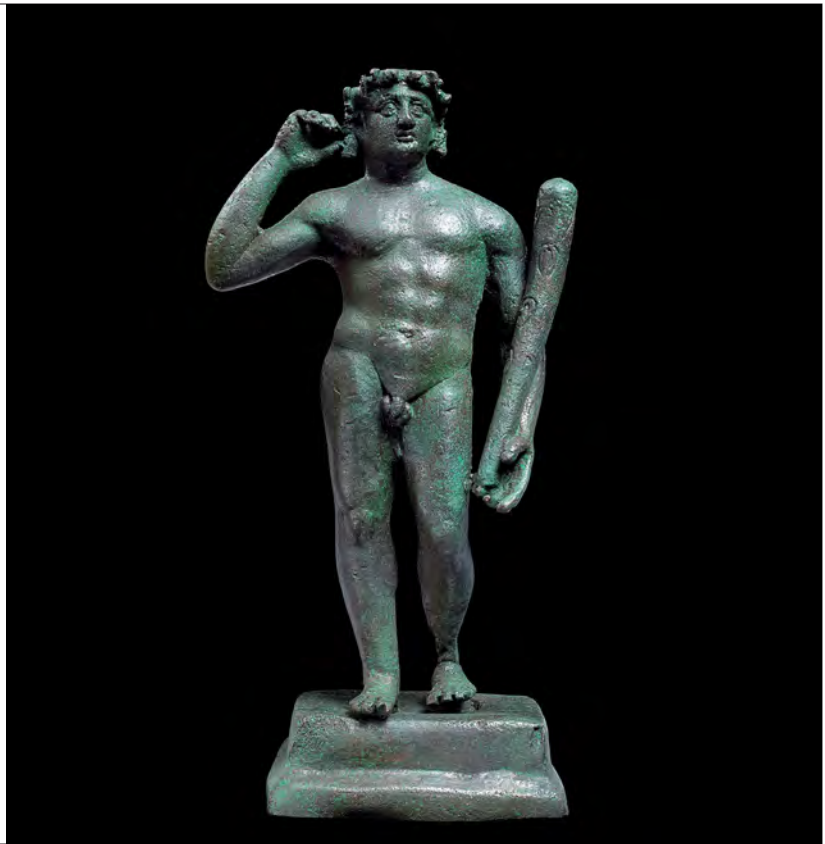


Image 1

Statuette of Herakles, 150 BCE.
Afghanistan; Ai Khanum, temple with
niches, sanctuary. Bronze. *National
Museum of Afghanistan.*



Who is represented here?

The sculpture represents Herakles (Roman: Hercules). Herakles is the hero of Greek epic literature celebrated for his strength and many feats of bravery and heroism. We can recognize the subject as Herakles because the figure holds a club in one hand, and with the other hand makes a gesture indicating that he is placing a crown upon his own head. Such a gesture is appropriate to a heroic figure, and the crown would probably have been a Greek-style headdress of leaves.

Herakles was a popular figure throughout the Hellenistic world, and was venerated throughout Greek-influenced Central Asia. An inscription at the gymnasium in Ai Khanum also mentions Herakles, and a bronze sculpture representing Serapis-Herakles (a blended Egyptian-Greek form of the god) was found at Begram.

What was the function of this object?

In Ai Khanum, Greek gods, goddesses, and mythological heroes were honored in temples and throughout the city. Many temples in the city reflect the diverse cultural influences present here. The principal temple, for example, had a Central Asian and Mesopotamian architectural design, with a flat roof, indented niches on the exterior, and sun-dried masonry. Greek gods and goddesses, however, were worshiped at the temple. Greek culture survived at this site from approximately 300

BCE until the city's demise in 145 BCE. Hellenistic culture persisted in Central Asia until the Islamic conquest beginning in the seventh century CE.

How was this object made?

The subject was made of cast bronze using the lost wax method, in which a wax model of the figure is used to create molds, in this case, of terracotta. Molten metal poured into the mold causes the wax to melt away and results in a bronze sculpture in the shape of the wax original. The style of this figure is relatively rustic and provincial. The base of the figure was cast separately from the figure, and is hollow. At one point the left foot was broken off, and was repaired with a metal pin. The repair was done somewhat awkwardly (we don't know exactly when), using molten lead to secure the feet of the statue to the base. As a result, the feet are a bit higher on the base than they probably would have been originally, and the right foot protrudes slightly. This may indicate that the base is not original to the sculpture.

The muscled torso of this figure relates to Greek sculptural models. However, the overall effect is rather two-dimensional and less naturalistic than many Greek figural sculptures. The models for this image may have been two-dimensional, originally transmitted from the Greek world through drawings or mosaics, ultimately to be reproduced and re-imagined in a remote colonial city.

Image 2

Ceremonial plaque depicting Cybele, 200 BCE. Afghanistan; Ai Khanum, temple with niches. Gilded silver. *National Museum of Afghanistan*.



Who and what is represented here?

The Greek goddess Cybele, goddess of nature, rides a chariot. She faces front, wears a crown-like headdress, and is protected by a parasol held by a Greek-style priest. In front of her is another Greek goddess, Nike, the goddess of victory, who is winged and holds the reins of the chariot. The chariot itself is drawn by two lions that traverse a rocky landscape that is also strewn with flowers. In front of the chariot entourage is a stepped altar, where another priest is seen making a sacrifice. The priests wear typical ritual garments, each with a wide belt tied three times around his waist and a conical hat. In the sky above the entire scene is the sun god Helios, with rays of light projecting from his head; the crescent moon; and a star likewise radiant. In its entirety, the subject matter here suggests that the goddess of nature is presiding over an orderly, brilliant, and well functioning cosmos.

What was the function of this object?

This object is a silver plate with gold leaf. It was originally nailed to a wooden disk. During antiquity, the object was looted and roughly torn from its wooden backing. The object was discovered in one of the sacristies (sacred areas for ritual and sacrifice) of the principal temple, but it is not clear that it originally belonged to the temple. The object may have been venerated like other divine images, or perhaps used in ceremonial processions; however we do not know for sure how it functioned.

Why is this object important?

This object is one of the oldest items found at the site of Ai Khanum, dating to the third century BCE. This style, subject, and media are unique at the site, and many consider this one of the most beautiful objects discovered at Ai Khanum. One interesting aspect of the piece is that its subject matter blends Greek and Asian themes. Cybele in a chariot drawn by lions is a popular motif from Asia Minor and the Greek Mediterranean. The figure with a parasol walking behind the chariot to venerate a divine figure is a specifically South Asian motif. The fact that the priests are barefoot (rather than wearing sandals or shoes) also reflects Asian norms. The structure of the chariot resembles ancient Persian models, and the stepped altar recalls West Asian examples, particularly from Iran and Syria.

Image 3

Corinthian capital, before 145 BCE.
Afghanistan; Ai Khanum. Limestone.
National Museum of Afghanistan.



What is this object?

This object is a capital whose original function was to top a column, and was the transitional element between the column and its supported ceiling or surmounting structure. It is Corinthian in style, referring to one of the three major Greco-Roman architectural styles and orders of column. We can identify the Corinthian style of capital because of its leafy decorative elements, as seen in the lower half of this example. Acanthus leaves are typically depicted in these capitals. In the Ai Khanum examples, a projecting element appears at each corner, called an angle volute. These are wide and massive, curling underneath themselves to create spiral forms at each of the four corners. These motifs contribute to the organic and curvilinear sense of the sculptural form.

How did capitals function in buildings?

A capital is the upper part of a column or pilaster, which is set above the shaft. In traditional classical architecture the capital supported the entablature or surmounting structures and roof elements. In classical Greek and Roman buildings, the entablature consisted of the architrave, freeze, and cornice. At Ai Khanum, capitals are found frequently, although many other building elements do not reflect classical prototypes.

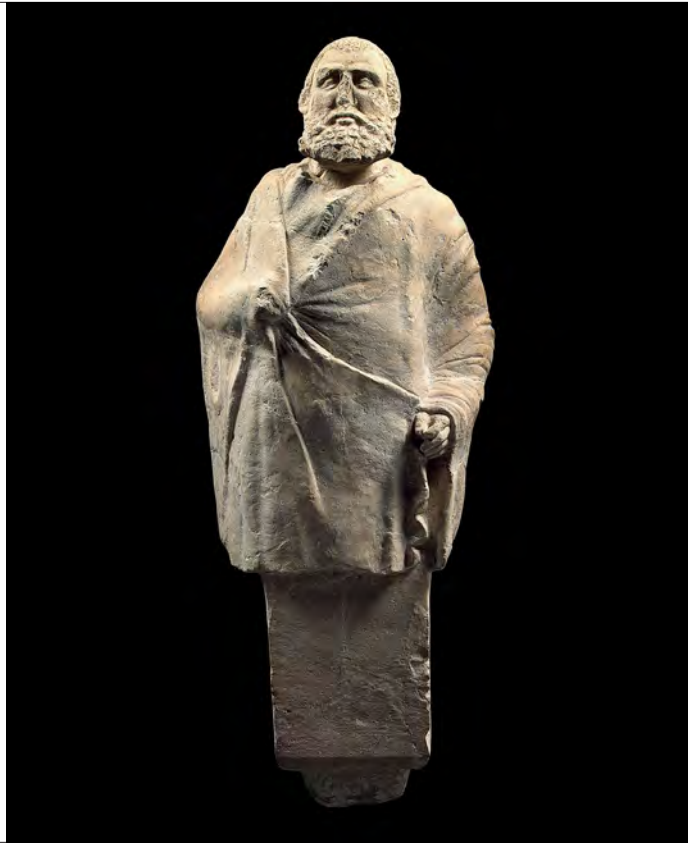
This capital was excavated from the southeastern citadel at Ai Khanum. It must have come from an important building, either a temple on the main promontory of the city or the residence of the military governor.

Why was this type of capital popular at the site of Ai Khanum?

At Ai Khanum, the three classical Greek architectural capital styles appear: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. Corinthian capitals were the most popular throughout the Greek colonial world, perhaps because of the visual appeal of their organic and vegetal motifs. Another popular Greek architectural element at Ai Khanum is antefixes, which appeared on roof joints and served to prevent rain infiltration. These antefixes likewise are decorated with organic and curvilinear motifs. Many grand public buildings in the United States also display this type of architectural decoration, including the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

Image 4

Hermaic pillar, approx. 200–150 BCE.
Afghanistan; Ai Khanum, gymnasium.
Limestone. *National Museum of
Afghanistan*.



Who is represented here?

A bearded elderly man is depicted, wearing a heavy cloak. He also wears a tight-fitting cap and would have originally held a metal rod in his extended left hand. His draped clothing and general appearance recall the norms of the classical world, although his garments are thicker and heavier than those typically worn in the Mediterranean, reflecting differences in climate.

This sculpture probably depicts an individual named Strato, who was the father of Triballos and Strato the Younger. From inscriptional evidence, we know that these last two individuals were donors who funded the rebuilding of the gymnasium at Ai Khanum, where the sculpture was found. Therefore, the sculpture may be a kind of portrait of the father of these donors, although it also reflects idealized features. Strato the father is believed to have been the director of the gymnasium, a position of significant responsibility in the Greek and Greek colonial worlds. The staff that he once held was a symbol of his authority.

What purpose did this sculpture serve?

The sculpture comes from the gymnasium at Ai Khanum, from the central niche in the northern colonnade. This type of statue, which is a pillar consisting of a human bust and figure, was common in the Greek world.

The term “Hermaic” refers to the Greek god Hermes. Hermes, the messenger god associated with athletics, and the epic hero Herakles, were protectors of the gymnasia. The donor’s inscription dedicated the gymnasium to these two figures. Hermaic pillars often depicted these or other gods and classical figures, as well as individuals associated with the gymnasium.

What does this sculpture tell us about the culture of this city?

The gymnasium is an important structure at Ai Khanum, and this sculpture expresses the continuity of classical culture here. In the Greek world, the gymnasium was a major focus of public life, where men trained for public games, and exercise and sporting events served to promote health, physical strength, civic engagement, and classical ideals about morality and masculinity. The gymnasium was also a school for teaching intellectual subjects. The combination of mental and physical exercise reflects the view, reportedly expressed by Socrates, that “the softening of the body involves the serious weakening of the mind.”

Image 5

Female figurine, before 145 BCE.
Afghanistan; Ai Khanum, sanctuary, temple
with niches. Bone. *National Museum of
Afghanistan*.



Who is represented here?

This nude female figure is probably a kind of fertility image. It is rather crudely carved, with a relatively plump body. Stiff legs are differentiated only by an engraved vertical line. Traces of red and black paint still appear on the image.

The shoulders have holes where the separately made arms were attached. The upper arm pieces shown with this figure may not have been original; they may have, in fact, belonged to another object from the site. The statue does not represent any known classical goddess or specific deity that we can identify.

What was the function of this object?

We do not know for sure how this object functioned. Its relatively small size suggests that it may have belonged to an individual or family who prized it for its associations with fertility. The rendering of this figure emphasizes the woman's lower abdomen and genitals, suggesting an association with fertility. Unlike South Asian models, her breasts are not particularly oversized, and the figure's posture is very static, implying that the model for this particular image is indigenous, rather than related to Indian examples like the many other bone and ivory carvings included in this exhibition.

Nevertheless, the image has a dot at the center of the forehead, and was originally decorated with detachable jewelry, relating to Indian models.

The image stands on a small pedestal. Many such miniature stools, carved in stone, were found at Ai Khanum. They appear to have served as small stands in shrines and private homes, although the types of objects they held are unknown.

How is this object different from others at this site?

This artifact differs from many others discovered at Ai Khanum in several ways. The medium, bone, is less commonly found here and much more associated with another site, Begram. The subject matter does not relate to those of the Greek or Hellenistic world. The style of this carving, with its rigid symmetry, stylized body, oversized head, and almost doll-like appearance, does not relate to classical norms. Rather, it depicts an indigenous style of figural representation. This object may have been produced by a local workshop specializing in bone and ivory, and creating objects to satisfy the tastes of city residents who were not Greek.

Image 6

Circular medallion with Eros and Psyche,
1–200 CE. Afghanistan; Begram, Room 13.
Plaster. *National Museum of Afghanistan*.



Who is represented here?

The subject, a charming representation of a young child, also shows a well-known classical theme. The child is Eros, son of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Here Eros is a young child with a cherubic face, who has wings shallowly rendered behind him protruding from his shoulders. Across his chest, he holds a butterfly, whose own wings fan out across his chest. This winged creature represents Psyche, the Greek goddess whose name means butterfly. Her name also means “soul.” In the well-known Greek myth, Psyche was a beautiful princess who was the object of envy by Aphrodite. When Aphrodite sent her son Eros to curse Psyche, instead he fell in love with her. Originally a mortal woman, through Psyche’s marriage to Eros and subsequent deeds and adventures, she becomes a goddess. The union of Eros and Psyche represents the allegorical joining of the human soul with the object of desire.

This theme was popular in classical mythology and associated with fertility, as well as with love and amorous desire.

What is significant about the medium of plaster?

There are many plaster molds representing a wide array of subjects that were discovered at Begram. Plaster itself, unlike bronze, gold, ivory, semiprecious stones, and other materials included in this

exhibition, is not a valuable medium. It was not expensive to create or purchase, and does not suggest that this object or others like it served as luxury objects. In the case of this object, the head rendered in a very high relief was created separately, and then attached to the rest of the piece. Use of multiple molds was effective in achieving very three-dimensional works.

What might have been the function of this object? What does this tell us about the site itself?

A current theory proposed by Dr. Sanjyot Mehendale of UC Berkeley is that this plaster object and others like it from Begram may have served as models for artists and merchants. It was not valuable on its own as a luxury item; however, it could have served as a model for objects that would be created in metal or stone. The abundance of such objects from Begram suggests that it was a major location for trade and artisan workshops. Materials from many different media and styles have been discovered at the site, suggesting that it was a very important trading center along the Silk Road.

Many other plaster models have been discovered at Begram, often illustrating classical themes such as this one. Other medallions illustrate various Greek gods and goddesses. Like this medallion, carved in extremely high relief and showcasing sculptural skill, these objects seem intended to demonstrate the virtuosity of the sculptors' work and the broad range of their repertoire.

Image 7

Large decorative plaque with women under a gateway, 1–200 CE. Afghanistan; Begram, Room 13. Ivory. *National Museum of Afghanistan*.



What subjects are represented here?

Two women, adorned in jewelry, girdle-like belts, and elaborate headgear, stand under a gateway. An archway and semicircular form further frame them in the scene. The woman at right holds a mirror in her left hand and dips her right hand into a dish, which is probably a vessel containing cosmetics.

Various Indian mythological creatures appear here, including celestial dwarves, projecting fantastical animal forms that are part lion, and human-headed figures with bird bodies. The last type of figure is also represented in the ceramic vessel included here (Image 7). The female figures are also related to classical Indian subjects. They recall female nature spirits and fertility goddesses (*yakshis*), which were often associated with temples and religious sites. They are considered auspicious and sacred. At Begram, many female figures are represented, similarly adorned and ornamented. Like many other female figures represented at Begram, these women probably represent palace attendants or courtesans, whose beauty and voluptuousness were set off by many kinds of jewelry and personal adornment.

What type of material is this object made from?

This object is made from ivory. Hundreds of carved ivory objects were discovered at Begram. Ivory was a luxury material made from the tusks of Indian elephants. The abundance of high-quality ivory objects at the site suggests that an ivory carvers' workshop existed here.

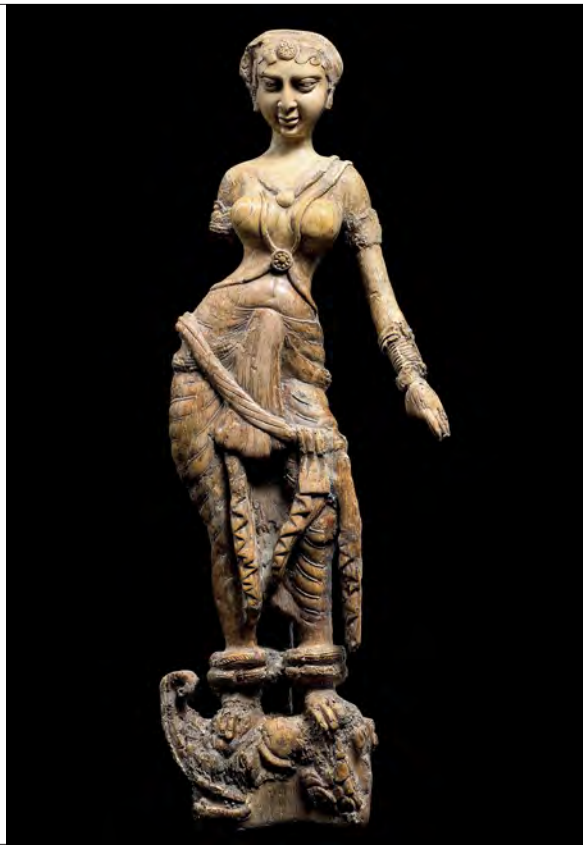
How does this object relate to other works of art? Why are these relationships important?

The style and subjects represented here directly relate to Indian models, specifically the Buddhist stupa (religious monument) sites of Sanchi and Amaravati, which date to approximately the same time as the ivory carvings at Begram. The gateway seen here, with two upright posts crossed by three decorated architraves, directly compares to the gateways found at each of the cardinal directions at these stupa sites. There are no explicitly Buddhist themes or subjects represented in this carving, however.

This object, like other ivories here, suggests that artisans were directly copying Indian models, and that Indian objects were in circulation here. Evidence suggests that many ancient artists were itinerant, and we know from inscriptional evidence that an ivory carvers' guild donated to the construction of Sanchi, the Buddhist monument in northern India. The carved ivories from Begram reflect primarily secular rather than religious motifs. While directly inspired by Indian models, carvers working here and merchants trading here no doubt catered to the taste of local patrons.

Image 8

Woman standing on a makara, 1–200 CE.
Afghanistan; Begram, Room 10. Ivory.
National Museum of Afghanistan.



What is represented here?

A voluptuous, adorned female figure stands on an aquatic Indian mythological creature (*makara*). A makara is usually a composite animal, as seen here suggesting the appearance of a fish, a crocodile, and an elephant.

A standing goddess atop the makara in Indian iconography suggests the goddess Ganga, the personification of the Ganges River. We do not know that this is the definitive subject here, but the representation may have been inspired by such models.

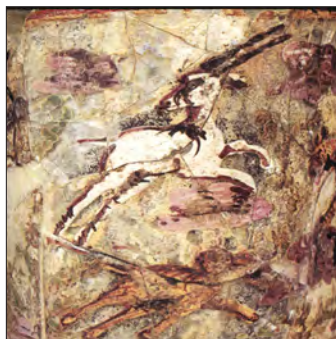
What do the style and details of this object suggest about how artists worked here?

This artwork suggests an interesting blend of stylistic models. The bracelets and anklets directly relate to Indian examples. The curved posture of the figure relates to the *tribhanga* or “thrice-bent” ideal of Indian posture, and also is fitting to the medium of curved elephant tusks. The lower garment of this figure is the Indian dhoti, while the artist’s interest in representing the curvilinear figure and draping sashes may relate to observation of Greco-Roman models. The upper body is adorned with two necklaces, including one that meets in a central floral medallion above the waist.

This type of ornament recalls Central Asian models and goes on to be a common detail in East Asian Buddhist sculpture. The figure originally had a larger headdress, and the surviving details of hair and ornament here may relate more to Mediterranean or Central Asian models than Indian ones. The figure's face also reflects an ideal combining different influences. The sculpture then is a fascinating illustration of the synthesis of numerous styles by artisans working here, and their distinct vision.

Image 9

Large painted goblet, 1–200 CE,
Afghanistan; Begram, Room 13. Glass.
National Museum of Afghanistan.



Large painted goblet, 1–200 CE,
Afghanistan; Begram, Room
13. Glass. *National Museum of
Afghanistan.*



What type of object is this?

These large goblets were drinking vessels as well as luxury objects.

What subjects are represented here?

The first goblet is depicted with a battle scene as the primary central motif. Two primary scenes seem to be rendered, one with armed combatants including three on foot and one on horseback. A larger scene shows three warriors on horseback and two on foot. Others appear to have perished on the battlefield. One possibility for the subject depicted here is episodes from the Trojan War, and the battle between Hector and Achilles.

The second goblet, better preserved, is divided into two registers. At the top, hunting scenes are shown, including hunters, a tiger, an antelope, and another animal. Below, fishermen are shown with various kinds of fish. The latter subject was popularly represented in several objects from this site.

What is significant about the material that the object was made from?

These goblets are made from glass. This medium is a direct import from the Greco-Roman world. These objects were probably produced in the Mediterranean for export trade along the Silk Road. Chemical analysis of glassware from Begram suggests a common source in the Roman world. Goblets such as these were probably made from molds. The coloration that has survived so well on these goblets is probably enameled paint, which was fired a second time to create a durable design.

Image 10

Fish-shaped flask, 1–200 CE. Afghanistan;
Begram, Room 10. Glass. *National Museum
of Afghanistan*.



What is represented here?

A naturalistic, lifelike fish is represented in glass. This object is a type of flask. The tail of the vessel was probably plugged with a cork or other similar material.

What material is this made from, and how was it made?

The object is made from glass, representing techniques and workmanship from the Roman world. This particular item was made from yellow and blue glass. Many glass objects were discovered at Begram, representing a variety of techniques of glassworking. Colored glass was produced through the addition of metal oxides to molten glass material. This type of flask was probably made in a mold, with separate smaller pieces (such as the upper fin) made separately and attached through heat. Fine lines on the surface, indicating the texture of the fish's body, were probably engraved.

What would have been the function of this object?

Several fish-shaped flasks were discovered at Begram. Like this piece, they tend to be approximately life-sized and seem to have functioned as a receptacle or containing vessel. Their exact function, however, is unclear. As is illustrated by other objects in this selection, fish and aquatic themes were often represented among objects at Begram. These subjects were popular in the Mediterranean world, and may have also enjoyed a special popularity at this site.

Image 11

Circular basin decorated with fish, 1–200 CE; Afghanistan; Begram, Room 10.
Bronze. *National Museum of Afghanistan*.



What is represented here?

This fanciful and unusual object has been described as an “aquarium” because it represents a scene of fish that appear to be swimming around a central motif. Rendered in bronze, the circular basin has a human looking face at the center, identified as a Medusa head, which has characteristic snake-like locks. Around this motif, plentiful and abundant fish circulate. These creatures have detached movable fins and tails. Originally this piece was accompanied by another circular bronze plaque that it attached to, and overlaid with an elevated piece of clear glass that protected it. Underneath the bronze basin are metal wires with small weights, which serve to make the fins and tails of the fish move. The basin was apparently placed for display in water, where the moving weights made the fish appear to swim.

Why is this object important? What does this tell us about this site?

This object is special in terms of its subject matter, design and engineering, movable parts, and possible function. It seems to be a kind of fanciful, amusing luxury object, which would have been an entertaining curiosity in the home of its owner.

Like the plaster medallions at Begram, this object could have served as an example of the skill and craftsmanship of artists, and a demonstration of their technical ingenuity. This object may have

served to demonstrate the inventiveness, engineering skill, and technical accomplishment of bronze-working artisans. This object, along with others from the site, suggests that Begram was a center of craftsmanship and skilled artisan workshops.

Numerous objects from the site, including glass, ceramic, and bronze, reflect fish motifs. These subjects were popular in the Mediterranean world. In the landlocked, dry environment of Central Asia, fish and aquatic life may also have served as a curiosity, a symbol of the exotic and cosmopolitan, and an emblem of luxury.

How was this object made?

This object was made from a single metal sheet, rather than being cast. The fish designs on the surface of this bronze basin were created by embossing, in which relief decoration is achieved by hammering and punching especially from behind, to create projecting forms. The moving fin and detail parts were created separately, cut from metal sheet.

Image 12

“Kinnari” jug, 1–200 CE. Afghanistan;
Begram, Room 13. Ceramic. *National
Museum of Afghanistan*.



What is represented here?

This subject, the kinnari, is an Indian mythological creature, which generally has a woman's head and the body of a bird or another animal. Its representation at Begram is another example of the importance of Indian themes and iconography at the site. In this case, the vessel of the body is decorated with feathers suggesting wings, and an underbelly suggesting the gills of a fish. The figure's hands are clasped in front of her chest in a typical Indian gesture of reverence.

In India, kinnaris are semi-divine beings, which often appear as decorative motifs at temple sites. In this case the artist seems to have taken a familiar subject and used its formal qualities inventively to create a functional object. The kinnari's mouth serves as a spout in this pouring vessel, while her hair extending in an arch behind her head creates a handle. The body of the vessel, appropriate to the form of a nesting bird, likewise serves as an ample container.

What was the function of this object?

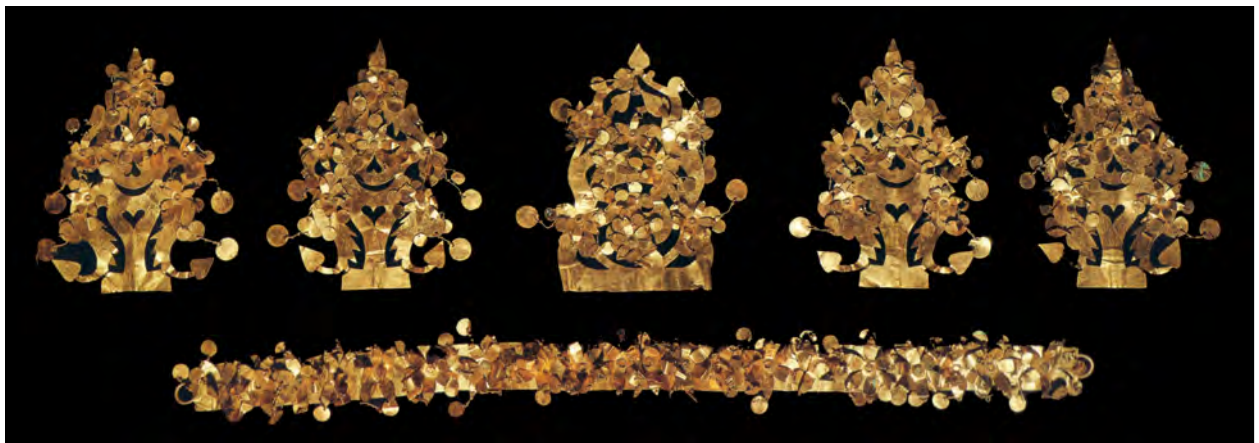
This jug was clearly functional, with a spout for pouring and a central opening for adding liquid. Its quality and workmanship suggest that it was a valued luxury object.

What material is this object made from? What is special about it?

This jug is ceramic, but it has the appearance of a bronze object. Bronze is an expensive luxury material, and many bronze pieces were discovered at Begram. This object's blue-green glaze suggests the color of bronze patina. It may have been a popular color, or perhaps was meant to deceive the eye. In this way, the owner could have a beautiful object that appeared to be made of a much more valuable material.

Image 13

Crown, 100 BCE–100 CE. Afghanistan;
Tillya Tepe, Tomb 6. Gold and imitation
turquoise. *National Museum of Afghanistan.*



The crown from Tomb 6 is collapsible, with five removable tree decorations, which could be attached to a golden band; indicating its function as a nomadic headpiece. Photo: Fredrik Hiebert.

What is this object?

This object is a crown made of various gold elements attached together. The central band that wrapped around the head is decorated with twenty-four floral-shaped elements or rosettes, each of which has a gem at its center. The central band also has five vertical tubes that hold the assemblage of five projecting elements.

The projecting elements recall the forms of trees, with leaf-shaped and branching forms. In four of the five pieces, a pair of birds appears near the top of each tree, shown in profile, with wings extended and their heads and beaks pointing upward toward the top of the tree.

The tree elements and band are all decorated with six-petaled rosettes, as well as circular gold pendants. When worn, this object would have made a lively impression with its moving, reflective parts and accompanying sounds.

What was the function of this object?

This object was discovered at Tomb 6 at Tillya Tepe (Image 14). This elaborate crown was the headpiece for an illustrious young woman, perhaps a nomadic princess. This crown was part of an extremely elaborate burial costume consisting of precious materials. In this tomb, the female figure's head bearing the crown was placed on a silver plate. Her head and upper body were decorated with a vast array of other ornaments. She wore pendants in her hair, and pendants on either side of her face. A golden band served to hold her jaw closed. She wore several necklaces, bracelets, and anklets made of gold and decorated with various gems. A silver coin had been placed in her mouth, and a coin was also found in her left hand. In her right hand was a gold scepter. At the center of her chest was the "Aphrodite of Bactria" ornament (Image 19). Other adornments included mirrors, clothing decorated with appliqués, and leather or felt slippers.

How does this object reflect nomadic culture?

An essential aspect of this object is that its parts are easily detachable and transportable. Assembled as a whole, the crown consisted of a tall and elaborate three-dimensional structure. It could also be collapsed and detached into one long band, and five separate tree-shaped pieces. At the back of the central band are five vertical tubes, into which a long pin on each of the five attachments is inserted to join the pieces. This design and construction demonstrate an essential quality of nomadic life: the ability to travel easily and transport valuable items.

The style and motifs of this crown do not relate to Greek, West Asian, or Northern Indian models. They do, however, relate to other nomadic Central Asian examples. Similar crowns have been found in Korea that date to the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE–668 CE). The tree and bird motifs are also found in Kazakhstan, for example, and are generally interpreted as representing the Tree of Life.

Image 14

The skeletal remains of the princess from Tillya Tepe, Tomb 6 as discovered by archaeologists. Photo copyright Viktor Sarianidi. Reprinted with permission.



Illustration of princess wearing crown from Tillya Tepe, Tomb 6.



What is shown here?

This photo shows the crowned female figure as she was discovered in Tomb 6 at Tillya Tepe. Her crown (Image 13) and numerous other ornaments, including necklaces, a gold band under the chin, appliqué ornaments (Image 19), and bracelets are visible.

Who was buried at the site?

Six individuals were buried at the site of Tillya Tepe, one male and at least five females. (Two more tombs at the site were looted and destroyed, their contents lost to the elements and exposure as well as to deliberate destruction and the ravages of war.) An important male leader, perhaps a royal chieftain, was buried here, surrounded by female family members and attendants who may have been sacrificed in conjunction with his death. The females buried at the site range in age from teenage to approximately 40 years old.

This crown, in combination with the other extremely elaborate and valuable jewelry found in this tomb, suggest that this woman may have been the most important female buried at the site, perhaps the principal wife of the male interred here.

The people buried here were probably nomadic invaders and conquerors who came from the east to raid Greco-Bactrian cities. Professor Viktor Sarianidi suggests that these interred nomads may possibly represent the same conquerors who eventually founded the Kushan dynasty in northern India and ruled a vast section of Central Asia.

Image 15

Sheath for three knives, 100 BCE–100 CE.
Afghanistan; Tillya Tepe, Tomb 4. Bronze,
gold, turquoise (within the sheath is the
iron blade of a dagger with a worked ivory
handle). *National Museum of Afghanistan.*



Illustration of prince wearing sheaths from
Tillya Tepe, Tomb 4.



What is this object?

This lavishly embellished object is a sheath that can hold three different blades. The rounded central section (illustrated here) contains an iron dagger with an ivory handle. On the backside of the sheath was another tube where two smaller daggers could be inserted. This construction reflects a Central Asian design, also seen in Siberia and Mongolia.

What was the function of this object?

This knife sheath was part of the burial adornment for the male figure buried in Tomb 4. He was also buried with a long sword on his left side, a dagger on his right, as well as bows, quivers, and arrows. The various weapons and weaponry accoutrements interred with this figure suggest he was as an important and strong military leader. Along with weapons and large jewelry items, this princely figure was also adorned with thousands of appliquéés sewn onto his clothing. Other emblems of his power and authority from the tomb site include a folding stool that might have served as a throne, and a horse sacrifice, associated with Central Asian burials.

What styles and motifs are represented on this object? Why is this important?

This object is remarkable for the variety and sources of stylistic motifs and details. The central raised portion of the sheath shows two fantastical animals engaged in combat, the lower a devouring dragon, and the upper also a dragon-like creature with antlers. The latter may refer to the deer, a common nomadic theme, while the dragon is a Chinese reference. These dragon-like creatures are embellished with pieces of turquoise inlay; the comma-shaped pieces in particular accentuating the shoulders of the lower figure relate directly to ancient Persian models. The high relief modeling of the figures, on the other hand, recalls the naturalism of Greek and Hellenistic influence. On the projecting lobes in the lower portion of the piece, two rams' heads appear, each face framed by curving horns. This motif is common in the jewelry from this site and also seems to represent a local or nomadic motif. Strikingly, the sheath is also decorated by a pattern of repeated inlay swastikas, filled with colored glass paste originally bright blue in color. The swastika is a well-known ancient Indian symbol, associated both with the sun and its life-giving properties, and with auspiciousness. The sheath is further embellished with repeated turquoise inlay designs, predominately small heart shapes that were probably understood as leaf or petal forms. This motif is likewise very popular in the jewelry from this site and reflects nomadic taste and techniques. This object, then, is an amazing synthesis of diverse sources: Chinese, Indian, Greek, West Asian, Central Asian, and nomadic, a vivid example of the multiculturalism of this environment.

Image 16

Ring with an image of Athena, 100 BCE–100 CE. Afghanistan, Tillya Tepe, Tomb 2. Gold. *National Museum of Afghanistan*.



Who is represented here?

The Greek goddess Athena, goddess of learning and wisdom, is depicted on this ring. Her name is inscribed in Greek letters. She wears a helmet and carries a characteristic sword and shield. The sway of her body actually indicates a seated position, although no throne is depicted. The goddess Athena was popular among many Central Asian nomads, probably as a result of her association with warfare and heroism.

What was the function of this object?

The name of Athena is inscribed in reverse, indicating that this ring served as a seal. When pressed into clay or wax the impression can be easily read. It was probably an emblem of authority and prestige. Several other rings from this site are also inscribed with classical subjects and rendered in a similar style.

How was this object made?

Unlike much of the jewelry in this exhibition, which was formed from sheets of gold, the main body of this ring is probably solid cast gold. It is inset with a smaller panel of a lighter colored gold. The image of Athena was created through embossing (working from beneath), and the name was engraved or carved into the front surface of the gold. The relatively soft quality of the gold material allows for greater artistic detail, although the medium is less durable than other materials such as hard stone.

Image 17

One of a pair of pendants showing the “Dragon Master,” 100 BCE–100 CE. Afghanistan; Tillya Tepe, Tomb 3. Gold, turquoise, garnet, lapis lazuli, carnelian, pearls. *National Museum of Afghanistan*.



What is represented here?

In each of this pair of pendants, a male figure is illustrated who wears a crown and garments whose stylistic sources are widespread. The crown may relate to West Asian or Persian models, while his garb appears to be nomadic, a thick robe associated with other Central Asian examples. An Indian-style circle or dot appears on his forehead. He is framed by two opposing dragon-like mythical creatures, with antlers resembling those of an ibex, wings, scales, and gaping open mouths. The central figure may represent a shaman or priestly figure.

What materials were used to create this work of art?

These pendants are relatively small, but extremely elaborate in their design and embellishment. The bodies of the central figure and dragon/antelope figures were created from gold sheet that was embossed and engraved. The three main pieces were then soldered together. The ibex horns are made from granulated gold shot soldered together. Various kinds of semiprecious stones are used to vividly embellish this piece, with comma-shaped turquoise serving to create scales and hooves or claws for the animal creatures, and garnets for their eyes. Other turquoise forms are inlaid in repeated decorative motifs in the lower part of the piece, and carnelian, lapis lazuli, and pearls are also used.

From heavy chains hang decorative elements and gold discs that may symbolize coins, prosperity, and wealth. The overall effect of the pendant was not only visually impressive and complex, but musical as well, as the various pieces moving together created tinkling sounds.

Image 18

Roman coin of Tiberius (obverse), 14–37
CE. Afghanistan; Tillya Tepe, Tomb 3.
Gold. *National Museum of Afghanistan.*



Roman coin of Tiberius (reverse), 14–37
CE. Afghanistan; Tillya Tepe, Tomb 3.
Gold. *National Museum of Afghanistan.*



What is this object and who is represented here?

The obverse (front side) of the coin is illustrated with the head of the Roman emperor Tiberius, crowned with a laurel wreath. Tiberius reigned from 14 CE to 37 CE. Roman inscriptions read TI CAESAR DIVI and AUG F AUGUSTUS (references to his rule and that of his predecessor). On the reverse, a seated female figure holds a staff and a laurel. She is framed by the inscription PONTIF[EX] MAXIM[US] (meaning supreme priest or ruler). This figure is believed to be Livia, the mother of Tiberius and wife of Augustus. She is presented here as a goddess of peace. It is believed that this coin was created in Gaul, part of the Roman Empire in present-day France, during the reign of Tiberius.

How did coins help to date material at this site, and the site itself?

Because we can precisely date such coins, they serve an essential role in establishing the earliest date for the site. The condition of a coin is also an important clue as to whether it was newly minted at the time of its interment, or had already been in circulation for some time, providing more information as to the approximate date of the burial.

This coin is the oldest Roman coin so far discovered in Afghanistan. It is believed that the coin made its way to this locality not across the Silk Road, but rather by a sea route, through southern India. Many Roman coins have been discovered in south and central India.

Why were coins included in a burial site?

Coins were part of the literal wealth of the interred. They reflected status and were essential to accompanying the deceased to the afterlife.

Image 19

Appliqué: the "Aphrodite of Bactria," 100 BCE–100 CE. Afghanistan; Tillya Tepe, Tomb 6. Gold, turquoise. *National Museum of Afghanistan*.



What is represented here?

The female figure here is generally identified as Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love also associated with erotic passion and fertility. In classical representations, she is often portrayed as a voluptuous, attractive female figure, sometimes with wings.

What was the function of this ornament?

This small but beautiful object was an appliqué, which served to ornament the princess or female figure in this tomb. This appliqué was the central ornament found in the middle of her chest, indicating that it was a favored object. The power and auspiciousness associated with this goddess may have held special favor for its original owner, for whom this object may have held particular totemic significance. It may have served as a fertility emblem.

How was this object made?

Like much of the jewelry in this exhibition, this figure was created from a sheet of gold that has been modeled and also engraved. This object may have been made from a die, and thus pressed in a stamping process; however the fact that it is unique may suggest that it is instead a one-of-a-kind

piece made through other means. Gold coins, which were produced in multiples rather than as singular objects, were created in metal dies where their forms were stamped out. The dies could be reused many times. Sculptural art works such as this one in gold appear to have been produced using multiple metalworking techniques involving significant time and individual workmanship.

Why is the style of this object important?

This object is another vivid example of the combination of styles and sources expressed in the art-works at this site. The goddess herself is clearly Hellenistic, and her wings, hairstyle, and draping garment reflect classical sources. At the same time many aspects reflect Indian models: her posture with one hand posed on a jutting hip, bracelets on the lower and upper arms, as well as a very notable circle engraved at the center of her forehead, and the three rings at her neck indicating beauty.

Image 20

The Bodhisattva Maitreya, 100–300 CE.
Pakistan; former kingdom of Gandhara.
Schist. *The Avery Brundage Collection*,
B60S597.



Who is depicted here?

This statue from the permanent collection of the Asian Art Museum depicts the bodhisattva or Buddha Maitreya, a figure from the Buddhist pantheon. Maitreya is considered the Buddha of the future, who will be born to teach enlightenment in the next age.

How does this sculpture relate to material in the exhibition?

The source of this stone sculpture is what is known today as Pakistan, in an ancient kingdom that spanned both Pakistan and Afghanistan and which is particularly associated with Buddhist monuments and sculpture. This sculpture, which belongs to the Asian Art Museum, shares important characteristics with objects explored in this special exhibition from the National Museum of Afghanistan. Most notably, the style of this figural sculpture relates directly to classical and Hellenistic models that, as we have seen through extensive evidence explored here, were prevalent throughout this part of the ancient world. In this particular sculpture, classical influence is found in the posture of the figure, the modeling of the arms and chest, the interest in representing drapery and its expression of the figural forms beneath, the idealized facial features, and the wavy naturalistic hair.

This figure is also clothed in relatively thick garments, which differ from the translucent, thin clothing depicted in other parts of the Buddhist world where the climate is hotter or more temperate. We have seen such Hellenistic figure types clad in heavy garments at Ai Khanum and Begram.

A striking aspect of this sculpture is the profusion of jewelry worn by the bodhisattva, including necklaces of many lengths and styles, bracelets, armbands, and hair ornaments. These symbols of wealth and prestige suggest Maitreya's princely status, and also relate directly to the range and complexity of jewelry we have seen in this exhibition. The bodhisattva wears many different kinds of overlapping necklaces, which are rendered in stone but reflect various kinds of metalworking and jewelry techniques, and like the ornaments particularly from Tillya Tepe, must have been in their original presentation lavish, visually complex, and even mobile and sonorous, appropriate to nomadic culture in this harsh but beautiful environment.