

Galerie Hioco

Detailed file – Head of a Bodhisattva (P648)

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What do we like in this sculpture?

- The extremely fine features of this face, a timeless classic beauty with a remarkably serene expression.
- The use of stucco, this unique material which conveys a supple modeling.
- Its origins, which testifies the outstanding diffusion and durability of Gandhāra style up to Afghanistan.

I. Detailed description

Head of a bodhisattva (P648)

Stucco

Ancient region of Gandhāra

4th- 5th century

H. 15 cm or 5 7/8 in

A devotee looking alike a bodhisattva

This bodhisattva has a remarkable face, drawing an almost perfect oval and imbued with serenity. The head gives off according to the codes of "Greco-Buddhist" art of Gandhāra a feeling of fullness and piety. The eyelids, half-closed, are the sign of his deep meditation, while the mouth, small and fleshy, very nicely modelled, outlines a delicate smile. This expression is reminiscent of that of the stucco Buddha and bodhisattva, made during the same period and for which comparable examples can be found in major museums. A major role in Gandharan iconography is played by bodhisattva, spiritual beings "promised to an Awakening", a specific state of historical Buddha before their "Enlightenment". They cannot go backwards in the cycle of reincarnation, feel compassion for all sentient creatures of the earth and only wish to break free of the causal loop along with them. These characters have become one of the major specificities of the Buddhism of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna).

A witness of the Art of Gandhāra found at the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan

Thin incisions characteristic of sites in Afghanistan, notably Hadda, outline the almond-shaped eyes, delineate the eyebrows, mark the nostrils, and accentuate the contour of the lips. We should also note as a distinctive feature of these works the depression in the middle of the chin, under the mouth. Drawing a characteristic fringe on the forehead, joined and regular curls separate from the rest of the hair. This consists of strands of hair pulled backwards that rose into a flattened bun from which longer wavy curls or ribbons fell. A braided headband holds and adorns the whole.

The stucco: a great freedom of treatment

Stucco was used brilliantly throughout Gandhāra craftsmanship's History, notably in the sites of Hadda in Afghanistan and Taxila in Pakistan. The statues were made by using molds, the resulting shapes picked up with a spatula. This technique allows a lot of ease in the treatment and to obtain, as here, faces with an incredibly supple shape. The mouth, with its particularly sensitive production, is a fine example. Often, the finer stucco heads were fired separately and glued to the bodies with slush. This donor's head was to participate in the decoration of the exterior courtyards of the monasteries, accessible to devotees. A thin slip - still very evident over the entire surface - covered the whole, concealing any disparity and bearing a rich polychromy of red, ocher and black, visible here at the level of the eyebrows and the headband.

II. Image of the piece – view 1



III. Image of the piece – view 2



IV. Image of the piece – view 3



V. Provenance

- . This piece comes from a large and old French private collection, constituted since the 1930's (by repute).
- . We are always very cautious and diligent about the provenance of the artworks we offer. Ensuring the seriousness and reliability of the information given by the former owners is one of our priorities and we then guarantee this origin by engaging our responsibility.
- . In order to reinforce this guarantee, we systematically verify that these artworks have not been registered as missing or stolen. As Interpol has granted us the right to directly consult their database of stolen or reported items, we verify by ourselves and issue a certificate attesting to this.

VI. Condition report

This Gandhāra sculpture is made in stucco, dated from circa 4th-5th century and measures 15 cm high or 5 7/8 in. The head is complete and belonged to a larger sculpture. Small losses are evident: the top part of the head is missing as well as most part of the ears. A spall is visible on the chin and the hair curls have an eroded relief. Other small asperities are visible over the entire surface. The face was originally completely covered with a white limewash layer, applied as a preparatory ground for polychrome decoration that once covered sculptures of all materials. It is residues of this layer which are still visible over the entire surface giving these differences in color tones. The layer created a smooth surface, so it makes sense that having partially disappeared, the face and hairstyle have a rougher-looking surface. This coating was covered with polychromy and only slight traces of black color are still visible on the eyebrows and some red persists on the headband, on the right proper side of the head. The rest of the face appears to have been covered in ochre-colored polychromy. Two traces of more sustained ochre color at the level of the headband appear to be recolorations or surface restorations. Fragments at the back (left proper side of the face) have been detached and reattached. No other restoration was detected.

Please note that since we are not conservators or restorers, it must be understood that any condition report we made is a subjective qualified opinion, even if we do our best efforts. Prospective buyers should inspect the piece to satisfy themselves as to condition.

VII. Comparable museum artwork - 1

A stucco head of a Bodhisattva in the British Museum in London, measuring 15,5 cm or 6 1/8 in height, date from 4th-5th century and found in Afghanistan (Nbr. 1931,0724.3):

The British
Museum



Description

Head, perhaps of a deity or Bodhisattva, turned a little to his right. Above a border of large curls is a fillet; the hair runs in wavy vertical grooves from it to a chignon under a barrel-shaped bead flanked by two locks or ribbons undulating to the sides. Here the hair falls in thick strands to the back. The eyes are long, narrow and horizontal with low prominent lids, the nose is thin, straight and damaged at the tip, and the mouth, with not very shaped lips, is thin and horizontal. Both ears are almost wholly lost. The sober and balanced treatment of the planes seems not to distinguish between the sides of the head. Traces of red pigment appear on the neck, lips and fillet.

VIII. Comparable museum artwork - 2

A Bodhisattva head in stucco kept in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London:



Sculpture - A Bodhisattva (possibly Maitreya)

Object: Sculpture

Place of origin: Pakistan (The sculpture was excavated in the Swat Valley at a site of monastic buildings and *stupas* at Abarchinar, a steeply terraced site on a hillside above the right bank of the Najigram river which flows into the Karakar river, a short way below Barikot where the latter flows into the Swat River. Barikot now is in the province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, but this area was formerly within the princely state of Swat at the time of this object's excavation., made)

Date: 2nd century-4th century (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Modelled lime stucco

Museum number: IM.75-1939

Gallery location: In Storage

IX. Our guarantees

- More photos will be sent to you on request.
- In case of purchase, we will establish an invoice that you can pay by bank transfer.
- You will receive our certificate of authenticity with the photo of the artwork, its detailed description and the mention of the provenance.
- We will define together the shipping modalities and we will take care of all customs formalities if you live outside of France.
- If you do not like the piece, we give you the possibility to return it to us and we will assist you with the resulting terms and conditions.