

An Interesting Gupta Clay Sealing from Kauśāmbī

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Kauśāmbī, mentioned in the later Vedic literature as the capital of the Vatsa *Mahājanapada* 'Great State', is identified with the modern village Kosam located about 65 km southwest of Allahabad on the northern bank of the Yamunā river. A Paurāṇika tradition states that when Hastināpura, the capital city of the Pāṇḍavas, was washed away by the floods in the Gaṅgā during the reign of king Nicakṣu, the grandson of Arjuna's son Abhimanyu, shifted his capital to Kauśāmbī. Excavation of the old mound at Kosam has confirmed its antiquity revealing twenty-five structural phases, beginning around BCE 1165 and lasting to CE 580 according to the excavator. It was subjected to destruction by the Hūṇas in the sixth century. The site has yielded evidence of the existence of a fire-altar of the form of a flying eagle (*śyena-citi*) as per the type described in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and other ritual texts; an extensive stone palace covering an area of 315 by 150 meters built according to the excavator by king Udayana, a contemporary of Buddha; remains of a monastery called Ghoṣitārāma as confirmed by inscriptional evidence, which was the scene of many a sermon of Buddha, consisting of a courtyard with rooms and a large *stūpa*, described also by the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang; and many other significant remains. It is thus one of the oldest and very important cities of India which has yielded year after year a rich range of iron implements, ivory objects, sculptures, human and animal terracotta figurines, coins, moulds, stone inscriptions and copper-plates, beads, bangles, seals and sealings and numerous other antiquities. Kauśāmbī is exceptionally rich in seals and sealings hundreds of which have been recovered from the site. Among them 218 are now preserved in the Gurukula Museum at Jhajjar in Haryana.² Of these, an interesting Gupta clay sealing (Fig. 4.1) forms the subject matter of this note.

This well-baked broken clay sealing measuring about 3.4 X 3.0 cm. in its extant form shows standing to front on a lined pedestal a human figure unfortunately broken above the thighs. A part of the *dhotī* worn by him covering the right thigh with free end suspended between his legs has survived. Part of a long almost vertical shaft or scepter held by him in his left hand is also visible. His feet are splayed outwards in the Kuṣāṇa style.



Fig. 4.1: Gupta clay sealing from Kauśāmbī



Fig. 4.2: Pillar capital with Kalpavṛkṣa, Vidiśā



Fig. 4.3: Winged conch from Mathurā exuding coins

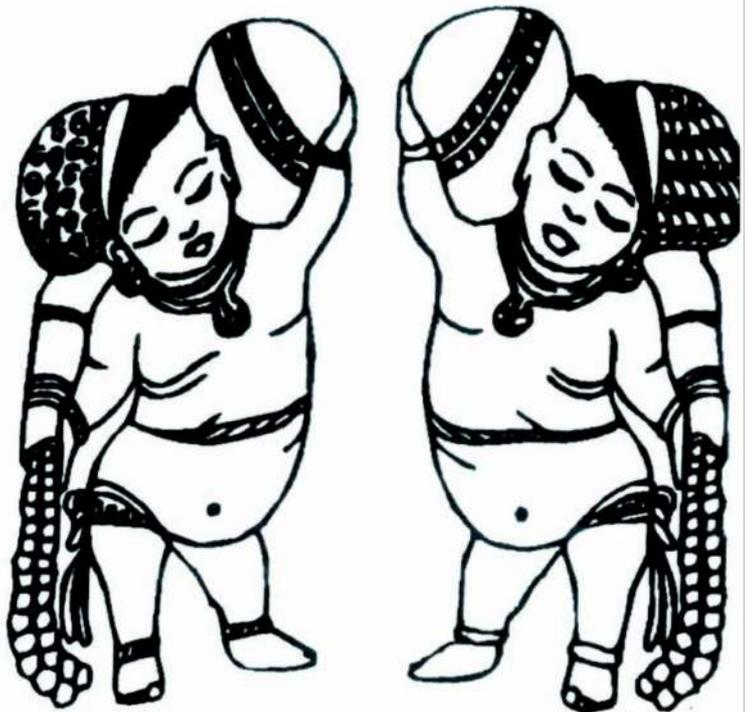


Fig. 4.4: Padma and Śaṅkha nidhi

A slantingly placed conch with spiral head down right is depicted on the right but what is very interesting is that a large number of globules are coming out of its groove and raining on the earth. It is not the ordinary conch but the *Śaṅkha-nidhi* of Kubera, the god of wealth.³ On the proper right hand side of the standing human figure also there are some traces of some device with two rows of similar globules below. It is quite possible that originally there may have been the *Padma-nidhi* here. The globules obviously are the *suvarṇas* (gold coins). It is well known that Yakṣas were considered as the presiding genii of wealth and were associated with Vaiśravaṇa-Kubera, the god of wealth, who is often depicted as holding a mongoose-shaped purse (*nakulaka*) in his left hand. A horizontal line divides the area of the sealing into two parts, the lower one carries the legend in Brāhmī characters of the Gupta period. The legend is unfortunately truncated and only *[syā]dhikaraṇasya* has survived indicating that this sealing belonged to some office. The depiction of *Śaṅkha-nidhi*, however, provides the clue of its being connected with revenue but it is difficult to identify properly the human figure with the scepter.

It is interesting to note that a pillar capital (*Dhvaja-stambha*) from Besnagar (Vidiśā) representing *Kalpa-vṛkṣa* 'wish-fulfilling tree', ascribable to third century BCE and pointed out to be the capital of a column of Kubera by Coomaraswamy, shows a pot and two bags overflowing with money as hanging between its aerial roots with a lotus and a conch exuding punch-marked coins on the corresponding other side (Fig. 4.2).⁴ A similar representation of a vertically placed conch (winged in this case) with spiral head upwards exuding coins from its groove exists on a cross-bar of the railing of Kaṅkālī Ṭīlā Jaina *Stūpa* at Mathurā belonging to second century BCE (Fig. 4.3).⁵

The tradition of representing *Śaṅkha* and *Padma nidhis* continued subsequently also and we have a good example from the Kevala-Narasimha Temple at Ramtek in district Nagpur belonging to the Vākāṭaka period which shows two dwarfish figures (*gaṇas*) carved on the door-jambs pouring coins from bags held on their shoulders (Fig. 4.4).⁶

Lakṣmī scattering coins depicted on Gupta coins⁷ corroborates the continuity of the old tradition. The intense and varied numismatic activity of the reign of Kumāragupta I evinces that conch and lotus shown on some of his coins⁸ may have been the symbolic representations of the *Śaṅkha* and *Padma nidhis* of Kubera. These two symbols are actually found on a large variety of coins issued by various kings and dynasties and may have signified the treasures of the god of wealth in many cases if not all.

References and Notes

1. G.R. Sharma, *Excavations at Kauśāmbī: (1949-50)*, New Delhi: ASI, 1969; *Indian Archaeology - A Review*, 1954-55 to 1966-67, relevant pages.

2. Swami Omanand Saraswati, *Ancient Seals of Haryana* (Hindi), Jhajjar: Gurukula, VS 2031; Virjanand Daivakarani, *Bhārata ke Prācīna Mudṛāṅka* (Part II), Jhajjar, 2010, pp. 34-37, nos. 218-309 & figs.
3. Daivakarani, *op. cit.*, no. 288. He has described the motifs on the sealing as human figure, bunch of grapes (?) and conch.
4. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part I, Delhi (reprint), 1971, Pl. 10, Fig. 10; Part II, pp. 72 & 83, Pls. 1 & 46. See also P.K. Agrawala, "The Depiction of Punch-marked Coins in Early Indian Art", *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, XXVII (1965).
5. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, p. 72, Pl. 46.3.
6. A.P. Jamkhedkar, "A Newly Discovered Vakataka Temple at Ramtek, Dist. Nagpur", in M.S. Nagaraja Rao (Ed), *Kusumāñjali; New Interpretation of Indian Art & Culture: Sh. C. Sivaramamurti Commemoration Volume*, Delhi, Agam Kala Prakashan, 1987, Vol. I, pp. 217-23, Figs. 4, 6-7 and 11. The *nidhi* figures have been adopted by the Indian Coin Society as its logo for its research journal named *Nidhi* and the line-drawings are after this logo.
7. A.S. Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Varanasi: NSI, 1057, pp. 126, 173, Pls. VIII. 3, X.6, etc.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 220-21, Pls. X.5, XVII.1-6

Traditionally the nine *nidhis* are *Mahāpadma*, *Padma*, *Śaṅkha*, *Makara*, *Kacchapa*, *Mukunda*, *Kunda*, *Nīla*, *Kharva*. - V.S. Apte, *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, see 'Nidhi'.

In the *Viṣṇu Smṛti*, naming the places where Lakṣmī resides, the goddess herself makes mention of *Śaṅkha* and *Padma*. - *Viṣṇu.*, verse 90, (*Smṛti Sandarbha*, I, Calcutta, 1952, p. 545.)

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