

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE NATURE OF THE GOLD ORNAMENT FROM PATTAN (INDUS KOHISTAN)

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From the dawn of civilization to the present day, Indo-Pak subcontinent has been a place of many interesting developments, specially in the domains of art and architecture. From his humble beginnings as a tool-maker, man in Indo-Pak subcontinent emerged step by step to the higher echelons of culture. The area has a glorious past and this can be appreciated by studying its heritage coming through archaeological diggings and chance discoveries which are the main source of tracing man's history, and backgrounds of different civilizations.

The first great discovery of the 19th century in the history of the archaeological finds of the Indo-Pak subcontinent was the discovery of an inscribed seal picked up by Alexander Cunningham from Harrapa in 1873. This was the first clue of the lost Indus Civilization. But a great landmark of the present century in the history of the archaeological finds of Indo-Pak subcontinent came in the form of a gold object found by a shepherdess, named Khafu, at Pattan (Indus Kohistan). This chance discovery has brought to the fore a new realm of studies in the field of art and for the art historians.

The discovery at Pattan was actually of two gold ornaments. One of these was a hollow bangle, which is lost¹, and the second one is a heavy weight ornament (Fig. 1) which, since its discovery, is still a mystery for common people. The object, which is the subject of the present study, now sits in the Peshawar museum.

The ornament, weighing nearly 16 kilograms and made of solid gold, has been broken into 11 big and 46 small pieces. The small pieces are so tiny that no idea can be developed about the motifs on them and their proper place in the ornament (Fig. 2). The main joints of the ornament are now missing but adequate pieces have been recovered which can give a good idea of the ornament as far as its shape and design is concerned. The ornament is square in section, bearing molded figures on its three faces (Figs. 3, 4) and the fourth one has a series of five parallel lines (Fig. 5). It has no sign of a precious or semi-precious stone inlaid in it or any hanging tassels from it.

The 11 pieces which are in a reasonable shape are of two types : some are rectangular, and some are cylindrical. The rectangular shaped pieces, which are 4 in number, are wider and thicker than the cylindrical ones which are 7 in number and if we place them all together in a circle they make a shape which gradually grows in thickness (see Fig. 1).

1. Saeedur Rahman 1990: 6.

A preliminary report has already been published and it is not my intention to follow the descriptive study of each and every piece and figure which is already done by Saeedur Rahman² and Miss Sobia Zaman³. I will rather touch briefly on other aspects, above all the exact nature of the ornament.

The ornament is beautifully decorated with sculptured forms of animals, human figures and birds, etc. But the most striking feature of the decorative theme is its animal forms which preside over the whole scene. Some animals are shown magnificently. Even the expressions could be seen.

The ornament presents an example of artistic skill and its animal decoration is very appealing. Animals are made in every form and every gesture. Hunting and fighting scenes are magnificently represented. The stronger animals pouncing upon the weaker one's whether men or animal (Fig. 6). The animals include camels, rams, tigers, stags, horses, ibexes, deers, boars, etc. Besides human figures and eagle, birds and trees are also represented.

The present pieces show the loving observation of animals. Another important aspect is its hunting scenes which are made beautifully. The postures and gestures are remarkable but the anatomy of human figures is not much developed. Generally it looks beautiful and the decoration and technique are remarkable and outstanding.

Nothing is overlapping but there is no feeling of space in between two figures. Figures are made one above the other and there is no symmetry (Fig. 7). Scene of proportion and perspective is lacking. The filling of the negative spaces is remarkable. Figures have been made in such a way that each one of them is fitted in its place due to the order of space and it is totally ignored whether the position of a figure is correct compared to the next one beside it or not. For example if one figure is in a standing position, the space between its legs is filled with another figure, sometimes with an upside down position just to fill the space properly.

The filling of space gives somewhat a stylized manner to the decoration because some figures like horses do not look like normal horses. Their muzzles are elongated and legs are shortened (Fig. 8) because they are made in respect of space. One can also observe that the central figure captures the attention of the viewer because of its size and the other figures are relegated to the background just like the mughal miniature paintings in which prominence was given to the central and main figures which were of some importance or which they want to show and other things like foliage, land scape, architecture or animals etc go into the background.

2. Saeedur Rahman 1990.

3. Sobia Zaman 1997.

No body knows what was the exact nature of this ornament. A preliminary account of the ornament has been already given by Saeedur Rahman and due to the hardness and heaviness of the ornament it is suggested to be a girdle⁴.

The jewellery for body decoration, specially for waist and neck, was used in many cultures and civilizations of different eras. But one of the crafts, Indo-Pak subcontinent is greatly noted for, is jewellery and the variety has perhaps no parallels. Ornaments were very popular in the Indian culture and are used both to adorn a person and a deity and the girdle (*mekhalā*, *kañcī*, *kinkini* or *rasana*, indicated women's girdle⁵ *shrinkhala*, *katibandha*, and *sarsana*, indicated men's girdle)⁶ and necklace (*hāra*) seemed to be the most elaborate and prominent of all the items of jewellery in the ancient Indian culture.

As far as the antiquity of the ornaments in Indo-Pak is concerned, we do not know exactly where did the idea come from; nor do we know when this idea first developed. Archaeological evidence tells us the history of the ornament only from the beginning of the Indus valley civilization when they started to present terracotta figurines with ornaments. The elaborate but exquisitely designed jewels found on the clay figurines tell of the lavishness and care bestowed on ornamentation of the body, beginning with hair down to the toes. Very common are female figures, generally very crudely modelled, decked with numerous girdles, chains and earrings. Round the neck were a complex array of necklaces starting with a choker round the throat followed by larger ones reaching down to the waist. The Gandhāra sculptures also portray extraneous modes in jewellery. The ornaments discovered, of gold and silver, in excavations, reveal fine workmanship and some of them are to be found to the present day. Even the names have not changed very much.

The literary evidences about the art connected with body decorations are numerous and can give a good idea about their shapes, use and value. The Mahābhārata is a very rich source of cultural material and speaks from time to time on the ornament-habits of the ancient people. In the information drawn from the Mahābhārata, gold chains and necklaces were worn by men and women alike. The most intricate ones consisted of gold flowers and gold lotuses. Gold necklaces were specially designed for elephants and horses. For the elephant, there was another thick heavy gold chain called *graiveya*. While *mekhalā* or *kañcī* was worn exclusively by women - both were worn by women of the class of courtesans or by *Apsaras*. Its use was typical in the female representation since from the Indus civilization up to the Gupta period.

4. Saeedur Rahman 1990: 6.

5. Kalidas, 5.10.

6. Maitreya 1923: 63.

Panini in his *Ashṭadhyayi* used the terms *graivaka*, *kancanmala*, *candrahāra*, *pralambhāra* for neck ornaments⁷.

In the *Jātakas*, in the wonderful story of Viśākhā⁸, there is the description of her most valuable wedding-present given by her rich father. It was an ornament, which, when worn from head to foot, would give the appearance of a dancing peacock and which five hundred goldsmiths took several months to complete. Kauṭilya mentioned a number of neck ornaments such as *sirsaka*, *prakandaka*, and *yaṣṭi*⁹. The *Arthaśāstra* gives further detail about gold and goldsmiths in ancient India.

But, as far as this present gold ornament is concerned, we have so far no other example of any such ornament for comparison in this region and we are therefore confronted with some difficulties to understand the real nature and use of this object. The term, which is generally used is girdle. Saeedur Rahman describes it in these words: “Its solidity and heavy weight it clearly suggest that it was most probably used as a girdle and not as a necklace”¹⁰. Professor A.H. Dani shares the same opinion and also uses the term girdle or waist band¹¹.

Before designating this ornament as well as knowing its exact nature, we have to think over three basic points because the real difficulty is its heavy weight. Different hypothesis are possible to make. First, was this object a daily use personal ornament? If so, how was it possible for a human being to carry such a weighty object about his/her neck or waist. Second, was this ornament used as a girdle or necklace by a king or a noble only on special occasions?. This possibility could not be excluded. Lastly, was this object a donation to a statue of a divinity? This supposition is more plausible and it is probable that this ornament might not have been used by an ordinary or noble person but may be a donation to a divinity.

The last hypothesis could be reinforced by the narration of Fa-Hien about the presence of a wooden statue of Maitreya in the adjoining valley of Darel. The statue was probably adorned with an ornament of such a size to emit an effulgent light. Fa-Hien narrates, “In this kingdom there was formerly an Arhan, who by his supernatural power took a clever artificer up to the Tushita heaven, to see the height, complexion, and appearance of Maitreya Bodhisattva, and then return and make an image of him in wood. First and last, this was done three times, and then the image was completed, eighty cubits in height, and eight cubits at the base from knee to knee of the crossed legs. On fast-days it emits an effulgent light. The kings

7. Panini: IV.3.6.

8. She was one of the faithful disciples of Buddha.

9. Kauṭilya: 76-77.

10. Saeedur Rahman 1990: 6.

11. Dani, in Saeedur Rahman 1990: 16; Dani 1995: 21.

of the (surrounding) countries vie with one another in presenting offerings to it. Here it is,-to be seen now as of old”¹².

We do not know what kind of offerings were presented to the Maitreya image by the kings of the surrounding countries. In the absence of some solid arguments, a conclusion will be uncertain. But it is clear that Maitreya image was wearing something which could shine and could be seen from far. It is possible that he was adorned with a gold ornament by one of his worshipers or by the community and I suppose with great reserve that, the present ornament might be one of the offering presented to the Maitreya image. If it is like this, it may be possible that the donation was of a neck-girdle or more probably a necklace and not of a waist-girdle because of the gigantic size of the image. The idea of a neck-girdle was also developed by Farooq Swāti by proposing: “I personally think that the archaeological evidence of this wooden statue (perished long before) is confirmed by the find of a huge gold neck-girdle weighing 16 kilograms which was recovered from Pattan.... This huge and heavy neck-girdle could only have been used for decorating this colossal wooden statue”¹³.

It should also be noted that one of the four sides is decorated with parallel lines and according to the shape, the lines are on outer surface of the girdle (Fig. 5). Using this ornament as a waist-girdle, the parallel lines come to the fore and the animals and other motifs against the body, downside and upside. I think that the idea was not to show the parallel lines to the viewers but the motifs and it was only possible to wear the ornament in a hanging position and the suitable part of the body for that was the neck. Another thing which is worth mentioning is the shape of the ornament, its thickness increases in the middle while it gradually reduces towards the joining ends like a necklace. While a waist-girdle normally keeps its width thickness throughout the same. It is therefore possible that this ornament was used as a neck-girdle or necklace, by a human being because of its weight but that it was a donation to a divinity probably made of wood which was spoiled or was burnt. Was the statue of the divinity located somewhere in Pattan area? Does this ornament belong to the Maitreya image? If so, how did it arrive in Pattan? This question remains open.

Since the ornament was picked up from surface and was not found in any context or without conducting proper excavation, it is difficult to put it in firm chronological framework, without invoking the help of external evidence. Animal decoration and the use of animalistic forms in the art of jewellery is very ancient and nearly used in every civilization but for some cultures it became its hall mark.

12. James Legge 1886: 24,25.

13. Farooq Swāti 1996. vol. 1, Text, 244.

In the decorative and ornamental art of Central Asia, figures of animals were used as decorations on a variety of objects¹⁴. The animals, like horses, tigers, wild boars, hares, ibexes, eagles and stags were frequently found. The present ornament has a wide variety of such animal designs which are unique and the only of its kind in this region. Such decorated objects have never come to my mind so far¹⁵. The comparison can only be made with the gold objects found in the graves from Tilya tepe, Afghanistan¹⁶. But the decoration and the techniques are hardly comparable. Some of the animal figures, specially the horses with their elongated muzzles (Figs. 7, 8) are of Central Asian type¹⁷. The human figures have a close similarity with those of Central Asia because of their long face, long eyes and sharp nose (Fig. 9). The figures here show the same dynamism as in the Scythian art and the ornament that we have is an example of artistic skill which is the characteristic feature of the Scythian art; it is, therefore, suggested that this ornament might be the work of the Scythians who came to this region in the first century B.C.

14. It should be noted that in the Achaemenid period, animals representations was also very common in designing jewellery (A. Upham Pope 19.. Vol. VII: 121,122).

15. The only examples can be seen in the rock carvings of the Upper Indus Valley (see Jettmar 1989, 1991).

16. Sarianidi 1985: Pl. V.I.

17. Rice 1965: Plats. 28.

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Fig. 1. Gold necklace from Pattan (Indus Kohistan)



Fig. 2. Segments of the gold necklace.



Fig. 3. Segment showing different animals.



Fig. 4. Segment showing different motifs.



Fig. 5. Segment showing fine parallel lines.



Fig. 6. Segment showing hunting scene.



Fig. 7. Segment showing a horse and other animals.



Fig. 8. Segment showing a horse.



Fig. 9. Segment showing fighting scene.