

Acquisition of Important objects



Alexander Obverse



Alexander Reverse



Menander Obverse



Menander Reverse



Kidār Kuşāna Obverse



Kidār Kuşāna Reverse



Samudragupta Obverse



Samudragupta Reverse



Samudragupta Obverse



Samudragupta Reverse



Candragupta II Obverse



Candragupta II Reverse



Candragupta II Obverse



Candragupta II Reverse

Early Coins

Prof. R.C. Sharma

The importance of *Kalāmaṇḍapa* of Jñāna-Pravāha is that every year some new and interesting objects are acquire and put-up on show. In the year 2004-05 such items were added through exploration and purchase and these have been mentioned in the Work-Flow i.e. Annual Report of the Institution. Acquisition of some rare coins is a remarkable development and this became all the more significant in the light of the fact that the coins gifted by Sri Narendra Agrawal in the year 2000 had to be returned in the light of the possibility of starting an Art Galery in his residential complex at Chunar. The vacuum thus created by return and deaccessioing of such coins has been filled in to some extent by the arrival of new specimens of which some are of rare nuistamic value. These are as under:

Alexander, 2005.7, Silver, Diam. 1.6 cm, Wt. 4.1 gm

With invasion of Alexander in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent in 326 B.C.E. opened a new chapter in the history. Several novelities were introduced as a result of contact with west, particularly, the Hellenistic world. The change is amply discernible in numismatics, as the practice of punching several symbols on the uneven shaped silver currency in the pre-Mauryan era gradually gave way to the evenly shaped round coins with portrait of ruler on obverse and his favourite deity on reverse. The legend giving the name and epithet of king was another remarkable introduction.

The present coin (drachm) on obverse shows the head of Alexander facing right in profile and wearing lion skin head-dress probably to show him as Herakles. About half of the ocin behind the head bears beaded decoration.

The reverse shows the enthroned Zeus holding eagle on his outstreched right hand, and a long sceptre in his left hand. The Greek legend in right field reads ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ (Alexendroy). Letters for monogram are seen in front and also between legs of the throne.

It can not be said with certainty whether the coin was issued by Alexander the Great of Macedonia himself or was issued posthumously by his Viceroy Selucus. Anyway, an issue associated with Alexander enhances the importance of any coin cabinet.

The observations of Dr. Savita Sharma on the Indo-Greek coinage are as under:

Alexander issued coins with the head of Herakles wearing lion-skin head-dress on the obverse and seated Zeus on the reverse.

These form the 'General' coinage of Alexander struck in Babylon during c.330 B.C.E.

A new phase in the history of Indian numismatics is ushered in by the Greeks who came into north-western India (now northern Pakistan) in c.2nd century B.C.E. The great Macedonian conqueror, Alexander, did not leave behind him any permanent settlements in India. But a second Greek invasion from Bactria, more than a century after his death, led to the establishment of Greek rule in north-western India.

A major part of history of the Indo-Greeks has been reconstructed entirely on the evidence of coins. The Indo-Greek coins are die-struck, of a neat execution and fabric introducing a new technique of coinage for subsequent Indian currencies.

A significant contribution of Indo-Greeks to Indian numismatic history is their series of well executed artistic pieces in silver and copper. Bearing portraits on the obverse and beautifully depicted deity on the reverse. They have the credit to introduce the inscriptions along with the titles and the name of the king which was earlier unknown to India. The Indo-Greek coins serve to introduce us to a whole series of divinities, gods and goddess drawn from Greek mythology.

Menander, 2005.8, Silver, Round, Diam. 1.7 cm; Wt. 2.3 gm

In the struggle for hegemony among the Indo-Bactrian rulers in the 2nd-1st century B.C.E. emerged an important claimant who is known not only from coins but also through inscriptions and literature. He was Menander who is remembered as Milinda in the Buddhist text *Milinda-pañha* i.e. "Queries raised by Milinda" (Menander). He is also supposed to be the most powerful personality among the Indo-Bactrians and ruled over the big kingdom including Punjab and Gandhāra and also exercised sway in the Gangetic plains¹.

The present coin (drachm) on the obverse displays the bare headed bust of king facing left. Behind his neck are seen the faint traces of spear which he was wielding. The Greek legend on border beginning at 9 o'clock reads ΒΑΣΙΛΩΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ/ ΜΕΝΑΝΔΡΟΥ (Basileos Soteris Menandroy) i.e. Great King Protector Menander.

Reverse being better preserved shows deity Pallas Athene standing to left, hurling thunderbolt with right hand and a shield in the left. The Kharoṣṭī legend beginning at 2 o'clock reads from right to left as *Maharajasa Tratarasa* and below *Menadrassa* (Great King Protector, Menander)¹. A monogram is in the left field.

1. Gupta P.L., *Coins*, 1969, p.20.

Silver Coin of Menander, 2005.9

Obverse : Circular silver coin of Menander represents helmeted bust of king to right. The Greek legend begins at about 9 o'clock is much rubbed off but when intact it read as *Bacileos Soteris Menandroy* (Greek Script). The name of the king is clearly visible.

Reverse : Pallas standing facing to left, wearing a helmet, hurling thunderbolt with right hand and a shield in his left hand. There is a monogram below the suspending scarf under the left arm. Only a few letters of the Kharoṣṭī legend can be read now. The major part of legend, being out of flan, is missing [*maharajasa Tratarasa/Menadrassa*].

Gold Coin of Kidāra, 2005.1

Obverse : Nimbate king standing to left offering oblation at altar with his right hand. He wears a helmet, long coat and trousers. In-front of his head is noticed a trident and below the hand is Brāhmī letter 'ko', with his stretched left arm he holds a trident and below the arm pit are vertically projected Brāhmī letters to be read as *Kidāra*.

Reverse: Nimbate goddess 'Ardokṣo' is shown seated on high backed throne, holding cornucopia in the left hand and noose in the outstretched right hand.

Exact identification of the Kidāra kings remains obscure. Some principalities of the Kuṣāṇa rulers were governed by the Sassanids and were known as Kidāras or Kidarites, belonging probably to the branch of the Yüeh-chi or Huṇas, they imitated the Kuṣāṇa gold currency but the quality is inferior¹.

1. Gupta, P.L., Coins, 1969, pp. 32-33, Pl. IX, fig. 83.

Dr. Savita Sharma on the Kidāra coins communicates as under :

During the years around C.E. 360 the control of Northern Pakistan passed from the Kuṣāṇa rulers into the hands of a new king named Kidāra a term read on the coins. He rose to power at a time when Gandhāra was still ruled over the traditional realm of the Kuṣāṇas. Kidāra came into conflict, not only with Kuṣāṇas in Gandhāra, but also with the Sassanian Emperor Shahpur II. Kidāra struck both Sassanian style silver drachms and Kuṣāṇa style gold statters. Kidāra made himself the master of realm in this Kuṣāṇa territory (in Peshawar region) during the course of the ensuing few years, creating a 'Kidarite' kingdom that stretched from the Khyber pass to the Punjab. Having overcome the Kuṣāṇas, Kidāra proceeded to issue gold statters in the Kuṣāṇa fashion.

Gold Coin of Samudragupta, 2005.2, Standard Type

Obverse : Nimbate king standing facing left wearing a close fitting cap, coat, trousers, ear-rings and wristlets. He holds a standard from the top of which ribbons suspend in his left hand. The king offers oblations at altar with his right hand. The *garuḍadhvaja* is seen in left field. The vertical Brāhmī letters under his left arm read *Samudra* and legend around is *samaraśatavita*.

Reverse: Nimbate goddess Ardokṣo sits on a throne the four pegs of which are ornamental and the back frame is also partly visible. She holds a cornucopia in the left hand while the outstretched right hand carries a noose (*pāśa*). A monogram is seen above. The feet of the deity rest on the decorated mat. The beaded circle around the coin is partly extant. The Brāhmī legend outside the frame of seat reads *parākrāmah*.

Gold Coin of Samudragupta, 2005.3, Standard Type

Obverse : Same as described in case of previous coin but in the legend on the border, a few more letters can be read clearly as *samaraśatavitata*.

Reverse : Same as described in the previous coin.

Candragupta II, 2005.6, Archer Type, Gold, Gupta, c. 375-412 C.E., Round, Diam. 19 cm; Wt. 7.6 gm

Obverse : The nimbate king standing to front facing left in a constrained *tribhaṅga* posture, a *garuḍadhvaja* which rests on an arrow to his right. Wearing a close fitting beaded cap, coat and trouser, earring and wristlets, he holds a bow (with string outward) in his left hand and an arrow in the right hand pointing downwards. The *garuḍa* standard is seen at the left of the king and the legend under his left arm is 'candra' written vertically out of the string of the bow. The legend being out of flan is not to be traced but on other similar coins it reads [*Devaśrī Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Candraguptaḥ*]¹

Reverse : The nimbate goddess Lakṣmī resembling Ardokṣo is seated on a throne of which four legs can clearly be noticed. Her feet rest on lotus pedestal or mat. She holds cornucopia with left hand with beaded top and a noose in outstretched right hand from which gold coins are rolling down in the form of dots. The Brāhmī legend reads *śrīvikramaḥ*. Goddess scattering coins is an important and auspicious feature and it reminds us the rain of gold coins as referred to by the famous poet Kālidāsa². Similar coins in which the goddess scatters coins have been noticed earlier also³ but in the present specimen the number of coins being rolled down is nine which is probably the largest. Depiction of Lakṣmī in the style of Ardokṣo with cornucopia marks the continuity of Kuṣāṇa trends.

1. Gupta, P.L., *Gupta Gold Coins in Bharat Kala Bhavan*, 1981, pp. 47-48.

2. *Raghuvaṁśa*, V. 29.

3. M.Raven, *Gupta Ellen Gold Coins with a Garuḍa Banner*, Vol. II, 1994, p. 307, pl. XLI, 59,61.

Gold Coin of Candragupta II, Archer Type

Obverse : Nimbate king standing facing left and holding an arrow with his outstretched right hand pointing downward. *Garuḍa* standard adorned with a fillet in the left field. He holds a bow with his left hand with string inward. The king wears a coat and trousers beside a close fitting cap. Under the left arm the name of king written vertically in Brāhmī letters, read '*Candra*'. The circular legend running round is to be conjectured by a few letters only [*Devaśrī Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Candraguptaḥ*]

Reverse : Goddess Lakṣmī seated to front on a big lotus seat holding a lotus with long stalk in left hand and a noose (not distinct) in the outstretched right hand. The Brāhmī legend to her left reads '*Srīvikramaḥ*' in right field. The coin bears a beaded border of which about two third is extant. The shape of the coin looks oblong rather than circular.

Terracotta-Female Head, 2005.1, Ramnagar Mound Varanasi, Kuṣāṇa Period, 2nd-3rd century C.E., Yellowish colour with red slip, 10 cm x 6 cm

Terracotta art in the Kuṣāṇa period could not keep pace with the overall development of the Indian art forms. The reason was the growing popularity of stone for making and chiselling of statues. The clay which had its hey-days in the preceding Śuṅga period, therefore suffered. The descending graph is viewed in some what crude, coarse and grotesque figures. The hand modeling was revived and folkish elements prevailed. The head and body were often separately prepared and joined. At the same time, the Kuṣāṇa terracottas sometimes display realism and bold expression.

The present figure represents a female head wearing a big circular head jewel with a central bead. The hair is tied with a broad plain ribbon. The eyes are large and lenticular with bold incised pupil and the eye-brows are sharply drawn horizontally. Large circular rings are worn in the ears. One cannot miss the subtle but mysterious smile on the face. This head is a result of surface collection from the mound of Ramnagar which appears to be a promising archaeological site.



** Photographs by Sri Bharata Ramamritam.