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A Study of Coin-Device on Seal from North Indian: Circa 3rd century BCE to Mid-Seventh Century CE

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Abstract:

Coins and Seals are the significant part of archaeological sources, is as important as the inscription in history. They confirm the information derived from literature. Seals, which studies of iconography and style do not distinguish from coins, are also particularly interesting by reason of their technical and functional aspects, since a study of their use teaches us something about the methods of chronology and trade. Whether the seals followed the same trends in art and iconography as the coins is an interesting study. Coins were issued by kings, republican tribes and rarely by guilds whereas seals belonged to all classes of peoples and institutions. Similar symbols were used in ancient times in various forms of art, but the resemblance between seals and coins, in so far as their shape, size and design are concerned, is very close. It is surprising that, unlike those of other comparative study of sources, the resemblance of seals and coins device have received so little attention. This research was indeed motivated by this deficiency.

Keywords: Coin, Seal, Resemblance, Symbol, Motif, Device.

Early Indian coin-devices

We may take up the symbols and motifs for parallels. The hollow cross occurs on several ancient Indian coins, to wit, the uninscribed cast¹ and tribal² coins from Taxila. The fish-standard within a railing occurs on Taxila coins.³ The *svastika*, which occurs on a large number of seals in association with other religious and auspicious symbols and also alone, is a common device on ancient coins.⁴ Quite interesting is the device of *svastika* with taurine's at its four ends.⁵ This is also met with in an exactly similar form on some of the ancient coins.⁶The 'Ujjain symbol' is a very popular device on ancient Indian coins.⁷Glyptics also provide close parallels to this numismatic device.⁸

The *nandipada*symbol occurs on several seals⁹ and the coins of several rulers of ancient India. $^{10}Y\bar{u}pa$ in railing was adopted as a device by rulers of certain dynasties. We find it occurring on the seals of

¹ J. Allan, *Catalogue of the coins of Ancient India in the British Museum*, pp. 85, 86, 88, 90, 91, 92, pl. XI, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, etc. ²*Ibid.*, pp. 227, 229-31, pl. XXXIII, nos. 10-14.

³*Ibid.*, p. 229, pl. XXXIV, 2 (obv.); it occurs in association with human head and moon-on-hill symbol.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 85, 86, 87, 88, 89 ff., pl. XI, 3, 6 etc. (uninscribed cast); *ibid.*, pp. 159-61(Kuninda); p. 187 (Mathura Kshatrapa); p. 248, 249, pl. XXXVIII, 10, 15 (Tribal, from Ujjayinī); pp. 130-32, pl. XVI, 10 (Ayodhya); p. 146 (Kāḍa); p. 158, pl. XVI (Kulūta); p. 159 (Kuninda); pp. 216 ff., pl. XXXV, 1 (Taxila); pp. 273-74 (Yaudheya), etc.

⁵Sealing, svastika with its arms ending in taurines, Jhusi, Allahabad Museum, no. 233.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 121, pl. XIV, 12 (Ārjunāyana); *ibid.*, pp. 255-56, pl. XIX, 5, 6, 8, 9 (Ujjainī coins).

⁷*Ibid.*, Intro., pp. XCI, XCIII; *ibid.*, pp. 243-44, 247, 249, 252, 257, 259, 260, 262; pl. XXXVI, 10-11, etc., XXXVIII, 20, 25 (Ujjayinī coins); pp. 130-34, pl. XVI, 14 (Ayodhya); pp. 140, 144 (Eran); pp. 149-50, pl. XX, 1 (uninscribed cast coins from Kauśāmbī), etc.
⁸ Sealing with the device of '*Ujjain*' symbol, Sonpur (Distt. Gaya), Directorate of Mus. & Arch., Bihar Govt., Patna.

⁹K. K. Thaplyal, Studies in Ancient Indian Seals, pp. 30, 33, 35, 37, 40, 100, 150, 151, 205.

¹⁰J. Allan, *Catalogue of the coins of Ancient India in the British Museum*, p. 159, pl. XII, no. 2 (Kuṇinda); pl. XVII, no. 17. (Ayodhya). More or less a similar symbol occurs on the coins of Azes (*Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum* by R. B. Whitehead, I, pl. XII, nos. 252 and 317) and WimaKadphises (*ibid.*, no. 31, pl. XVII).

Harishena, ¹¹Navva, ¹² etc., associated with other symbols and, on a Rajghat sealing alone. ¹³ This device also has its parallels on coins. ¹⁴

Another device on seals with a definite numismatics parallel¹⁵ is that of the 'hill symbol' of three or more arches. On one sealing¹⁶ we find it with crescent as its crest and also in association with a taurine and another symbol while on another we find it with a curved line below.¹⁷ The 'pyramid of balls', which occurs on certain sealing from Bhita¹⁸ also belongs to this category, and is to be seen on certain coins.¹⁹ This device suggests the influence of Sātavāhana coinage.²⁰ A seal represent a sun, a taurine and a *jayadhvaja*.²¹ All these symbols occur frequently on our ancient coins.²² Likewise, the device taurine within a 'U' shaped design is an interesting coin-device parallel.²³ The tree within railing and the tree in a container are two of the few most commonly found devices on coins.²⁴ We have notice only one sealing with the device of a steelyard.²⁵ A similar device is to be met with on certain *Negama* coins from Taxila²⁶ and also on certain Ayodhya ones.²⁷

A signet ring noticed by Rapson²⁸ has the legend *Namdivadhasa* and the device of a lion, a staff surmounted by a fish within a railing, a *svastika*, a taurine and another symbol-perhaps the Kharoshṭhī 'spa'. These symbols, as already noticed earlier, occur on ancient Indian coins. Excavation at Maheshwar have yielded a glass seal with the device of an elephant with the trunk raised and mouth open, a svastika with curved arms, a symbol formed by taurine and a very peculiar symbol.²⁹Dr. Sankalia is of the opinion that the impression was probably made by some hitherto unknown variety of cast-coins as these symbols, so commonly found on the punch-marked coins, are not met with together as a group.³⁰Hoernle reports certain unmistakable Yaudheya coin-device on clay seals.³¹

The above-mentioned specimens can be classed in two categories: (1) those that are partly similar, and (2) the more or less identical ones.

The Indo-Greek coin-devices on clay-lumps described below are suggestive of trade contacts between India and the West. The Gupta coin-devices also noticed below might have been tokens issued by the Imperial Guptas to acquaint people with their prowess as well as their artistic taste and talents like playing on the $v\bar{l}n\bar{a}$. Early indigenous coin-devices on clay-lumps do not portray royal figures and as such could not have served the purpose suggested in the case of the Imperial Gupta devices. Likely enough, those that are exact parallels of coins could have been issued by minting authorities providing *bona fides* of the person possessing them, or else were results of mint-masters' testing of the coin-dies on clay-limps which somehow escaped destruction.³² We

¹¹K. K. Thaplyal, Studies in Ancient Indian Seals, pp. 41, 122, 200.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 26, 200.

¹³ Sealing with the device of a yūpa in railing, Rajghat, Deptt. of A.I.H.C & Arch., B. H. U., no. 401.

¹⁴J. Allan, Catalogue of the coins of Ancient India in the British Museum, pp. 267-68, pl. XXXIX, 11, 12, etc. (Yaudheya).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 86-94, 98, etc., pl. XI, 7, 8, 9, 19-25; pl. XII, 3-10 (uninscribed cast) ;*ibid.*, pp. 216-34, pl. XXXII, 1-16 (Tribal coins from Taxila).

¹⁶ Sealing with two impressions: (a) crescent over a three-arched hill, a taurine and a human figure and (b) tree in railing and crescent over a three-arched 'hill', Rajghat, *Bharat Kala Bhavan*, no. 6456.

¹⁷ Sealing with the device of the hill, sun, moon and river, Kauśāmbī, Deptt. of A.I.H.C & Arch., Allahabad University.

¹⁸K. K. Thaplyal, Studies in Ancient Indian Seals, pp. 47, 145, 151.

¹⁹J. Allan, Catalogue of the coins of Ancient India in the British Museum, pl. XXXII, 5-10 (Taxila); pl. XXIII, 1-16 (Kuninda)

²⁰E. J. Rapson, Catalogue of the coin of the Andhra Dynasty, the Western Kshatrapas, the Traikūṭaka Dynasty and the Bodhi Dynasty, pls, I, 14-15, II, 17-29.

²¹ Sealing, sun and taurine and a triangle-headed standard, Sonpur, Directorate of *Mus. & Arch.*, Bihar Govt., Patna.

²² For sun, see *Catalogue of the coins of Ancient India in the British Museum*, p. 266, pl. XXXIX, 10; for taurine, *ibid.*, p. 232, pl. XXXIV, 10, pl. XLIV, 17; for *jayadhvaja*, *ibid.*, pp. 85-88, pl. XI, 8-9.

²³*Ibid.* p. 143, pl. XVIII, 9.

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-91, pl. XI, 7, 8, etc.

²⁵ Sealing, scale device, Sonpur, Directorate of *Mus. & Arch.*, Bihar Govt., Patna.

²⁶ J. Allan, Catalogue of the coins of Ancient India in the British Museum, pp. 214-15, pl. XXXI, 2, 3, 4.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 129, nos. 3-5, pl. XVI, 8-10.

²⁸Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1900, p. 103 and plate.

²⁹Journal of Numismatic Society of India, Vol, XV, p. 201, pl. VII, no. 1. It has been described as 'an inverted triangle with two lines on the right resting on a horizontal line standing on a perpendicular one.'

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

³¹Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1884, p. 138. He is of the opinion that perhaps 'these fictious seals were made by poor people who in this way wished to escape payment of a, for them probably, considerable fee chargeable by the temple authorities for the making of a properly stamped votive tablet' (*ibid*). this, however does not seem to have been the case.

³² Incidentally, their find may also suggest the possibility of the existence of mint in the neighbourhood of the findspot.

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are, however, inclined to include another possibility. D. R. Bhandarkar, 33 long back, showed that, according to the commentary on the *Vinayapiṭaka* by Buddhaghosha (5th century A. D.), the coins could be of copper, iron, $s\bar{a}ra$ wood, the outside of bamboo or palmyra lac or gum bearing $r\bar{u}pas$ and also of skin, fruits and seeds with or without $r\bar{u}pa$ marks. The testimony of the poet-saint Jñānadeva attests to the prevalence of leather money as late as the thirteenth century A. D. 34 Rhys David took a lacquer model in the collection of Pearse as a possible example of non-metallic type of coins mentioned by Buddhaghosha. 35 Most of the non-metallic substances being perishable, their coins would have been lost beyond recovery. But if the coins were of such material as leather, wood or gum, as stated by Buddhaghosha, they could very well have been fashioned out of clay, a substance which, in some respects, is more suited for this purpose than some other material mentioned by that scholar. In our opinion, if any existing non-metallic substance bearing $r\bar{u}pa$ -marks has any claim of being taken as coins, these are also equally entitled to be classed in the same category.

Indo-Greek coin-devices

Several seal-impressions with Hellenistic coin-devices are of unique interest.³⁶ Sealings shows Apollo standing to the right and holding a bow from the centre in the right hand.³⁷ A similar figure of this deity on coins³⁸ is shown facing and holding a bow in the left hand and an arrow in the right. Another numismatic parallel on Rajghat sealings is to be seen in the exquisite representation of Herakles standing to the left, carrying a club in his right hand and a lion's skin in the left.³⁹ It bears resemblance with the somewhat crudely depicted figures of Herakles on the coins of Kujula Kadphises.

Sealing from Rajghat⁴⁰ shows a winged Nike holding a wreath with fillet and has something protruding to the front and back from her waist. The letter feature is absent on the coins, ⁴¹while the palm-leaf, shown on the coins, is absent here. Sealing of this type have been found at Rajghat in a large number and are housed in different Museums of Northern India. A clay sealing from Sirkap⁴² also shows the figure of Nike but, unlike the Rajghat ones, does not show projections from the waist and is nearer to the depiction on coins. Sealings from Rajghat⁴³ show the figure of Pallas, helmeted, facing left and carrying a shield in her left hand. Her right hand is uplifted and perhaps holds a spear. Its resemblance the figure of Pallas on the coins. ⁴⁴ The figure of Apollo standing and carrying bow in one hand and arrow in the other occurs on some Rajghat sealing and also on some Indo-Greek coins. ⁴⁵ Some Sealings from Rajghat⁴⁶ depict heads with classical features bearing close affinity with those on the Indo-Greek coins. ⁴⁷ These all are devoid of string-marks on their backs. Some of them bear holes; they might have either been appended to letters or used as ornaments. One of these heads is extremely artistic and can be favourably compared with some of the best representations of a similar type on coins and seals. In passing, we may also allude to similar imitation of Satrapal coin-heads on the glyptics. ⁴⁸

Gupta coin-devices

The inventive genius of the illustrious Gupta devised methods to acquaint people with their personal talents and artistic spheres. They are portrayed on coins in various moods and acts, such as playing on lyre, riding a horse or an elephant, slaying a tiger, lion or rhinoceros. In the same mood, it appears, they popularised

³³Ancient Indian Numismatics, pp. 140-41.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.

³⁵Ancient Indian Numismatics, pp. 145-46.

³⁶For their significance, see K. K. Thaplyal, *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, pp. 233-36.

³⁷Rajghat, Lucknow Museum, no. 40. 161.

³⁸Gardner, Catalogue of Coins of the Greek and Scythic kings of Bactria and India, pl. IX, nos. 10-12 and pl. XI, 3; R. B. Whitehead, Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, I, pl. IV, no. 307 (holding bow and arrow).

³⁹K. K. Thaplyal, *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, p. 435.

 $^{^{40}}Ibid.,$

⁴¹Gardner, Catalogue of Coins of the Greek and Scythic kings of Bactria and India, pl. XI, nos. 4, 5, 13, etc.

⁴²J. Marshall, *Taxila*, II, p. 682, no. 42; *ibid.*, III, pl. 207, no. 29.

⁴³Allahabad Museum no. 64.

⁴⁴Gardner, Catalogue of Coins of the Greek and Scythic kings of Bactria and India, pl. XXI, nos. 9 and 11.

⁴⁵For Rajghat Sealing, see *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, III, pp. 76-77, pl. V, 15, and for coins, see *Catalogue of Coins of the Greek and Scythic kings of Bactria and India*, pl. IX, 10-12.

⁴⁶Sealing, head Graeco-Roman style Rajghat, Deptt. of *A.I.H.C & Arch.*, B.H.U., no. 59; K. K. Thaplyal, *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, pp. 434-35.

⁴⁷Gardner, *Catalogue of Coins of the Greek and Scythic kings of Bactria and India*, pl. V, 10; R. B. Whitehead, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum*, I, nos. 27 and 28. A royal bust more or less similar to head Graeco-Roman style sealing Rajghat, has been illustrated by Shri K. Deva in *JNSI*, III, pl. V. 11.

⁴⁸K. K. Thaplyal, *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, p. 435.

coin-devices on clay tablets, ⁴⁹ which were, generally speaking, tokens used as 'marks of official authentication, passports or identity cards', since they are devoid of string-marks on their backs. ⁵⁰

A Sealing⁵¹ from Rajghat now housed in Bharat Kala Bhavan, no. 6477, shows a person seated to the left, playing on a bow-shaped $v\bar{t}n\bar{a}$ resting on his knees. The figure emulates the lyrist type coins of Samudragupta⁵² and Kumāragupta I.⁵³ On the Lyrist type of Samudragupta, the figure is shown seated cross-legged and on those of Kumāragupta the right leg is folded on the couch while the left is over the right one and hangs down. The figure on the clay-impression sits in bhadrāsana and there is an additional device of an elephant standing to the left. This latter feature is absent on the coins. We suggest that the intention was to show that even an elephant could be enhanced by the musical notes of the lyre. We are reminded of king Udayana of Kauśāmbī who, we are told, could enchant wild elephant by the music of his $v\bar{t}n\bar{t}a$.

A Sunet Sealing⁵⁴ shows, on the obverse, a device of Samudragupta's *Aśvamedha* type of coins. Penons of cloth flutter from the top of the *yūpa* in front of the uncaparisoned horse and the *chashāla*or wooden ring with which the *yūpa* was adorned near its end has also been shown.⁵⁵ It bears the legend *Parākramaḥ*, which is an abbreviated form of *Aśvamedha-parākramaḥ* occurring on the reverse of the *Aśvamedha* type of his coins.⁵⁶ The Lucknow Museum sealing no. 49. 190, is an exact copy of the obverse of the Archer type of Chandragupta II. The legend *Chandra* below the left arm is quite clear.⁵⁷

There are five triangular lumps from Jhusi in the Allahabad Museum (nos. 286, 304, 399-401), 58 which are impressed on two sides. On one side is depicted an archer shooting with a bow and traces of legend; on the other are a tree and a vase with foliage. The third or lower side, in some cases, bears string-marks. The depiction of the figure and the posture is similar to what we find on the lion-slayer type of coins of Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I. the device on a Rajghat sealing in the Bharat Kala Bhavan showing the figure standing in pratyālīdhāsanaresembles more closely the Lion-slayer type of Chandragupta II.⁵⁹ The Lucknow Museum no. 49. 198 is similar to the Lion-slayer type of Chandragupta II. 60 Allahabad Museum no. R. 26, likewise, shows a man slaying a lion and probably belongs to the above type of Chandragupta II. A Sealing⁶¹ depicts Lakshmī seated, facing, on lotus holding fillet in her outstretched right hand and lotus with stalks in left. There seem to be faint traces of letters on the right margin. The device is met with on the reverse of several Gupta gold coins. 62 Shri K. Deva has referred to a token from Rajghat bearing four impressions, one of which shows the figure of Lakshmī seated, similar to the one referred to above. 63 With the help of the presence of a few letters, Shari Deva ascribed the token to Kumārgupta I.⁶⁴ A sealing from Rajghat⁶⁵ shows Durgā seated on a lion, couchant to left. This closely resembles the reverse of Lion-slayer type of Chandragupta II. 66 Shri Deva 67 refers to a similar token on which the goddess is seated on a lion, couchant to right and traces of the legend (Śrī-Ma)hendra(sinha) occurs on its right margin. The legend leaves no doubt regarding its attribution; the device is similar to the reverse design of the Lion-Slaver type of Kumāragupta I.⁶⁸ Sealing⁶⁹

⁴⁹Some such tablets bear devices which are completely identical with those on coins in shape and size, seem to be pressed out of coin moulds. The use of these could hardly have been allowed to private individuals (*JNSI*, III, p. 76).

⁵⁰*JNSI*, III, p. 76.

⁵¹The same as *JNSI*, III, p. 73, pl. V, 1.

⁵²A. S. Altekar, *The coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pl. III, nos. 15-17. Epigraphic evidence bears testimony to Samudragupta's skill in playing on the *vīṇā* (*Corpus Inscription Indicarum*, III, no. 1, line 27, *niśita-vidagdha-mati-gāndhara-lalitair-vrīḍita-trdaśapati-guru-Tumburu-Nāradādeḥ*).

⁵³Ibid., pl. XVI, 5; Altekar, Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard, pl. XXXI, nos. 4 and 5.

⁵⁴K. K. Thaplyal, *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, pp. 65, 92, 200.

⁵⁵ On the coins (*The coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pl. III, 6-12; *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*, pl. IV), the $y\bar{u}pa$ is shown on pedestal and the penons fly over the horse. These features are lacking on our specimen.

⁵⁶A. S. Altekar, *The coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pp. 67-69.

⁵⁷ Its close resemblance is to be found in Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard, pl. X, no. 14.

⁵⁸One of them has been illustrated in the Lalit Kalā, no. 9, pl. VI, 12.

⁵⁹JNSI, III, p. 74 and pl. V, 4

⁶⁰A. S. Altekar, Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard, pl. XVI, 12-13.

⁶¹Lucknow Museum nos. 49. 196.

⁶²A. S. Altekar, *The coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pl. XVI, 12-13.

⁶³*JNSI*, III, pp. 73-74, pl. V, 2.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Lucknow Museum nos. 42. 65/8.

⁶⁶A. S. Altekar, *The coinage of the Gupta Empire*, pl. VI, 15.

⁶⁷*JNSI*, III, pp. 74, pl. V, 5.

 $^{^{68}}Ibid.$

⁶⁹Sealing, two impressions: (a) two human figures and a bird and (b) bust of a king, Rajghat, Bharat Kala Bhavan, no. 6454.

shows a bust wearing a crest and large earrings. The device is quite similar to the one on a copper coin illustrated by Altekar and plausibly attributed to Chandragupta II.⁷⁰ The figure of Garuḍa on a Rajghat seal⁷¹ resembles with the Garuḍa device on some copper coins of Chandragupta II.⁷²

One of the impressions on a token from Rajghat,⁷³ showing a figure standing left three-quarter length with left hand on waist (*katyavalambita* pose) and right hand outstretched (possibly in the act of casting incense on the altar)⁷⁴ seems to be an imitation of the crude busts and half-length portraits on Chandragupta II's copper coins. Still another impression on a token from the same site⁷⁵ representing a crude bust seems to imitate busts of Chandragupta II as met with on copper coins.⁷⁶ On the other side of this piece is the figure of a fan-tailed peacock⁷⁷ similar to those on the Central Indian silver coins of Kumāragupta I and some of his successors.⁷⁸ A single token from this very site shows fire-altar.⁷⁹ The device resemblance the one on the coins of Skandagupta meant for circulation in Western India.

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⁷⁰A. S. Altekar, *The coinage of the Gupta Empire*, p. 349.

⁷¹K. K. Thaplyal, *Studies in Ancient Indian Seals*, p. 203.

⁷²J. Allan, Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśāṅka, king of Gauḍa. pl. XI, 4-12; JNSI, III, 75, pl. V, 10.

⁷³*JNSI*, III, p. 74, pl. V, 6.

⁷⁴J. Allan, Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśānka, king of Gauḍa. pl. XI, 8; JNSI, III, p. 74.

⁷⁵*JNSI*, III, p. 74, pl. V, no. 7.

⁷⁶J. Allan, Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśānka, king of Gauḍa. pl. XI, 12-19.

⁷⁷*JNSI*, III, pp. 74-75, pl. V, no. 8.

⁷⁸J. Allan, Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśānka, king of Gauḍa. pl. XVIII, 1-15; pl. XXI, 13-22; pl. XXIV, 13-14.

⁷⁹*JNSI*, III, pp. 75, pl. V, no. 9.