

TERRACOTTA SEAL-IMPRESSIONS FROM BĀLĀ HISĀR, CHARSADDA

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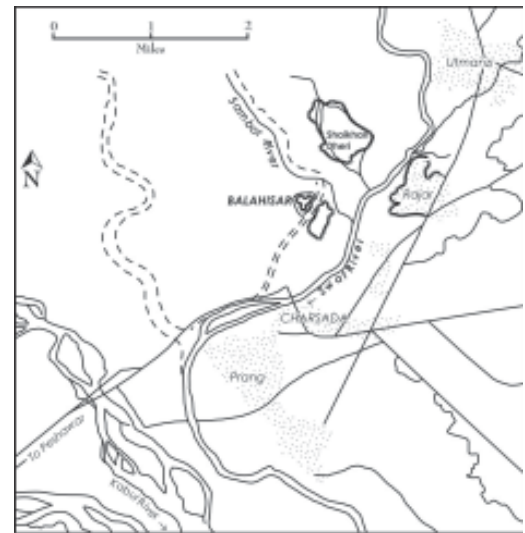
The remains of two ruined cities at Charsadda, ancient Pushkalāvati¹, situated about 27 km to the northeast of Peshawar, are indicated by two archaeological sites Bālā Hisār and Shaikhan Dheri. The former site (or Charsadda-I, Wheeler 1962:13), locally known as Hisār Dheri, lies on the south-western while the latter on the opposite bank of the Sambor River. It dates back to Pre-Achaemenian period, established through successive excavations by different missions. Mortimer Wheeler dug out from here two terracotta seal-impressions, each with a different sketch.²

Excavations at the other site, Shaikhan Dheri (or Charsadda-II, Wheeler 1962: 14), have revealed that the foundation of the city was laid in the second century BC by the Indo-Greeks, and deserted in or after the Kusāna period.³ Amid other antiquities, there were found several terracotta seal-impressions in excavation of the site in 1963 and 1964 (Dani 1967:120, Pl. XLVII). Some of them have already been published, while others are not.

None of the previously found seals at Bālā Hisār and Shaikhan Dheri shows any inscription. In one example from Bālā Hisār an animal is depicted on the flat surface while its back is curved (Fig. 2). The other example shows a standing Athena facing right (Fig. 3).

One of the six specimens from Shaikhan Dheri shows a single human bust (Fig. 4), while another one depicts a standing winged figure astride holding something in both the hands (Fig. 5). The third type shows two human figures: the right one is seated while the left one, possibly a female, is sitting on his knees offering probably a diadem to him (Fig. 6). The fourth impression shows two figures standing face to face (Fig. 7). The man in the right field wearing a Greek helmet with a fillet that drops from the top of his helmet and floats behind his shoulders. His right hand is raised in the gesture of argumentation. His left akimbo hand, most likely, carries a lion skin. The figure in the left field has a long nose and a prominent chin. He is probably wearing a Greek helmet and is carrying a bow (?). The fifth one, like the preceding one, shows two figures standing face to face (Fig. 8). The sixth variety depicts two standing figures: the one to the right standing front with crossed legs (Fig. 9). His left hand is hanging, while the right one seems akimbo. The figure in the left field is probably a female standing right looking to the man. The last category is probably depicted with an animal drawing (Fig. 10).

In addition to the above-mentioned, several other types of seal-impressions have recently been recovered from Bālā Hisār, according to the private owner.⁴ All of them show a variety of script



Charsadda – Sketch Map from Wheeler 1962

and figures and, therefore, form the focus of our interest for the current paper. They are divided into three main groups: Tri-lingual, bilingual and uni-lingual impressions and are further classified on the basis of accompanying figures. Most of them are impressed on the flat surface with the back being curved and having a hole. Finger prints are clearly visible on most of them.

Type A: Trilingual Seal-impressions (Figs. 11-25)

These impressions show a standing figure probably with a beard facing left. The right raised hand is extended making a gesture of blessing with the two pointing fingers, while in the left hand akimbo holds a water flask and an animal's pelt. The figure is standing left on a disc placed above five petalled budding lotus. The figure wears a lower garment comparable to an Indian *dhoti* with a fold hanging between the legs. The upper body is most probably naked except for a scarf like garment covering the left shoulder turns at the back to appear in the left field. Close to the left hand below at the loin level, there is visible part of the wrapping end of the lower garment tucked in there. The headdress seems round with a top knob. All of these 15 impressions seem to be from one seal.

There are inscriptions in the left and right fields. The one in the left is in Greek language reading as ΝΑΝΔΟΥ. While that in the right is bilingual (i.e., Pāli and Prākṛt) written in Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī characters respectively. The former is cursively and close to the shoulders of the figure can be read: *nandasa*. The latter script (Kharoṣṭhī), which starts at 5° o'clock, reads it *naṃdasa*. The Brāhmī inscription, particularly the ligature 'nda', is written in a cursive manner, which indicates the poor knowledge of the engraver. The name *nanda* (meaning 'joy, delight, happiness') is probably of Indian origin and is also used as a personal name.

On the basis of palaeography, the inscription can be placed between the 1st century BC and 1st century AD. The shape of the letter 'sa' is typical of the Greek or Indo-Scythian period.

Type B: Bilingual seals (Figs. 26-29)

The whole flat surface of the object is covered with a three lined inscription. The uppermost line is written in Kharoṣṭhī and the inscription can be read as *indravarmasa strategasa*, which means 'Indravarma the governor or the commander'. The lower two lines show Greek characters; the first line can be read as ΑΛ ΕΣΧΑΝΔΡΟΥ. ΑΛ ΕΣΧΑΝΔΡΟΥ could be a Greek version of Indravarmasa. In the upper margin a *nandipada* ΤΡΑΤΗΓΟΥ type symbol (𑀘𑀓) and in the lower margin there is another symbol (𑀘𑀓); both these symbols usually occur on the Azes-II coins⁵. These four impressions are probably from a single seal.

Type C: Uni-lingual seals (Figs. 30-45)

This type is further divided into five sub groups.

Sub-group I (Figs. 30-35)

The flat surface of the seal is depicted with a bearded male figure standing right. He seems bare footed wearing a lower garment, part of which passing over his left shoulder falls on his back; the floating object at his back could also be part of the headdress. A hare or a cat like animal stands in his right hand. The hare has an elongated body with long erect ears, and a wide open mouth.

The hare seems to be standing on its two front legs in the open hand of the standing figure while the back legs are lifted up. In the margin is a Kharoṣṭhī inscription which is to be read as *kṣatrasava mahatasa vasanati* which means 'Vasanati, the Great kṣatrapa'. *Vasanati* could be formed on the verb *vas* which means to 'shine', 'grow bright', etc. The impressions might be from the same seal.

Sub-group II (Figs. 36-38)

The central field is decorated with a *nandipada* type symbol in the middle and a Kharoṣṭhī legend in the margin. The symbol can be compared with the one seen on a seal found at Kashmir Smast (Nasim Khan 2006: 126, Figs. 137). The Kharoṣṭhī legend in the margin is *Soṣakasa gaṇaviasa* which means 'of Soṣaka, beloved of army'. On the basis of its palaeography, particularly the closed-mouth *sa*, the object belongs to the Scytho-Parthian period. I do not know any etymology for the name Soṣaka, which could be an Iranian name. The first letter of the inscription could also be *spo*, in which case the name could be read as *Spoṣaka* but this too has no certain etymology and once again could be of Iranian origin. The Gaṇaviasa could also be for *gaṇa-vīryasa* meaning 'who has power or strength of army'.

Sub-group III (Fig. 39)

We have a single example in this group. A male figure, probably Heracles, is standing naked except for a strip hanging between his legs. He is holding a sceptre or a club in his right hand, while the left one is akimbo. He seems holding a lion skin in his left hand. In the right field a Kharoṣṭhī inscription can be read as *naṃdasa* meaning 'of Naṃda'. Naṃda is most probably for Nanda a proper Indian name formed on Sanskrit *nand* which means 'joy, happiness, etc'. The letter *sa* shows a half open mouth.

Sub-group IV (Figs. 40-44)

The field is depicted with a standing male (?) figure to the left facing right and a lion seated on his haunches facing him. The lion is shown lifting-up its fore-right paw with wide-open mouth as if groaning on the man, whose arms back-stretched seems to retreat. The lion has shaggy whiskers erecting its manes. In the top margin there is a three letter Kharoṣṭhī inscription, *naṃdasa* (see above). All these five impressions are probably from one seal.

Sub-group V (Fig. 45)

In the central a standing figure faces right wearing a Greek helmet with a diadem, which fillets are floating behind. He is putting on, probably, a mantle (cloak). Winged shaped upper garments can partially be seen⁶. He is standing on a disc encircled by block-like petals of a lotus flower (?). In his right hand close to his chest and the left extended forward he is holding certain objects, which could be a bow and arrow. Traces of a legend at the margin, probably, are of a Kharoṣṭhī inscription, but its reading is difficult.

Seals or their impressions from Gandhara are well known from different sources, but the present impressions recently discovered at Bālā Hisār are more significant in terms of different subject matter and their recovery from a single site. All these seals are made of baked-clay, which show impression on a flat surface and thread-hole in their curved back. Although they do not come from a proper

context, the name Indravarma on some of the seals and the palaeographic study of the Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī inscriptions suggest that these objects can be placed between the 1st century BC and 2nd century AD.

These seals are very informative and confirm some historical statements related to the ancient history of Gandhāra. The trilingual seals are amongst the rarest evidence showing the use of Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī and Greek scripts in a single context at this period. Except for historical sources where it is used for a person, a dynasty or a king, the name Nanda is not known so far from any archaeological source other than the present Bāla Hisār seal-impressions. Both 'Nanda' as well as the dynasty of the same name are much earlier than the possible date of the seal-impressions.⁷ Although not much is known about Nanda of the 1st century BC/AD, appearance of this name on these impressions shows that he was an important figure in this period. The context in which the name is mentioned suggests that Nanda was probably an important figure during the Parthian rule on Gandhāra. It is also possible that it is of Indian origin and refers to the same person depicted on the impression along with the inscription.

Indravarma, one of the names used in the bilingual inscriptions, is known from other contemporary records, particularly from the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions found in ancient Gandhāra.⁸ He served as a governor or commander of an army under the Parthian dynasty. ΑΛ ΕΣΧΑΝΔΡΟΥ is most probably the Greek version for Indravarma or vice-versa.⁹

The names the 'Great Kṣatrap Vasanti' and the 'Gaṇavirya Soṣaka' of the uni-lingual inscriptions are not known from other sources. Vasanti seems governor of a certain province of the Parthian rule in Gandhāra while Soṣaka or Sposaka, an Iranian name, was probably serving the Parthian army at the same time. The first name seems of Indian origin while Soṣaka or Sposaka is Iranian.

The iconography of the figures, mostly Greek or Roman in character, and the mixing up of names of different origins indicate amalgamation of several cultures during the Scytho-Parthian rule of the region. The present seal-impressions are, therefore, some of the important documents from the site of Bāla Hisār that provide insight into the processes of syncretism that were taking place at the this site in the last century BC or early century AD.

Notes

- ¹ The earliest archaeological evidence regarding the name comes from a coin (Gupta 1958) (see Fig. 1) probably found at Shaikhan Dheri and an inscription found at Ghaz Dheri (Marshal 1904:176, Fig. 23). On literary evidence see Watter 2004:214; see also Cunningham 1994:89-90.
- ² Wheeler 1962: Plate XL. A.1-2.
- ³ On Shaikhan Dheri excavation, see Dani 1967:17-214
- ⁴ According to the owner, these seals were found at the nearby archaeological mound Hisār Dheri (Bala Hisār) but I have the impression that they could have originated from Shaikhan Dheri site.
- ⁵ Bopparachchi 1995: No. 833.
- ⁶ For similar dress, see Nasim Khan 2006: Fig. 47.
- ⁷ Date for Nanda family or dynasty is 430 century BC (Smith:41, 51).
- ⁸ See e.g., Nasim Khan 1997.

- ⁹ It is also possible that these two names indicate two different persons in which case it would suggest that even after the departure of the Greeks or decline of their rule in Gandhāra, some of the Greeks stayed behind and served the succeeding rulers even to the extent of occupying higher position in the army.

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Fig 1: Coin showing the City Goddess of Pushkalāvati



Bala Hisar
Fig 2: (Wheeler 1962)



Bala Hisar
Fig 3: (Wheeler 1962)

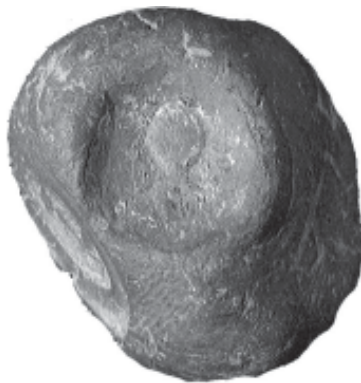


Fig 4: Shaikhan Dheri



Fig 5: Shaikhan Dheri

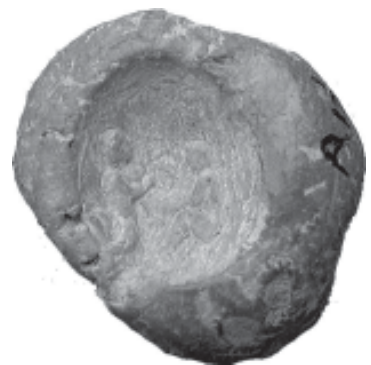


Fig 6: Shaikhan Dheri



Fig 7: Shaikhan Dheri (Dani 1965/66: 120, 2)



Fig 8: Shaikhan Dheri (Dani 1965/66: 120, 5)



Fig 9: Shaikhan Dheri (Dani 1965/66: 120, 3)



Fig 10: Shaikhan Dheri



Fig 11: (1.76gr., 1.9mm)



Fig 12: (1/84gr., 2mm)



Fig 13: (2.02gr., 2.1mm)



Fig 14: (1.30gr., 1.8mm)



Fig 15: (2.42gr., 2.2mm)



Fig 16: (2.44gr., 1.9mm)



Fig 17: (2.32gr., 2.2mm)



Fig 18: (2.04gr., 2mm)



Fig 19: (1.92gr., 2mm)



Fig 20: (2.44gr., 2.2mm)



Fig 21: (3.80gr., 2.7mm)



Fig 22: (1.46gr., 1.9mm)



Fig 23: (1.86gr., 2mm)



Fig 24: (1.90gr., 1.9mm)



Fig 25: (2.9gr., 1.9mm)



Fig 26: (1.3gr., 2.1mm)



Fig 27: (2.20gr., 2.1mm)



Fig 28: (2.36gr., 2.2mm)



Fig 29: (2.62gr., 2.3mm)



Fig 30: (1.58gr., 2mm)



Fig 31: (1.36gr., 1.9x1.4mm)



Fig 32: (2.04gr., 2mm)



Fig 33: (1.36gr., 1.8mm)



Fig 34: (1.58gr., 1.9mm)



Fig 35: (1.76gr., 2mm)



Fig 36: (2.14gr., 2.1mm)



Fig 37: (2.04gr., 2mm)



Fig 38: (1.60gr., 1.7mm)



Fig 39: (2.08gr., 2mm)



Fig 40: (1.92gr., 2mm)



Fig 41: (1.62gr., 1.5mm)



Fig 42: (1.74gr., 1.7x2.1mm)



Fig 43: (1.96gr., 1.8x1.5mm)



Fig 44: (1.64gr., 2mm)



Fig 45