

Unearthing Pakistan: Buddhist Art, Muslim Nationalism, and Global Public History, 1947-1977

Unearthing Pakistan tracks the local exhibition and global circulation of ancient Buddhist sculpture from Pakistan from 1947 to 1977. This project explores how Pakistani museum curators and archaeologists turned to the region's Buddhist artefacts to exhibit an ancient history for the new nation. Some Pakistani curators and public intellectuals creatively retold the history of ancient Gandhara, a Buddhist kingdom in northwest Pakistan, to provide deep historical logic for Pakistan's existence as a religious homeland in the twentieth century and to build new ties to Southeast Asia and Europe. These scholars and museum officials anticipated that the ancient Buddhist past could culturally connect the country's separate wings, help to reconcile Pakistan's contentious debates over national history and religion, and forge new global ties. In doing so, they helped to reshape crucial debates about the role of religion in public life, offering an alternative to an exclusively Islamic narrative of Pakistan's history. I am requesting support for targeted research in unstudied archives on Pakistani archaeology and museums that are found in Turin, Naples, and Rome (Italy.) The Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan played a central role in the excavation and global circulation of Pakistan's Buddhist art in collaboration with Pakistani archaeologists. *Unearthing Pakistan* is both a local story of the crafting of Pakistani history and a global story of the staging of Pakistan as a religious homeland in museums around the world.