

DAVID AARON



Head of a Bodhisattva

3rd-6th century A.D.,

Gandhara

Schist

H: 29 cm

Fine grey schist head of a bodhisattva (one of the paths to becoming a buddha). With a richly decorated headdress featuring a large central jewel, above which is a central cockade. To the sides are decorations of winged quadrupeds, carved in high relief. The face bears a serene expression and downcast eyes, with an auspicious forehead mark (urna) and wavy moustache typical of such representations.

His elaborately jewelled turban identifies him possibly as Avalokiteshvara, the earthly manifestation of the self-born eternal Buddha Amitabha and the bodhisattva of compassion, who protected against shipwreck, fire, assassins, robbers, and wild beasts and who was widely venerated in northern India between the 3rd and 7th centuries.

Centred on the Peshawar Valley and the Potohar Plateau, the kingdom of Gandhara was an ancient province deeply aligned with the teachings of the Buddha, since his death in 480 B.C. Known to the Greeks throughout antiquity, and for a brief period under the rule of Alexander the Great between 329 and 325 B.C, it was both an important trade route between the east and west, and a place where many foreigners settled. It became a melting pot of Greco-Roman, Chinese, Indian and Central Asian

influences, causing a diverse yet idiosyncratic form of Buddhist art to evolve.