

Remains and Legacy of Buddhist Monasteries in Shangla, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

As part of the larger cultural mass of the Indo-Pak subcontinent, Pakistan has been the center of cultural activity through the ages. But many of the areas still need thorough documentation and conservation. District Shangla is one of those neglected areas which have been the center of Buddhist cultural activity during the beginning of the Christian era.

The present researcher took the responsibility of documenting the cultural heritage of this district in 2012 and till now has documented more than 200 sites of the Buddhist and Islamic periods. The Buddhist period remains include monastery remains, settlement sites and rock carvings of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas while the Islamic period remains include graveyards with decorated stones and wooden mosques which show clear evidence of the Hindu-Buddhist influences in the decorative patterns.

The area under discussion was part of the famous Gandhara Civilization which was the center of cultural, commercial and, above all, the Buddhist religious activities. It was this land where, besides many travelers, the famous Chinese pilgrims, such as Xuan Zang and Fa-Xian, came for learning. This is the land from where the famous trade caravans between the East and the West passed while trading through the Silk Routes. These activities led to the spread of culture and introduction of Buddhism from this region to the Eastern Asia. This later on became the center of Muslim activities but in the beautiful Muslim decorative patterns one can clearly see the continuity of previous religions and cultures.

This paper, thus, is divided into two parts. The first part show the documentation of the Buddhist period monastery remains while the second part shows the early Muslim period mosques and grave yards with decorated patterns bearings pre-Islamic influences.

Keywords: Remains, cultural activity, cultural heritage