The Importance of Names in Archaeology: Exploring 'Gandhāra'

RUTH YOUNG

Introduction

Names are very important, not only in allowing us to communicate clearly and effectively with others about objects, people and places, but also in terms of identity. What we are called has a great impact on our perception of ourselves and how other people perceive us. Historians and archaeologists have long recognised the power of the past and its contribution to emerging nationalism and collective identities (e.g. Chakrabarti 2003; Trigger 1989). In turn, names are recognised as highly powerful aspects of the development of personal, local, regional, national and even international identity, and when there is a link between names and the past (whether historical or archaeological) this is often seen as a legitimation of present occupation and confirmation of time-depth, as well as sometimes enhancing tourist activity, as Alexandri found in her study of Greek place name changes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Alexandri 2002).

In a globalised world it is almost impossible to avoid instant recognition of brands such as McDonalds or Coca-cola and what they stand for. The power of brand names and their positive and negative associations is well understood by companies such as Philip Morris Companies, which is the world's largest and most profitable tobacco seller. Given the increasingly negative image of tobacco and cigarettes, and indeed the involvement of Philip Morris in legal activity related to tobacco related deaths in recent years, considerable time and money was poured into consultation and research before Philip Morris Companies changed their name to The Altria Group in 2003 (Smith and Malone 2003). This name change is intended to remove the company from any negative associations: 'Philip Morris' will continue to refer to tobacco while Altria avoids the connotation" (Smith and Malone 2003: 554).

The names for people, places or things are often used out of habit, without thought given to the process behind the name, or for multiple meanings of implications of a name. Conversely, names are also often used as shorthand for much bigger issues and ideas, and we assume that those hearing the name will recognise the full meaning that is implied or implicit in the name. An example of this might be the use of the names 'Indus' and 'Harappa' for the major Old World Civilisation. 'Indus' of course has immediate geographical connotations as it refers to the location of many archaeological sites within the basin of the Indus River. 'Harappa' is the type-site for the whole civilisation, and as such, using this name has more immediate archaeological links. Because 'Indus' and 'Harappa' have very specific meanings, as well as their wider meanings, a number of scholars have recently argued that the name 'Indus' is too restrictive, after all, we now know that there are Indus sites located across a vast area, from coast to desert, and many are outside the Indus river system. 'Harappa' is also considered by some to be an unrepresentative name, as it refers to one of two (or perhaps three) major cities, and the vast number of Indus sites are much smaller, although many are urban in nature. Therefore some scholars, such as Chakrabarti, have suggested that the civilisation should be known as

the 'Indus-Hakra' or the 'Sindhu-Sarasvati'. Indus-Hakra because a large number of sites are located in the Hakra plain area, and Sindhu Sarasvati because the Sarasvati River has been mentioned in the earliest Indian literature and is thought to have been located in the Hakra region, while Sindhu is the Sanskrit name for the Indus (Chakrabarti 1999). However, the names 'Indus' and 'Harappa' are firmly embedded in both the academic and public consciousness, and the civilisation continues to be known as the Indus or Harappan.

Names, therefore, are extremely important, and have far reaching implications in terms of social, political and national identity, and as archaeologists, we should be aware of these implications and that we must be mindful of the power of names in heritage and archaeology. In this paper I will explore the name Gandhāra, considering different explanations for its origins, its geographic and cultural applications, various alternatives, and finally the impact of the name itself.

Origins of 'Gandhāra'

The name 'Gandhāra' or 'Gandhāris' is found in the *Rigveda* (RV 1.120.1) indicating that it was an early geographical or social entity. While there have been numerous speculations about the origins and development of this early Gandhāra, the problems of dating the Rigveda and of linking material culture to literary and linguistic analyses continue to limit such work to the realm of speculation.

The *Samhitas*, or compilation of the Vedas, is estimated to have taken place between c.1500-1300 BCE, and it is believed that the hymns, poems and other material were composed over an unknown preceding period, and passed down as oral tradition (Allchin and Allchin 1982: 298). These dates have been assigned based on linguistic analysis, and also the hymns have been closely tied into the reading of the material culture as evidence for the movement of people, in particular the Indo-Aryans by many scholars (Allchin and Allchin 1982: 305-306). Allchin (1995: 41) points out that the third century BCE Aśokan inscriptions are in fact the 'first datable and readable inscriptions' and although the Vedas are considered to be considerably earlier, the date of their composition remains the subject of much debate and controversy. The Vedic texts should be read with certain cautions in mind: they are believed to be the product of priests and those of a priestly caste or group, likely to be recorded by the strata with control over literacy – the hymns may well be as much propaganda as literal record; they are selective in subjects covered; they are thought to have been codified in some cases many centuries after their first composition (Allchin 1995: 84).

We can securely date the existence of 'Gandhāra' as a geographical entity to the Achaemenid Empire and its dramatic expansion under Cyrus II (559-530 BCE), which included successful campaigns in the east, including 'Gandara', prior to 539 BCE (Brosius 2006:11). Various inscriptions linked to different Achaemenid rulers mention the satrapies or provinces that made up the Empire, and these include Gandara (ibid. 49). Herodotus (iii.91) notes that the seventh province or satrapy of the Achaemenid (or Persian) Empire is 'Gandarioi', and an area called Gandhāra or Gadara is included within inscriptions relating to Darius c. 518 BCE (Wheeler 1962: 3).

Applications of Gandhāra

Gandhāra has a number of different meanings to be considered here. Clearly, it is a geographical area known from a range of sources such as the Achaemenid inscriptions noted above as well as the more ephemeral mentions in the *Rigveda*. This geographical presence persists, and following the end

of the Achemenid Empire, Gandhara becomes one of the sixteen mahajanapadas, or states, absorbed into the Mauryan Empire (Allchin 1995:115-118). Gandhāra as a geographical entity persists over many centuries, and was an important part of the later Kushan Empire, and a heartland of Buddhist practices. Gandhāra as a physical entity, a destination, is mentioned in various travel accounts, including the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims Fa-Hsien (5th century CE) and Xuanzang (7th century CE) (Legge 1965). While the precise boundaries and placement of Gandhara are still subject to debate and interpretation, Gandhāra was clearly an important and widely recognised place for a considerable period of time.

'Gandhāran Art' is the name given to the extensive corpus of Buddhist iconography that has been recovered within the historical area of Gandhāra. The Kushans ruled much of northern South Asia, including Swat from the early first century CE, and under the rule of the great Buddhist patron Kanishka, this art form developed and flourished (Swati 1997:3). It is believed that within the geographical unit of Gandhāra images of the Buddha (and Boddhisattva) were created (Khan 1993). Previously, only symbolic representations of the Buddha were used in decorations, so the school of Gandhāran Art was a significant break with tradition, and one which has had an immense and lasting impact on Buddhist art in the two millennia since its inception. Muhammad Ashraf Khan of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Pakistan (now Director, Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i Azam University, Islamabad), recently described ancient Gandhāra as 'an integral part of Pakistan that played [a] vital role in the spread of Buddhism...and in the creation of one of the most important religious art[s], popularly known as Gandhara art' (2005: 363). Gandhāran Art was produced over a long time period, and during this time has been divided into a series of different internal phases.

Less well known to the general public is a further use of the name Gandhāra, which has been given to a prehistoric archaeological culture (Dani 1967). The 'Gandharan Grave Culture' is understood to be the burial traditions associated with a particular group of people occupying the valleys of Swat and Dir between approximately 1600-500 BCE (Dani 1992; 1967). These people have been variously explained as invading Indo-Aryans and pastoral nomadic groups (Allchin and Allchin 1982; Dani 1992; 1978). The name Gandhāran Grave Culture was given to the people believed to be responsible for what has been described as a very homogeneous archaeological culture because the material culture – graves, grave goods, related occupation sites – were first identified in an area roughly equating to ancient Gandhāra.

Alternatives to the name Gandhāra

Given the strong links between the geographical area of Gandhāra and the past, particularly a past ratified by such an important and influential source as the *Rig Veda,* it is not surprising that 'Gandhāra' has such potency as a name. Gandhāra has great antiquity, was both an autonomous kingdom or state and a recognised part of the great Achemenid Empire, was considered a significant 'destination' for religious travellers and was a religious core of the hugely important Buddhist Kushan Kingdom. 'Gandhāra' thus had great resonance with the newly emerging state of Pakistan and was a fitting choice of name for a newly recognised archaeological culture. However, neither the use of 'Gandhāra' to describe and name the school of art nor the archaeological culture has gone unchallenged.

While both the school of art and the archaeological culture are clearly present within this geographical region, both have been recognised in areas beyond the boundaries of ancient Gandhāra.

The association of the artistic style with a particular region was indeed recognised by contemporaries of this Buddhist art, however, we have no evidence to support the idea that the people responsible for the graves and other material culture of the Gandhāran Grave Culture thought of themselves as 'Gandhāran' or as living in an area known as Gandhāra. Well known geographical place names are often used to simultaneously name and describe historical and archaeological traditions and events (e.g. the Indus Civilisation), and while this makes for a clear association of place and culture, in the kind of shorthand of names noted above, this does not necessarily offer us the most accurate or sensitive name for archaeological and cultural phenomena.

The style of Buddhist representational art which is believed to have developed in the region known as Gandhāra has been recognised and recorded in areas well beyond this central area, with clear local and regional stylistic and technical developments. Because of this, the name 'Gandhāran Art' is thought by some scholars to be both restrictive and inaccurate, and suggestions such as the 'Indus-Oxus School of Art' have been put forward as alternatives (Swati 1997). While 'Indus-Oxus' itself is also closely linked to geographical names, the use of the two main rivers (and by implication their catchment areas) allows the vast geographical sweep that is the current reality of our knowledge of this particular style of Buddhist art to be more accurately conveyed. This in turn has implications for the scale of contact and spread of ideas, which is in contrast to the contained and bounded sense of the artistic tradition, which comes from the use of the name 'Gandhāran Art'.

The Gandhāran Grave Culture, the archaeological phenomenon named after the area where it was first recognised and believed to be the core area, has also had alternative names proposed. The best known of these is 'Pre-Buddhist cemeteries' which was used by the Italian archaeologists, primarily Stacul (1987; 1966) and colleagues who were identifying and defining the graves and associated material primarily in Swat while Dani worked in Dir. While Dani's name 'Gandharan Grave Culture' tied this culture firmly to a known and historically celebrated geographical region, Stacul and others gave a name, which tied this culture to a time period. Both names are thus offering at least a partial description of the archaeological tradition that they are naming – Dani's preferred name telling us about the location of the sites and material, and Stacul's preferred name telling us about the chronology of the sites and material. Why might we then consider that either or both of these names are problematic?

Recent archaeological work has shown that neither the geographical boundaries implied by the name Gandhāra, nor the chronological boundaries implied by the name Pre-Buddhist are necessarily correct. One of the key tenets of good archaeological research is its awareness of the importance of new data, new analyses and ultimately new interpretations, and the Gandhāran Grave Culture is a good example of new data changing how we might understand (and thus describe) an archaeological phenomenon. Archaeological surveys have recorded numerous cemeteries with burials in a style that has been identified by some researchers as Gandhāran Grave Culture styles (Ali et al. 2002; 2005) in areas outside ancient Gandhara, and in places as distant as Kashmir and even the Salt Range in the Punjab (Dar pers.comm.). Recent radiocarbon estimates from putative Gandhāran Graves in Chitral show that the age range for burials in similar styles to those from ancient Gandhāra itself range from the mid first millennium BCE up to the mid first millennium CE (Ali et al. 2008).

Ways forward

Given the apparent spread of Gandhāran Grave Culture outside Gandhāra itself, it is clear that this name is no longer descriptive nor even accurate. However, as the other favoured name for this archaeological tradition – Pre-Buddhist cemeteries – is also likely to be viewed as inaccurate at least insofar as the Chitral graves are concentred, it seems that the issue of re-naming is far from simple. Certainly, it would be possible to argue that the Gandhāran Grave Culture needs to be reassessed in terms of its geographical and chronological extent, as well as a detailed consideration of the material culture itself. Of course, such a re-consideration alone will not automatically solve this issue of nomenclature – names are an important and sensitive part of identity.

When something such as 'Gandhāran Art' or 'Gandhāran Grave Culture' becomes so embedded in local and national consciousness, is it even possible to change the name? Or desirable? Gandhāra (and particularly Gandhāran Art and the Buddhist sites and associations of Ancient Gandhāra) is now an international brand and a highly successful one, bringing in millions of tourist dollars each year and to change the name would be to lose a considerable asset (though looting and the illegal art market is the dark side of this success, see e.g. Coningham and Ali 2002). Despite the offering of Pre-Buddhist Cemeteries as an alternative name at a similar time as the coining of Gandhāran Grave Culture, it is the latter which has been more rigorously promoted in both academic publications and the popular press, thus making it the name used by the vast majority of archaeologists and historians today, as well as members of the public.

Perhaps 'Gandhāra' should stand as an example and warning to all archaeologists – that names have a great power, and that we all need to be very careful before we name and display new discoveries? We should all be aware that archaeology is very important in the formation of national or collective identities, and because of this the names that are selected or imposed carry a great deal of weight; they are never neutral or objective.

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Alexandri, A. (2002). 'Names and Emblems: Greek archaeology, Regional Identities and National Narratives at the Turn of the 20th century'. *Antiquity* 76: 191-199.

Ali, I., D. Hamilton, P. Newson, M. Qasim, R. Young, and M. Zahir. (2008). 'New Radiocarbon Dates from Chitral, NWFP, Pakistan, and their Implications for the Gandharan Grave Culture of Northern Pakistan' *Antiquity* 82: project gallery.

Ali, I., M. Zahir, and M. Qasim. (2005). 'Archaeological Survey of District Chitral, 2004', *Frontier Archaeology* 3: 91-106.

Ali, I., C. Batt, R. Coningham, and R. Young. (2002). 'New Exploration in the Chitral Valley, Pakistan: an Extension of the Gandharan Grave Culture', *Antiquity* 76: 647-653.

Ali, I. and RAE Coningham. (2002). 'Recording and Preserving Gandhara's Cultural Heritage'. In Brodie J., J. Doole and AC. Renfrew (eds), *Illicit Antiquities: the Destruction of the World's Archaeological Heritage*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. 25-31.

Allchin, FR. (1995). *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Allchin, B. and R. Allchin. (1982). *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brosius, M. (2006). *The Persians. An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.

Chakrabarti, DK. (2003). *Archaeology in the Third World: a History of Indian Archaeology since 1947*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.

Chakrabarti, DK. (1999). *India. An Archaeological History: Palaeolithic Beginnings to Early Historic Foundations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dani, AH. (1992). 'Pastoral-Agricultural Tribes of Pakistan in the Post-Indus Period' In: AH. Dani and VM. Masson (eds). *History of Civilizations in Central Asia*. Volume I: *The Dawn of Civilization: Earliest times to 700 BC*: 395-419. Paris: UNESCO.

Dani, AH. (1978). 'Gandhara Grave Culture and the Aryan Problem', *Journal of Central Asia* 1: 42-55.

Dani, AH. (1967). 'Timargarha and Gandharan Grave Culture', *Ancient Pakistan* 3: 1-407.

Khan, MA. (2005). 'Recent Discoveries in the Ancient Gandhara Region and Adjoining Areas with Special Emphasis on District Attock in the Punjab-Pakistan', in C. Jarrige and V. Lefevre (eds). *South Asian Archaeology 2001*: 363-4. Paris: Editions Recherché sur les Civilisations.

Khan, MA. (1993). *Gandhara Sculptures in the Swat Museum*. (Saidu Sharif, Swat: Swat Museum).

Legge, J. (transl.) (1965). *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. New York: Paragon Reprint Corp and Dover Publications Inc.

Smith, EA. and RE. Malone. (2003). 'Altria Mean Tobacco: Philip Morris's Identity Crisis', *American Journal of Public Health* 93(4): 553-556.

Stacul, G. (1987). *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Swat, Pakistan (c.3000-1400 B.C.)*. Rome: Is-MEO.

Stacul, G. (1966). 'Notes on the Discovery of a Necropolis near Kherai in the Gorband Valley (Swat – West Pakistan)', *East and West* 16:261-74.

Swati, MF. (1997). 'Special Features of the Buddhist Art in the Swat Valley', *Athariyyat* 1: 1-60.

Trigger, BG. (1989). A History of Archaeological Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wheeler, REM. (1962). *Charsada*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The Litho-Garnished Grave Art at the Necropolis of Charsadda: A Prelude

QASIM JAN MOHAMMADZAI

The gulf in status between the lives of the rich and poor as seen in the living world, may also be witnessed in their abodes of eternal rest, and is a common trend experienced throughout the world. The rich as usual are desirous to be prominent and dominant even after they expire, thus we see today graves from a customary mass of soil to grand mausoleums with beautiful gardens all around. For instance the Taj Mahal in India and the Egyptian pyramids are also tombs, but they were meant for the kings and Pharaohs or the privileged class of the society. Whether it is the pyramid or a grave of any other kind, its style of construction cast back the multi faceted needs of the people of that age. In our country, the majority of the population follows Muslim faith, and buries their dead according to the Islamic customs, which follows common practice throughout the world. But the external shape of the grave differs from place to place depending upon the availability of local material and aesthetic needs of the people. The latter is practised where the people are relatively rich. One such area where specially built graves could be encountered in the North West Frontier Province is at the vast Muslim burial ground of *Hashtnagar* (the old name of the present day district Charsadda), which lies in the heart of the Peshawar valley on the confluence of the Swat and Kabul rivers. It is at this cemetery that the best examples of stone decorated graves can be seen. There are thousands upon thousands of graves here among which more than ninety per cent are decorated with this typical mode of stone ornamentation.

The Hashtnagar graveyard, which is the landmark of the area, lies to the south of the main tehsil bazaar. It caches the visitor's attention when he enters the town from the Peshawar side after crossing the river *Jindai*. It is on the banks of this river that the remains of the eight towns of antiquity are located.

The rudimentary area of the cemetery was much larger than its present size. A portion of it was transfigured into the tehsil headquarters and its adjoining government buildings, at the time the North West Frontier Province was formed in 1901 during the British period. As the graveyard is almost surrounded by populated area, the activity of land mafia has been a constant threat to its survival. It was during the pre-British days that the necropolis became known as one of the largest in the whole of South Asia. Its approximate area has now been reduced to 4 x 3 kilometres only. It is the common equity of the dwellers of the neighboring villages, which, according to the local elders, was endowed to them during the suzerainty of the Mughal king, Akbar. Such collective (common) property is locally called *shāmilāt*, whose origin can be traced back to the ancient Indo-Aryan society of c.1500 BCE. Among the communal graves there are shrines of the so-called saints, locally known as *Bābāgān*, some are known by their names while others not, and are given strange names by the local people. The most well known among them is that of Ali bin Yousaf Dalazak commonly known as Bābā Sāhib (of c. 1002 CE). Gopal Das in his *Tārikh-i Peshāwar* has mentioned shrines of some other saints in the surrounding area as well. He also notes that a special *Eid* day fair is held (Das 1874: 287) on the

Akhtar Dherai, an archaeological mound in the southern extremity of the graveyard (see also Dani 1963: 8), which is now called *Majoki Dherai* because of its close proximity to the village of Majuki (Mohammadzai 2001: 44; 2003). A good number of solitary graves attributed to martyrs or fallen heroes locally known as *Shahīd Bābā* could also be noticed in even the thickly populated quarters of the adjoining towns. Such graves are generally long in size and could be encountered anywhere, in farms, old houses, lanes and even mosques.

The Swat and Kabul Rivers have not only provided water for agriculture in the Peshawar plains for the last thousands of years, but have also gifted the area with rolled stones and pebbles that come down from the northwestern foothills with seasonal flood-waters, especially in the Swat River. Remains of ancient settlements on the banks of both the rivers still have traces of the river stones, which the occupants of the sites employed in the walls and foundations of their structures. The core of Buddhist stupas were generally replenished with rubble and rolled stones that could still be seen on the surface of such sites.

With the arrival of the Muslims, burning of the dead gave way to burying and afterwards making a grave over the remains. With the passage of time, alterations were added to make it better-looking. Thus the simple use of rolled stones developed into a full fledged art, exclusively associated with this land of the twin rivers. The grave builders of the area have widely utilized these river stones not only for its making and invigorating but also for its beautification and embellishment. As time passed, the task was taken over by artisans who showed distinction in this fastidious profession, applying their hidden genius and transforming it into an art. A purely indigenous decorative art locally called 'Da Kānro Gulkāri' meaning stone decoration, was developed, which we have termed 'The Litho-Garnished Grave Art of Charsadda'. The material is locally obtainable and cost free, but the proficiency of its use in time developed into an art, which was admired greatly by the local populace that its use soon extended into the whole of the Peshawar valley.

The skilled artisans expressed their artistic intellect in the art, thus utilizing this free gift of nature for gratifying the aesthetic requirement of the locals. Rolled river stones of two colours, i.e. black and white, are utilized as the main medium of expression, though other colours such as brown and green are also employed but quite rarely. According to an expert of this art we talked to:

> we keep no pre-planned concept what pattern we would make. Once we start decorating a grave with stones, an idea about a particular contour is automatically formed in our mind. Sometimes the client demands for a special pattern or illustration of his choice, but we normally prefer to work according to our own sketch in mind (Figure 1). This gives us full freedom to express our dexterity as we feel appropriate for the job, thus the end result is always more than the client's expectations.

A wide range of floral and geometric patterns are being used in this decoration process. All the four sides of the grave are covered with stones, each side normally having a different design. Though faunal patterns are generally not used because of its living character, yet some bird designs are occasionally depicted. Geometrical designs include squares, rectangles, circles, triangles, crosses, multiple lines and numerous other composite ones (Figures 7, 9). Floral designs include flowers and leaves of different shapes and sizes (Figure 8). The faunal designs normally consist of a flying eagle

(Figure 6). Sometimes the name of the deceased is also written (Figure 5). *Kalimah, Allah-o Akbar, Ya Allah-Ya Muhammad, Allah Khair* are written in Urdu/Arabic (Figure 2). There are also some graves which bear the deceased date of death (Figure 4). A grave was also noticed with Roman letters 'A' and 'S' representing the initials of the name of the deceased, i.e. *Asif Ali.* The decorations hint at changing trends and new experiments in the art according to the shifting tastes of the community. They also indicate its elasticity and flexibility, with the new requirements and altering predilections of the locals being incorporated. This style of decoration started here centuries ago, passed through many developmental stages, and still used widely. It did not need help of the rich and nobility for its subsistence, indeed this style of grave decoration seldom appeals to the upper class. It is rather the art of the common people, which they have kept alive for many centuries. It is not costly and is within the reach of everyone. It began centuries ago, and its popularity indicates that it will be kept alive for much longer time. With the passage of time both shapes and themes have been modified. Time has so far failed to subdue this artistic development present only in this part of Gandhāra. Likewise we have collected more than two hundred pot sherds with stamped designs from the surface of Majoki Dherai, an ancient settlement mound located close by as noted above. The different designs on the existing litho-garnished graves as well as those on the ancient pot sherds are so similar to each other that a possible link between the two cannot be ruled out. The extant art seems to be the developed form of that forgotten art of stamped designs on the earthen pots utilized by the ancient people of the land.

Bibliography

Dani, AH. (1963). *Pushkalavati: The Lotus City*, Peshawar._

Das, G. (1874). *Tārikh-i Peshāwar* (Urdu), Lahore.

Muhammadzai, QJ. (2001) 'A Short Note on Mra Dherai in Charsadda, Pakistan', *Ancient Pakistan* 14: 41-54

Muhammadzai, QJ. (2003). 'Majuki Dherai: Charsadda (Description of the Recent Finds)', *Journal of Asian Civilizations* 26: 79-96.