

## TWO BUDDHIST KHAROṢṬHI SEALS FROM GANDHARA

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### 1. A crystal seal from Haḍḍa

A private collection in London lodges a seal in transparent crystal, measuring 30x24 mm, with a thickness of about 10 mm (fig. 1). It shows a monk in a sitting position looking at a person to his right, who folds his hands in veneration. To the left a tree completes the composition (fig. 2). Starting at this tree an inscription winds around the figures following the edge of the stone. It reads (fig. 3):

*khamṭ(i)vardane vihar(e) saghamudra,*

"Seal of the community in the Monastery called 'Increase of endurance'".

The name corresponds most likely to Sanskrit *\*kṣāntivardhana*. Deaspiration of *dha* to *da* is not unknown, and found e.g. in *sadaviyari*, Skt. *sadhavihārin* (Konow 1929:107), or *damarakṣita* on a seal from Taxila (Marshall 1951,II:680 no. 15), obviously meant for *dharmarakṣita*. After *r*, *dha* can be preserved, as in *ayubalavardhie* in the Patika inscription from Taxila (Konow 1929:28) or in *guṣaṇa-vaśa-saṃvardhaka* on the Manikiala slab (Konow 1929:149), it can also become cerebralized as in *ṇaṃḍivaḍhaṇeṇa* on the Kalawān plate (Marschall 1951,I:327). Alternatively, we might consider equating it with Skt. *\*kṣāntivartana*, "life through endurance", comparable to *kṣāntivrata* in Udānavarga 33, 18.



Fig. 1: The new crystal seal from Haḍḍa



Fig. 2: Squeeze of the seal from Haḍḍa

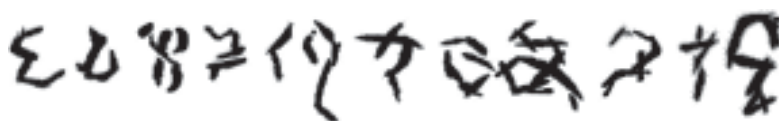


Fig. 3: The inscription in re-arranged letters

With regard to style and material this seal can be compared to three other specimens. One very nearly parallel (fig. 4) was published long ago first by Whitehead (1950), then partly read by J.Ph. Vogel (1950), who could not decipher the name of the monastery. This lacuna was filled by M. Henig (1994: 213) as no. 479. The complete text reads:

*vhumiagamajhi-viharami saghamudre,*

rightly understood as Sanskrit *bhūmyaṅkamadhya-vihāre saṅghamudrā*, "the seal of the community in the Monastery at the Middle of the Earth's Lap".



Fig. 4: A crystal seal bought in Rawalpindi (after Henig 1994: 213)



Fig. 5: A crystal seal, Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (after Janert 1966)

This first seal was purchased in Rawalpindi; Henig therefore guessed at a provenance in the Kabul valley; the new seal is said to come from Haḍḍa.

The second, uninscribed, parallel was published by Chr. Sachs as no. 189 in *Bopearachchi e.a. 2003:195*, referring to Whitehead 1950 and Vogel 1950. It is described as a Buddhist seal, depicting an "ascète avec pot à eau et plante", made from rock crystal, measuring 25x19x16 mm. She dates it to the 5th to 6th century, probably too recent a date when compared to the two inscribed relatives now known.

The third parallel belongs to the Museum of Indische Kunst, Berlin, since 1961, acc.no. MIK I 9954. It was published by K.L. Janert in 1966. Its maximal measurements are 25 x 23 cm, being 6.7 mm high, made from crystal and weighing 11.7 g. It shows a sitting and a standing person, facing each other, and nothing else (fig. 5). Twelve Kharoṣṭhī letters, to be read from inside, run around the lower half of the surface. The reading of Janert needs not be mentioned; it was corrected by D. Schlingloff (1967:320) as *thetakula-viharaṃmi saṃghamudra*. For *thetakula*, however, *therakula* has to be read.

Since all inscribed seals were made from the same sort of stone, with the same composition of central figure and bystander, showing a tree in three of the four cases, and having the same formula for its inscription, we can assume that they came from the same workshop, made, most likely, for monasteries not far apart from each other.

Some more seals from monasteries in UP or Bihar have been interpreted collectively by Vogel in 1950; Schlingloff (1967:317f.) has added eight more. Unnoticed went another one published by S. Konow (1929:101) as no. 10, reading *atavihare mudra satasa*, "This is the seal of Sata in his own monastery".<sup>1</sup>

## 2. One more Buddhist seal from the Kashmir Smast?

At the exhibition at Lattes (Bopearachchi e.a. 2003) a seal was on display that once had belonged to a *śramana* called Saṅghamitra (*saṅghamitrāsa* / *ṣamaṇasa*) (fig. 6; Falk 2003:380 no. 335). It depicts a man confronting an attacking lion raised on its hind legs. Instead of shooting at him he holds an inverted bow in the direction of the animal. The scene certainly refers to a story or maxime, current at the time, but which is unknown to me. The seal was said to have come from the Kashmir Smast, the famous cave in the mountains north of Mardan, NWFP, Pakistan.



Fig. 6

Seal and print with  
lion and archer



Fig. 7

Another seal of absolutely the same manufacture has surfaced now (figs. 8,9). It is likewise of bronze, its diameter is 31 mm, being 4 mm thick. It shows a bearded ascetic, sitting in front of his leaf-hut on a stool. This scene can be compared to a seal published by Konow (1929:101 no. 8), with an inscription saying *bramadatasa*. On Konow's plate XX,8 the ascetic sits in front of his hut facing an altar of Iranian shape (fig. 10).



Fig. 8

Seal and print with Ṛṣyaśrṅga



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Seal showing Ṛṣi in hut with altar  
(Konow 1929: pl. XX no. 8)

On our new seal a more elaborate story is told. A flask is seen at the feet of the ascetic. He looks at a female deer standing in front of him. Between the legs of the deer kneels a human baby with its head turned towards the udder of the animal. Behind the deer a tree represents the woods where the three live. This scene undoubtedly depicts ascetic Kāśyapa with his son called Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. The episode in itself is not particularly Buddhist in nature. As H. Lüders has shown in 1897, Hinduistic Sanskrit versions are preserved in the *Mahābhārata*, (3.110,23 - 113,25), the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.8-10), *Padmapurāṇa* (Pātālakhaṇḍa 13; Lüders 1940:7-11) and other Purāṇas. Buddhistic narratives are found in the *Mahāvastu*, the *Avadānakalpalatā* (65), and in the Pali canon in the *Alambusajātaka* (no. 523) and the *Nalinikājātaka* (no. 526; Lüders 1940:26). The picture in the seal refers to a core event common to all the stories, so that any sort of attribution to a particular narrative tradition is not possible.

The earliest depiction of the story is found in Bharhut on a relief inscribed with *isisiṃgiyajātaka*, explained in Lüders 1940:41, who adds another examples from Amarāvati. Schlingloff (1971/73) adds further depictions from Sanchi, Mathurā and Ajanta. On pieces of plastic art from Gandhāra<sup>2</sup> the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga episode seems to be rather rare. Kurita (1990:279, nos. 854, 855) shows two panels with a scene from the *Alambusā-Jātaka*, without stating their original provenance. On both panels the ṛṣi sits in his leaf-hut and the deer stands immediately in front of him. In no. 854, lodged today in a private collection in Japan, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga kneels under the animal and drinks from its udder. The horn on his head is clearly visible. So far as the composition goes, this panel provides an absolute parallel to our seal.

The panel is not datable; our seal with its Kharoṣṭhī inscription should not be much older than the end of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty in the 4th century. The earliest pieces in Bharhut and Gandhāra in the North and North-west of the subcontinent seems to speak against the hypothesis of H. Berger (1968) that the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga tale is the outcrop of a Dravidian rain myth, although this idea was taken up again by von Simson in 1986.

The owner of the seal calls himself a Buddhist monk, *śramaṇa*, in the lower register (*śamaṇasa*). His personal name is difficult to read. The first letter is just a vertical, bending slightly to the right, too short for a *kha*, so that the most likely guess is that it is a *na*. The second letters is *ḍa*, the third is the wavy *sa*, already known from the parallel. A personal name Naḍa or Naṭa is attested in several sources, including Buddhist ones.

Design, material, size and script of this seal is identical with no. 335 in the Lattes catalogue, referred to above. The almost vertical outline of the letter *sa* is particularly striking. Both seals were fashioned in the same workshop and both were made for Buddhist monks. There are other series of seals definitely coming from the Kashmir Smast, one being very much different from the other in size and inscription, as if different workshops had developed different styles regarding material, shape of the seals and the style of letters and contents. If this new seal really comes from the Kashmir Smast then we would have an indication that one of the shops there was specializing in a kind of seal to be given to Buddhist visitors. The artists involved are very skilled and they depict stories not directly related to the gods venerated in and near the cave.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Konow reads *mudrasatasa*, "Of Mudrasata, in his own Vihāra".  
<sup>2</sup> On a so-called Ṛṣyaśṛṅga from Mathura cf. Bhattacharya 1991.

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