

Re-Interpretation of the Copper Plate Inscription and the Discovery of More Epigraphic Specimens from Kashmir Smast

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Introduction

One of the most recent and exciting discoveries in the region of Gandhāra is the identification of Kashmir Smast as a Śivaite site. A variety of antiquities found at the site confirm this.¹ Although belonging to different periods, most of them suggest that Kashmir Smast remained under the influence of Hindu pantheon for many centuries. The famous Gupta copper plate inscriptions and a number of other antiquities, e.g., the *lingas*, iconic representations of Hindu gods and Lajjā Gaurī seals attest the practice of Śivaite cult for about eight centuries, i. e., from the 2nd to 10th century AD (Nasim Khan, M. 2002b). In addition to these multiple coins, particularly the predominating ones of the Kidarites and Hepthalites, help us to reconstruct the history of the region between the 4th and 8th centuries AD, the period that is barely understood.

Like other antiquities from the site, the epigraphic records can be found in a large number that belong to different periods. They are broadly of two different kinds: immovable and movable inscriptions. The immovable inscriptions are either painted or engraved on surfaces of huge boulders, rocks or cliffs. The most important among these are those painted on the surface of the sacred rock of Barē Uba, located in the embouchure of the Kashmir Smast valley.

Materials used for the second category, i.e., movable inscriptions are metal, stone and birch-bark. The last one has been recovered from the north-eastern wall of a small temple inside the cave. It is a roll of birch-bark placed in a three centimetres thick layer of mud between two stones of the wall. It seems of great historical interest and needs further investigation. Besides the engraved inscriptions included here, another important one supposed to be incorporated in the present work was a copper-scroll bearing Kharoṣṭhī inscription, engraved with a dotted technique. But the owner of the scroll did not allow the author to unroll it because of its bad state of preservation. However, some of the surface letters indicate that the inscription belongs to the late Kuṣāṇa period. All the inscriptions being mentioned in the present paper are lying in different private collections.

Gupta Copper Plate Inscription

The author published the Gupta copper-plate inscription (Pl. 1) with preliminary notes for the first time in the year 2000 (Nasim Khan 2000-b). The present modified reading and translation is not only the result of holding a better opportunity of sufficient time but also of being able to check and verify, during excavation at Kashmir Smast², certain names mentioned in the text. Some of the words that were defaced or hardly visible on the plate are now corrected or reconstructed on the basis of comparison with other contemporary inscriptions, not available at the time of its first publication. The most important among them are the Lajjā Gaurī seals, in particular the Acimā one.

TRANSLITERATION

1. siddham svasti bhagavata[ḥ] suravaratara [si]ddha-gandharvvanityā-dhara-gāṇa+
2. sita-mahā-kandara-śikhare śrīmīṅja-parrva-mahā-guhā nivasiny-aci
3. māyāh-pāda-mūle prayad-chatya-kṣayaṇim yā-suvarṇasi te]+++

4. s[va]ssa 5 viṣṇuśīpi-tara-śālīyakah asya-su-varṇasya vardha[mā]
5. neśvarasya nṛibhīś-ca-ṣoṭṭako-snapana[m](or stapinaṃ) kartavyaṃ puṣpā-hārika-dvayena dakuṭa
ca pā
6. [ra]-maṭhakena śuklarāmyā/śūkarāmyā bhoktavyaṃ vardhamāneśbharasyā-agrata-darantu (or
agranasṛintu) ṣurvakaṃ kṛtvā-
7. taṇ[ḍa]ṇardha-ḍhakaṃ bhaktasya ṣu or pūpāḍakadvayaṃ ca-ekekasya [ca]-iyaṃ tatha- eva
kriṣṇacatu
8. rdaśyā kuṭinsa pāra-maṭhakena puṣpuhārikadvayena bhoktavyaṃ snāpanaṅ-ca [deva]
9. sya kbhatavya (bhaktavya) ya-iva dāpogāvaś-canta-ādityau-navad bhoktavya [asya] s[u]-
varṇasya graha+
10. ++ddha++++koma+++tha+gaṣya[ta]yadanadrau+śa+++++
11. do+++cchadaikadata++++maga+ śrava (da)

TRANSLATION

Success, Svasti, (by this act all are honored), the Bhagavant, the most excellent among the gods, Siddhagandharva, Nitya (and) Dharagāṇa.

To Acimā who dwells in the great secret place (or cave) of the mount Śrī Miñja, (situated) at the end of the great Sita valley.

At the foot of the mountain, a beautiful living place with tranquil water and a lively *Caitya*. On the 5th, the house (that is) enlightened with rays of stars, of this beautiful (house) of the god Vardhamāneśvara (Śiva), men and women of the monastery were given food and water with two Saktu (each).

After giving food inside the (house) of Vardhamāneśvara, one enjoys the pure food on the opposite side of the temple. (By) the men of Śiva of the large sacred building, the food was given one by one.

In this manner, on the fourth day in the dark half of the month (the men and women) of the temple enjoying twice the food and the water, given by the god. Thus the Dapogavas and the nine Adityas of this beautiful house were given food...

Second Copper plate inscription

According to an eyewitness, this copper plate was lying for a long time in the recently constructed rooms, which are located on the western ridge to the north of the main central complex of Kashmir Smast (Pl. 2). The illegal diggers had been using the plate for an extensive period of time as a floor-scrapper or for cleaning cow-dung. They did not realise its historical important until it was reduced to its present form and, also, the inscription on it became visible. Due to its prolonged use, part of the rust has gone away and one can easily recognise most of the *akṣāras* on the plate.

The surviving part of the plate has five lines executed with a dotted technique. The first line and the right part of the inscription are missing, however, the possibility of more lines in the beginning cannot be ruled out. Some letters on the left side of the lines are not easy to read. A dotted horizontal line at the bottom of the inscription indicates the lower limit of the inscription. The owner of the inscription did not allow the author to clean the rust of the plate, therefore, the proposed reading may present certain errors, which could, however, be corrected once we have its better copy.

TRANSLITERATION

...+...
 ...ṅmna śrutayena siddhasya or sikdhasya...
 ..[ś]rirmaḍhāsaptakaiḥ samyuktasya di...
 ...ṭhava[ca]ndro yanallokasti candrajñāsata
 ...bha || vi++tantrisu

TRANSLATION

Success by hearing... of the combination by the seven Śrī Maḍha...

The first word of the first line is incomplete. The second one is an instrumental formed on *śruta-* 'hearing, listening'. The next word is either *sardhasya* or *sikdhasya*. In the later case *sikdha-* might be for *siktha-* means 'boiled rice from which the water has been poured off, etc.,'. The reading *sardha-* means 'together with' is also possible for the same word.

The beginning of the second line is missing. The reading of the first word might be '*śrī*'. The second word is an instrumental plural of a compound word '*maḍhā-saptaka-*'. *Maḍhā* is not clear; it might be used for *maṭha*. The next word is instrumental plural formed on *saptaka-*. *Samyukta-* is from *Sam-Yuj-* 'to join together, conjoin, connect, combine, unite; married to'.

...ṭhava[ca]ndro may be a compound word with a last component as *candra* which is in nominative case. *Yanallokasti* seems third person indicative present of *yanallok-* without any certain etymology. The first word can also be read as *yena* an instrumental of relative pronoun *yad*. The last word of the same line might be a compound of *candra-jñā-sata-*. The rest of the inscription is unclear.

There is no date in the inscription but the writing style is the same as the previous inscription, which could be dated to 4th/5th century AD.

Bangle inscription

A piece of bangle bearing four Brāhmī characters has also been recovered from the site (Pl. 3). The inscription seems a proper name in the dative. The reading of the available inscription is *///jvalāya* means to *///jvala*. The name might be a compound of at least two words with a *-jvala* for a last element which signifies 'flame'. The word *jvāla-* means burning, blazing, light.

Linga inscription

A rectangular slab of schist stone decorated with a *linga* under an arch has on its right a very faint Brāhmī inscription probably in four lines (Pl. 4). The letters are not very clear and nothing can be said for sure about its text. According to the style of writing of some of the characters, such as the triangular head marks, the inscription can be placed between the 4th and 6th centuries AD.

Śāradā inscription

Another rectangular piece of schist stone is deeply engraved with three lines inscription in Śāradā characters (Pl. 5). The inscription is framed within simple contour lines on three sides. The lines on the left and right are single, while double on the upper side. The lower side, however, has no such line and, probably, part of the slab is missing at this end.

TRANSLITERATION

1. kṛṣṇaratipadajo ra
2. jāputro saṃdikate li
3. kaṃ śivaloki+naṃ ||

TRANSLATION

Kṛṣṇaratipadaja, the son of Raja, wrote in the world of Śiva (this) religious text.

The reading of the third letter is not very clear because the letter 'ra' occurs in the word *raja-putro* shows a different form. It is also possible that the same letter has been written in two different ways. The main difference is the hollow triangle added in the first case. The first word, *kṛṣṇaratipadaja* is formed on *kṛṣṇa-rati-pada-ja-* means 'the one who is born in the feat of the chariot of Kṛṣṇa'. The reading *raja-putro* poses no problem while the second letter in the next word can be read either *ja* without the right side slanting stroke as to be seen in other examples or it could be read *di*. The word is in the locative and seems the name of a locality, the etymology of which is not certain. *Saṃdikata* could also be read as *saṃnikata* formed on *saṃ-nikas-* 'to make quite clear, manifest, reveal, announce, declare'. It is also possible that the word is *sannikṛita-* mfn. 'appeased, satisfied'. The word *lika* is probably for *likha-* scratching, writing; a writer. *Śiva-lokin-* means 'Shiva's heaven (Kailasa)' while *lokin-* denotes 'possessing a world, possessing the best world'. The curious sign between the letters *ki* and *naṃ* seems to be an obliterated one which might have been corrected with the last letter *naṃ*. At the end of the inscription is a double *daṇḍa*, a punctuation mark.

Apart from some orthographic mistakes and corrections, the present piece is an excellent example of late Śāradā script. From its contents it is clear that the inscription is Śivaite and goes in close conformity with the cultural context of Kashmir Smast. According to the style of writing it can be dated somewhere between the 9th and 12th centuries AD.

Apart from those on some of the Lajjā Gaurī seals dated to the 2nd century AD and the Śāradā one, almost all the recorded inscriptions from Kashmir Smast mostly belong from the 4th to 6th centuries AD. The contents of the majority affirm the fact that all these in one or another way are related to the Hindu pantheon and are clear testimony of the Hindu cult prevailing in the area between the 2nd and 10th centuries AD. Another important aspect of these epigraphs is that all of them are written in Brāhmī characters from which one can conclude that the common script of the time, at least from the 4th century AD onwards was Brāhmī.

The illegal diggers of Kashmir Smast bring the site into a great catastrophe. They not only mercilessly remove antiquities from their proper cultural context but also destroy beautiful walled structures at the site. The small shrine inside the great cave and the main Śiva temple, for example, are almost demolished by the antique seekers. If necessary measures are not taken, nothing can be seen at the site except debris in a very near future. Kashmir Smast, despite of its ruthless robbing, is of great historical significance and, therefore, needs to be scientifically excavated, preserved and properly studied before it is too late.

Notes

- ¹ For details on the Kashmir Smast site, see the excavation report in the present volume of this journal
- ² See the excavation report in the present volume of this journal.

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Plate 1: Gupta Copper Plate Inscription.

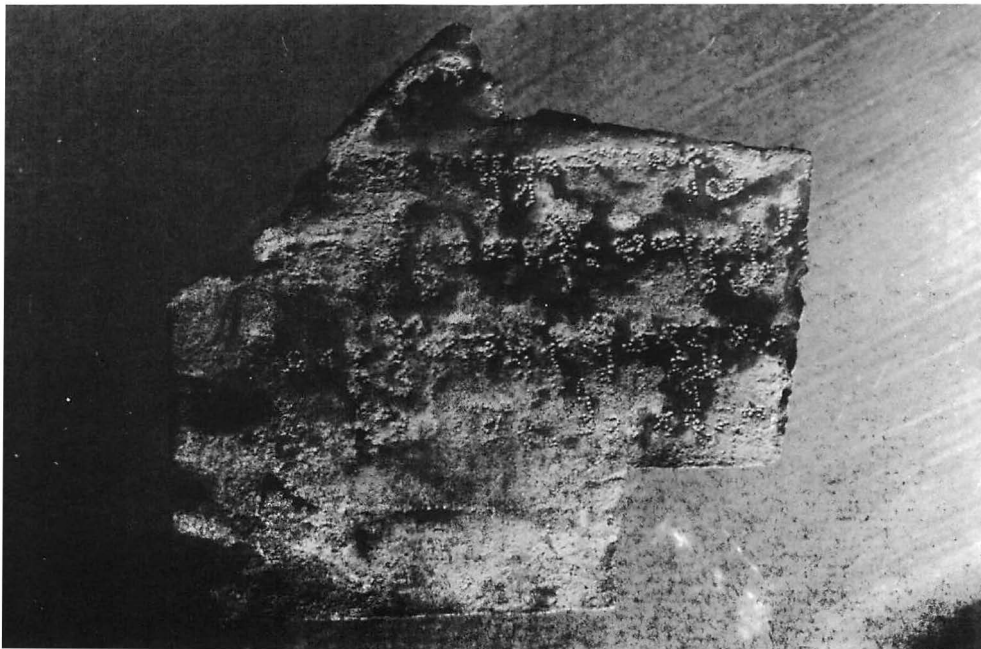


Plate 2: Second Copper Plate with Brahmi Inscription.

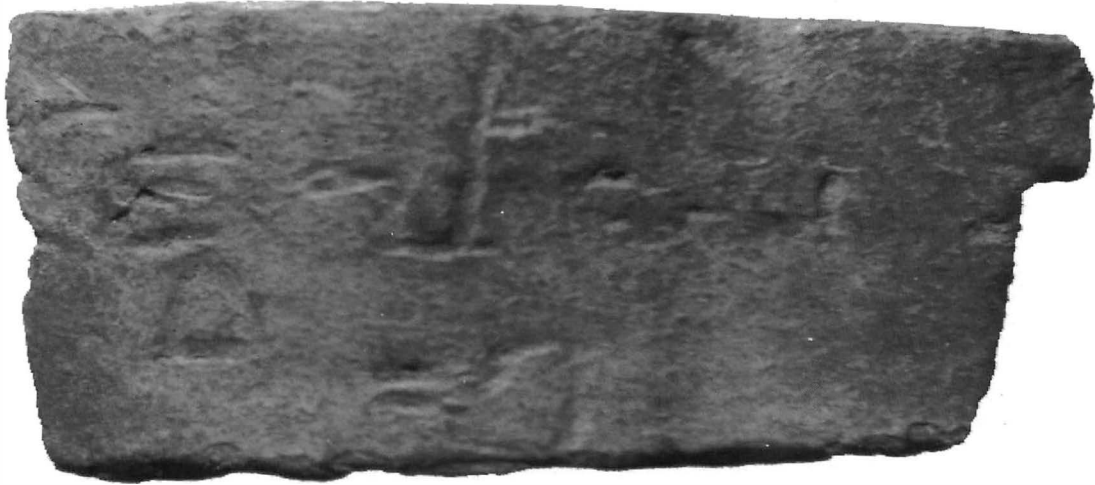


Plate 3: Bangle Inscription



Plate 4: Linga Slab Inscription.



Plate 5: Śārada Inscription.