

Exploring Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites in Pakistan: Historical and Spiritual Significance

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Abstract: This research delves into the Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Pakistan, unraveling their historical and spiritual significance. The paper aims to shed light on the role of these sites which play in attracting pilgrims and tourists interested in Buddhist heritage. Pakistan, with its rich cultural and religious diversity, boasts several sites deeply rooted in Buddhism, offering a unique blend of history, spirituality, and architectural marvels. The study begins with an overview of Buddhism's historical presence in the region, highlighting its rise and establishment in ancient Gandhara. Subsequently, the paper explores specific pilgrimage sites, such as Taxila, Takht-i-Bahi, and Julian, unraveling their historical contexts and religious importance. Taxila, an ancient centre of learning and Buddhist philosophy, serves as a testament to the region's intellectual and spiritual legacy. Takht-i-Bahi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, showcases exceptional Buddhist monastic architecture, providing insights into the daily lives of monks during ancient times. Julian, with its ancient stupas and monastic remains, adds to the spiritual aura of the region. Furthermore, the research examines the role of these pilgrimage sites in attracting pilgrims and tourists. The interplay between spirituality, history, and tourism is analyzed, emphasizing how these sites act as conduits for cultural exchange and understanding. The paper also investigates the impact of tourism on the preservation of these heritage sites, balancing the economic benefits with the need for responsible tourism practices. Through a multidisciplinary approach that combines historical research, cultural analysis, and tourism studies, this paper contributes to the broader understanding of Buddhist heritage in Pakistan. The findings aim to encourage sustainable tourism practices, fostering the preservation of these sacred sites for future generations while promoting cultural exchange and dialogue.

Keywords: Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites, Gandhara, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Historical and Spiritual Significance

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Introduction

Ancient Pakistan has been home to many civilizations, and one of them is Buddhist civilization. Buddhism has significantly influenced the history and culture of Pakistan since its introduction in the third century B.C. The signs of Buddhist heritage in Pakistan, scattered in almost all the regions of Pakistan (Akram; 1955: i), spanning over a millennium, have left an enduring imprint on the country's architecture, art, literature, and philosophy. A leading example of this heritage is the Gandhara School of Art and Architecture, which flourished in the ancient Gandhara region. Historically, the term Gandhara applied to the western region of Pakistan around Peshawar Valley, which is bordered by the Sulaiman range on the west and by the Indus River on the east (Brancaccio and Behrendt, 2006, 1; Jansen, 2009, 27–35). The geographical limitation of Gandhara extends to its cultural influence to the east and west, and the new term used Greater Gandhara (Sharma, 2004,45) as a broader sense based on Gandhara art and extent to some other regions, particularly the Taxila, Dir, Malakand, Swat valley (Marshall, 1973), Bajaur agencies, eastern Afghanistan, and even parts of Kashmir (Gazetteer of North West Frontier Province: 1979; 124; Nadiem, 2008, 9–11).

The history of Buddhist art and architecture might date from the time of Asoka Maurya. The Dharmarajika stupa (Taxila) (Marshall, 1960), Butkara I stupa (Swat) (Beal, 1969, 125) (Stein, 1930, 48) (Faccenna, 1980) (Jansen, 2009, 28) at Jamal Garha and Mirpur Khas (Sindh) were among the earliest stupas, erected on the orders of King Asoka and contained the real relics of the Buddha (Beal, 1969, 125) (DPPN, 1, 218). The Graeco-Bactrian kingdom (Tarn, 1902) was ruled with new philosophical and cultural approaches and gave new dimensions to the architecture and art of Gandhara (Errington, 1994). They were the founders of the Hellenistic school of art, well-known as Gandhara art (Dunbar, 2004). The Indo-Scythian and the Indo-Parthian set new trends in the local traditions of art and architecture. It is believed they were the founders of Gandhara art. Kushan's rule, especially the Kanishka-I (78 A.D.) period, is considered the golden age of art and architecture (Kuwayama, 2010, 170). Hundreds of stupas and monasteries were erected by King Kanishka throughout his empire (Beal, 1984, 60–61) and decorated with sculptures (Pugachenkova and Dar and Sharma and Joyenda and Siddiqi, 1996). In Peshawar, Kanishka built a stupa consisting of thirteen stories with a total height of 213 metres (Spooner, 1908–9, 38–59). The grand stupas and wonderful monasteries were established in these regions, where Buddhist monks spent their lives in meditation. This artistic tradition is renowned for its distinctive fusion of Greek and Indian styles, reflecting the cultural exchanges that characterised the region. Sculptures created during this era represent some of the most iconic forms of Buddhist art in the world. Monastic institutions established by Buddhist monks played a pivotal role in providing education, healthcare, and various social services to the local populace. These institutions also fostered trade and commerce, contributing to the development of prosperous towns and cities in the region. Today, the Buddhist heritage sites in Pakistan serve as major attractions for global tourists, drawn to the rich history and cultural significance of these locations. As Pakistan endeavours to promote Buddhist tourism, understanding the historical importance of Buddhism in the country and its impact on culture, society, and the economy becomes important.

Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites in Pakistan

During the spread and development of Buddhism in ancient Pakistan, several centres of excellence were developed throughout the ancient land of Pakistan. Among the exceptionally rich centres were Gandhara and Sindh. The Gandhara Buddhist site is divided into three main valleys: Taxila, Peshawar, and Swat.

Taxila valley

The ancient city of Taxila (Takshashila), a UNESCO World Heritage Site located near the modern city of Islamabad, was an important centre for Buddhist learning in ancient times. It flourished as a centre for education and attracted scholars, students, and teachers from across the Buddhist world. It was renowned for its educational institutions, including the famous Taxila University, which is considered one of the earliest universities in the world. The city served as a strategic crossroads for trade and cultural exchange between the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, and the Persian Empire. Its location made it a melting pot of diverse cultures, ideas, and traditions. It served as an important hub along the Silk Road and was a melting pot of various cultures. Taxila came under the influence of various civilizations, including the Persian Empire under Darius the Great's and Alexander the Great's conquests. The city absorbed elements of Persian, Greek, and Indian cultures, creating a unique blend of influences. Taxila has a rich history dating back to the Gandhara period (6th century BCE to 11th century CE), making it one of the oldest cities in South Asia. Taxila flourished during the Maurya to Kushan periods in ancient Indian history. Under the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, Taxila became an important centre for spreading Buddhist teachings and principles of non-violence. The Buddhist Jataka tales, which recount the previous lives of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), mention Taxila as a significant place where the Buddha-to-be practiced virtues and accumulated merit and was closely associated with Buddhism, and numerous Buddhist monasteries, stupas, and relics have been discovered in the region.

Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites in Taxila Valley

The Great Stupas of Taxila are one of the most significant Buddhist structures, reflecting the city's role in the spread and development of Buddhism. It is the home of many grand Buddhist establishments, eleven miles long and five miles wide, protected by a natural defense of high ridges and irrigated by the Haro River. The most representative architectural specimens have been excavated in the Taxila Valley. The Taxila valley was first investigated by Sir Alexander Cunningham (Khan & Lane 2006, 17), and Sir John Marshall was the first archaeologist to regularly excavate there and expose the region's hidden history. The richness of Gandhara culture is evident from the remains of the cities and other sites, which are mainly of religious nature (Nadiem, 2008, 65).

The city boasted scores of Buddhist stupas and monasteries embroidered with beautiful specimens of Gandhara art. The archaeological probe in this valley has laid bare the remains of three city sites, namely Bhir Mound (Sharif 1969, 6–99, Bahadur Khan, 2002), Sirkap, and Sirsukh. There are many stupas and monasteries including stupas of Dharmarajika (Marshall, 1951, 233) (Dani, 1999, 118) (Ahmad, 2013, 411), Badalpur stupa (Marshall, 1951) (Dani, 1999, 150), Mohra Moradustupa and monastery (Marshall, 1960, 156–157) (Dani 1999, 142), Kunalastupa and monastery (Marshall, 1951), stupa of Giri (Dani, 1999:140), Khader Mohra and Akhauristupa (Marshall, 1951:315), Manikyalastupa (Marshall, 1951) (Khan & Lone, 2006, 26) (Kiwaiama, 2010:173), Lalchakstupa (Marshall, 1960, 180), Bhallarstupa (Beal, 1959, 138) (Marshall, 1960, 178–179), Bhamalastupa (Marshall, 1951) (Dani, 1999, 149), Jaulian Monastery (Marshall: 1999, 145) (Dani, 1999; 147) (Nadiem, 2008, 77), Pippala stupa and monastery (Marshall, 1960, 163) and Ghai Monastery (Marshall, 1960, 154–155). These stupas and the Taxila Museum house an extensive collection of Buddhist artifacts, sculptures, and relics, providing pilgrims and tourists with a glimpse into the vibrant past of Buddhism in these regions. The ancient ruins of Taxila are a testament to the spiritual heritage of the region. The presence of Buddhist structures and artifacts reflects the spiritual pursuits of ancient inhabitants and the influence of Buddhist philosophy.

Important Buddhist Pilgrim Sites in Taxila valley

Taxila is considered a sacred site for Buddhists, and it attracts pilgrims from around the world. The Buddhist monastic complex and stupas, such as Dharmarajika Stupa and Mohra Muradu Stupa, are revered by followers of Buddhism. Pilgrims are drawn to Taxila to explore the remnants of monasteries, stupas, and relics, providing a tangible connection to the historical development of Buddhism. Here are several factors that highlight the role of Taxila's Buddhist sites in attracting pilgrims and tourists interested in Buddhist heritage. Pilgrims can explore these ancient structures, gaining insight into the spiritual practices of early Buddhists.

Sirkap

Sirkap (Fig. 1) is an archaeological site near Taxila, founded by the Greeks in the 2nd century BC. It holds historical significance as a testament to the cultural fusion during its occupation by the Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, and Kushans. Its strategic location facilitated economic and cultural exchanges in the Gandhara region. The ruins include stupas (Khan & Lone, 2006, 18), monastic complexes, and the remains of a city that was an integral part of the Gandhara region. Buddhist stupas with strong Hellenistic decorative elements can be found throughout the Sirkap site (Nadiem, 2008, 70). The site's occupation for three centuries reflects successive civilizations, with diverse artefacts such as pottery, coins, jewellery, and sculptures providing tangible evidence of material culture and trade networks. The discovery of ritual objects and relic caskets underscores its connection to religious practices, offering insights into ancient inhabitants' spiritual beliefs. Sirkap's spiritual importance is tied to Buddhism, evident in the presence of stupas and monastic complexes with Hellenistic, Persian, and Buddhist influences, showcasing syncretism.

Dharmarajika Stupa and Monastery

The Dharmarajika stupa (Fig. 2) of Taxila was a prominent centre of Buddhism. It holds historical and spiritual significance in the Buddhist traditions. It is one of the oldest Buddhist edifices in Taxila (Marshal, 1951, 233). It was built in the 3rd century BCE, under the patronage of the Indian Emperor Asoka, to enshrine relics of the Buddha. His support for the Buddhist faith left a lasting impact on the cultural and religious landscape of the region. It provides insights into the development of Buddhist architecture, art, and religious practices during ancient times. It is situated three kilometres east of the first city site of Bhir mound and Taxila museum (Dani, 1999, 118). This stupa was discovered during the archaeological survey of India and excavated by Sir John Marshal in 1913–1914 A.D. The whole complex of Dharmarajika consists of two parts: the first part is called the stupa area, which is a combination of several types of construction, especially a group of small votive stupas that bound the great main stupa of different periods, and the second part is called the monastic area, which is situated to the north side (Marshal, 1960, 105). The stupa was the biggest and most conspicuous of all such erections at Taxila. The stupa is a dome-shaped structure that typically contains relics or sacred objects. The Dharmarajika Monastery contributed to cultural and educational exchanges between various regions and served as a centre for Buddhist monastic activities and learning (Dani, 1999, 126). Dharmarajika stupa attracts visitors and pilgrims, contributing to its preservation, paying homage to the Buddha, and gaining spiritual inspiration.

Mohra Moradustupa and Monastery

The Mohra Moradu (Fig. 3) is a great Buddhist monastic complex in Taxila, dating back to the 2nd century during the Kushan period. It is a significant marker of the flourishing Buddhist culture in the

region. The remains of Mohra Moradu located in a secluded valley surrounded by mountains about a mile or 1.5km to the southeast of the city of Sirsukh, 5 km from Sirkap, and between Sirkap and Jaulian, a little off the road to Kanpur. It is situated in a small, isolated valley at the back of the village of Mohra Moradu, surrounded by beautiful green mountains. The stupa lies on the western side and the monastery on the eastern side was built in the 2nd century during the Kushan period, The remains of Mohra Muradu comprise two stupas on the oblong terrace and a Buddhist monastery excavated by Sir John Marshal in 1915 and by Abdul Qadir in 1994. The stupa stands on a double rectangular terrace with a balanced plan for the steps on the east (Marshal, 1960, 156-157). The monastery consists of square courts of cells, a hall and the biggest assembly hall, a kitchen, a refectory, and a guardroom (Dani, 1999, 142). The monastery's layout and discovered sculptures speak to its functional and artistic dimensions. The double-story structure emphasizes the educational and communal aspects of Buddhist monastic life. Many coins of the Kushan kings (Marshal, 1960, 160) Huvishka and Vasudeva, were discovered on the floor of the monastery hint at political connections. White Hun's destruction in the 5th century and subsequent neglect highlight historical challenges. Among other antiquities, the best collection of stucco sculptures discovered from this monastic establishment mostly shifted to the Taxila Museum. Mohra Moradu stands as a testament to the rich historical and spiritual heritage of ancient Buddhist culture in Taxila, offering insights into architectural, cultural, and religious dimensions of the time.

Bhamala Stupa and Monastery

The Bhamala stupa (Fig. 4) is a unique Buddhist establishment in Taxila Valley near Haripur District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, dating back to the 2nd–5th century A.D., situated close to Khanpur Dam at the very head of the Haro, about ten miles to the east of Sirsukh and 20 km from Taxila Museum in the lap of the Muree Hills. The Bhamala Buddhist complex consists of a stupa and a monastery. It has revealed a wealth of history and treasure and is known for its 1700-year-old sculpture of the Buddha, known as the oldest such statue in the world. It is believed to be one of the best-preserved sites in the Taxila Valley. In the middle rises the solid mass of the principal stupa, set round with a group of nineteen small votive stupas and chapels, and to the east of it is a rectangular monastery mostly of the same type as seen at Jaulian in Taxila. The main stupa has a rise of over 30 feet. The shape of the main stupa is very unique in its type: a cruciform plan, consisting of a high square base for the dome above with offset projections and an impressive flight of steps rising in the middle of all four cardinal directions, which is one of the last steps of the evolution of the Gandhara stupa. This is one of the few sites in the world to have the cruciform stupa, which was reserved for Buddha himself. The cruciform design further evolved into the towering design of the Kanishkastupa. It is the biggest and largest Buddhist stupa surviving example of this shape in the Taxila and Gandhara regions. Firstly, Marshal excavated this site, and in 2017, excavation started again. During the new excavation, 510 relics were discovered, including terracotta, stucco sculptures, iron objects, and coins from the late Kushan period. The recent discoveries confirmed that the site dates back to the 3rd century A.D., and Kashmir's influence has added new dimensions to what we know about these ancient civilizations. It is a very important and different Buddhist site from other sites in Taxila (Dawn, 5-3-2015). It is an emerging site for Buddhist pilgrims and is considered an essential archaeological find for understanding the Buddhist heritage of the region.

Julian Monastery

The Buddhist monastery of Jaulian (Fig. 5), locally known as “Jay Waliyan” in Taxila, meaning the seat of the saint, derives its name from the nearby modern village of Jaulian. The monastery is located some 10 kilometers from the Sirkap, 7 kilometers from the Taxila museum, and less than a mile northeast

of Mohra Moradu Khanpur Taxila road. This Buddhist monastic establishment is spread at an ideal place on the height of some 100 meters or 300 feet of a smooth hill. The monuments of the Jaulian are the most highly ornamented and best-preserved sites in Taxila. The overview of the surrounding hills and valleys from this 92-metre-high religious establishment is simply fascinating and bracing for the spirit (Nadiem, 2008, 77), as is the traditional style of Buddhist cult for concentration and to avoid the interference of worldly affairs and attractions. The monastic establishment of Jaulian was originally built in the 2nd century A.D. during the Kushan period, reflecting the flourishing Buddhist culture in the region during that time, but the addition of buildings, along with repairs and elaboration of the old ones, continued up to the fifth century. It is a double-story monastic complex (Marshal, 1999, 145). The Julian Monastery holds significant historical and spiritual importance in the context of Buddhism and the ancient Gandhara region.

The Jaulian complex comprises a main stupa and 27 smaller stupas, a monastery with 59 small chapels, two quadrangles around which monastic living quarters entrance on different levels, the upper to the south, the lower to the north with a third, and on the west a smaller court adjoining the stupa and monastery. The main stupa of Jaulian is surrounded by 21 smaller votive stupas, mostly built on relics of revered monks, and represents a focal point for religious ceremonies and worship, emphasising the spiritual significance of the site. The monastic buildings are situated on the eastern side (Nadiem, 2008, 77). The sculptures situated in the stupa are mostly preserved and are mostly now in museums. The Jaulian Monastery holds dual significance as a historical testament to the Buddhist civilization in ancient Gandhara and as a spiritual centre that provided a sacred space for Buddhist monks to pursue their spiritual path. It serves as a testament to the artistic and architectural achievements of the Gandhara civilization, attracting tourists interested in historical and cultural heritage. The Dharmarajika Stupa and the Jaulian Monastery in Taxila are particularly respected by Buddhist pilgrims. These sites offer a peaceful atmosphere for meditation and reflection. Taxila's historical and spiritual significance lies in its role as an ancient centre of learning, a crossroads of civilizations, and a sacred site with deep connections to Buddhism and other religious traditions. The ruins of Taxila continue to be a source of fascination for historians, archaeologists, and spiritual seekers.

Peshawar Valley

The Peshawar Valley, located in the northwestern part of Pakistan, has a rich historical and spiritual significance that spans thousands of years. The ancient city of Pushkalavati, which means "town of lotus," now known as Charsada (Hargreaves, 1986), served as Gandhara's ancient capital (Wheeler, 1962) before Purusapura, located in the Peshawar Valley (Pakistan), was an important centre of the Gandhara civilization. Fahein called it Po-lu-sha and Hiuen-Tsang Po-lu-sha-pu-lo, the capital of Kanishka (Khan & Lone, 2006, 28). Peshawar has historically been a crossroads for various civilizations and cultures due to its strategic location on the ancient trade routes connecting Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, which played a crucial role in the spread of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism gave birth to the most tangible form of Gandhara art (Zwalf, 1996): the ornamentation of stupas. The Peshawar Valley was a significant centre for Gandhara art, which flourished during the Gandhara civilization. This art form, influenced by Greek, Persian, and Indian styles, is characterized by the representation of Buddha and other Buddhist figures in sculpture and other forms of art. Many Gandharan art pieces are found in the region, contributing to its cultural richness. Buddhism played a major role in the spiritual history of the Peshawar Valley. The Buddhist archaeological sites in and around Peshawar are important for pilgrimage and attract scholars and tourists interested in ancient history (Khan & Lone, 2006, 28).

Buddhist Sites in Peshawar Valley

The region was home to numerous Buddhist monasteries, stupas, and other religious structures. Firstly, Alexander Cunningham discovered these sites in 1870 and excavated them by Gerrick (1882), Vogel & Marshal (1903), Wheeler (1958), and Dani (1963–64). Ahmad Hassan Dani played an important role in the archaeology, art, and architecture of Gandhara. He discovered many sites in Gandhara and excavated them. Dani (1963), (1966), (1988), (1995), and (2001) are great contributions in the field of art and architecture. The Kushan period is represented by a large number of Buddhist sites throughout Peshawar valley, such as ChankaDheri in the Mardan (Saeed, 2020), Ranigat (Cunningham, 1871) (Garrick & Cunningham, 1969) (Nishikawa, 2011), Zardheri (Saeed, 2020) (Khan & Lane, 2006), Shahbazghari (Khan & Lane, 2006) (Dani, 1965–1966), and Sehr-i-Behlol (Spooner, 1907, 1909–1910) (Hargreaves, 1920–11) (Bargar & Wright, 1955–56). The Thareli mountain range is situated to the northeast of Jamalgrahi. From 1963 to 1976, the Thareli mountain range to the northeast of Jamalgrahi was the subject of research by Kyoto University (1976) (Mizuno & Higuchi, 1978). The Kyoto University mission conducted a survey from 1962 to 1967 and mentioned that Mekhasanda remains with a stupa, and small stupas are located to the northeast of Shahbazgarhi. At this location, sculptures made of stone and stucco were also discovered (Mizuno, 1989). Firstly, Foucher excavated some of the eastern portion of the stupa at this site in 1895–1897.

Important Buddhist Pilgrim Sites in Peshawar Valley

Some of the most outstanding sites representing the apex period of Gandhara, like the stupa at Shah-ji-ki-Dheri near Peshawar, Takht-e-Bahi Monastery, and several other stupas and Buddhist sites, have been exposed in this valley.

Shah-ji-ki-Dheri, Stupa of Kanishka

The most famous mighty stupas originally stood on the southeast side of Peshawar. The largest of all the stupas in Gandhara, not far from the city, was erected by King Kanishka at Shah-ji-ki-Dheri (a mound or raised platform of the pious), near Peshawar, in commemoration of his conversion to Buddhism. It consists of thirteen stories with a total height of 213 meters, close to Peshawar. The stupa is a Buddhist religious structure that typically contains relics or objects associated with Buddha. The famous Chinese pilgrim Sung Yung says that its superstructure was built of ‘every kind’ of wood. He further describes it as having thirteen storeys reaching a height of seven hundred feet. In 630 AD, the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang visited Peshawar. He discovered it looming over a 550-foot-high base that was constructed in five phases, with a superstructure made up of 25 copper umbrellas that had been gilded (Beal, 1984, 60–61). The most famous reliquary of all the caskets recovered from the excavations in the Gandhara region is called the Kanishka relic casket, which was also found in the relic chamber now preserved in the Peshawar Museum (Khan & Lone, 2006) (Nadiem, 2008, 90) (Falk, 2002) (Dani, 1965–66). The stupa was studied under the supervision of D.B. Spooner in 1909–1910 (Spooner, 1909–10, 38–59). On its lid are small figures; in the round of a seated Buddha, flanked by two Bodhisattva figures; in the upper part of the cylinder is a frieze of flying geese; below is the main frieze with an image of King Kanishka standing in front of undulating garland bearers and framing demi figures of votaries. It is a great piece of the Buddhist art of Gandhara. A copper coin from Kanishka was also found lying beside the reliquary. With the copper relic casket lay a six-sided crystal container with the remains of its former clay sealing. In the container were three fragments of bone, undoubtedly the relic of the Buddha (Nadiem, 2008, 90). The stupa was investigated under the supervision of D.B. Spooner in 1909–1910.

Today, its remains lie in a heap of dust and rubble. It's worth noting that archaeological sites like Shah-ji-ki-Dheri contribute significantly to our understanding of ancient civilizations, and ongoing research and excavations may uncover more details about the history and significance of this particular stupa. Over the years, the site has undergone archaeological excavations, revealing the remnants of the stupa and providing insights into the religious and cultural practices of the Kushan Empire.

Takht-i-Bahi: A Monastic Complex

Takht-e-Bahi (Fig. 6), occupying a prominent place over the hills 15 kilometers northeast of the Mardan district (Pakistan), is a remarkable monastic complex that holds significant historical and architectural importance. This UNESCO World Heritage Site dates back to the 1st century CE and stands as a testament to the Gandhara civilization. It is one of the best-preserved Buddhist monasteries in all of Gandhara. Takht-i-Bahi was a Buddhist monastery and centre of learning. The literal meaning of Takht-e-Bahi is a throne or a flat terrain with a spring (Nadiem, 2008, 90). Below (1870), Wilcher (1871), Cunningham (1873–75), Spooner (1890–87), Hargreaves (1910–11), and Stein (1911–12) excavated this site. The complex comprises stupas, votive stupas, monastic chambers, and a large assembly hall; residential cells surround the monastic quadrangle for monks; two courtyards with an underground meditation chamber; and intricate sculptures showcasing the rich cultural and religious practices of the time (Saeed, 2020). The layout reflects a fusion of Hellenistic and Indian architectural styles, making it a unique and well-preserved archaeological site (Khan& Lone 2006:30). In one of the stupa courtyards is a line of colossal Buddhas, which were originally 16 to 20 feet high. The site includes stupas, monastic buildings, and other structures, providing visitors with a comprehensive view of the Buddhist way of life during ancient times. Takht-i-Bahi serves as a window into the past, allowing us to appreciate the artistic and intellectual achievements of the Gandhara civilization. It stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of Buddhism in the region, drawing history enthusiasts and spiritual seekers alike to marvel at its ancient beauty.

The remains of the monastery were found in a much better state when excavated, as compared to many other sites in the Gandhara region. The sculpture robbers had removed some of the best specimens of Buddhist art, out of which only a few could find their way to the Peshawar Museum (Khan& Lone 2006:30). An inscription said to have been found here belongs to the Parthian ruler Gondophares and is dated to the year 103. This, according to scholars, might correspond to 45 A.D. Taking it as a basis for the dating of the beginning of the construction here, the monastic settlement would be placed at the peak of the Kushan period (1st to 2nd centuries A.D.). The low-level monastic cell complex, which was added later, would in this way be concluded to have been constructed around the 5th–6th century A.D. (Nadiem, 2008, 94). This site has produced fragmentary sculptures in stone and stucco to an extent that shows great wealth, but its most amazing feature is the typical design and arrangement of shrines that surrounded the main stupa. The Takht-i-Bahi monastery represents an exceptional example of Buddhist monastic architecture. It served as a significant centre for Buddhist culture and scholarship. The site invites pilgrims to ponder the transience of worldly existence while connecting with the ancient roots of Buddhist philosophy. Pilgrims and tourists are fascinated by the well-preserved stupas, monastic complex, and intricate carvings that offer insights into the daily lives of Buddhist monks. The Takht-i-Bahi -is a well-preserved Buddhist monastery complex. It dates back to the 1st century CE and reflects the influence of Hellenistic and Persian architectural styles. The meditation cells and stupas at Takht-i-Bahi provide pilgrims with a unique opportunity to connect with ancient Buddhist traditions and teachings.

Swat Valley

The Swat Valley, the ancient Buddhist land of Uddiyana (Oddiyana) or Savastu, situated in the north-western region of Pakistan, about 260 kilometers from Islamabad and 180 kilometers from Peshawar in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, holds both historical and spiritual significance. It has a history dating back to ancient times. It has a rich cultural and historical heritage. During the Buddhist era, Uddiyana was part of the Gandhara region and was one of the most well-known Buddhist centres (1st millennium BCE to 11th century CE). The Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-Tsang (629–630 A.D.) mentioned 1400 Buddhist monasteries, the majority of which were declined. There used to be about 18000 priests in them, but they have been continuously dwindling until there are now very few (Beal, 1969, 119–124). Although Hsuan-Tsang claims that they practiced Mahayana Buddhism (Beal, 1969, 119–121; Khan & Lone, 2006). The first survey of Swat Valley was carried out in 1926 and the second in 1930 by the great explorer Aural Stein. He discovered many important Buddhist sites. The monuments mentioned by Aural Stein have two categories: first, those that are large in size, and after this tour, they are excavated by different missions; and second, all were damaged and destroyed at that time. Aural Stein, an archaeological tour in the upper swat and adjacent hill traces in 1930, mentioned twenty-nine stupas, but large numbers were destroyed and damaged at that time. Some stupas have great size and length (Stein, 1930, 2).

After Aural Stein, Barger and Wright (1941) carried out their survey and excavated various ancient archaeological sites, particularly the Barikot site and the surrounding hills, in 1941, but a detailed study and survey of this area were conducted by the Italian Archaeological Mission headed by G. Tucci, the president of IsEMOE Rome, and D. Facenna (1964) in close collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Museum Government of Pakistan. The detailed excavations of Butkara, Panar, and Sayu Stupa provide useful information and a very rich collection of Gandhara art. During the last 34 years, they have been able to collect a large volume of research data spanning from prehistory to the advent of Islam, a deep and detailed study of this area that may bring to light a complete cultural profile of the Swat Valley. The Italian Archaeological Mission engaged in archaeological research in Swat Valley since 1955–96 has not only brought to light the hitherto unknown chapters of the history of Swat but has also enriched Swat Museum with archaeological artefacts and sculptures. The Department of Archaeology and Museums has carried out extensive surveys and documentation of Swat Valley, and excavations at some sites have yielded very fruitful results. Some marvelous specimens of Gandhara art unearthed during excavations have added to the beauty and importance of the Swat Museum. The Department of Archaeology, under the guidance of Prof. A.H. Dani (1988), carried out exploration and excavation in Dir programmed to swat for the salvage excavation of Buddhist sites, some of which have yielded rich specimens of Gandhara sculpture.

The innumerable ancient remains scattered all over this area bear testimony to its east-west relations and provide great opportunities for scholars and historians to study its art and architecture. A large number of ancient sites and monuments in the form of stupas and monasteries, viharas, and structures of different buildings scattered in the plains and stretched along the hilly slopes were discovered through phased excavations. These historical and cultural remains provide evidence of human activities covering a very large period. Swat Valley has numerous Buddhist stupas and monastic remains. These sites are associated with the Buddha's life and teachings.

Buddhist Sites in Swat

The area is dotted with Buddhist stupas, monasteries, and statues, including the Shingardar stupa (Stein, 1972, 49–50), known as the first stupa in Gandhara, which was erected after the Prinibana

of Buddha (Beal, 1969, 126–127). The Shingardarstupa (J.RSA, 1980, 21-29) lies three kilometres from Barikot on the right side of the road and nearly one and a half kilometres from the stupa, a large figure of the Buddha carved on a rock (Deane, 1896). The Saidu Stupa (Rehman 1966, 1968–69) is situated one kilometre south of Swat Museum in the lap of the mountains close to Saidu Sharif town. The site was excavated by the Italian archaeological mission of the IsEMO in 1963–1968 and 1977–1982-89 under the supervision of Domenico Facenna (1984) (Khan & Lone, 2006). The Bari Kot Stupa lies 21 kilometres from Saidu Sharif on the way to Mardan (Stein, 1972). The Top Darastupa site belonged to the lower Swat region and was situated in a small valley about 38 km from SaiduShraif on the way to Mardan (Barger and Wright, 1941). The Gumbatuna stupa is situated in a wide valley on the right bank of the river Swat, six kilometres west of Bari Kot village, along the metal road leading to Nimograma (Stein, 1929; Berger and Wright, 1941). Professor G. Tucci carried out its excavation in 1955–56 (Khan, 1993; Rehman, 1968). The Buddhist stupa of Paner is located about two or three kilometres east of Mingora in the Jambil valley (Nadiem, 2008). The site of Baligram is a Buddhist establishment situated about four kilometres south of Swat Museum in a narrow side valley behind SaiduShraif town (Khan, 1989). The Buddhist site of Shana Shah is situated about 5km south west of Saidu Sharif on Mingora (Rehman, 1993) (Qamar & Khan, 1989–90). The Malamjaba, a Buddhist establishment, is situated in an upper swat valley surrounded by the mighty ranges of the Hindukush, the Karakorum, and the black mountains (Khan, 1993). Above the large village of Guligram, the valley makes a sharp bend, and about a mile further up, not far from the village of Batera, there rises the fairly well preserved stupa known as ShinasiGumbat, as explored by Stein (1929).

The Top Dara Gokandstupa, also explored by Stein (1929), lies 5 km south of Barikot (Khan, 1993). The Sisaka Kandaro Patay Dadhara stupa is situated about 26 km west of Saidu Sharif on the right bank of the river Swat on Kabul Parri Road and 1km east of the modern village of Dadhara (Khan & Lone, 2006). The Leobanr stupa was explored by Stein (1929). The stupa of Leobanar was excavated by the department of archaeology at Peshawar University in 1981. The Chatpatstupa is located 2 km west of Chakdara and 4 km from the main Chackdara-Dir road (Dani, 1968–69b) (Khan & Lone 2006:31). AndanDheri is a Buddhist monastic complex located in the heart of the AdinZai plain, about 8 kilometres north of Chakdara (Samad, 2011) (Dani, 1968–69a) (Khan & Lone, 2006). The Buddhist stupa of Nawagai is located 3 kilometres east of Barikot village. (Qamar, 1992), The Marjanaistupa, Aziz Dheristupa, Charg-Pate stupa (Saeed, 2020), Butkara 111 (Rahman, 1991), Shararaistupa, Jurjuraistupa, stupa near Pan, Charbagh stupa, Malong stupa, Kargha-dheraistupa, the Commemorative Stupa, stupa near foot print carving, Ramanai spur stupa, Bingalalstupa, stupa near Gujar hamlet, and the stupa of Giroban, Manglawarstupa were explored by Stein (1929).

Footprints of Lord Buddha were discovered in Tirat, situated on the right bank of the Swat River between the villages of Mopandai and Tirat, opposite Adyan village. These massive foot prints are inscribed with the name of the donor in Kharoshti, and the soles are decorated with Dharmachakra. This footprint has now shifted to the Swat Museum (Khan& Lone, 2006). The rock carvings of Buddha and Bodhisattva were discovered in the Swat Valley by an Italian mission and other archaeological missions (Sardar, 2003). Jehanabad is located about 5 kilometres to the north-east of Manglawar. Udegram, a site in Swat, is believed to be the birthplace of the famous Buddhist philosopher and scholar, Nagarjuna. He was a key figure in the development of Mahayana Buddhism. There is a huge image of a seated Buddha carved into a high rock (Khan& Lone, 2006). These sites played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism.

Important Buddhist Pilgrim Sites in Swat Valley

The Swat Valley in Pakistan has several Buddhist pilgrim sites, but the most important are Butkara Stupa, Nimogramastupa, and AmlukDarastpa. These sites have revealed a wealth of Gandharan art and artefacts and are considered sacred places by some. Pilgrims visit these sites seeking spiritual solace and blessings.

Butkara 1

Butkara 1 (Fig. 7) is one of the most important Buddhist stupas in Swat, near Saidu Sharif. It is situated at the eastern end of the Mingora by the side of the Jambil, a small tributary of the Swat River, a stone's throw east of the Swat museum in Saidu Sharif. It was built by Asoka. Hsuan-tsang mentioned some stupas associated with Asoka, and it was part of the group of Dharmmrijaka stupas to be built over the relics of the Buddha during the Asoka period. He said, "When he reached the four or five li to the east of Men-ch-ich-li, he saw a large stupa that was built by Asoka Raja. In old times, Tathagata was here practicing the life of a Bodhisattva, called Sivika Raja (or Sibi), seeking the fruit of Buddhaship. He cut his body to pieces in this place to redeem a dove from the power of a hawk (Bea, 1960, p. 25). Sir Aural Stein first explored this stupain in 1929. At that time, it was a large mound near Minglawar (Stein, 1972, 14–50).

The Italian archaeological mission of IsMEO, under the direction of Doman Faccemna (1964), excavated (Tucci, 1958, 279–280) with the help of the Department of Archaeology and Museum of Pakistan. The joint excavation started in 1956 and continued until 1962. The result of excavation appeared on a large stupa decorated with stone and stucco sculptures depicting on them the various scenes that belonged to important episodes of Buddha life and different jataka stories. Individual sculptures of Buddha and bodhisattvas were also discovered in great quantity. About seven thousand precious schist stone pieces were recovered (Khan, 1999, 18). Besides the sculpture, a great number of coins were also found there, and on the basis of this numismatic evidence, the site was given dates ranging from the 3rd century B.C. to the 10th century A.D. The main great stupa stands in the middle of votive stupas. The votive stupas are in large numbers, crowding all around the main stupa. The crowd of votive stupas witnesses this fact that Butkara1 had the central place of Buddhism at Swat. This situation also proved the Hsuan tsang account that Asoka erected here a stupa on the Buddha relics. The present aspect of the sacred area is the result of a long existence characterized by repeated destruction and rebuilding.

Amluk Dara stupa

Aural Stein mentioned another Buddhist sacred stupa named AmlukDara (Stein: 1929). The site was investigated by Barger and Wright in 1938. They recovered some Gandhara sculptures but did not investigate further to ascertain the exact period. The stupa, with its separate components of scale, podium, drum, and dome, is the best example of a Swat stupa (Khan, 1993).

Nimograma Stupa

The Buddhist site of Nimograma (Fig. 8), situated about 45 km west of Saidu Sharif and about 22km from Barikot at Tehsil Zarakhel in the Shamoza region, brought to light a complex of a monastery and a row of three stupas encompassed by several votive stupas, a promising collection of antiquities, including a class of sculpture. The site of Nimograma, consisting of a stupa and monastery, was discovered by Inayat-ur-Rehman, the first curator of the Swat Museum, in 1966. Mr. Mughal Nazir Ahmad Khan then undertook excavations at Nimograma in 1968–69 (Department of Archaeology,

Government of Pakistan), while M. Sharif also remained associated with the preliminary report of its discovery submitted by Inayat-ur-Rehman (Khan & Lone, 2006). Pilgrims are drawn to Swat Valley for a spiritual journey, seeking inspiration from the places connected to the Buddha's enlightenment and his preaching. The tranquil setting of Swat Valley, surrounded by lush greenery and mountains, enhances the spiritual experience for pilgrims seeking solace and introspection.

Buddhist Rock Carvings Sites in Gilgit Baltistan

Gilgit-Baltistan, a region in the northern part of Pakistan, has a diverse cultural and religious landscape. The region was a part of the ancient Silk Road (Dani, 1985, 29–72), and its history is marked by the influence of various cultures and religions. While the majority of the population in Gilgit-Baltistan is Muslim, there is also a historical presence of Buddhism in the region. The area has a rich Buddhist heritage dating back to ancient times. Buddhism flourished in this region during the heyday of the Silk Road, and there are archaeological sites that attest to this history. Gilgit-Baltistan is home to numerous rock carvings, inscriptions, and archaeological remains that point to its Buddhist past (Jettmar, 1987, 12; Dani, 1983, a24–26). Some of these artefacts date back to the Gandhara civilization, which was a major centre of Buddhist art and culture. The region boasts several Buddhist sites, including monasteries, stupas, and rock shelters with Buddhist carvings (Dar, 1988, 35).

Important Buddhist Rock Carving Sites

In the 1980s, a collaborative effort between Pakistan and Germany marked the first comprehensive investigation into the petroglyphs and inscriptions in the northern areas of Pakistan. To date, over 30,000 figural drawings and 5,000 inscriptions have been discovered and examined (Samad 2011). Although the petroglyphs were initially recognised in the early 20th century, it was Prof. Karl Jettmar and Prof. Ahmad Hasan Dani who conducted contextual analyses (Ahmed 2014, 422). These petroglyphs are scattered along the Karakoram Highway, with varying concentrations observed between Shatial and Chilas (Dani 1989, 91). Sites like Alam Bridge (near Gilgit), Shatial, Chilas, and the sacred rocks of Haldeikish in Hunza present inscriptions in Kharosothi (Fussman, 1993).

Shatial Rock Carving

Shatial is a small town located on the Karakorum Highway (KKH) and administratively falls in the Upper Kohistan district in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, which is known for Buddhist and Zoroastrian symbolism and hundreds of ancient scripts, especially Kharosthi, Sogdian, Brahmi, etc. Even some Chinese inscriptions were recorded at this site. A huge stupa engraving covers the face of the boulder, flanked by a few votive stupas. Near the huge stupa is a Kharosthi inscription from the 5th century AD (Malik, 2013).

Chillas Rock Carving (Fig. 9)

There are more than 50,000 pieces of Buddhist rock art (petroglyphs) and inscriptions all along the Karakoram Highway in Gilgit-Baltistan that are concentrated at ten major sites between Hunza and Shatial. The rock carvings from the early Buddhist period, which, in spite of their simplicity, are of high artistic quality, were never found in clusters. The rock carvings at Chilas shed light on the popularity of the Bodhisattva cult and the independent beginning of Buddhist art. Carvings from Chilas II contain many representations of stupas (Dani, 1983, 106–116). The carvings were left by various invaders, traders, and pilgrims who passed along the trade route, as well as by locals.

Kargah Buddha

The Kargah Buddha (Fig. 10) is an archaeological site located about 9.7 km outside of Gilgit. It is a carved image of a large standing Buddha, some 50 feet high, on the cliff face in Kargah Nala. The carving, which is in a style also found in Baltistan, probably dates to the 7th century. From the 3rd century to the 11th century, Gilgit was the centre of Buddhism. Nearby, about 400 meters (1,300 ft) upstream, a Buddhist monastery and three stupas containing Sanskrit manuscripts were excavated in 1931. It is estimated that the carving was completed in the 7th century. It was discovered in 1938–39, following the innovation of supposed Gilgit manuscripts in 1931.

Manthal Buddha Rock

The Manthal Buddha Rock (Fig. 11) is a large granite rock on which an image of Buddha has been engraved and dates back to the 8th century. This rock is located in Manthal village, Skardu Town, in Gilgit Baltistan. Buddha Rock is one of the most important relics of Buddhism in Skardu. It is quite near the main Sadpara Road. This Buddha carving was not known to the world until the beginning of the 20th century due to its remote location. In 1906, the Scottish traveler Ella Christie wrote a book on her journey to Western Tibet and featured the carving in her book, which gave it international attention. For Buddhists, these carvings are not just historical artifacts but also hold spiritual significance. They may be considered sacred sites. Pilgrims and practitioners may visit these locations for meditation, prayer, and to connect with the teachings of Buddhism.

Buddhist Pilgrim Sites in Sindh

Sindh is a region located in the southeastern part of Pakistan and has rich historical and cultural significance. It has been the cradle of ancient Indus Valley civilizations, one of the world's oldest urban cultures, a melting pot of various cultures, and a centre for spiritual and religious practices. The city of Mohenjo-Daro, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is located in Sindh around 2600 to 1900 BCE and was known for its advanced urban planning, sophisticated drainage systems, and distinctive art and artifacts. Over the centuries, Sindh has been a crossroads for various cultures and civilizations, including Buddhism. Regarding the introduction of Buddhism to Sindh, the historical evidence seems somewhat elusive. The absence of concrete evidence before the preachers of Asoka, as mentioned by Limbrick (1973, 104), suggests that the early history of Buddhism in Sindh might not be fully documented. The account from Divyavadana (Winternit, 11, 223) and Vinaya of the Mulasarvastivadins, referring to the conversion of King Udrayana and Queen Chandraprabha in the life of Buddha through King Bimbisara of Magadha, provides an interesting perspective (Davidus, 1959, 28) (Luders, Beitrage SPAW, and 61–63). This story indicates not only the conversion of people in Sindh to Buddhism but also the construction of stupas on the holy ashes of the priest, highlighting the deep impact of the religion in the region. Betreugh S-PA-W (55–58). The Second Buddhist Council actually took place much earlier, around 100 years after the Buddha's death, in the city of Vaishali, and some Buddhist monks joined this council from Sindh. As per historical records, Upagupta was a Buddhist monk and a disciple of the renowned teacher during the time of Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BCE). He came to Sindh for the preaching of Buddhism, and his stay there was usually quite long. Asoka built stupas and monasteries at this place in Sindh, the place, where Upagupta stayed. Cousens (1975, 92–93) identified it with the stupa of Mirpur Khas.

Buddhism spread in Sindh during the Mauryan period, and Emperor Asoka played a role in promoting Buddhism in the region. The Chinese pilgrim Hieun-Tsang recorded that Asoka had built ten stupas in Sin-Tu (Sindh), and the people of Sindh were Buddhist during his travels. They studied

the Little Vehicle according to the Sammatiya School of Buddhism (Beal, 1960, 58; Smith, 2011, 41). These constructions were made using delicate materials such as wood and unbaked brick and may have been adorned with gold and silver. Regarding the mention of Sin-Tu and the construction of ten stupas by Ashoka, it's essential to cross-reference this information with other historical sources to verify its accuracy. The identification of specific stupas and monasteries may also be subject to further archaeological research and exploration. However, Mirpur Khas is mentioned as having the remains of a large stupa built of mud bricks and decorated with terracotta friezes. The Indo-Greek kings ordered a Sindhi Bhikshu of Patala to go to Ceylon for Buddhist preaching. The origin and home of Kushan was one of the most magnificent periods in the ancient history of Sindh. The Kushan and post-Kushan periods are considered one of the most magnificent periods in the ancient history of Sindh. Many early Buddhist stupas in Sindh are believed to belong to this era. Hinayana and Mahayana, both streams of Buddhism, have flourished and influenced the culture of Sindh. The rich Buddhist heritage of Sindh highlights the construction of stupas and monasteries during different historical periods, from Maury to the Ray dynasties.

Buddhist Pilgrim Sites in Sindh

There is large number of Stupa, monasteries, inscriptions and sculptures have been found in Sindh. Buddhist architecture is a basic expression of a religion and Buddhist monasteries as the center of nucleus or focal point of growth of Buddhism. Sindh was once dotted with stupas and monasteries, showcasing the religious interest and dedication of the Buddhist population. A lot of work has been done on Buddhism in Sindh. Excavations in Mohen-Jo-Daro reveal the presence of Buddhism in Sindh. However, there are the remains of a large stupa at MirpurKhas(Cousens, 1998, 66)(Beal,11,273) (Misl, 1877,33) built of mud bricks and decorated with terracotta friezes. Another stupa located at Sudherno-jo-dharo in Saidpur(Hasan,1996), ThulMirRukan (Daulatpur), in the Nwabshah, Kahu-JoDaro (MirpurKhas) (Cousens,1998,66) (MMisl,1877;33) (Wodburn,1894) (Beal,11,273), Depar Ghangro, SudheranjoThul, Jerrakstupa (*Cousens,1975*), Dhamraostupa, KhijraniUmerKot, Gul Mohammad Jamro (Ranipur), Koriani (Badin), Siraj-Takri (Khairpur) (Bukhari,2015) and Buddhist Stupa (Guja), exhibit varied assemblages consisting of sculptures, artifacts, coins, and inscriptions.

Important Buddhist pilgrim sites in Sindh

Thul Mir Rukan stupa

Thul Mir Rukan stupa (Fig. 12), possibly built between the 6th and 11th centuries CE, lies near the modern city of Daulatpur in Sindh. The well-preserved stupa, Thul Mir Rukan, has solid cylindrical structures, slightly tapering, standing about 60 feet high over a 66-foot-square basement. This architectural style is reminiscent of the Mirpur Khasstupa. During excavations at Thul Mir Rukan, a notable find was a collection of terracotta images depicting Buddha and scenes representing his birth. Terracotta is a type of fired clay, often used in ancient art and architecture. These findings contribute to the historical and cultural significance of the site, providing insights into the religious and artistic practices of the time.

Mohenjo-Daro stupa

Mohenjo-Daro (Fig. 13) is one of the major archaeological sites located in the Larkana district of Sindh province, primarily associated with the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, which reveals a fascinating confluence of cultures that exists around 2600 to 1900 BCE. However, it's important to

note that stupas are typically associated with later periods in Indian history, particularly with the development of Buddhism. The stupa excavation conducted in 1922 revealed the palm of a monastic establishment with an imposing stupa in the centre. The finds here include fragments of sculptures and copper coins, which have helped in assigning a positive date to be complex. It is evident that the stupa was built during the period of Kushan King Vasudeva. The entire collection excavated from Buddhist establishments during the British period was sent to the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay. Recent archaeological findings suggest the presence of Buddhist stupas and relics, shedding light on the dynamic history of the region. Stupas are dome-shaped structures that serve as Buddhist monuments, usually containing relics of the Buddha or other revered figures. Mohenjo-Daro, on the other hand, predates the rise of Buddhism by several centuries. Some scholars believe that the stupa found here indicates the coexistence of multiple cultures over different historical periods in this region. Pilgrims can contemplate the interplay of diverse cultural and spiritual traditions at Mohenjo-daro, fostering a deeper understanding of the region's history. Pilgrims and tourists interested in the spiritual side of Buddhism are captivated by the symbolic presence of a stupa in an archaeological setting.

Buddhist pilgrim sites in Bahawalpur

The present Bahawalpur was a former princely state, situated in south Punjab. Since ancient times, Bahawalpur has always been rich in culture and heritage that is different from all other cultures, thus giving it a unique identity of its own. Therefore, it has a substantial range of cultural assets from ancient civilizations like the Hakra River (3800–1500 BCE) (Sten, 1942) and the Indus Valley civilization (Mughal, 1991). It is a land of vibrant culture with many hidden wonders, observable only to those who know the events that unfolded here (Wasti, 2009). There are many Buddhist sites that were discovered in Bahawalpur, namely Dham Raya ka Tibba, Babul di Tibbi, Ali Shab, BadarShaheed, TibbaApaPoora, MahmoodShaheed, DhamrayakaTibba, Hithiji, Kukrhara, or KafroonkaTibba (Sadiq, 1994), KotlaMausa Khan, and Murwat (Wasti, 2009, 103). The most important of all of them is Sui Vihar.

Sui Vihar stupa in Bahawalpur

Sui Vihar (Fig. 14) is the prime Buddhist site in south Punjab with a stupa and monastery, which is situated 17 kilometres south west of Bahawalpur on the main highway to Ahmadpur East. (Auj, 1987, 90). If we look to the left side of the road, there is a broken mud pillar standing between the graveyard and meadow farms. This pillar is a left fragment of a stupa that belonged to the Kanishka period. Alongside the stupa, some other ruins of historical buildings can be observed too, which seem to be of a monastery. There is a small village near these ruins named Sui Vihar. The excavation of Sui Vihar started in 1867–68 under the supervision of Major Stubbs, but the work continued only for two days. He found a copper plate inscription in Bactrian Pali, which is written in Kharosthi characters and dates back to the 11th year of Kanishka (Bayley, 1870). Now this copper plate is lying in a Calcutta museum in India. Sir Aural Stein visited Sui Vihar in February 1941 (Aurel, 1940–42). The archaeology department of Punjab University started a project funded by UNESCO in 2011–2012. The partial excavation of the Sui Vihar stupa was also part of the project, but they did not provide any further information about the Sui Vihar. The site is in a tragic condition and needs to highlight the plight of this important archaeological building.

These sites attract pilgrims retracing their spiritual journeys. The architecture of the stupa reflects the cultural achievements of the region. With a focus on both historical and spiritual aspects, these sites offer a glimpse into the evolution of Buddhism and its impact on the region's cultural and historical

development. Pilgrims seek deep spiritual experiences, drawn to the serene atmosphere of ancient monasteries and stupas. The sites also serve as educational centers, hosting lectures and workshops for those interested in Buddhism. Additionally, the preservation efforts contribute to the appeal, ensuring the authenticity and historical integrity of these significant locations. Buddhist pilgrimage sites hold a multifaceted allure for both pilgrims and tourists, extending beyond religious significance to encompass cultural, historical, and natural elements. Pilgrims are drawn to these sacred sites for their connection to the life and teachings of the Buddha, fostering a deep spiritual bond. Tourists seeking diverse cultural experiences are attracted to witness Buddhist rituals and explore the rich historical and architectural heritage, including ancient temples and monasteries. The economic impact is substantial, as pilgrims make donations and tourists contribute to local economies through expenditures on accommodations, transportation, and souvenirs. This influx of visitors leads to the development of infrastructure, job creation, and improved living standards for local communities. Furthermore, well-known Buddhist pilgrimage sites serve as cultural and spiritual landmarks, promoting the overall tourism industry of a region or country. Governments often invest in their development to boost tourism, foster economic growth, and enhance the socio-economic fabric of the hosting regions. In essence, Buddhist pilgrimage sites play a pivotal role in integrating spirituality, history, art, and natural beauty, contributing significantly to the holistic development of the regions they occupy.

Conclusion

The Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Pakistan, with their historical depth and spiritual resonance, offer a unique experience for both pilgrims and tourists. As guardians of an ancient legacy, these sites beckon those seeking to unravel the mysteries of Buddhism's past and connect with the spiritual essence that lingers in the air. Through exploration and preservation, Pakistan invites the world to share in the wisdom and beauty of its Buddhist heritage. Exploring Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Pakistan allows individuals to connect with both the historical roots and spiritual essence of Buddhism. The role of these sites in attracting pilgrims and tourists lies in the unique blend of historical significance, spiritual resonance, and cultural richness that they offer. As more people seek meaningful travel experiences, these sites continue to play a crucial role in preserving and promoting the diverse heritage of Buddhism in Pakistan. Buddhist sites serve as magnets for both pilgrims and tourists, offering a blend of religious, cultural, and historical experiences. The enduring appeal of these sites lies in their ability to provide a deep and meaningful connection to Buddhism's spiritual heritage, making them important contributors to global cultural and religious tourism.



Fig. 1: Sirkap Taxila



Fig. 2: Dharmarajika stupa Taxila



Fig. 3: MohraMoradu stupa Taxila



Fig. 4: Bhamala stupa Taxila



Fig. 5: Jaulian monastery Taxila



Fig. 6: Takht-e-Bahi Monastery Mardan



Fig. 7: Butkara 1stupa Swat



Fig. 8: Nimograma stupa Swat



Fig. 9: Chillas Rock Carving



Fig. 10: Kargah Buddha



Fig. 11: Manthal Buddha Rock



Fig. 12: Thul Mi rRukan stupa Sindh



Fig. 13: Mohenjo-Daro stupa Sindh



Fig. 14: Sui Vihar stupa Bahawalpur

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