

Galerie Hioco

Bust of Buddha Śākyamuni (P635)



What do we like in this sculpture?

- Its early datation, around the 10th century, and its significant size: this kind of pieces have become extremely rare on the market!
- The polish of its black stone, the finish of its details, the elegance of its proportions: all the harmony and balance of Pāla art are brought together in this very beautiful sculpture.
- The unique contrast between the incredible clarity of the carving and the unstructured form of the old breaks. The combination of the two creates a most organic effect.

I. Detailed description

Bust of Śākyamuni Buddha (P635)

Black stone

Northeast India (Bihār, Bengal)

9th-10th century, Pāla dynasty

H. 43 cm or 16 7/8 in

A clear iconography

This very beautiful representation of the Blessed One is of a very significant size. One must imagine that originally the Buddha, of heroic size, occupied the major part of a stela with a non-openworked background that magnified him. He was probably figured sitting in *vajraparyāṅkāsa* on a lotus, both legs bent with the soles of the feet visible: the seated position can indeed be concluded from the stone block that has reached us fragmentary. By comparison with stelae preserved in the greatest museums, his right hand either sketched the fear-allaying gesture (*abhaya mudrā*) or made the earth witness gesture (*bhūmisparśa mudrā*), while his left hand rested in his lap.

A codified representation

Buddha is perfectly recognizable here: wearing the monk's robe (*saṃghāṭī*), also called the "outer cloth" (*uttarāsaṅga*), this garment covers his left shoulder only. Of the distinctive signs (*lakṣaṇa*) of a "great man" (*mahāpuruṣa*), tradition kept only two essential items in its images, both of which are evident here: the fleshy protuberance on the crown of the head (*uṣṇīṣa*) covered with well-defined curls, and the whorl of hair on the lower forehead (*ūrṇā*). The earlobes distended by the wearing of heavy gold jewelry demonstrate the renouncing of the vanities of his former worldly life.

A purified style, characteristic of an early datation

Absolutely characteristic of Pāla stelae, the face was surrounded by a nimbus fringed with stylized flames that is still visible above his right shoulder and suggesting the light radiating from the Buddha. One must admire his face, both powerful and charismatic, with fine features and a particularly sensitive modelling. Typical of this art, extreme attention is paid to the contour lines. The chin and mouth are slightly prominent and the arched eyebrows meet in a V shape. Stylistically speaking, the stela appears to predate the strong stylization that characterizes Pāla art as of the 11th century. The elongated face, with its full lips and somewhat protruding eyes, refers to post-Gupta art of the 7th-8th century, and beyond that to classic Indian art of the 5th-6th century.

II. Image of the piece – front view



III. Image of the piece – left three-quarter view



IV. Image of the piece – left profile view



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V. Image of the piece – back view



VI. Image of the piece – right profile view



VII. Image of the piece – right three-quarter view



VIII. Image of the piece – detail view



IX. Provenance: in all transparency!

- . This piece comes from a private German collection, acquired in the 1960s (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.

X. Condition report: our scientific approach

This fragment of stele representing a bust of Buddha is dated to the 9th-10th century, Pāla period, is made of black stone and is 43 cm high (or 16 7/8 in). Some losses are obvious but quite logical given the age of the piece and the known fragility of the most protruding parts: Part of the left forearm and a large part of the right arm of the Buddha have disappeared, as has almost the entire lower part of his body and most of the background of the stele. The face is overall well preserved, although the nose is partly missing and it should be noted that on the surface, the lips, the right eye and the chin have also suffered minor material losses. All these breaks appear to be old, as evidenced by the weathered surface.

The surface of the stone has been polished and waxed, which is indicated by the particularly smooth and dark appearance of the Buddha's body. Very superficial scuffs are visible all over the sculpted surface and sand concretions survive in the most recessed parts of the sculpture. Rare small golden dots are visible, suggesting that the piece was also once gilded, at least in part, to honour the Blessed One. In the lower part, there are clearly visible traces of tools, as a result of a reduction of the block of stone at a more recent time. No 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.

XI. Comparable museum artwork – The Guimet Museum

A Pāla stele depicting the Buddha sketching the earth witness gesture, in the collections of the Guimet Museum in Paris (MG17842):



La victoire sur Mara (Maravijaya)

COTE CLICHE	95-018842	DIMENSIONS	Hauteur : 0.48 m Largeur : 0.4 m Profondeur : 15 m
N° D'INVENTAIRE	MG17842	MODE D'ENTREE	achat 1931
FONDS	Arts Asiatiques	LOCALISATION	Paris, musée Guimet - musée national des Arts asiatiques
DESCRIPTION:	"La mort", Mara est la personnification de la mort et tentateur du futur Buddha, "Maravijaya" Qualificatif du Buddha vainqueur du démon de la tentation et de la mort Mâra, parvenant ainsi à atteindre l'Eveil.	CREDIT	Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Hervé Lewandowski
PERIODE	10e siècle dynastie Pala-Sena (8e-12e siècle)		
SITE DE PRODUCTION	Bihar (origine) provenance incertaine		
TECHNIQUE/MATIERE	sculpture (technique)		

XII. Comparable museum artwork – The British Museum

A Pāla stele depicting the Buddha sketching the fear-allaying gesture, in the collections of the British Museum in London (1887,0717.47):

The British
Museum

Description

A figure in stone of the Buddha seated on a lotus throne with seated lions underneath, the right hand raised in abhaya-mudra, all below a parasol with streamers and with stupas on either side. Inscribed.

Cultures/periods

Pala

Production date

11thC

Production place

Made in: India (Eastern)

Asia: South Asia: India

Findspot

Found/Acquired: Bodhgayā

Asia: South Asia: India: Bihar (State): Gaya



XIII. Our guarantees: for a serene acquisition!

- 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.