



Seated Buddha, approx. 200–300
Pakistan; perhaps Jamalgarhi, Peshawar valley,
ancient region of Gandhara
Schist
The Avery Brundage Collection, B60S393

WHO IS DEPICTED HERE?

This is an image of the preaching Buddha. He is seated in a full lotus position on a dais or throne, portions of which can be seen in the corners of the statue. Two smaller figures below the throne are shown in a position of reverence.

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE THE BUDDHA?

As a result of his enlightenment, the historical prince Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha (the enlightened one), and thereafter acquired various marks (*lakshana*) that identify him as the Buddha. These markings became formalized over several centuries as sculptors refined the image of the Buddha and adapted that image to local cultures.

One of these marks is the wisdom bump or protuberance on the head. The Buddha's hair is gathered in a top knot, in keeping with the fashion of the times and similar to the way ascetics (spiritual people who renounce the comforts of material life) gather their hair in India even today. The depiction of the top knot in sculpture became more formalized over time as a bump, and the hair developed into tiny stylized curls. Another mark is the *urna*, a tuft of hair between the eyebrows. The Buddha's earlobes are extended in reference to the heavy jewelry he wore previously as a prince. He wears a simple monk's robe, in keeping with his spiritual purpose, and sits in a lotus position. If his hands were lying flat in his lap, he would be meditating, but in this sculpture his hands are raised in a teaching position. The Buddha is also identified as an exceptional person by the addition of a halo behind his head, which may have derived from a sun disk, and may also refer to the wheel of the Buddhist law, a symbol for the Buddha's teachings.

WHAT IS THE STYLE OF THIS PIECE AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

We don't know exactly where this image came from, but many objects like it originate in the region near the border of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. During the early centuries of the Common Era, this region was called Gandhara, and was part of the Kushana empire. The Kushana rulers, who had migrated from western and central Asia, ruled a large part of central Asia and northern India. This area was crossroads of trade and cultures between Rome in the West and China in the East. It was during this time—centuries after the historical Buddha had lived—that images of the Buddha and related figures began to appear in large numbers. Many similar to this one were produced in Gandhara, and others were produced in the urban center of Mathura, south of present day Dehli. Such figures would have filled the niches on the exterior of stupa and monastic complexes.

Gandharan style has been described as expressing Greco-Roman influence. This is because Western art historians and archaeologists have drawn connections between the style of these figures and those seen in Hellenistic statues and friezes. Gandhara was an outpost in the Hellenistic world since the fourth century BCE, as well as a major crossroads of commerce and travel. There existed a great diversity in imagery and material culture in the region. Now, however, scholars tend to characterize this art as showing a mixture of influences—Western, Indian, and West Asian—since this area was very cosmopolitan and tolerant of many different belief systems at the time this statue was created.