THE FIRST BUDDHA IMAGES

The first images of the Buddha were sculptures in human form that appeared in Gandhāra (northeast Pakistan) and in Mathurā (northern India, on the Yamuna River, NW of Agra) during the last half of the 1st century CE. Understandably, these were areas ruled by foreign powers: the Greeks in Gandhāra and the Scythians (Śakas) in Mathurā.

In Gandhāra art, the Buddha was at first depicted in approximately human size, equal in size as the other figures in the reliefs though he was the central figure. Later, however, the Buddha figure was made larger than the surrounding ones. Finally, they appeared independently of the biographical contexts, and the first Buddha images as we commonly know them appeared.

Mathurā and Gandhāra were important centres of Buddhist art. Many Buddhist inscriptions dating from the reign of the Greeks, the Śakas, the Parthians (Pahlavas) and the Kushans have been found there, testifying to its importance in the history of Buddhism.