rendition of the curly hair and the naturalistic facial features, which are predominantly

<sup>39</sup> Most notably the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Ashmolean Museum, Musée Guimet in Paris, the Tokyo National Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

<sup>40</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 484–536, 700–28.

<sup>41</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 695.

<sup>42</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 513–15, pl. 153.35.

<sup>43</sup> Cat. 13.96.4, Rogers Fund, 1913; Behrendt 2007, 66, fig. 48.

<sup>44</sup> Cat. IM.3-1931; Irwin 1962, fig. 3; Bussagli 1984, 229, fig. 1.



Fig. 4: From left to right: head of the Buddha from Marshall's excavation report (1975, pl. 153, n. 35); head of the Buddha (copyright Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); head of the Buddha (copyright the Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

interpreted as Hellenistic characteristics. However, the almond shape of the eyes, the elongated earlobes, the top-knot hairstyle and the *urna* dot between the eye-brows all match the specific physical characteristics of the Buddha as described in the *Dighanikaya* scripture.<sup>45</sup> These three sculptures are not accompanied by any typical Hellenistic attributes, nor have they recognisable western/Mediterranean facial features comparable with the 'Graeco-Roman' style sculptures with which Foucher and Marshall compare them. But the technical rendition of the curly hair, the slightly bent pose of head (in case of the third example) and the naturalistic expressions are visually reminiscent of, and hence have so often been directly associated with, Mediterranean Hellenistic sculpture. This combination of Buddhist iconography and content (in terms of attributes, facial features and subject matter) and naturalistic Hellenistic technique (in terms of detailed anthropomorphic rendition and composition) appears to have been typical for Taxila. As mentioned above, the city had become a central haven for Buddhist culture since the patronage of Ashoka the Great; moreover, since the founding of the Indo-Greek kingdoms, the number of merchants and craftsmen travelling from the Mediterranean to the Gandhara region would have increased significantly. Finds like these three heads of the Buddha indicate that craftsmen who were at least schooled in or familiar with certain

<sup>45</sup> The *Dighanikaya* scripture dates from the 5th century BC, and contains detailed lists and descriptions of the Buddha's appearance and the significance (often symbolic) of these features. For a recent overview and analysis, see Krishnan 2009, 125.

Hellenistic naturalistic techniques had produced Buddhist sculptures in Taxila – perhaps simply because there was so much demand for them in this city.

An important nuance here is the fact that this interpretation, in itself, is unrelated to those craftsmen's own ethnic identity, in contrast with previously (often automatically) made cultural/ethnic associations. As mentioned above, 19th-century scholars based their interpretations of the archaeological record predominantly on specific culture styles of objects, namely, according to how they perceived them, and subsequently categorised and used those objects to determine the ethnicity of their craftsmen (labelling them, for example, 'Greek', 'Indo-Gandharan' or 'Kushan'). Moreover, such connections were used to strengthen the suggested connection between Greek culture, especially philosophy, and early Buddhism.<sup>46</sup> The use of Hellenistic styles for Buddhist art, such as these three portraits of the Buddha, was regarded as substantive link; i.e. the use of (at that time perceived superior) Hellenistic styles could not merely be because of certain practical conditions. But the data that these sculptures themselves provide do not seem to indicate such a strict compartmentalisation of either 'Greek' or 'Buddhist' cultural styles. In fact, both their Buddhist subject matter and naturalistic Hellenistic rendition techniques make up an integral part of the same object. Interestingly, Bussagli speaks of how a 'filter' of Greek culture shaped material culture in the Gandhara region.<sup>47</sup> But the term 'filter' does not imply an actual interaction or merging of two different entities; rather, it implies that one entity (in this case, Greek culture) is dominant over the other (Buddhist and Indo-Gandharan culture) and decides its resulting shape. But that is not what these sculptures indicate. Instead of a filtering process, they appear to be the result of an interactive process; namely, a union of topic and technique as part of one object, of which neither element can be singled out as dominant. This interactive process, moreover, is far more likely to be representative of the multicultural diversity that must have marked daily life in Taxila since the 6th century BC.

When examining the archaeological record of Taxila without focusing necessarily on a Graeco-Buddhist category, a remarkable variety of topics and styles emerges. Interestingly, artefacts with a recognisable Hellenistic naturalistic style as well as subject matter have generally been dated much earlier than artefacts considered

<sup>46</sup> As suggested by Foucher 1911; Coomaraswamy 1913; for a recent overview see Wick and Rabens 2014. Notably, Beckwith has recently suggested a connection between the philosophical core ideas inherent in Early Buddhism and the school of thought of the Greek philosopher Pyrrho of Elis. However, he bases this suggested connection on textual and intellectual comparisons alone, and, correctly in my view, does not present it as a result or automatically assumed parallel of the 'hybridity' observed in Graeco-Buddhist art that previous interpretations have often used as an indication, or even source, of such an intellectual Greek-Buddhism connection (Beckwith 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Bussagli 1984, 161–65.





Fig. 5: Bronze Harpocrates statuette. Left: Marshall 1918, pl. XV. Right: Plaster cast (copyright the Victoria and Albert Museum London).

to be Graeco-Buddhist, even though there seems to be no specific archaeological evidence from the Taxila/Sirkap excavations to suggest such a distinction. One example is a small bronze statuette of the Hellenistic-Egyptian deity Harpocrates, excavated from the Sirkap phase by Marshall between 1913 and 1934, which he singles out in his intermittent report from 1918 and describes as ‘charming in its simplicity, and unmistakably Greek’.<sup>48</sup> A very similar bronze statuette is recorded at the Victoria and Albert Museum as excavated in Taxila and acquired in 1914, but the original statue is lost and only a plaster cast of it remains in the museum archives (Fig. 5).<sup>49</sup>

Marshall links this statuette to the ‘Hellenistic School’ from the earliest days of the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek phases of Taxila, either as import from the Mediterranean or made locally by Hellenistic craftsmen in Taxila. He states that only later, ‘around the beginning of the Christian era, we find Indian ideas coalesce with the Greek and the art becoming more hybrid’.<sup>50</sup> This again emphasised a substantive link between Greek and Buddhist/Indian material culture; i.e. only

<sup>48</sup> Marshall 1918, 29–30, pl. XI, 78. See fig. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Cat. IM.448.1914, measuring *ca.* 5 cm × 12 cm. See fig. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Marshall 1918, 30, following the interpretation of Foucher 1911.

when Greek culture began to influence and 'filter' the local Gandharan culture with certain cultural and philosophical ideas, would this have led to 'hybrid' Graeco-Buddhist art. Objects from the strictly 'Hellenistic School', such as this Harpocrates statuette, could thus be clearly separated from Graeco-Buddhist artefacts in terms of style category as well as dating. But this linear compartmentalisation of the archaeological record (and of the workings of something as complex as culture, in general) is representative of the perception of scholars rather than of the actual data yielded by the archaeological record. This distinction between 'Greek' and 'Graeco-Buddhist' objects from the Taxila site is therefore based only on perceived cultural style markers, while there is no evidence to disprove that objects with both Greek *and* Buddhist subject matter were being made in Taxila simultaneously. Taxila was already a central haven for Buddhist culture long before the Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms arrived in the region; there is no empirical evidence that suggests that the production of material culture with Buddhist content suddenly came to a halt, or even decreased, in Taxila during the first phases of Hellenistic presence in Gandhara, only to re-emerge again after being influenced and 'filtered' by Greek cultural ideas. In fact, this would seem highly unlikely for a city that was favoured by the Bactrians and Greeks especially for its strategic status as cultural and trade-related crossroads. It is more plausible that the increase of Hellenistic craftsmanship and workshops in Taxila from the 1st century BC onwards came to incorporate both Greek and local (Indo-Gandharan and Buddhist) subject matters for production. Instead of a 'Greek filter' resulting in neatly categorised stylistic subdivisions and datings, this would indicate a far more dynamic and continuous interaction process between the many different cultures that coalesced in this region, among which the Bactrians and Greeks became prominent in the 1st century BC. Another strong argument for this interpretation is the fact that the majority of artefacts from Taxila that have been categorised as part of the earlier 'Hellenistic School' were actually manufactured from local materials. Copper and bronze were very common materials in the Gandhara region, and many bronze figurines and jewellery categorised to belong to a local 'Indo-Afghan' style have also been excavated at the Sirkap site by Marhsall,<sup>51</sup> but these are not associated with or even compared with bronze figures of the 'Hellenistic School', such as the Harpocrates statuette above, even though they originate from the same site and share such significant properties.

A second example of this kind is presented by a small coral head of the gorgon Medusa, recorded as originating from the Bactrian kingdom in the Gandhara region

<sup>51</sup> Listed in Marshall 1975 II, 564–85.

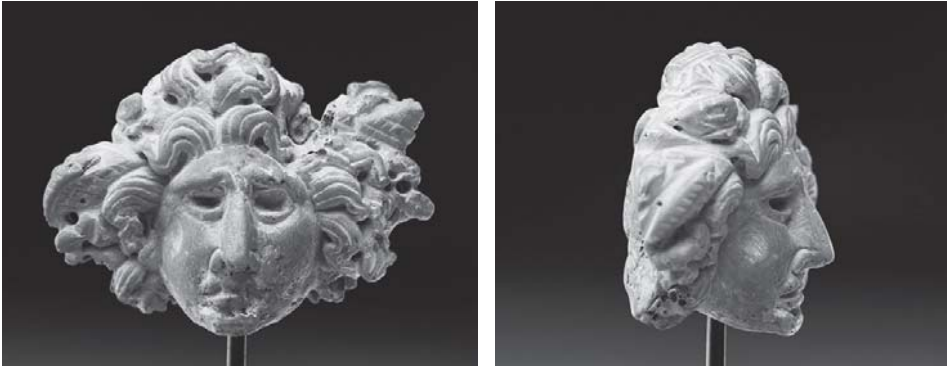


Fig. 6: Head of Medusa, pink coral sculpture  
(copyright the Trustees of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

(1st century BC), possibly its capital Taxila (see Fig. 6).<sup>52</sup> It measures 10.8 cm × 6.5 cm, and is carved from a type of pink coral that was well known as precious material in the Gandhara region since the 5th/4th century BC.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, in the 1st century AD the Roman scholar Pliny the Elder writes that there was a great demand from India for trade in red coral from the Mediterranean (NH 32. 21: *quantum apud nos Indicis margaritas pretium est, tantum apud Indos curalio*. ‘Coral is prized in India as much as Indian pearls are prized by us.’) In fact, according to Pliny, the great demand for coral in India had led to its lack of availability in the Mediterranean during Roman times, indicating that red and pink coral supplies had been shipped from the originally Greek colony of Massalia (current Marseilles) via Alexandria to northern India since the early Hellenistic era (NH 32. 23–24).<sup>54</sup> A number of Sanskrit texts from India dated to the 2nd/1st century BC use the term *alasdndraka* in reference to red coral, indicating that supplies were indeed shipped to the region from Alexandria since the 2nd/1st century BC at least,<sup>55</sup> which would link this particular trade with the Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms in the region as well. The Greek word for coral, moreover, is *gorgeia*, in direct reference to the myth of Perseus and Medusa, wherein the blood from Medusa’s severed head turned to red coral. The choice of red coral as material for this Medusa sculpture is therefore directly related to its subject matter.

<sup>52</sup> The sculpture was privately owned until 1993, when it was purchased by the Ashmolean Museum (Cat. EA 1993.19).

<sup>53</sup> Coral is listed, for example, in the *Mahābhārata* (2. 27–26) among the priceless gems and pearls, gold and silver of the Gandharan princess. See also Fröhlich 2009, 63.

<sup>54</sup> See also Feugère 2000, 205–10; Marzano 2013, 163–64.

<sup>55</sup> De Romanis 1998; Marzano 2013, 164; De Romanis and Maiuro 2015.

Looking more closely at the sculpture itself, the lively chaotic rendition of the curly hair, among which small snake heads and parts of scaled snake-bodies can be made out, seems distinctly Hellenistic in character, as is the naturalistic rendition of the face, which is not a grotesque, as often the case in earlier Greek examples. An interesting parallel is the famous Hellenistic Medusa Rondanini marble sculpture,<sup>56</sup> which also displays naturalistic facial features and wild curly hair among which snakes can be made out, although the coral sculpture from Taxila is smaller and appears to have been more roughly carved, lacking the famous *finesse* of the Rondanini.

The Hellenistic features of this coral Medusa combined with the great popularity for red and pink coral in the Gandhara region may indicate that it was imported as a fully finished figure from the Mediterranean via Alexandria to Taxila during the time of the Bactrian or Indo-Greek kingdom, to which its current documentations refer. But it may just as well indicate that the coral was imported as raw material via Alexandria (seeing that both Pliny and the local Indian texts seem to indicate trade in uncut materials that were then crafted locally according to current fashions in the Indus valley), and that the Medusa figure was the work of a Taxila-based craftsman that was both schooled in naturalistic Hellenistic techniques and familiar with the locally popular coral material. The apparent rarity of pink and red coral in the Mediterranean from the 2nd/1st century BC onwards seems to argue more strongly for the latter interpretation. Neither of these two possibilities, once again, reveal the ethnicity of such a craftsman or of the person(s) who may have purchased and owned the figure, or indeed to what specific cultural container such individuals might have 'belonged'. Instead, it demonstrates that, if anything, a wide-ranging fusion of materials, techniques and subject matter had become characteristic of the material culture of Taxila, and part of what appears to have been a continuous network of far-reaching trade and cross-cultural interaction and exchange. And as such, it seems to disprove the traditional notion of cultural compartmentalisation – as well as the subsequent ethnic labels that have underlined interpretations of the Taxila archaeological record so far.

The interaction between different materials, techniques, styles and subject matter seems to be one of the most prominent characteristics of the Taxila archaeological record as a whole – which is reminiscent of the typical Hellenistic phenomenon of *koine*.<sup>57</sup> Rather than separating 'Hellenistic', 'Graeco-Buddhist' or 'Indo-Afghan'

<sup>56</sup> Currently in the Munich Glyptothek (Cat. no. 252).

<sup>57</sup> The concept of a Hellenistic *koine* was explored initially in terms of a Greek linguistic repertoire that had spread and was available throughout the entire Hellenistic world (see especially Colvin 2011, 33–43), and the term has since also been adopted to refer to the similarly flexible material culture repertoire of the Hellenistic World (see especially Versluys 2012).



Fig. 7: Details of Corinthian capital with Buddha  
(photographs M. van Aerde; copyright the Trustees of the British Museum).

categories, elements from all these appear to come together not only within the same archaeological site, but very often within the same object. The example of the three heads of the Buddha still showed a fairly clear distinction between the use of Hellenistic naturalistic technique and Buddhist subject matter, but especially in many decorative architectural finds from Taxila/Sirkap this is not the case. A good example of this is a grey schist fragment of a Corinthian capital, which has been documented as originally part of a *stupa* in Taxila (traditional Buddhist monument, see above). The fragment measures 14.4 cm × 23 cm, and depicts the Buddha seated in meditation among large acanthus leaves (Fig. 7).<sup>58</sup>

Schist is one of the most widely used materials at the Taxila site for decorative architecture and sculptures, as marble or other hardstones were unavailable in the region and were not imported, apparently (or at least not frequently)<sup>59</sup> When looking closely at this fragment, the rendition of the acanthus leaves and the overall structure of the capital and the junctures that would have attached it to the monument wall seem directly comparable with Corinthian capitals as widely known from Hellenistic architecture. However, both the subject matter of the figurative scene and the architectural ensemble of the *stupa* of which it was part are specifically Buddhist. *Stupa* monuments were discovered throughout the Sirkap phase of the Taxila excavation, integrally incorporated into the city plan.<sup>60</sup> In similar integral fashion, the figurative

<sup>58</sup> British Museum Cat. 1880,174; Zwalf 1996 (museum catalogue), 460. See Fig. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 692–93.

<sup>60</sup> Marshall 1975 I, 112–213; Bussagli 1984, 160–61.

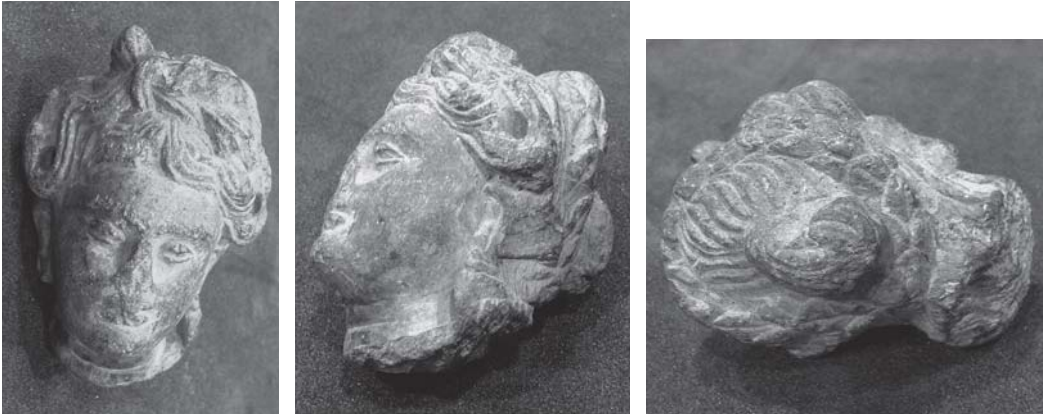


Fig. 8: Details of head of statuette  
(photographs M. van Aerde; copyright the Trustees of the British Museum).

scene of this capital shows how the Hellenistic naturalistic techniques used to render the Buddha's garment and curly hair go hand in hand with the traditional Buddhist meditation pose (*dhyāna*) and the characteristic Buddhist attributes of the top-knot, halo and *urna* dot that have been recorded since the 5th century BC.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the figurative scene itself was part of a typically Hellenistic capital, which functioned as component of a likewise typically Buddhist monument in the Indo-Greek phase of a city that had been a haven for Buddhist culture as well as a central junction for cross-continental trade for centuries. Briefly put, it is impossible to single out one distinct 'cultural style' or 'container' to categorise this fragment. It is a Corinthian capital as much as that it is part of a *stupa* monument, and its figurative scene shows Hellenistic naturalistic techniques and Buddhist attributes in equal measure. Its interactive mixture could only be categorised as typical of the diverse archaeological record of Taxila.

This apparent flexibility with which different topics, architectural contexts and manufacturing techniques coalesced in Taxila's material culture is emphasised even more strongly by finds that have not traditionally been interpreted/categorised as Graeco-Buddhist and which, for this reason, are but rarely featured in publications and museum displays on the Gandhara region. Two such examples are shown in Figs. 8 and 9.

The first is the head of what has been documented as a small female statuette made of schist, which was excavated in the Sirkap phase of Taxila by Sir Alexander

<sup>61</sup> See above n. 45.





Fig. 9: Details of figurative peg  
(photographs M. van Aerde; copyright the Trustees of the British Museum).

Cunningham 1862.<sup>62</sup> The statuette measures 6.5 cm × 5 cm and has been later interpreted as representing a *Boddhisattva* (Buddhist follower who has attained enlightenment), but there seems to be no concrete indication for this; Marshall also questioned this interpretation in relation to other, similar statuettes that were discovered during his own Taxila campaign<sup>63</sup> (alas, the current whereabouts of most statuettes he mentions are unknown). Still, this *Bodhivattsa* association has been generally accepted. The specific find-spot of the Cunningham statuette is not documented for the Sirkap site; it may have varied from private house context to sanctuary. The identity of the statuette as female has been associated with the hairstyle, with bun in the nape of the neck and leaf-wreath diadem, which indeed seems recognisable as Hellenistic female representations. The specifically Buddhist interpretation of the figure, however, appears to be based solely on the fact that the statuette's origin is known as Taxila/Sirkap: since 1862 it has been automatically associated with Graeco-Buddhist art, as this was the main topic of interest of archaeologists who studied finds from the

<sup>62</sup> British Museum Cat. 1892,1103. 87; Zwalf 1996 (museum catalogue), 531.

<sup>63</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 519.

Gandhara region. The statuette itself, however, does not present evidence for this. Whereas the hairstyle and leaf diadem seem characteristically Hellenistic, the almond-shaped eyes and elongated earlobes of the figure, as well as the complicated knotted front of the headband are in fact characteristic of sculptures throughout the Indus valley.<sup>64</sup> For this same reason, Marshall labelled it as part of an 'Indo-Afghan' sub-category and, as such, inferior to 'fully' Graeco-Buddhist objects.<sup>65</sup> Again, this interpretation relies on the scholar's own perception, and not on evidence provided by the object itself or its original context. The absence of recognisable Buddhist attributes in this figure, in fact, could even suggest that this statuette portrayed a very different, possibly local subject matter instead (i.e. non-Buddhist), and that it was manufactured according to Hellenistic naturalistic techniques as well as with knowledge of local Indian/Gandharan iconography that would also have been part of the repertoire of (or at least known to) workshops in Sirkap from the 2nd century BC.

The second example (Fig. 9) presents a remarkable interpretative contrast. It is a figurative garland peg most likely to be identified as *nāgadanta*, a specific peg used on *stupa* monuments for garlands, featuring a male *protome*.<sup>66</sup> The object was likewise discovered by Cunningham in the Sirkap phase of the Taxila site in 1862, but additional details have not been documented.

The piece measures 40 cm × 12 cm and is made of rare green schist or mica chlorite, according to a different analyses;<sup>67</sup> whereas Marshall describes similar figures as made of green talcose schist, and places them among his category of 'diverse' and/or 'exotic' sculptures.<sup>68</sup> Also comparative are his descriptions of 'volute bracket figures' of winged males surrounded by acanthus leaves.<sup>69</sup> The use of volutes (in this case in the shape of the curled tip of the male figure's wing) in this kind of decorative architecture in the Gandhara region is known only from Taxila and its direct surroundings, and indicates Hellenistic influence and naturalistic technique.<sup>70</sup> An interesting parallel is the small temple at Jandial described by both Cunningham and Marshall, bordering on the Sirkap phase of the Taxila site, of which several Ionic and Corinthian columns and capitals remain, featuring volutes that are directly comparable with the smaller one on this decorative peg.<sup>71</sup> The male figure that forms the

<sup>64</sup> For a comparison, see Rowland 1953, 189–91.

<sup>65</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 520–21.

<sup>66</sup> British Museum Cat. 1892, 1103.78; Zwalf 1996, 429.

<sup>67</sup> This material analysis has been recorded as 'personal communication to the British Museum' in 1980.

<sup>68</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 702–03, as shown in III, pl. 213.11, 18, 19; 1960, 23.

<sup>69</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 703–04.

<sup>70</sup> Zwalf 1996, 429; Rhie 2010, 358.

<sup>71</sup> As documented in Marshall 1975 III, pl. 44.

peg's main feature is dressed in a turban and a long, pleated kilt.<sup>72</sup> The torso is nude and elaborate jewellery is worn around the arms, neck and ears; in its current documentation, the figure is described as belonging to a more 'rough style' because of the 'primitive face' with prominent cheekbones and moustache.<sup>73</sup> Simply put, it is not interpreted as being Hellenistic at all. Marshall even speaks of a 'bastard-Hellenistic' style when describing similarly attired winged figures, which according to him could not be dated to the Indo-Greek phase of the site because of their lack of 'Greek character'.<sup>74</sup> The sculpting technique of this peg figure, however, is directly comparable with that of the Corinthian Buddha capital discussed above; the architectural junctures and grooves visible along the top of the volute of the peg figure and the acanthus leaves of the capital, respectively, are identical. But because this peg figure was originally not perceived as 'Greek enough' to be considered Graeco-Buddhist, even its known origin from Taxila has been put to question in its documentation; instead, a much later dating is suggested, which would indicate Parthian or Kushan manufacture of the piece between the late 1st and the 4th century AD (and that would match Marshall's interpretation of a non-Hellenistic 'bastard-style'). But these interpretations simply ignore the known fact that Cunningham discovered this object in the Sirkap phase of the Taxila site. In short, because its appearance was not deemed sufficiently Greek or Hellenistic (i.e. not sophisticated enough to be interpreted as such by 19th-century Western scholars), the piece was automatically disassociated with the Indo-Greek phase of Taxila.

The object itself, however, seems to indicate something altogether different: the figure's 'non-Hellenistic' attire and attributes, especially when combined with the use of the volute and Hellenistic architectural components, would in fact be representative of the repertoire of diverse techniques, topics, attributes, materials and styles that were available in the workshops of Taxila from the 2nd century BC onwards. To exclude it is a contradiction of the archaeological record. This implies that the generally highlighted connection between 'Greek' and 'Buddhist' elements that can be made out from Taxila's archaeological record would simply have been one part of a much more diverse repertoire, which relied more than anything on the interaction between the many different cultures that shaped Taxila's history. Therefore, based on the different examples from the Taxila archaeological record in this section, it appears that the Graeco-Buddhist category is in fact a selection made by scholars from that archaeological record, but not a comprehensive or proportional representation of its reality.

<sup>72</sup> Similar garments have been compared by Marshall with the *dohiti*, the traditional Hindu garment worn by men across the Indian subcontinent; Marshall 1975 II, 703.

<sup>73</sup> Zwalf 1996, 429 and British Museum record.

<sup>74</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 518.

## Conclusion

Marshall states in his Taxila report that 'among the many problems of Indian art, few have been more baffling than the Gandhara School'.<sup>75</sup> The repertoire or *koine* of cultures evident from the archaeological record of sites such as Taxila did not seem to fit the chronological and cultural categories maintained by scholars in the late 19th and early 20th century, during which time most known analyses of the sites and objects were made. The connection between Greek and Buddhist culture especially, because it was so visually striking to scholars such as Foucher, Cunningham and Marshall, was deemed an important new category which had to imply a substantial influence of Greek culture on Buddhism in general. The suddenly so-recognisably Hellenistic visage of the Buddha had to be the cause of a 'filter of Greekness' to account for what was still considered its (Greek) artistic superiority. As a result, this predominant Greek-centric view of the western scholars who excavated the major sites in the Gandhara region led to artificially devised cultural and ethnic categories, regarded as if separated 'containers', and disjointed chronological interpretations of the archaeological record. Original find-spots often did not match the chronological categories that scholars had envisaged and were subsequently considered out of place (as in the example of the decorative peg from Sirkap, discussed above). The focus on Graeco-Buddhist art also led to interpretations of objects as somehow related to Buddhism based purely on their association with specific sites that were specifically categorised as Graeco-Buddhist, such as Taxila (as in the above example of the female statuette head). And in regard to artefacts of which the original find-spots were unknown, specific datings and origins were suggested and often simply stated by association of stylistic affinity only; namely, any object that looked Graeco-Buddhist had to come from Gandharan sites such as Taxila (as in the example of the three stucco heads of the Buddha). In response to this diversity, even more categories and sub-categories were devised; Marshall, for example, attempted to bring order to the chaos of the Taxila record by devising distinctions between 'Graeco-Bactrian', 'Indo-Afghan', 'Graeco-Buddhist', 'proto-Gandharan' and even 'bastard-Hellenistic' subdivisions, among others. In short, the greater the diversity of objects discovered, the greater the number of categories that were added. And the subsequent debates about the Taxila archaeological record have focused mainly on these categories, shifting them, or suggesting new ones altogether. The preliminary results of the present study, however, paint a different picture, and can so far be summarised as follows:

<sup>75</sup> Marshall 1975 II, 691.

- (1) The famous interaction between Hellenistic (Greek) and Buddhist elements in Taxila appears to be one part of a much larger repertoire that was marked by diversity and flexibility. Subject matter, techniques, material choices and architectural contexts were apparently available interchangeably, depending on the specific requirements for the artefacts and/or architecture in question (as, for example, shown by the Corinthian *stupa* capital). There appears to have existed a *koine* of many different elements that were available in that region, at that time – and from which elements were taken out depending entirely on specific circumstances and contextual requirements. The combination of Greek and Buddhist elements, especially in sculpture and architecture, certainly appears to have fit quite a number of these contexts in Taxila – but there is no indication that this was always the case, or in any context, as previously was often presumed.
- (2) As a result of the predominant focus on Graeco-Buddhist art, a large part of the archaeological record from sites such as Taxila (i.e. objects that were not deemed Greek enough) have often been misinterpreted and incorrectly dated, or neglected altogether. However, the archaeological record of Taxila indicates that these objects constituted quite a significant portion of the city's material culture, and point towards a type of cultural interaction that was complex and dynamic in nature – and as such does not match categorisations based on ethnic and cultural labels. Such interpretations are simply not supported by the archaeological data. More simply put, perhaps, in Taxila, you did not need to be Greek to do Greek, nor did you need to be a Buddhist to make a Buddha.
- (3) These above findings call for a continuation of future research in similar trend; namely, re-examination and new analyses of the archaeological record from multiple sites in the Gandhara region as well as beyond, in order to document correctly and interpret many more important sources. As well as expanding the understanding of sites in Gandhara, like Taxila, the present author aims to expand the scope of future research eastwards from Gandhara as well, towards the Tarim basin, to continue a similar line of investigation. This is important, because: (a), only with such comprehensive and empirically studied datasets will it be possible to address larger-scale questions of how cultural processes worked in the Gandhara region based on the information left behind by its material record; and (b), to approach questions of how such processes subsequently spread and developed beyond that region, and how this, once again, is evident from the archaeological record. Traditionally, studies on Graeco-Buddhism have tended to 'stop' at Gandhara, and usually consider only some remaining influences in the material culture of the Indian Gupta empire. Sufficient research is

still lacking in this respect, and will constitute important new material for future studies into the flexibility and complexity of cultural interaction between ancient 'East' and 'West', as this study has hoped to show, on a preliminary level, for the site of Taxila.

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