

A WOODEN SCULPTURE OF BĀLA KṚṢṆA FROM GANDHĀRA

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Lying in a private collection¹. This statue of Kṛṣṇa is made of wood polished with brown paint. It measures, along with pedestal, 16.8 x 20 cm while the pedestal itself is 16.8 x 3.9 cm and weighs 950 grams. The left temple, part of the right shoulder, the tip of the nose, the right hand and the short neck top of the milk pot are damaged and missing.

The baby Kṛṣṇa is shown crawling (Pls. I, II). His right leg rests flexed on the ground, whereas the left is so bent that the knee rests on the ground and the left heel is supporting the left hip forcing on the tips of his fingers. Divinities in such a posture are not very common except few one and they are too not represented exactly in the same manner as the present image. One among these rare examples is the image of Nāyika carved on a pillar at Hampi, Vijayanagar, dated to 1513-1542². But the present sculpture may represent the infant Kṛṣṇa in crawling position. The question which arises here is whether infant Kṛṣṇa ever is represented before with a crown or not? The examples known so far do not show any sign of crown on the head of infant Kṛṣṇa (see *infra*).

The right hand, resting on the snake hood, is broken off (Pl. III) and we do not know if he was holding something or not. Kṛṣṇa is inclining on this broad hooded snake, which passes between his legs (Pl. IV). This may represent the famous episode Kāliya-Damana, where Kṛṣṇa subjugates the Nāga-Kāliya (Kāliya-mardana).

The left hand turns around a pot (Pl. III), the upper part broken, which seems to have a short neck and a broad lipped lid. In *Dadhimanthana* (the churning of butter), Kṛṣṇa is always shown stealing butter from a milk pot. For example, in a panel in Cave No. 3 at Bādāmī, one of the women churns butter from an earthen pitcher held by a child in one

¹ we are very thankful to Major General (Rtd.) Nasirullah Khan Baber, former Interior Minister of Pakistan, for his generosity and cooperation in publishing this article.

² Munshi 1959: plate 133.

hand. At the same time he is seen removing butter from the pot with his right hand. There are many other representations of Kṛṣṇa's stealing butter from a milk pot of the cowgirls. In earlier Indian art, e.g., in a panel in cave no. 3 at Badami, one of the women churns in an earthen pitcher, held by a child with the left hand while removing butter from the pot with his right. Found many versions of the same representation, the present pot seems to have relation with the famous episode of *Dadhimanthana*.

Here, Kṛṣṇa, in his feminine representation, is shown with long almond shaped eyes, long broad nose and with protruded lips. As compared to the other parts of the body, the face is not shown so fleshy.

As far as Kṛṣṇa's garments are concerned, here he is shown naked except for wearing a napkin and a headdress or crown, similar to the Greek helmet, adorned above the forehead. The top of the helmet, shown spiral, comes forward and rests just above the forehead. Although bedecked with bracelets, anklets and other jewellery, Kṛṣṇa does not wear a crown in his childhood³. The helmet ends at the back in long tresses resembling a snake with a large hood. A loop-knot and a floral design terminate the tail of the snake (Pl. V). It is also possible that the presumed snake is his tressed hair allowed to fall on the back. Part of the hair is braided into a loop knot. In one of the examples from the Gupta period, Kṛṣṇa's hair is arranged in braids, two of which hang on either side of his head⁴. Another example is from Kṛṣṇayana scene where his hair is tressed in a tail falling on the back⁵. Similar representation of hair can be seen on a stone sculpture, depicting Kṛṣṇa striking at demon Keśi, from Paharpur, Bangladesh, dated to eight-ninth century A.D.⁶

He is bedecked with all types of ornaments usual to him (Pls. III, VI). The now broken tip of his nose (Pl. IV) might have borne pearl pendant (*mauktikānvita nāsāgra*).⁷ In paintings, especially of Kishanagarh School of the eighteenth century, the nose ornament is made of a pearl. In Rajasthani painting, Jaipur, circa A.D. 1800, he is also shown with nose ornament (pearl)⁸. The mention of Kṛṣṇa's pearl pendant in nose in *Vṛddha Hārīta* deserves

³ See e.g., Francis Brunel: Pls. 64. 65.

⁴ Jayantika 1988: Fig. 64.

⁵ Ibid, Fig. 51.

⁶ Jayantika 1988: Fig. 74.

⁷ *Vṛddha Hārīta*, 5. 107-9; II 1085.

⁸ Gupta 1985: 112, No. 148.

special attention⁹. The ear-ornaments (Pl. III), which have the appearance of a half-blown flowers or inverted pericarps of the lotus, hang from the ear lobes. The crown covers the upper part of the ear-ornament.

He is wearing a row of four neck ornaments (Pl. III, VI). Three of them are necklaces (hāras) and one is necklet (kaṇṭhī). The necklet seems to be of one string with a floral-terminal having a central gem. Two of the three broad necklaces are shown with round floral terminals and central gems. Kṛṣṇa might have two bracelets, one on each wrist, and two shoulder ornaments, one on each side. The shoulder jewellery is in fact part of the necklaces falling on the shoulders. Similar ornamentation can be seen in the sculptural representation of Kṛṣṇa image of 12th century A.D. where he is dancing on the head of naga Kāliya¹⁰. The figure is also shown with two anklets, one on each ankle.

The only dress of Kṛṣṇa consists of a napkin passed around the waist and then gathered in the front.

From where and what for the sculpture was?

The exact locality of the sculpture is not known and we do not know if the image was used by an individual of the Kṛṣṇa sect in his house for worship or placed in a temple. The nails and holes for them on the lower surface of the pedestal indicate that it was fixed, most probably, on something, for example the top of a pillar. In the Buddhist monuments, e.g., at Sanchi four lions are separately sitting on the top of four columns. Other examples of such kind of representations are those coming from Shing Nala site, the Upper Indus Valley, and Peshawari cave between Mansehra and Besham. The later are paintings in red representing hunting scenes, animals, *stūpa* and other Buddhist establishments¹¹. Here the most important is the Kaṇiṣka *stupa* (*kaṇiṣka vihare*, written in *Kharoṣṭhī* characters). Here, in front of the *stūpa*, there are two columns on the top of each one is sitting a lion looking towards each other (Pl. VII). They are sitting in the same posture as near the Sanchi *stūpa*. We cannot compare the Buddhist representations of animals with the Kṛṣṇa sculpture, not only because of the different subject matter but also because of the long gape of time

⁹ Vriddha Hārīta, 3. 305-13; 1041.

¹⁰ Jayantika 1988: Fig. 59.

¹¹ The then chairman of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, Prof. Farid Khan, has discovered these painting in 1982. These paintings are still waiting to be published.

between the two (see infra). But one can at least take into consideration these examples for comparison in this regard. In the light of the above, it is therefore supposed, the present Kṛṣṇa image might have been fixed to the top of a pillar in a temple or to stairs accessing the plate form where a divinity is generally placed for worship. We can also suppose that there might be another sculpture of the same divinity for the same purpose and for the same temple because of the symmetry.

Date of the sculpture:

Vṛiddha Hārīta and Vasiṣṭha give us ample information about Kṛṣṇa iconography and it is thus seen that the artist of the present sculpture has drawn his idea both from Vṛiddha Hārīta and Vasiṣṭha. Vṛiddha Hārīta is a late work and may be placed in post – 900 A.D. periods. Anklets are not put on Viṣṇu in early sculptures; it is a mediaeval phenomenon. Similarly, the use of a pearl pendant in the tip of nose of Kṛṣṇa, known as “bulāka” in Hindi, is also a late phenomenon¹².

The present sculpture is a unique piece of art coming from this region. In the early Indian art, such type of representation of Kṛṣṇa is not usual and it seems to be the work of an artist of the medieval period.

Kṛṣṇa

Kṛṣṇa, literally means ‘black’, from where his name and his colour are derived. Kṛṣṇa is a Hindu god and the 8th Avatāra of Viṣṇu¹³. He is equally considered as Avatāra of all the divinities of Hindu Pantheon. He is probably the most venerated of all the Indian divinities. His history known to every one gave birth to the innumerable legends, which inspired the Indian literature and artists. Many temples are consecrated to him and sects dedicated to his unique adoration¹⁴.

The tradition says that he is born in Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) from a hair of Vishnu. He was the son of Devakī and of Prince Vasudeva of Mathura. The brother of Devakī, Kāṃsa, king of Varanasi (Kashi) after hearing a prediction saying that the 8th son of his

¹² Joshi 1987: 246-247.

¹³ Another avatara recovered from the same region is that of Narasimha (see Nasim Khan 2000).

¹⁴ E.g., Kṛṣṇa , religious sect. founded at the end of sixties by Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (died in 1979). The object of this sect is to teach that Krishna is a unique god.

sister would bring his destruction because he was a cruel and immoral king. He made to kill six among the seven sons of Devakī and kept her and her husband in prison. The seventh son of Devakī, Balarama could escape. Devakī being pregnant of her 8th son, Viṣṇu incarnated in the small being to be born. To keep him away from Kaṁsa, his mother changed him since his birth with the son of shepherds Vrindvan, Nanda and his wife Yashoda. The young Kṛṣṇa could so escaped from Kaṁsa and was brought up among the shepherds and the cowherds (Gopis). During all his childhood helped by his brother Balarama, who rejoined him, he did a number of miracles, killed or made impuissant different demons aroused against him and his brother by Kaṁsa.

It is not easy to give a complete his historical backdrop or to resume the personality of Kṛṣṇa in few words¹⁵, but one can at least say that Kṛṣṇa is the incarnation of Viṣṇu, the child Kṛṣṇa (Bala Kṛṣṇa), the prankish son of Devakī and foster-son of Nanda and Yashodhā. He was the leader of the Abhiras cowherd boys of Gokula and adored lover of the milkmaids (gopi) of Vrindavana, overshadowed his aspect as the mature hero of the Mahābharata, the lord of Dvaraka (Dvarakanatha), the husband of Rukmini and teacher of the Bhagavad Gitā.

The following are some of the principal blessings, which the world gained from this incarnation of Viṣṇu in the person of Kṛṣṇa:

He puts to death Pūtanā, a woman celebrated for her extraordinary size, strength and ferocity. She was a demoness lived in the court of Kaṁsa. He effaced from the earth a great number of giants. Kṛṣṇa uprooted two trees of such tremendous size that they covered one-half of the earth with their shade. He chastised the serpent Kāliyā. Kṛṣṇa suspended a mountain (Govardhanagiri) in the air to serve as an umbrella for forty thousand shepherds who had been over-taken by a storm. Besides all this, Kṛṣṇa cut to pieces Kaṁsa and all his followers.

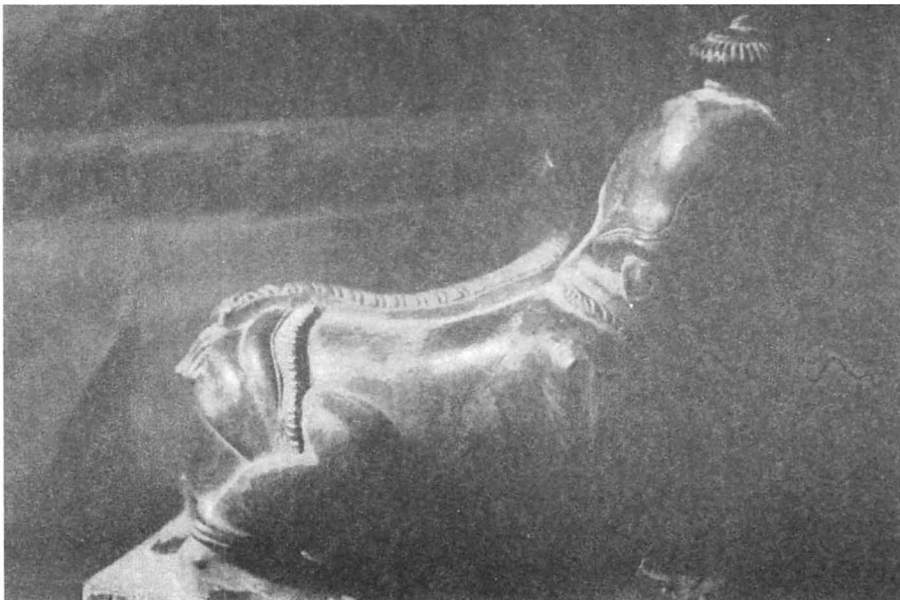
¹⁵ On the other hand, there is no need to repeat because, other before me, have spoken at great length about him.

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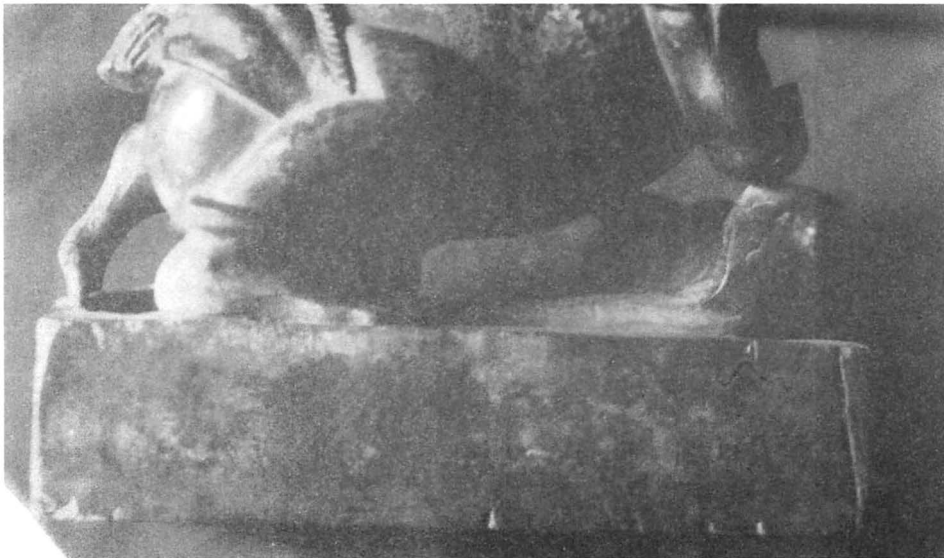
Pl. I. Kṛṣṇa image from Gandhāra.
Left side view of the image.



Pl. II. Kṛṣṇa image from Gandhāra. Right side view of the image.



Pl. III. Photo showing details of the jewelry, snake Kāliya and the milk pot.



Pl. IV. Subjugation of snake Kāliya by Kṛṣṇa.

Pl. V. Details of the backside of Kṛṣṇa image.



Pl. VI. Details of Kṛṣṇa jewelry.