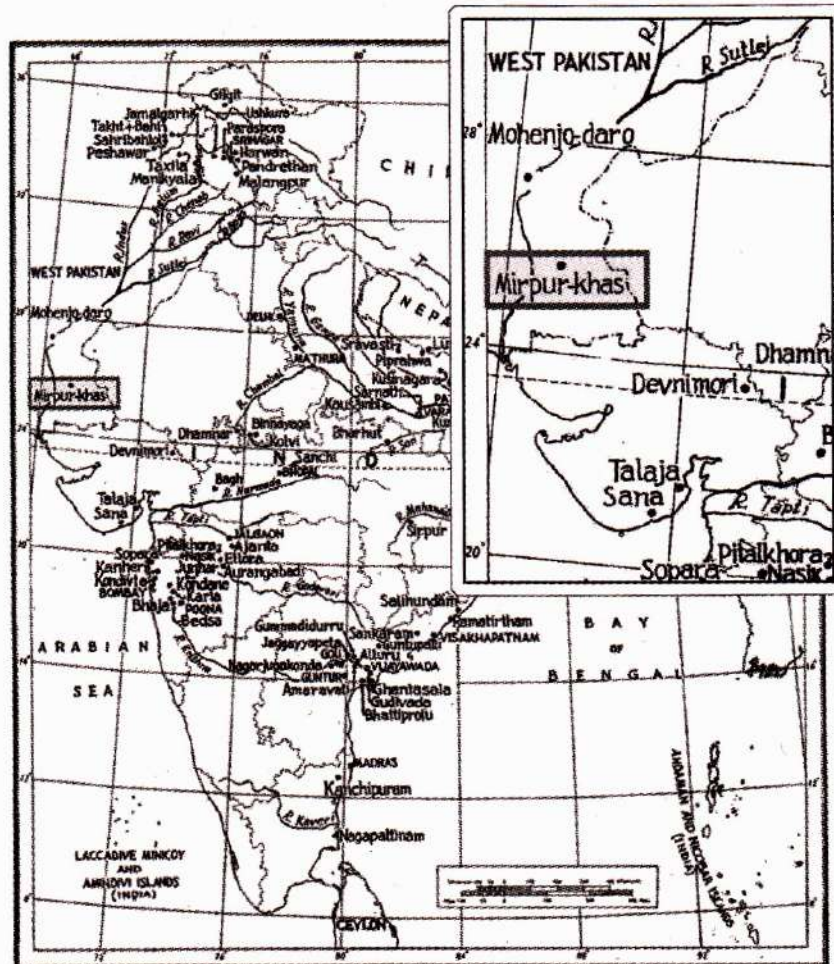


The Terracotta Buddha Stūpa of Kahu-jo-daro at Mirpurkhas - An Artistic Imagery and Religious Inspiration

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The ruined Buddha *stūpa* at Kahu jo-daro was originally part of a larger Buddhist establishment situated in one of the large mounds extending over 30 acres (some 12 hectares) of land to the north of the present town of Mirpurkhas, today the district headquarters of Thar and Parkar in the Sindh province of Pakistan.

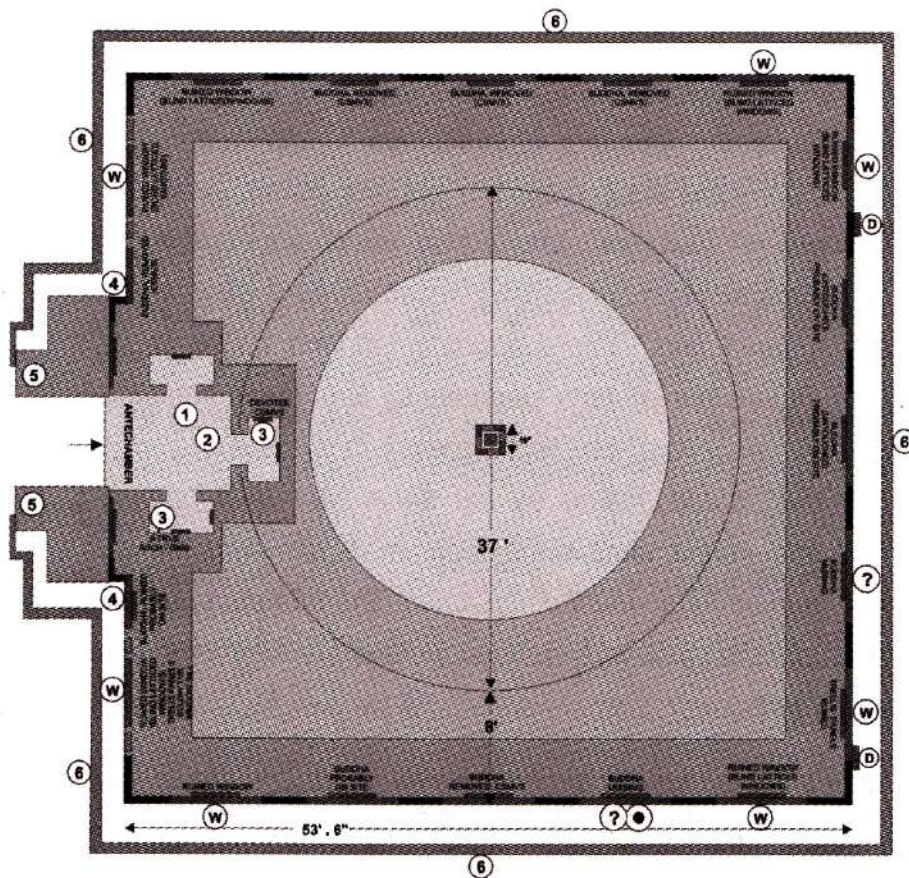


Based upon Survey of India maps with the permission of the Surveyor General of India

The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate base line
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Like many other archaeological finds, the Kahu jo-daro *stūpa* was a chance discovery. The site was initially noticed by General John Jacob, who was then Acting Commissioner in Sindh, but he did not understand its importance. In 1859 James Gibbs described the site as remains of a brick platform or “thul” and removed a fine earthenware pot from the upper part of the hollow chamber, which contained some pieces of crystal and amethyst. Unfortunately, the whereabouts of these finds are now unknown. Mr. Woodburn, the Collector of Hyderabad (Sindh), rescued a large terracotta seated Buddha image and also the head of a second image from railway contractors in 1894.¹ However, the historical importance of the Kahu jo-daro *stūpa* remained unknown until Henry Cousens, (then Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey, Western Circle), excavated the site in 1909-10.



Scale : 1 inch = 120 inches



Plan of the reconstruction drawing of the Kahu-jo-daro Stūpa at Mirpurkhas, Sindh

Archaeological Remnants from the Site

The site was found badly destroyed by the railway contractors who had been using the upper level ornamental bricks for laying rail lines in the region. What was visible at the time of excavation was a layer of sun-dried bricks projecting from a heap of rubbish. The circular base of the *stūpa*, revealed on the top of a square platform, was probably a part of the earliest structure, which later supported a beautiful *stūpa*. This must have been once surmounted by a large *harmikā* (square capital), which contained the sacred relics presumably of some Buddhist saint (Fig. 18.1). The casket containing these relics was later handed over to the Mahabodhi Society, Sarnath. The relics were enshrined in the new Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra there.²

The stone relic casket at the Kahu jo-daro *stūpa* also contained a small crystal bottle covered with white sand, and a number of offerings of coral and crystal beads, seed pearls, four gold beads, one small gold wire ring, ten copper coins, some small lumps of charcoal, a few grains of unidentified material, and some other odd beads. Inside the crystal bottle was a small silver cylindrical case containing some minute object the size of a pin-head and some dust, wrapped in gold leaf. The existence of two relics in two different containers raised the question of the relics of two persons in the same reliquary, in the minds of the excavators. Similar relic stone caskets were found in the ruined *stūpa* of Panahiam Jhar at Saheth-Maheth in Uttar Pradesh, dated by Sir John Marshall between 3rd and 4th centuries B.C.E, and in the Boria *stūpa* near Junagadh in Kathiawar, Gujarat (now in Junagadh Museum) of the same period. The identification of the Mirpurkhas *stūpa* relics has remained a mystery in the absence of any inscription and other literary evidence, but their importance should not be overlooked.

Originally there were eleven terracotta relief panels of seated Buddhas in the niches of the four faces of the platform- three large panels (about 65cm in height) on each of the north, east, and south faces, and two smaller panels on either side of the entrance to the *stūpa* on the west face (Fig. 18.2). At the time of excavation, only seven large images and a small one were found in situ. Images were missing from the southern niche on the east face, the eastern niche on the south face, and the northern side of the entrance on the west face. The two large missing images were probably those rescued from railway contractors by Mr. Woodburn, as already mentioned, and now one of them found in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. All these terracotta sculptures were originally painted. According to the excavator, only six Buddha images were removed from the four faces of the platform for safekeeping. However, in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu

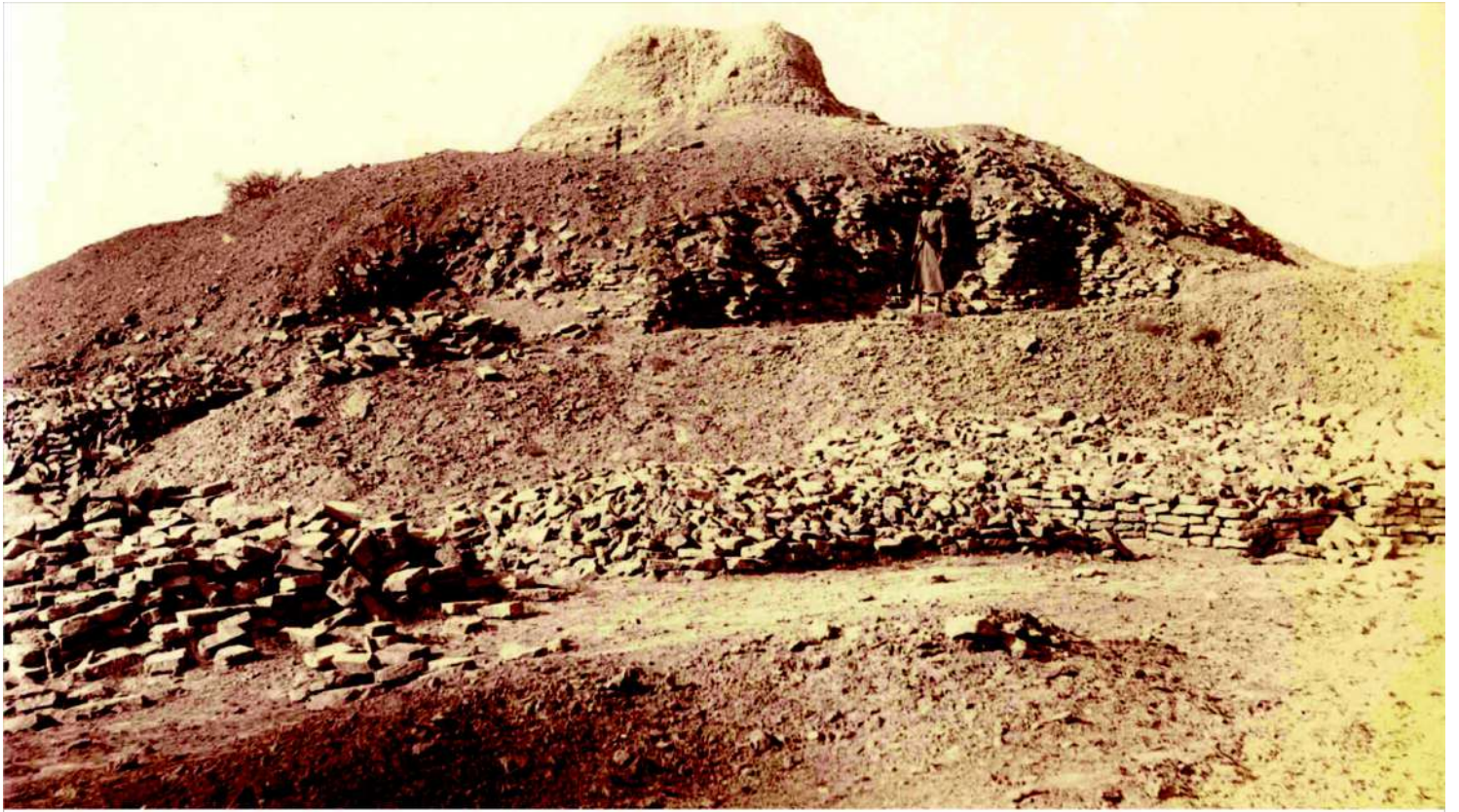


Fig.18.1 : Stūpa remains, Kahu-jo-daro



Fig.18.2 : Entrance to the stūpa showing North-west face

Sangrahalaya (formerly Prince of Wales Museum of Western India) collection, there is one image of the Buddha from this group; seated cross-legged on a low stool in the Gandhara style, bearing the same site number, which finds no mention in the excavation reports (Fig. 18.3).

Kahu-jo-daro is probably the only site in the region which has yielded so many relief panels of the Buddha images. The *stūpas* at other sites in the region such as Thul-Mir-Rukan, Sudheranjodaro, and Deperghangro were exclusively decorated with terracotta work. The site Kahu-jo-daro has also yielded hundreds of sun-dried votive clay tablets, almost identical with those discovered from Nalanda and Sarnath. These votive tablets were found along with copper coins just about 15 cm below ground level and used by the devotees on pilgrimage as offerings and were heaped in front of the three shrines at the entrance to the *stūpa*. The remaining artefacts in the collection of the museum are mainly of decorative nature, and most likely adorned the outer face of the base as well as the *stūpa*.

Buddhism in Sindh

There exist no sufficient archaeological remains to establish when and how Buddhism got a footing in Sindh. But, at the same time, it is evident that Buddhism took its root in Gandhara during Aśoka's time and continued to expand in the reigns of successive Indo-Greeks, Scythians, Parthians and Kuṣāṇas. More particularly, the Shinkot casket inscription from the Bajour in North-West Frontiers proves that the Great Buddhist Indo-Greek King Menander propagated Buddhism between Hindukush and Sindh.

The *stūpa* at Kahu-jo-daro was not an isolated activity in this region, such activities began during the reign of great Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, whose close association with the territory started with his first appointment as Governor of Taxila, the main city of the eastern region of Gandhara, an ancient Peshwar Valley (c. 300-273 B.C.E.), now in north-west part of Pakistan. Later when he became the Emperor and embraced Buddhism, the site of Taxila was selected for the erection of one Buddhist *stūpa*. It was attested by the Kharoṣṭī versions of the Fourteen Rock Edicts at Shahbāzgarhī and Manshera.

The activities got a momentum and a firm root during the rule of Kuṣāṇas. The most famous of Kuṣāṇa rulers was Kanishka, who made Peshwar his winter capital. He had great fascination for Buddhism and held the fourth Buddhist Council in Kashmir during his time. The great *stūpa* at Mohenjodaro is an interesting architectural example of this period in the region. The remains of the Buddhist establishment at Mohenjodaro, indicates the existence of main *stūpa* in the centre and apartments around the periphery that were rebuilt or



Fig.18.3 : Seated Buddha in Gandhāra style



Fig.18.4 : Kubera, Terracotta

repaired more than once. The earliest floor of the quadrangles was originally made of bricks taken from the existing old structures of the Harappan culture.

Art Traditions

The art tradition in the region allowed different art forms from North-Western India to get assimilated into the main stream, particularly, the Greco-Roman style of the Gandhara region and indigenous style at Mathura (North India) metamorphosed into an Indianness, and termed as India-Gandhara art tradition. There is an interesting literary reference in the *Rudrayānāvādāna* of the *Divyāvādāna* which mentions close commercial and cultural relations between Rajgriha (in Bihar) and the Rorua (modern Rohri in Western Pakistan). The Allahabad Pillar inscription mentions the glorious expedition of Samudragupta (C.E. 330-370) in the North-Western frontier of India which brought Gandhara and Central India face to face with the people and helped them to establish a long trade and cultural relations. The Gupta influence in Sindh region, which left its incredible mark on a number of brick *stūpas*, however, may be attributed to Chandragupta II (C.E. 375-412) as mentioned in the Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription.

The different art elements which constituted the art of Kahu-jo-daro are enough indication that the artists of this region were more liberal and flexible in accepting various architectural principles, forms and designs from Gandhara as well as Kuṣāṇa - Gupta art tradition. Dr. Motichandra had described these newly found ideas of art and the transformation of the new concepts in temple architecture, its forms and decorations "Architecture, both Hindu and Buddhist, if it were to be in store naturally required plenty of money and time. But the people in the Gupta age seem to have been in a hurry to propagate their newly made discoveries in the field of aesthetics and art forms as extensively and within as short a time as possible. Building of the brick temples and *stūpas* and decorating them with carved and moulded bricks and figures caught their fertile imaginations as this new mode of construction was cheaper."³

There is no doubt that the religious faith in this region survived even after the conquest of Arabs which is evident by Pala images, bearing inscriptions recording their installation by a Buddhist monk of Uddandepura from Sind (same as Oddantapurī Mahāvihāra, Bihar Shariff, near Nalanda, 11th Century C.E.). The Kahu-jo-daro *stūpa* at Mirpurkhas yielded hundreds of unbaked clay votive tablets and Arab copper coins at the entrance to the *stūpa* on the west face and help us to conclude that the establishment was in worship and a living centre at least up to the 9-10th century C.E.

Religious Inspiration

The site Museum has the largest and most comprehensive collection of finds from the Kahu-jo-daro *stūpa*. It provides a rich source to examine the religious as well as artistic activities of the 5-6th century C.E. inhabitants of the site. It is significant that, except for images of the Buddha, the site has not yielded any outstanding Mahāyāna image. Though several contemporary Buddhist monuments in the eastern and western parts of India are replete with Bodhisattvas, the considerable fragmentary remains from Kahu-jo-daro do not even indicate the possibility of a Bodhisattva image here. However, the presence of Kubera and Jambhala(?) images would only remotely connect the site with the full-grown Mahāyāna tradition (Fig.18.4). Moreover, the *stūpa* structure, made of the sun dried bricks, predates the decorative terracottas and bricks. From a study of the site it is obvious that the original *stūpa* structure was erected by devotees of orthodox Hīnayāna creed, who had only marginally accepted the Mahāyāna tenets. The fact is corroborated by the records of the contemporary Chinese travellers. Xuanzang (629-645 C.E.) mentioned that Buddhism was at its peak in the Sindh region and the king of the region was a Buddhist. Yi-Jing (C.E. 671-695) observed that the Sammitīya sect of Hīnayāna tradition dominated the region. The Sammitīya sect had been quite popular and widespread during 3rd-4th centuries C.E., as is evident from one of the earliest inscriptions at Sarnath which states that around the 3rd century C.E. this sect drove out the Sarvāstivādins. Later they became more prominent at the time of Harshavardhan (606-647 C.E.). Yi-Jing also recorded the presence of a large number of monasteries of this period at Ahichhatra, Sravasti, Vaishali, Sarnath, Kapilavastu, Malva, Valabhi and Sindh region.⁴

It is very likely therefore that the original sun-dried brick *stūpa* structure of Kahu-jo-daro was purely Hīnayāna in character. In all probability it existed at least for a couple of centuries before the introduction of Buddha images. The Mahāyāna influence is evident in the eleven Buddha relief panels found in the niches on the platform. These and other smaller panels must have been added later as a result of the Sammitīya sect accepting the image of the Buddha in their religious practices.

Buddhism survived even after the Arab conquest of the region in C.E. 715, as is evident from the presence of hundreds of unbaked clay votive tablets and Arab copper coins found at the entrance to the *stūpa*. The clay tablets in the collection are of different sizes varying from 4 to 9 cm in length and are mostly oval in shape. Most of the tablets bear the inscription "*Ye dharmā*" under the image of the Buddha or *stūpa* in the Brāhmī characters of the 7th or 8th century C.E. similar to those found from Nalanda (Fig. 18-5).



Fig.18.5: Clay votive tablets



Fig.18.6: Decorative bricks, Terracotta



Fig.18.7: Seated Buddha, Terracotta

The bricks found at the site offer a great variety of patterns. Being stylistically akin to similar remains from the Gandhara region, the Hellenistic influence in ornamental details is apparent. Among these designs there are several forms of fret, chequers, rosettes, lozenges, palmettes, T-pattern moulding, stylized leaf, acanthus, and other motifs (Fig. 18.6).

The decorative architectural fragments found at the site consisted of beautiful terracotta moulded pilasters, arches, capitals, medallions, and dentils of brackets. Stylistically, the terracotta images of Kahu-jo-daro combine not only the Gupta and Gandhara traditions but also reflect some characteristics from distant Amaravati, Rangmahal, and Ter. Pronounced Gupta influence is apparent in the highly decorated *prabhāvalī* (hello) and smooth curves of the face and body, half-closed eyes, shapely modelled eyelids, and characteristic earlobes (Fig. 18.7). Each of the seated Buddhas found in the niches of the platform walls is placed on a high lotus pedestal with an *āsana* (cushion) spread over it. Both the *prabhāvalī* and the relief framing the entire panel are decorated with a design of four and eight-petalled flowers. A remarkable feature of Buddha's drapery is an undergarment that extends slightly beyond the *saṅghātī* (robe) that covers the folded legs. It is evident from the *Mahāvagga* that the Buddha was particular about the code of conduct for monks, including their manner of dress. A Buddhist monk was supposed to wear three robes: a double waist cloth, a single upper robe, and a single undergarment. The undergarment seen beneath the robe of the Buddha is his *antaravāsa* which was wrapped around the loins and reached down to the knees.⁵

Conclusion

It is interesting to note the *stūpas* in Sindh, the Mahāstūpa at Devnimori (in Gujarat), and the later *stūpas* in Bihar and Bangladesh followed the Gandhara tradition of square terraced platform supporting a spherical dome, a tradition which evolved during the Kuṣāṇa period (1st-2nd century C.E.). But the possible date of the original establishment of Mirpurkhas has remained unresolved in the absence of inscriptions and other literary evidences. From the architectural design and ornamentation point of view one can assume that the reconstructed stūpa at Mirpurkhas seems to have been closer to the Devnimori *stūpa* (late 4th- 5th century C.E.) in Western India. Both *stūpas* indicate their close affinity with the stylistic tradition that prevailed in Gandhara during the 2nd-5th centuries C.E. The tradition of reconstruction and renovation of *stūpas* was a well known Buddhist convention. They would renovate or encase a *stūpa* within a larger envelope, such act being considered one of great merit. Almost all the important *stūpas*, in the Gandhara and Sindh regions, and at other sites in India, followed such conventions.

In conclusion we may reiterate the original sun-dried brick structure of the Mirpurkhas *stūpa* probably belonged to the earliest period, and underwent major changes during the 4th-5th centuries C.E. as is apparent from the presence of a large number of curved and ornamental bricks of that period. The normal size of the bricks is 17×10×3 inches (42.5×25×7.5 cm), which is again close to that of the bricks of Gupta shrines such as those at Bhitargaon, Ter, and Devnimori.

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