



## GANDHĀRA

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**GANDHARA** (OPers. *Gandāra*), a province of the Persian empire under the Achaemenids. The name of Gandhāra or Gandhārī occurs in ancient Indian texts as the name of a people, obviously the inhabitants of Gāndhāra, a district traditionally placed in the extreme northwest of the Indian subcontinent. It was located along both banks of the Indus, around the famous cities of Takshaśilā (Taxila) and Pushkalāvātī (modern Charsada, northeast of Peshawar).

The name Gandhārī first occurs in the *Rigveda* (I, 126,7; late 2nd millennium B.C.E.) in the phrase *Gandhārīnām avikā* (ewe of the Gandharans), and also in the somewhat later Atharva Veda. The name is used, around 400 B.C.E., by the Indian grammarian Pānini (Monier-Williams, pp. 346, 353), who himself probably hailed from Gāndhāra and who listed the land as one of the major provinces of India. The name of Gandhāra was still used in the 11th century C.E. by Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī (q.v.), who referred to Wayhend (I, p. 206) as the capital of Kandhāra (a place probably to be identified with Und near Attock). The earliest reference to Gandāra in Iranian sources occurs in the Old Persian version of the Bīsotūn text of the Achaemenid Darius I (in ca. 520 B.C.E.). In this text the land is listed as one of the “countries” (*dahyus*, q.v.) in the Persian empire (DB 1.16; Herodotus 3.91). In the Akkadian and Elamite versions of the same text, the name of Gandāra is replaced by that of the Paropamisadae (Akk.: *pa-ar-ú-pa-ra-e-sa-an-na*; Elam.: [*par-ru-ba-ra-e]-sa-na*). The latter name is also found in later classical sources and was used to denote the foothills south of the Hindu Kush watershed, near ancient Capisa and the modern city



of Kabul. The name of the Paropamisadae can be given an Iranian etymology, “(the land) beyond (the land) above the eagle/falcon,” and would thus indicate an appellation given to the country by (Iranian) people living to the north of the Hindu Kush, namely in or near ancient Bactria (q.v.). The etymology of the Old Persian name of Gandāra is still in doubt, although it has a clearly Indian background. It is likely that in antiquity the people of Gāndhāra were mainly Indian, as may be deduced from the fact that Indian languages (Pashai) are still being spoken in isolated valleys north and east of modern Kabul. Another indication of the ethnic background of the people of Gāndhāra in antiquity are the Achaemenid reliefs at Persepolis, where delegates from Gandāra /Gāndhāra are depicted with bare torso and wearing loincloths. Gāndhāra has become widely known as the center of the so-called Gandhara Art, which flourished in the early first millennium C.E. This art is characterized by strong influence from the Hellenistic and Roman West. The geographical position of Gāndhāra as the ancient gateway to India is not only indicated by the Gandhara Art, but also by much earlier finds. In particular it is linked to the so-called Gandhara Grave Culture, which flourished between ca. 1500 and 500 B.C.E. in this area. Relevant finds have been found along the banks of the Swat and Dir rivers to the north, Taxila to the southeast, and the land along the Gomāl river to the south. The Gandhara Grave Culture shows unmistakable links with finds from South Central Asia and the Iranian Plateau, also dating to the second and first millennia B.C.E.

See also: [GANDHĀRAN ART](#).

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