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Kashmir Smast (Gandhara) and its Religious Significance
– Study Based on Epigraphic and other Antiquities from the Site

Fig. 1. Kashmir Smast. Map of the area. Falk 2003, 1.
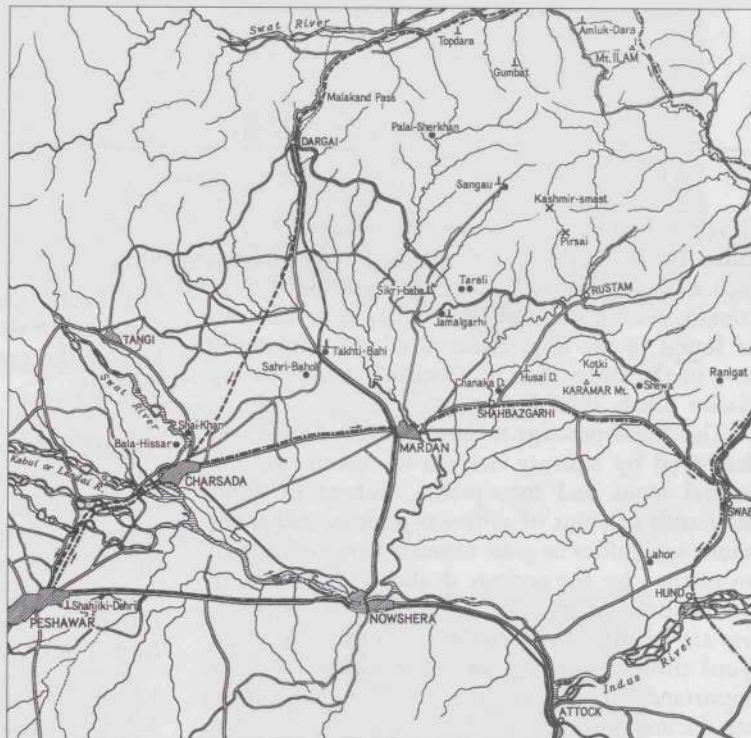
Merely a few scholars knew not very long ago Gandhara as the name of a territory. But now, thanks to the ever-expanding archaeological investigations in this area, it has become a common knowledge. Archaeological activities have not yet stopped. But there is a wealth of cultural materials excavated from different sites, which need to be sorted out and studied against the background of recent epigraphical and other discoveries. Such a study will be greatly appreciated at all hands and is in fact the need of the hour.

It is a known fact that the region of Gandhara has always produced remarkable data of archaeological and historical importance. Thanks to these discoveries many of the flaws and vacuums that existed previously are now resolved and gaps filled. But although the history, or the cultural profile,

of Gandhara has so far been fairly well reconstructed, there are still certain parts of the history that have remained blank due to the shortage of sufficient data. Fortunately, the research presently conducted by different national and international organizations, institutions, and individual as well continues to produce important discoveries. Some of these recent discoveries can be considered as landmarks in the religious history of Gandharan archaeology. One of these milestones is, in fact, the identification of Kashmir Smast as the earliest Shaivite monastic establishment.

Kashmir Smast, a large, isolated cave some 1150 m above see level, is located about 50 km northeast of Mardan in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan (fig. 1; for detail see Nasim Khan 2001b). On a spur below the Great
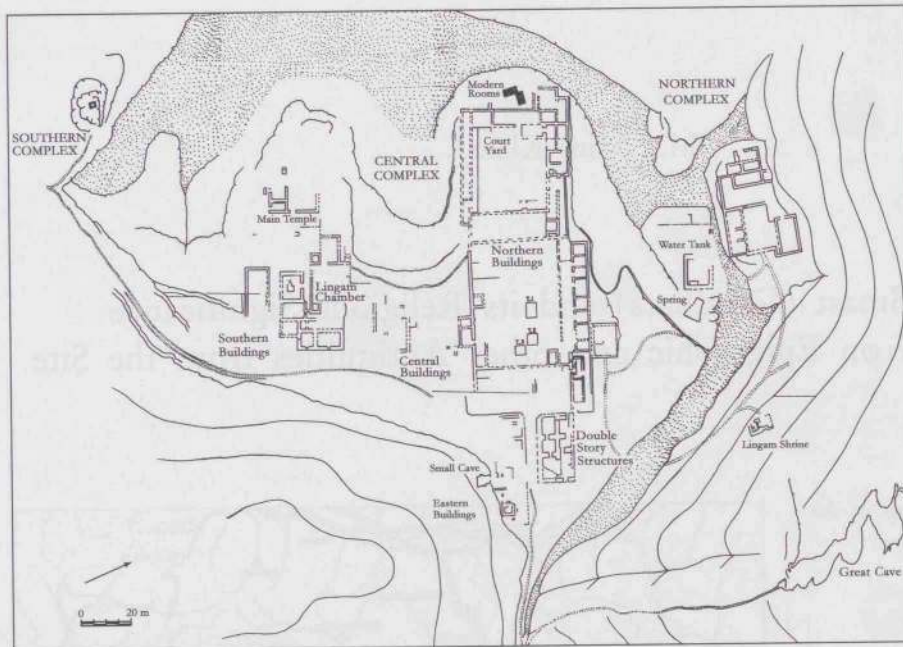
Fig. 2. Kashmir Smast. Layout of the Main Complex. After Nasim Khan 2001b, 248.

Cave there is an impressive establishment, locally called Bakhai (fig. 2). Many other establishments, such as a huge tank, most probably meant for an *ashnan,* or ablution, and other water reservoirs can be found in the area, close to or away from the cave in the valley (for the remains at the site see Nasim Khan 2001b).

This important site is unfortunately looted and destroyed by treasure hunters for many decades. Several icons and inscriptions, dozens of seals, thousands of coins of different periods, and other minor antiquities in great number have so far been un-earthed by the antique dealers and are still in circulation among the art-markets. These antiquities are heading to private collections all over the word through illegal trade. Keeping in view the importance of the objects, since 1999 the author has documented them and is trying to reconstruct their proper archaeological context by conducting a scientific excavation at the site (Nasim Khan 2001b).

Although all antiquities from the site are of great historical significance, some of them need more attention. Their study will not only help us to know the ancient landscape of the area as mentioned in one of the inscriptions from the site, but they will also make us understand its religious importance. Most important of all are the iconic representations of Hindu gods, liṅgas, seals and inscriptions. All these objects are associated with Hinduism and confirm – contrary to the previously held idea that the site is a Buddhist establishment – that Kashmir Smast is in fact, the earliest Śivaite monastic complex. Furthermore, the Great Cave, probably is the earliest recorded abode of the Hindu goddess Lajjā Gaurī. In this regard, one of the inscriptions from the site states (fig. 3):

sita-mahā-kandara-śikhare śr īmīñja-parrva-mahā-guhā nivasiny-acimāyāh

'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' (Nasim Khan 2000, 2001b)[1].

'Acimā' of the above inscription is one of the names of the goddess Lajjā Gaurī. The same name is also found on a seal bearing the name and a figure of the goddess. Many seals recovered from the site bear the figure of this goddess. Despite some orthographic mistakes, one of them also carries the above-mentioned text in abbreviated form (fig. 4). It says:

1. *śrīrmīji parvata ga*
2. *hā vasinyacirmāya*

'To or of Acimā, who dwells in the secret place [or cave] of the mount Śrī Mīji' (Nasim Khan 2002).

Inside the cave, there are three main areas of interest: the first is a secret chamber situated at the distal end of the cave. It is not easily accessible because the passage leading to it is extremely steep and so narrow that one has to crawl to reach its entrance. The chamber itself is comparatively wide, enough to turn easily. The second area of importance is a shrine which opens to the south and which is lightened by a window in the roof. It was from one of the walls of this shrine that a manuscript, written in Bactrian script, has been

[1] The reading of H. Falk (2003) for "Acīmāyah" is "Bhīmayah".

Fig. 3. Copper plate inscription from Kashmir Smast (Gandhara).

Fig. 4. Lajjā Gauri seal from Kashmir Smast Gandhara.

Fig. 5.   Inscribed pot from Kashmir Smast (Gandhara).

Fig. 7.   Liṅga from Kashmir Smast (Gandhara).

Fig. 6.   Rock paintings at Kashmir Smast (Gandhara).

recovered. The central and front areas exhibit a water tank and small shrines which are now completely destroyed.

From the above text it is not clear whether the narrow chamber at the far end of the cave, the small shrine, or even the entire cave itself (the Mahā Guhā) was the abode of the goddess. If the cave *in toto* was her abode, Lajjā Gaurī must have been an important deity of her time.

The fact that Kashmir Smast was a sacred place of Hinduism is enhanced by another important aspect transmitted by the seals. It is the strong association of Lajjā Gaurī with other Hindu gods which are symbolically represented on the seals, e. g., *triśūla* representing Śiva, the *purṇaghāṭa* Brāhma, the *cakra* Viṣṇu and the dancing figure Narasiṃha or Śiva (Nasim Khan 2002). This association of the goddess with other Hindu gods on the earliest material evidence discovered so far with inscriptions is unique and, in our opinion, is the earliest of its kind.

One of the seals recently published by the author shows, for the first time, Lajjā Gaurī with a prominent head (Nasim Khan 2001a, 240–241). She holds a cornucopia in her left hand and is seated in a posture like Ardokṣo on Kaṇiṣka II coins (Göbl 1984, 33). The goddess, in a complete human form and seated on a throne, may have an association with Ardokṣo as depicted on coins.

The inscriptions from Kashmir Smast not only reveal the cult of Lajjā Gaurī and her association with the Great Cave. They also help us understand the entire setting of several monuments in one assemblage, and its dedication to a particular god or divinity. The inscription discovered on a copper plate makes this clear (fig. 3):

pāda-mūle prayad-chatya-kṣayaṇiṃ

"At the foot of the mountain, a beautiful living place with tranquil water and a lively Caitya"

The inscription further explains the Caitya and adds:

Śāliyakaḥ asya-su-varṇasya vardha[mā]neśvarasya

"of this beautiful house of the god Vardhamā-neśvara"

It should be noted that in these inscriptions Śiva is mentioned either as Vardhamāneśvara or Bhīma (see *supra*) and that, due to the absence of anthropomorphic images at this stage, he is exclusively represented symbolically as 'Liṅga-vigrahas'. The inscription mentions in one sentence the temple of Śiva and identifies buildings located to the north of the temple as a monastery. The inscription adds:

nṛibhiś-ca-ṣoṭṭako-snapana[ṃ](or stapinaṃ) kar-tavyaṃ puṣpā-hārika-dvayena dakuṭa ca pā[ra]-maṭhakena

"men and women of the monastery were given food and water with two Saktu [each]".

Another inscription, preserved on three different pots recovered from the site, repeat three times the word 'maṭha' (fig. 5). It narrates:

dīvadharma nagara śrī bhīmaya guha-vasīṇīya haṇī-su-va[r]ṇ -suṇī -maṭhe . . . |syarītī-ghaṭarasya

"The town of Devadharma [i. e., Holama] [did this donation] to Bhīma who lives in the beautiful monastery of Ahaṇī of all qualities; the liquor of the pot is poured"

Another inscription mentions not only the term 'maṭha' but, also the name of the town from where a certain individual came and presented a gift to the god 'Bhīma'. The inscription reads:

Bhīmāyāhaṇī su-maṭhe devadharmarakṣitasyaḥ holamaysa(sya) nagara

"To Bhīma, in the beautiful monastery of Ahaṇī, [donation of] the town of Holama of Devad-harmarkṣita [or ruled by Devadharmarkṣita]"
or
"The town of Holama of *Devadharmarkṣita* [did this donation] to Bhīma, in the beautiful monastery of Ahaṇī"

The name of the town in its different forms is several times mentioned in the Upper Indus Valley Brāhmī inscriptions. At Helor Das East Rock Carving Site, the name occurs in 'Horamusa' form (Nasim Khan 1994, 202), while in Shatial it is written 'Hora(mu) (Fussman/König 1997, 31). In Gichi Nala site (Bandini-König/von Hinüber 2001, 157) the orthography is 'Horumaysa', whereas in the Hodar site it is mentioned as 'Horamaysan-agara' (Bandini-König 1999, 42), as we also have it in the Kashmir Smast inscription. The Hodar inscription is properly read, but incorrectly de-composed. It reads:

1. *rudrāśani (h)o*
2. *ramaysanagara*

1. Rudraśani (has arrived?)
2. Ramaysanagara

The Upper Indus valley inscriptions mentioned above and the inscriptions from Kashmir Smast reveal the same type of script and are almost certainly of the same period. Therefore, the fact that 'Horamaysa nagara' is mentioned in these different localities should not be considered as a mere coincidence, but makes rather likely that these different inscriptions refer to a particular town which is most probably situated somewhere to the northeast of places visited by travellers or pilgrims in the Upper Indus Valley and Gandhara, either for trade or for a pilgrimage to sacred places.

Beside the above mentioned inscriptions, there are dozens more from the site, either painted or engraved (fig. 6). Most probably, they all deal with the same subject, however, the full picture will emerge only after a detailed study. One inscription from the site, which poses difficulties in reading is associated with the carving of a liṅga. On the basis of palaeographic features, it can be dated to 4th/5th century AD.

Although the word 'Maṭha' which is mentioned three times in the Kashmir Smast epigraphs is referred to in the literature elsewhere, it occurs for the first time in relation to the identification of a place, thus rendering Kashmir Smast a site of great religious significance.

Apart from the inscriptions, other important antiquities from the site advance our understanding of the true nature of its nature and importance. Among these are iconic or aniconic representations of Hindu deities, such as anthropomorphic depictions of Viṣṇu and Gaṇeśa, or liṅgas representing Śiva (fig. 7).

From the above discussion it is clear that the site has been one of the most important religious centres of its time and the earliest Śivaite monastic establishment in South Asia. Moreover, it also represents the earliest recorded temple of the goddess Lajjā Gaurī who, as can be assumed from the discourse summarized above, might represent the proto-type of the goddess Ardokṣo.

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