Head fragment - The Stein Collection

Object: Head fragment

Place of origin: Khadalik (made)

Date: ca. 6th century (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Moulded stucco

Credit Line: Stein Loan Collection. On loan from the Government of India and the Archaeological Survey of India. Copyright: Government of India

Museum number: LOAN:I A SURVEY.7

Public access description

This stucco relief fragment shows the head of a small Buddha appliqué figurine. Everything below chin is lost. Such small appliqué figures formed part of the decoration within the vesicas surrounding life-size or larger Buddha statues in shrines. It was found by Sir Marc Aurel Stein in the one of the two main shrines at the site of Khadalik between Khotan and Keriya on the southern branch of the Silk Road in Xinjiang, China. Such small appliqué figures would have decorated the vesicas of life-size or larger Buddhist statues.

The Victoria and Albert Museum has more than 70 ceramic fragments and fragments of Buddhist sculptures, as well as around 600 ancient and medieval textiles recovered by Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1943) during his second expedition (1906-8) into Chinese Central Asia, where he once again visited and excavated sites on the southern Silk Road, before moving eastwards to Dunhuang. At Dunhuang, he studied and excavated the Han-dynasty watchtowers to the north of the town, as well as the Mogao cave temples to the southeast, where he acquired material from the Library Cave. From there he moved on to the northern Silk Road, stopping briefly at Turfan sites but not carrying out any excavations. He made a perilous north-south crossing of the Taklamakan desert in order to hasten to Khotan where he excavated more ancient sites, before finishing off his expedition with surveying in the Kunlun Mountains.

Descriptive line

Head fragment of a Buddha appliqué figurine, China.

Physical description

Stucco relief fragment of a head of small Buddha appliqué figurine. Burnt stucco. Everything below chin is lost.

Dimensions

Height: 6 cm, Width: 5 cm

Museum number

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Object history note

Found in one of the two main shrines at Khadalik. It was mistakenly numbered “Kha.i.e.001” in the loan agreement between the V&A and the Government of India (numerical file).

Historical context note

Khadalik lies between Khotan and Keriya on the southern branch of the Silk Road. Here Stein discovered remains of a number of Buddhist shrines. Inside several temples were elaborate murals depicting Buddhist deities, large statues with traces of gilding, reliefs and painted panels. Large numbers of Buddhist texts were found among the ruins, including potthi, religious books of Indian origin, written in Sanskrit, wooden tablets and sticks covered in Tibetan writing, and fragments of documents deposited as votive offerings. Other votive gifts included numerous small pagodas and moulded Buddha figures. Strings of Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) copper coins, left as offerings near Buddha statues, were taken by Stein as evidence that the site had been abandoned in the eighth century AD. The V&A holds, on loan, from Khadalik, pieces of woven plant fibres, wool felt and twill; and plaster-covered woven fabric, which may have functioned as stucco backing.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O134681/the-stein-collection-head-fragment-unknown/