Gandhara Heritage Sites in Pakistan

MAP OF GANDHARA HERITAGE SITES IN PAKISTAN

A Project by Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in collaboration with University of Wah and Gandhara Resource Center.
Pakistan is a young country, yet it is a land of ancient civilizations, comparable in antiquity to the Egyptian and Sumerian. Buddhism is one of those world religions that have spawned an ancient civilization, whose footprints are spread in all provinces of Pakistan, including Gilgit Baltistan, Baluchistan, Punjab and Sindh.

One of the most famous Centers of Buddhist civilization in Pakistan is called Gandhara, which means “the land of fragrance”. The ancient region of Gandhara, known for its scenic natural landscape with rich, well-watered valleys, and clear-cut hills is situated in the present day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. The kingdom of Gandhara was ruled from capitals at present day Charsadda, (Pushkalavati), Taxila (Takshashila) and Peshawar (Purushapura), which in their days of former glory had one of most splendid art and architecture. Once strategically located at the junction of caravan routs on the Silk road that linked China and Central Asia with the Mediterranean world, Gandhara became a melting point of various civilizations, which include Achaemenids, Hellenistic, Mauryans, Bactrian-Greek, Kusha, Gupta, Huns and eventually the Muslims.

The Buddhist heritage in Pakistan, consisting of stupas and monasteries, is largely concentrated in the ancient borders of Gandhara, though the archeological remains of Buddhist civilization are found in parts of Punjab and Sindh. Gandhara art, for which Pakistan is known for all over the world, emerged under the Kushans from first to fifth centuries C.E., who ruled Gandhara as well as Sindh, as a distinctive style of sacred art, marked by Greco-Roman elements. As an aesthetic expression of Buddhist ideas, Gandhara sculpture and relief illustrated the stories of Buddha and Bodhisattvas, and other members of the Buddhist pantheon that adorned the stupas and monasteries spread all over Pakistan.