

## Relic Shrines Pilgrimage

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### Abstract

In the South Asian world, the first and second centuries CE gives a new dimension to Buddhism and its pilgrimage with the rise of Buddha image in human form. Whether the image originated in Mathura school of Art or Gandhara school of Art had been a long time question for scholars. This paper does not dwell into the origination of Buddha image but inspite it offers some light on Gandharan regional sites, and relic shrines pilgrimage and routes. Chinese pilgrims' accounts this region mostly confined to Peshawar basin, but due to its unified artistic and stupa tradition which had an extent to South-Afghanistan, as well as on the east of it due to Graeco Roman influences on art, Kashmir is also taken in examples. Buddhist art, culture and traditions flourished in Gandhara which was an ancient region between north-western Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. The spread of Semi-Mahayanic tradition and monastic art from India via Gandhara to Central Asia and China played a vital role in the propagation of Buddhism as a world religion. Rise of Buddhism is evident in the period of the 1st century CE to 4th century CE during the rule of Kusana Empire. A distinctive feature of this period was the sustained patronage of Buddhist monasteries, art and architecture. Buddhist chronicles give an idea of pilgrimage sites which venerated body relics of Buddha which later were enshrined in the stupa. It comprises several narrative strands that relate the life story of the Buddha and the manner in which Buddhist teachings and institutions were established on the Gandharan periphery in ancient times. The focus of this work traces the relics associated with the historical Buddha. This paper traces the art and religiosity of relic shrines via Buddhist and cultural context in selecting some specimens of the 4th century BCE until 5th Century CE. Thus the paper will address some broader parameters in the history of Gandharan pilgrimage and move to a focus on Gandharan sculptures and Indo-Greek antiquities, coins that have been subject to concerted collecting efforts in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

**Key Words:** *Buddhism, Gandhara, Pilgrimage route, Relic shrines, Buddha, Bodhisattva, Art*

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