

## Detailed file – Head of Buddha (P650)

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### What do we like in this sculpture ?

- A face of high quality, marked by an extreme refinement of details, lively hair, and an expression of grace and majesty.
- A supple modeling made possible by the use of a soft schist with gray, green and ocher foliage which enhances the eyes by giving them softness and intensity.
- The successful fusion of a face with features marked by Greek influence and Buddhist iconographic elements of Indian origin.

## I. Detailed description

### **Head of a Buddha (P650)**

*Schist*

*Ancient region of Gandhāra*

*Circa 3<sup>th</sup> century*

*H : 18 cm or 7 in*

### **The first face of the Buddha**

This figure of Buddha shows an exceptional quality, characteristic of the most prestigious and high-quality workshops of Peshawar (Pakistan). It is in this region that the figure of the historical Buddha appeared for the first time (563- c. 480 BC), whose literature and abundant artistic productions contributed to the diffusion of the Buddhist doctrine along the ancient roads of the silk. The head, very slightly tilted, gives off according to the codes of "Greco-Buddhist" art of Gandhāra a feeling of fullness and piety. Conforming to the distinctive iconographic prescriptions which characterize the representations of Śākyamuni (*lakṣaṇa*), the face has a tuft of hair or *ūrṇā* between the eyebrow arches, a symbol of his omniscience, while the eyelids, half-closed, are the sign of his deep meditation. The mouth, small and fleshy, almost sensual, is characteristic of the Gandhāran naturalist style, as well as the hair treated in fine wavy locks brought back in bun on the top of the head, at the place of the *uṣṇīṣa*.

### **A witness to the artistic effervescence of Gandhāran school**

A perfect illustration of the art of Gandhāra at its peak, this head is an example of the Indo-Hellenistic artistic and cultural interbreeding which expresses itself fully under the royal patronage of the Kuṣāṇs or Yuezhi rulers (1st century BC-240 AD). Alongside the old aniconical representations, this figure deploys an iconography whose codes are permanently fixed throughout History. It testifies to the contributions of Greek statuary through the classicism of this Apollonian face, its naturalism, visible in the overall plastic harmony of the face, as well as the Indo-Parthian influences in stylistic codes, in particular the representation of the bun devolved on the rider princes.

### **A high quality shale**

The preferred material of this Greco-Buddhist art, schist is present in various forms throughout the Gandhāra region and its periphery. This sculpture thus reveals great stylistic similarities with the creations of Takt-i-Bahi in the outlining of the reliefs of the hairstyle as well as the stereotypy of the faces. The quality of the dense shale used for this sculpture is another indication of its achievement for an elite patron. The use of this soft stone allows a lot of ease in its treatment and to obtain, like here, faces with an incredibly supple shape. The mouth, with its particularly sensitive production, is a good example. On the reverse, the presence of a prop connecting the back of the skull to the nimbus, an iconographic device of Iranian origin that highlights the figure of the Blessed One, is still visible.

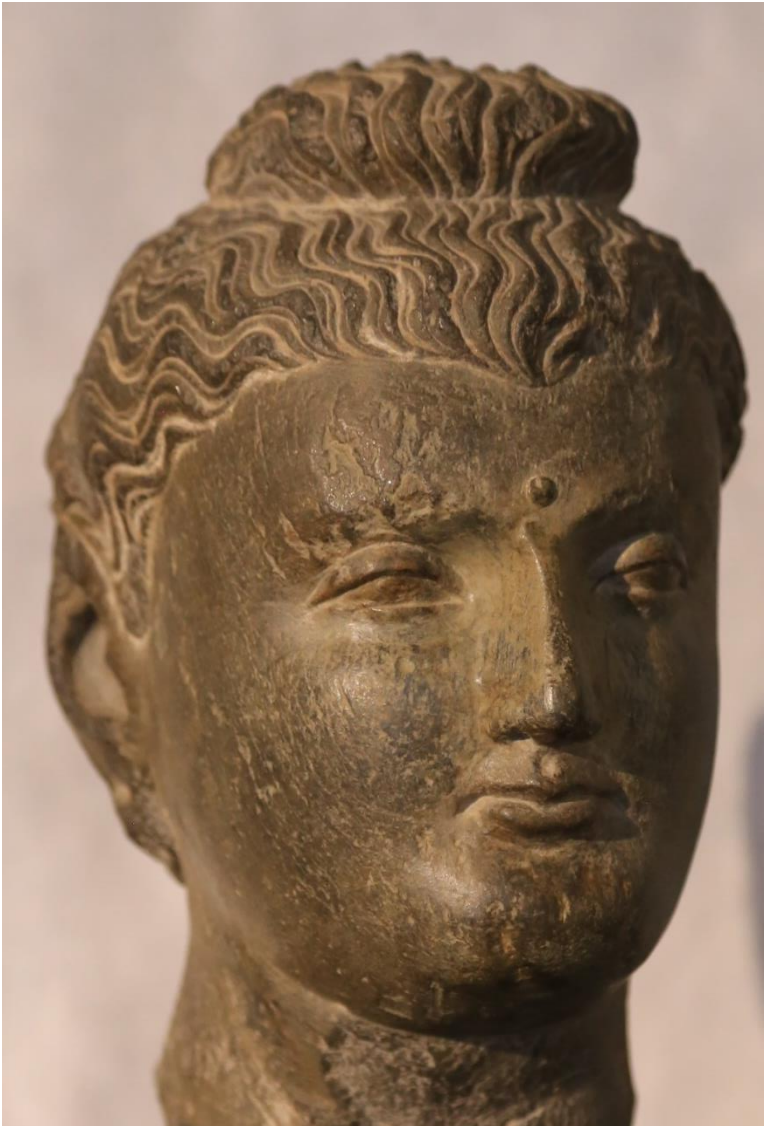
II. Image of the piece – view 1



III. Image of the piece – view 2



#### IV. Images of the piece – detail view



The head presented here is characteristic of Gandhāra art at its peak. The proportions of the face avoid the excessive geometrization that characterizes so many heads. The half-closed eyes hint at the intensity of the Buddha's meditation and translate it plastically.

Note also the very neat style of the hair, with lively wavy locks, which can only be found on the most successful heads. This is a particularism which will become the norm following the artistic innovations of Gandhāra. According to the Buddhist hagiography, the blessed abandons the princely attributes and cuts his bun when he leaves the family palace, but the Kuṣāṇ artists will ignore this interpretation in order to signal and keep this bun, characteristic of the attributes of the Kuṣāṇ nobility. Incidentally, this Gandhāran bun will, over the centuries, be interpreted as one of the 32 distinctive marks of the Buddha.

## V. Provenance

. This piece comes from Galerie De Ruimte, Eersel, (Jean and Marcel Nies) before 1985; it was then acquired by a private collector in the Netherlands.

. 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 Buddha head is made of schist, dated around the 3rd century and is 18 cm high or 7 in. It is carved in high relief and belonged to a statue which was to represent the standing Buddha. At the back, the work presented a halo that has now disappeared. Some losses are obvious but quite logical given the age of the work: the earlobes are missing and spallings are to be noted on the whole sculpted surface, in particular part of the hair (at the right rear), the right eyebrow and the neck. Other slight asperities are visible on the sculpted surface. One can observe a filling at the level of the bridge of the nose, extending superficially on both sides: a restoration of very frequent use because of the known fragility of this protruding part. Sand concretions are visible in the more recessed parts of the sculpture and similar residue covers the break in the neck. At the back right part of the hair, more precisely behind the ear, the hair appears barely sculpted, as if this part was not meant to be seen.

*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 gray schist Buddha statue in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, measuring 93 cm in height or 36 ½ in.

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### Buddha

3rd century


Pakistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, possibly Takht-i-bahi monastery, ancient region of Gandhara

📍 On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in [Gallery 235](#)


This refined Buddha, the finest example of this iconic image type to appear on the market in at least the last decade, is the product of one of the great workshops active in the central Gandharan region of modern day Pakistan. It is of exceptional quality and must have been done by a master sculptor as is evidenced by the figure's beautifully carved face, dramatically cascading drapery folds, naturalistic hair and finely finished surface. The quality of the dense schist used for this sculpture is another indication that it was produced for an elite patron.



Public Domain 3/4 view of head



Public Domain Head



## VIII. Comparable museum artwork - 2

A statue of the Buddha in gray schist in the British Museum, 34 cm high or 13 in.

The British  
Museum

**Object Type**

figure

**Museum number**

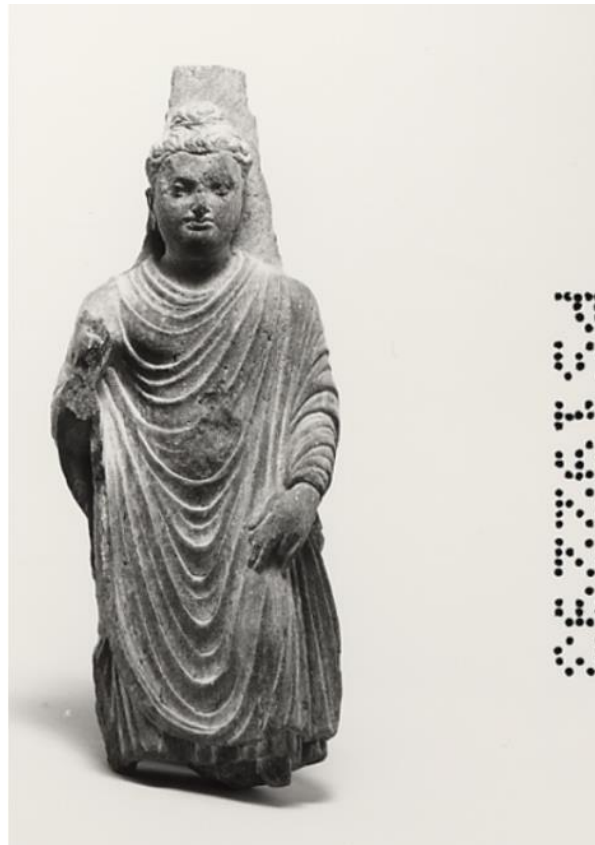
1898,0913.4

**Title**

Object: The Buddha

**Description**

Standing Buddha, in 'abhaya-mudra'. At the low neckline the backthrow is barely distinguished. The drapery folds are regular terraces and ridges in the two schemes. The head is oval, the face fleshy and the hair undulating into the *uṣṇiṣa*, which is secured at its base by a narrow band. The eyes are almost round under indistinct eyebrows and the ears are short. The *ūrṇā* is barely distinguishable; the mouth is summarily shaped and the chin is full. The left hand is complete and has long fluid fingers, one flexed under the palm with the loop of drapery hardly visible; a modest fall of drapery is gathered below it and part of the backthrow is distinct under the forearm. The figure stands with the left knee forward.





## 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.