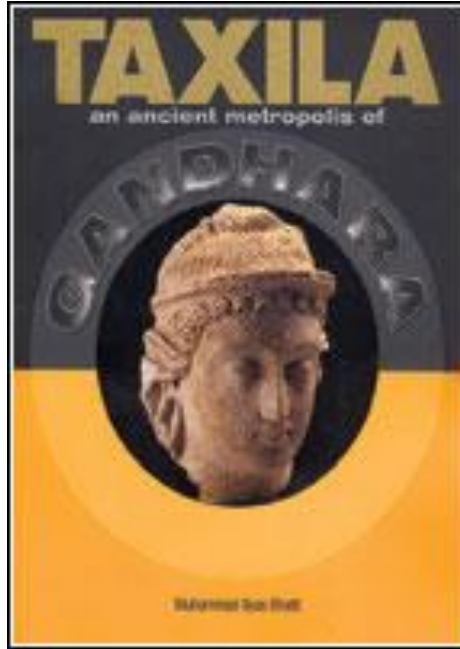


## Book REVIEW



**TAXILA, an Ancient Metropolis of Gandhara**  
**By Muhammad Ilyas Bhatti**  
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***This book is the history of the ancient Gandhara civilization. It carries several photographs of the monumental remains discovered at Taxila.***

The city of Taxila has a long and ancient history. The book “Taxila: an ancient metropolis of Gandhara” by Muhammad Ilyas Bhatti gives information about the Taxila and introduces the history of Taxila and Gandhara art to the foreigners who attempt to understand the heritage of Gandhara. The narrative is illustrated with specific pictures that help to understand and see the Art without even visiting the city. The objects and topics have been carefully selected and the text is well-written for international readers. The book consists of eight main chapters and a preface.

In the first chapter titled “History of Taxila” the author provides a historical assessment and broad background of the region. The author describes the location of Taxila city. The opinion of the travelers who visited the city is shared in the chapter to create a clear picture of the region. According to the author, “Taxila was given a legendary history in Indian literature” (p.4).

He points out the story told by the Ramayana which is about the rulers of Taxila (Takshasila) and Pushkala. Moreover, Mahabharata gives information that “...the city was conquered by king Janmejaya of Hastinapura” (p.4). In addition, the author mentions the fact that Taxila was known as a place of learning and it was famous with its teachers. The author also describes the dynasties, the historical invasions of Alexander the Great who had claims on the Achaemenid Empire. When Alexander the Great claimed the old provinces of the Achaemenid Empire, he stayed in Taxila for a few days, leaving a part of his garrison in Punjab. With this fact, I assume, the author shows the importance and strategic location of the Taxila city. After the death of Alexander the Great, his troops in Punjab were destroyed by Chandragupta (the founder of the Mauryan Empire) or driven out of the region. After all, Seleucus who wanted to recover the provinces of Alexander recognized the sovereignty of Chandragupta over Punjab and in return got 500 elephants (p.6).

The most interesting part of the chapter is about the historical monuments that were founded at Taxila. “The great majority of these monuments date from the first five centuries of the Christian era, and none of those now visible are as early as the Maurya Kings” (p.7). The most were done by Chandragupta and his successors in the region. The construction of canals, wells, reservoirs helped to improve agriculture, and coinage was issued from the royal mints which facilitated trade relations (p.7). At the end of the chapter, the author tells about the population that lived there before the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire. This chapter presents the historical narrative of the region that is very important for foreigners to understand the monuments and other historical pieces.

The Chapter 2 entitled “The Life of the Buddha” is dedicated to Buddha’s life and history. The author drives attention to Buddha and describes it as a special event: “A remarkable man is deemed to require a remarkable birth” (p.17). It is believed that Buddha (the original name of the man was Siddhartha) “...descended from Tushita Heaven and entered his mother’s womb in the form of an elephant” (p.17). He was born in a very unusual way. His mother died after giving birth to him and his sister, Mahapajapati was taking care of him. His father, Suddhodana built three palaces for Buddha to prevent him and create a comfortable environment for his son (p.19). The book depicts the map of the places Buddha visited after the birth of his son to find peace with his soul. The pictures of the monuments are also giving a broad understanding of the life of Buddha. The author points out the facts about the life of Buddha, the love of ordinary people and rulers towards him, and a brief story of his death. This chapter is helpful to further understand the history of the art of the region.

The third chapter is dedicated to the Buddha’s Teachings is divided into three parts: 1) Buddha Teachings; 2) Monks and the Monastic Life; 3) Lotus in Buddhism. In the first part of the chapter, the author writes about the life of Buddha and his followers and describes the Buddha as a teacher. “The Buddha taught his followers the four “Noble Truths” concerning suffering, the cause of suffering, the destruction of suffering and the way that leads to the destruction of suffering” (p.25). There was a path that opened my eyes, lead me the wisdom and peace of mind. Buddha preferred to walk throughout India and explained everything he knew to the people who wanted to listen to him without any discrimination. Buddha used the ordinary language of Pankrit for ordinary people to understand him. In the second part of the chapter, the author writes about the life of Buddha as a monk and the way he inspired people to join Sangha (the community of monks and nuns). According to the book, the first monks were five holy men who followed Buddha, his son, and his cousin and lived with them in the forest. Nowadays, some Buddhists leave their homes to live in the forest and dedicate their lives to practicing and teaching the Dharma (p.32). These monks are allowed to have eight items such as robes, belts, alms’bowls, a razor, needle threaded walking sticks, a water strainer, and a toothpick. They must obey the monastic rules and live a simple life. The third part of the chapter is about the famous flower of Buddhism the – Lotus. The lotus has been used in religious and festive decorations. Moreover, the flower was used ornamental designs. The author points out that the lotus is the “symbol of purity” in Buddhism (p.35). This chapter is an explanation of the further chapter about the “Buddhist Art of Gandhara”.

Chapter four-titled “Buddhist Art of Gandhara” gives information about the Gandhara region, its location, and history. The map illustrates the location of Gandhara, which helps foreigners to understand the geography of the region. This region holds several monuments describing the invasion of Alexander the Great, king Asoka, etch or the authors the hat “Buddhist Art of Gandhara represents both

Buddha and the Buddha's teaching" (p.44). The life of Buddha is illustrated in the monuments and a part of those illustrations is shown in the book. This art is divided into three periods: 1) the life of Buddha previous to his birth as Siddhartha; 2) the life of Buddha as Siddhartha; 3) his life as Buddha (before he attained the Enlightenment). The author points out that Buddhist Art is assimilated the local styles of various Asian states. "One important characteristic of Gandhara art is its passionate love for an art showing the life of Buddha" (p.45) says the author. The most interesting art piece that drew my attention was the "Fasting Siddhartha" because it helps to imagine the life of Buddha in the forest. "Gandhara sculptures decorate the base of stupas or stand in niches within the monasteries" (p.48). The base of the sculptures has different panels that are separated by pilasters, with square corner pillars. One of the stupas is called double-head eagle because the base of that stupa shows three different types of arches from three transitions. It belongs to the Scythian period. Together with this information about the history of Gandhara art, the book shows the pictures of the sculptures.

The fifth chapter of the book titled "Excavations at Taxila" is mainly consisted of pictures with different jewelry and sculptures. The excavations in Taxila were carried out from 1913 until 1934 by Sir John Marshal. Then Mortimar Wheeler excavated it in 1944 (p.63). "These excavations have helped to unearth the remains of early settlement sites belonging to Neolithic, Early-Harappan, and Gandharan Grave Culture periods at Sarai Khola, Jhang and Hathial" (p.63). This part of the book shows the importance of the excavations and how helpful they were in the studies of the history of Taxila.

The sixth chapter titled "The Ancient cities of Taxila" gives information about the history, location, and contribution these cities gave to link the history and culture of Taxila. Five cities have been mentioned: Sarai Khola, Hathial, Bhir Mound, Sirkap, and Sirsukh. The author gives special emphasis on Bhir Mound city ruins and describes the history of the city in various aspects. The position of each city is depicted in the book, which makes it more clear for the people to understand and analyze. This chapter completes the narrative that is brought from other chapters.

The seventh chapter named "Buddhist Stupas and Monasteries" starts with the introduction about the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang who mentions four stories about Buddha and construction of stupas and monasteries: 1) Naga-raj (Serpent King) Elapatra; 2) prediction about Maitreya; 3) the Buddha's "cutting off his head, earnestly seeking the acquirement of Bodhi (enlightenment)"; 4) blinding of the prince Kunala, son of Asoka (p.81). Then author starts to describe the Dharmarajika stupa. He describes photos and a map. This monastery is close to the cities Sirkab and Bhir mound. According to the book, the monastery has two parts: first "...which shows a medley construction of several types and periomaybey be called stupa area" (p.83), and the second part, which is monastic area. Then the author gives information about the other eight stupa and monasteries (Mohra Moradu, Jaulian,

Pippalan, Jinanwali Dheri, Bhamala, Manikyala Stupa, Bhallar, Jandial Temple), with their pictures and maps. Each of the monasteries has an ancient history and the book describes that history in a very interesting way.

Last but not least, the chapter titled “The Museum” gives broad information with illustrations and text about the archeological museum in Taxila. The museum reflects the cultural history of the city and the different achievements of the Taxila population throughout four thousand years.

In general, in the book, Muhammad Ilyas Bhatti wants to deliver full information about Taxila and the region as a whole. This book is very interesting for historians, tourists, and ordinary people who want to get information about the region. The cultural heritage, archeological findings, and maps are clearly explained. Moreover, the text of the book is well-written and could be understood easily by everyone. I would recommend this book to one and all.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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