

HINDU ICONS FROM CHINJI, CHAKWAL, PAKISTAN

M. Nasim Khan, Gul Rahim Khan and Mastoor Fatima Bukhari

The author is grateful to the owners who allowed him to photograph the following selected pieces of Hindu icons in their collections and publish them for an academic interest. They most probably seem to have been robbed from different ruined temples around Chinji Village, situated about a kilometre from Kallar Kahar towards Talagang in the Punjab province of Pakistan.¹

Standing Figure of Viṣṇu: Fig. 1

This figure of Viṣṇu made of sandstone is about 16 cm in height. He stands on a roughly prepared pedestal wearing, probably, a *dhoti*. His crown shows a lotus flower on its front. The only visible jewellery is the neck and ear ornaments. A plain nimbus is added behind his head.

Viṣṇu is shown with four hands, each holding one of his four main attributes. His right lower hand rests on *cakra* (wheel), while the left lower one grasps the *gadā* (mace). His upper right hand holds a lotus bud and in the left upper one a *śaṅkha* (conch-shell). Between his feet goddess Pṛithvī is depicted.

Seated Figure of Viṣṇu: Fig. 2

This figure, carelessly executed and lacking grace, is also made of sandstone and the size is also the same as of Fig. 1. Seated on his left folded leg, he has a nimbus behind his head and wearing a crown, which is executed with a lotus flower in the middle. He is decorated with a variety of ornaments—beaded necklace, bracelets and anklets and earrings. A strip of beaded ornament falls down from the necklace and reaches the *mālā* (?).

The figure is shown with two hands—the right rests on his knee holding a pot like object, which could be an earth symbol. His left hand resting on his thigh holds an unclear round object. Because of rough execution, identification of the sculpture remains difficult at this stage.

Four-armed Durgā Mahiṣasuramardinī: Fig. 3

Made of sandstone, this figure of Durgā Mahiṣasuramardinī is 45 cm in height. The goddess is decorated with earrings, necklace, armlets and bracelets. Her curly hair is done in a top chignon and her twisted locks drop on her shoulders. She wears the upper garment as well as the lower cloth, which reaches to her ankles. A large plain nimbus is shown behind her head.

Out of four, the goddess is carrying weapons only in her two hands.² She is shown subduing and killing *mahiṣa* (the buffalo demon.). Furiously attacking the demon, she spears its hind part with the trident of Śiva she is holding in her right front hand. With her left front hand, she is twisting back the neck of the demon by gripping its lower jaw. She is controlling the demon by holding fast its tail with her right rear hand. She places one foot upon the back of the recumbent animal. With her rear left hand, the goddess seizes the disc of Viṣṇu with flames. In the early text composed in her honour, she is also called in her this manifestation as Devī Māhātmya.

Six-armed Durgā: Fig. 5

This six-armed Durgā Mahiṣasuramardinī figure recovered from Chinji is made of green phyllite and is about 15 cm high. She is decorated with diademed-crown, necklace, ear ornaments, bracelets, armlets and anklets. She seems to be naked or might be wearing a transparent dress.

She is riding a lion, her *vahana* or mount, in *ardhaparyanka* or *lalitāsana* pose. The lion with long manes lying to left has a matted seat with beaded border on its back. The goddess is holding different attributes in all her six hands. In her front right hand she holds, probably, an arrow or a trident resting on her thigh. In the back upper hand she holds a *gadā* or mace visible above her head, while in the middle one she holds a sword. The front left hand holds an unidentified object. The raised back hand grips a *vajra* or thunderbolt, while the stretched middle one is holding a bow. An alligator is shown at the back of the lion.

Pedestal of the figure is carved in three parts: the base, plinth and the platform. The backside of the sculpture is plain.

Kārttikeya (?): Fig. 6

The sculpture of Kārttikeya 38.5 cm in height is made of locally available sandstone. Except for the damaged right foot and the left wing of the peacock on his diademed headdress, the sculpture is intact. He is seated on a plain 20x7.5 cm pedestal in *lalitāsana* pose. There is no sign of drapery and the figure is naked. He is wearing a diademed crown with floating ribbons two on either side behind the head. The end of the ribbons is in fishtail design. A peacock seated on the top of his crown facing front and holds in his beak three strings drawn upwards from the diadem. The left wing of the peacock is broken. Its spread-out tail covers the top of the large nimbus, 19.5 cm in diameter, behind his head and shoulders. Below the crown, hair is arranged in several tresses falling down on his shoulders, while in front it is arranged above the forehead. He wears an earplug like ornaments in his long-lobed ears. The neck jewellery includes three-tiered short and a single row long beaded necklaces. He wears no bracelets or anklets and is adorned with cobra-shaped armlets. He also wears a beaded girdle at his pelvis.

He is robust having broad shoulders and muscular body. His long thick moustaches, wide-open eyes and other facial impression give him autocratic personality. He is holding an object probably a plate or a symbol for earth or sun in his left hand. With his right hand he seizes a cobra that coils around his right leg. The presence of a plate and the serpent with a wide open mouth looking in the direction of the object could indicate that the scene might represent feeding of the serpent. In some examples, Kārttikeya holds a bowl of fruit and feeds his *vāhana*, the peacock (Banerjee 1956: plate XI.2).

Nothing is clear about the nature of the image. This might be an Indian god Kārttikeya or Iranian Mithra or could also be a syncretic figure having on one the hand Indian elements and on the other Iranian. If the peacock represented here is considered as *vāhana* of Skanda Kārttikeya the sun on the other is the emblem of Mithra. If cobra on the one hand is associated with Śiva it is linked on the other with Mithra. The presence of diadem with ribbons is mostly Iranian in origin. It could also be the image of certain royal personality (?).

Ekamukhaliṅga: Fig. 7³

This *ekamukhaliṅga* figure is made of backed clay measuring 11.10 cm in height. It is placed on a pedestal with a base, plinth and platform supported on bracket. It is shown with a single faced Hindu god Śiva, executed almost at the junction of glans as in an example from Gandhāra.⁴ He has a round face, fleshy nose and protruded lips. The long ears of Śiva are added with *kuṇḍala*. A large necklace is displayed on his neck. The hair is combed upward and arranged in a top knot.

Śiva Metal Plaque: Figs. 8-10

Metal plaques are rarely reported from the region⁵. The few ones recorded by the author come from different areas of Pakistan. Although they come from different areas, their common characteristics show some kind of relation among them.

The only recorded example from Chinji is a very thin copper plaque measuring 7x8 cm representing, probably, a divine face⁶ (Fig. 8). It has wide open eyes, a small nose and a small mouth with prominent cheekbones. The chin is broken and, probably, has some kind of decoration. He is wearing a three pronged crown with beaded lower margin, while its frontal surface is executed with spiral design. Between his eyebrows, there is a floral design composed of a diamond shaped central part with five petals of the same design. The other examples, found at Bajaur and Kashmir Smast ((Figs. 9, 10), show between their eyebrows a simple diademed shaped symbol, representing the third eye of Śiva. This may indicate that the symbol between the eyebrows of the Chinji plaque is the third eye of Śiva. If so, it would suggest that the object in question is a Śiva metal plaque. There is a Brāhmi inscription, probably of five letters, on the right side of his forehead but its reading on the photograph is quite difficult. The shape of the letters helps us to place the plaque after 4th/5th century AD.

Terracotta heads: Figs. 11-14

Several terracotta heads, all of them having almost the same facial features and expression, have been recovered from different Hindu sites at Chinji. They are about of the same size with an average diameter 4.5 cm.

Each head has a round face and Negroid features — woolly hair, flat nose and thick lips. It has small ears and wide open eyes and mouth with clearly visible teeth of the upper jaw. The eyebrows, moustaches and beard are stylised in floral design. Eyebrows are like ribbed leaves placed stalk to stalk at the middle of the forehead. As it is the case for the eyebrows, the moustaches are also arranged in the same manner.

Knob-like projections with a flat end at the back of these heads helped in fixing them in structures.

Except for few among the icons described above, identification of all of them without secured context is difficult, however, all of them belong to the Hindu faith and come from different ruined temples in the Chinji area. Belonging to different periods, they could be dated between 4th to 10th century AD or even later.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the owners of the antiquities for allowing me to publish it here. I am also thankful to them for placing at my disposal their photographs and notes.
2. Durgā with two hands has also been attested in the region (see Fig. 4) (Khan, A and Azeem, A. 1999/2000). There is another similar figure represented in the same gesture (Khan, A and Azeem, A. 1999) but I am not quite sure about its identification.
3. See also Nasim Khan 2006: 61.
4. Gupta 1984: Plates 18-21; Ghose 2003a
5. For some of these examples of masks recorded in the region, see e.g., Fussman 1991; Ghose 2003b, 2003c; Nasim Khan 2006: 67-68.
6. The Śiva metal plaques are normally shown with chest (see Ohri 1991: 7.6-7.12).

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Fig. 1



Fig. 1: back side



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4. Durgā from Kharaki, Peshawar



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8. Plaque from Chakwal



Fig. 9. Plaque from Bajaur



Fig. 10. Plaque from Kashmir Smast

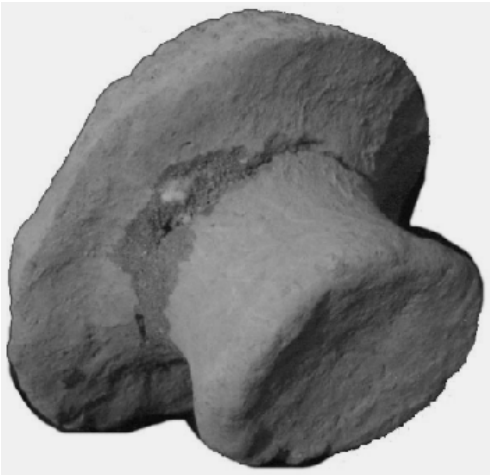


Fig. 11



Detail of Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14