

A P P E N D I X

A METAL STATUETTE OF ATLAS FROM SHAMALAJI

This unique statuette was discovered quite accidentally while digging a foundation trench for a dam across the river Meshvo at Shamalaji. It was recovered by two engineers of the Public Works Department, Gujarat State, who very kindly presented it to the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History of the M.S.University of Baroda. At present, it is lying in this departmental museum at Baroda.

The dam-site is famous in the surrounding country as Nagadharo meaning the pool (dharo) of the Nagas. Before the construction of this dam, it was a deep pool between two hills. Every year, thousands of pilgrims visit this holy spot for a purifying dip.

The statuette was discovered at a depth of five meters in the river bed amidst the deposits of sand, pebbles and mud. As it was lying loose in an impaired state under the river bed - probably for centuries - it got deteriorated. So naturally at the time of its recovery, it was in a highly tarnished condition. Due to a fairly thick coating of corrosion, its features were not clearly visible.

Its primary cleaning was done by the engineers who seem to have no idea of its fine patina which probably coated the

whole piece and gave it a glossy finish. As a result, probably their cleaning wiped off the patina, although some of its traces are still retained.

This statuette is an ideal specimen of a well balanced combination of craftsmanship and art.

It is in a half-sitting or crouching posture, almost what may be called a virāsana. The posture is such that the legs are bent from knees almost to an acute angle. The heels are pressed against the respective hips. Both forefeet and right knee are resting on ground while the left knee is slightly raised. All the three points touching the ground are flattened to produce a perfect footing and stability.

Long muscular arms are stretched to rest on respective thighs. The right arm is stretched full length, while the left one is slightly bent from the elbow. Both palms are pressed against the thigh muscles just near the knees. The right hand thumb and fingers are stretched following the curvature of thigh muscle. The two middle fingers of left hand are bent towards palm in such a way that they are not visible. The left hand thumb, index finger and small finger are represented in typical Indian curves.

As the arms are stretched full length and pressed against the thighs, shoulders are slightly raised. Due to such a pose, shoulder muscles are depicted very prominently. Sloping muscular chest and flat belly are typical. Abdominal muscles

are not depicted. The stomach is marked with a pair of slightly incurved incised horizontal lines near iris. The waist is slim. The torso is inclined backward, probably to emphasize the athletic posture. The head is not perfectly erect but slightly leaning forward as if due to some burden. ^{Throat} ~~Neck~~ is not visible due to dense growth of beard. Though the lower part of the face is hidden under moustache and beard, it is clearly evident that the face is oval.

Facial features represent a fullgrown mature manly personality. Aquiline nose is slightly damaged at its tip. Due to this, its tip gives slightly flattened appearance. As the figure is a small one, no eyebrows are depicted. The half-closed eyes are represented in relief. Thick lower lip is slightly protruding, while most of the upper lip is hidden under thick moustache. The zygomatic arch of cheekbones is prominent. Due to this feature, cheeks seem to be sunken. Broad forehead is marked with two incised vertical lines between eye-brows, probably to produce a pathetic expression—a common feature of Atlas figures. Small portions of earlobes are visible, while rest of the ears are hidden under the curls of hair.

Simple plain coif is typical. It fits to the head and reaches upto forehead. The rich wavy hair stick out from under the coif and cover the back of neck and temporals. The drooping moustache are long. Long pointed beard having dense growth reaches upto chest. The hair are not curly but wavy.

At the back of the head just above the neck, there seems to have been some protuberance like device which is mutilated. Its deteriorated core which is still clearly jutting out looks like a knob in its present deteriorated condition. From its position and nature of curve, it is clear that originally it might have been protruding upward. Whether this projection worked as a joint with some other sculpture or only held something cannot be ascertained.

The body is devoid of ornaments. The only drapery it is having is a short loincloth wrapped around waist. It covers hips and lower abdomen only. The folds and frills of this cloth are realistic. Feet are protected by wholeboots reaching upto calf muscles. They are depicted in prominent relief.

From this description, it is clearly evident that the artist has tried to create an athletic figure. Square broad shoulders, full muscular chest and slim waist represent a perfect manly figure. But, it should be noted that though an athletic figure is represented, the sculptor has cared to render principal features of prominent muscles and not any further details. On the other hand, folds of the loincloth are realistic. On the whole, body proportions are typical Indian, while the other anatomical features are an Indianized copy of Greco-Roman figure.

Other worthnoting feature is hair. Beard and moustache are having wavy hair, while the temporals are covered with thick locks.

In absence of a direct evidence, it cannot be ascertained whether this statuette is a local manufacture or an imported one. To fix its chronological position also, we have to rely on its stylistic evidence. Although nearby presence (about 300 yards from the site) of Buddhist Stupa and Vihara belonging to 3rd to 5th centuries is significant.

This statuette is a clever as well as artistic blending of probably three traditions of art - Greco-Roman, Indian and Persian.

For a detailed study of these three trends and their mutual relative impacts, we have to take into consideration the political and cultural condition of India during the early centuries of Christian Era.

It is a well-known fact that Greeks from their base at Bactria had established political and cultural relations with India on one hand and Persia on the other (B.C.190-90). The ancient "Silk route" which bifurcated at Bactria¹, has played an important role as a 'culture communication route' between Asia and Western World. One of the important outcome of these contacts was the introduction of Greco-Roman arts and

1. Bagchi, Prabodh Chandra, India and Central Asia, Calcutta, 1955, p.18.

crafts. The methodical Greek mind and Indian mystic tradition joined hands to create many masterpieces of what is now known as Gandharan Art.

The Gandharan sculptor tried to blend two ideals: Indian concept of divinity in superhuman spiritualised body and Greek concept of realistic beauty.

Later on Sakas outsted the Greeks (B.C.90), and they themselves were driven off by the Kushanas (A.D.64). The vast Kushana empire was stretched from Oxus and Amudarya in Central Asia to the Ganges (and probably upto Narmada) in India. The bulk of their empire was comprized of peoples belonging to various religions, cultures, and creeds. So Kushanas quite obviously adopted as well as blended all the four trends of Greek, Indian, Parthian and Central Asian, cultures in their coinage². The great Kushana Kanishka actually invited Syrian sculptors to work on Buddhist monuments³.

The present statuette seems to be an outcome of such a tradition of compromise between Eastern and Western cultures.

From typical sitting posture and knoblike protrusion at the back of the head, it is clearly evident that this

2. Rawlinson H.G., India and the Western World, Cambridge, 1916, pp.164-5.

3. Rawlinson H.G., Op.cit., p.167.

statuette is that of Atlas, the Greek God of older family, supposed to be holding the pillars of Universe. The pathetic expression on the face also supports this assumption.

Generally, Atlas is depicted lifting the Globe or some other thing on his shoulders.

A small nude Atlas supporting a winged victory on a pillar from a late Antonine peristyle at Ascalon (near Judea) is a typical example of a western prototype of Indian Atlantes⁴.

What did this Shamalaji Atlas lift cannot be ascertained as we have no direct evidence to trace the nature of the original missing fragment? But, it is fairly certain that the missing piece was attached to the statuette by means of an iron rod one end of which is still embedded in the back of the statuette⁵.

It is a well-known fact that during early centuries of Christian Era due to Greek cultural contacts, many Greek deities were transformed or Indianized to suit the needs of the Buddhist Faith⁶. As a result of such a trend, probably Kicakas (semigod bulky human figures used as brackets) were replaced by athletic figures of Atlantes.

4. Ingholt, Harald, Gandharan art in Pakistan, New York, 1957, p.155.

5. The cleaning of the statuette and testing of metals was done by Shri K.T.M.Hegde, Lecturer in Chemistry, Dept.of Archaeology and Ancient History, M.S.University of Baroda. The author is grateful to him for his prompt help and co-operation.

6. Ingholt, Harald, Op.cit., p.21.

Atlantes figures in horizontal panels as well as loose pieces have been found from Sahri-Bahdol, Nathu, Takht-i-Bahai, Sikri and Taxila (All in North-west province of Indian sub-continent)⁷.

But these pieces are either in stone or stucco. No metal piece has been reported upto this date.

These Gandharan Atlantes are modelled in various sitting or crouching postures. Muscular bodies and pathetic facial expression are their common features. Some of them are clean shaved, while others have moustache as well as beard. But, like the one from Shamalaji, none so far is reported having a coif and whole boots. The above-mentioned Gandharan pieces are modelled in typical Indianized Greco-Roman features. The best of them the one from Sikri (now in Lahore Museum) is a perfect Greek Athletic figure having sturdy muscular body and curly hair. Its slightly exaggerated abdominal muscles are depicted in typical Western style. But inspite of Greem^k originality, all these pieces clearly bear at least some tinge of Indianization.

7. Hargreaves, H., Handbook to the Sculptures in the Peshavar Museum, Calcutta, 1930, pp.93,96,74,83.

Shakur, M.A., A guide to the Peshawar Museum, Part I 1954, pp.81,96,97,104.

Shamalaji Atlas bears following peculiarities:

- a. Proportionate athletic body.
- b. Almost realistic rendering of muscles.
- c. Typical drapery folds and frills.
- d. Peculiar head gear.
- e. Wavy hair.
- f. Whole boots.

The torso is the first focus of attraction. The relative proportion of broad shoulders and slim waist is of typical Indian standards (Simhakati - Lion-waist). Greek figures generally do not have so slim a waist. Unlike the Greek sculptures, no abdominal muscles are depicted. Thus, broad shoulders, muscular chest and slim waist represents a typical Indian torso resembling a cow's face (Gaumukha). The realistic drapery folds and frills are rendered in Western style.

Although rendering of body proportions is according to Indian Standards, the treatment of muscles seems to be alien. Instead of smooth rhythmic curves of Indian school, this piece has clearcut prominent muscular features. As mentioned above, the shoulder, chest, thigh and calf muscles are almost realistic. But the absence of details clearly indicates a step towards Indianization.

The head-gear is typical. This piece has a tight

fitting coif covering almost half of the forehead. This peculiar style of coifs or skull-caps and head bands covering almost half of the forehead was a typical Ancient West Asiatic style. It can be traced right upto ancient Sumerian, Assirian, and Akkadian cultures from which Persia seems to have borrowed it⁸.

This peculiar head-gear fashion and hairstyle more or less correspond to those of a life size (Ht.1.94 meters) bronze statue from Shami (2nd or 3rd century A.D.), Persia⁹.

The blunt toed whole-boots grooved near the forefeet are identical and reminds the wholeboots of Kushana figures from Mathura.

From the above discussion and comparative study, it will be clearly evident that the three cultural traditions - Greco-Roman, Indian and Persian - do have their direct or indirect contribution in the creation of this statuette.

It is a well-known fact that right from the beginning of Christian Era (and even earlier) trade routes from North India and Malwa leading to Bhragukaccha - Greek Barygaza -

8. Frankfort, Henri, The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient, London, 1954, Plates 41,42,43, 48,49,50B,54,57,60,61A and B, 63.

9. Goddard, Athar-e-Iran, II, 1937, p.286., Fig.115, as quoted by Ingholt, Harald, op.cit., pp.27,43, Seyring "Antiquit's Syriennes", III, Paris, 1946, pp.9-15, p.XXV, right, quoted by Ingholt Harald, op.cit., pp.27,43.

(Modern Broach) has to pass through Northern and Eastern hilly belt of Gujarat¹⁰. Shamalaji due to its strategic position on one of such routes was in constant contact with North India. (The newly laid Delhi-Bombay Highway also passes by Shamalaji).

Shamalaji itself and the excavations of the Buddhist site of Devanimori have provided clear epigraphic evidence of the inscription of Gasket. The Kshatrapa coins belonging to third and fourth centuries¹¹ and well-known Red Polished Ware belonging to early centuries of Christian Era also clearly indicate that Shamalaji was in constant contact with North India, Malwa and coastal Gujarat. Terracotta Buddha images - about twenty-six in number - along with Chaitya arches, medallions, Indo-Corinthian pilaster-capitals - all lavishly adorned with typical Gandharan motifs clearly indicate a Gandharan influence, which was widely prevalent in North-Western India during early centuries of Christian Era¹².

10. Sankalia, Hasmukh, D., Archaeology of Gujarat, Bombay, 1941, pp.1-2.

Shah, Dr.U.P., Sculptures from Shamalaji and Roda, Bulletin of Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda, 1960, p.5.

11. Earliest King : Mahakshatrapa Rudrasena (II), A.D. 255-274.
Latest King : Swami Rudrasena (III), A.D. 348-378.

12. Chowdhary S.N.: Excavations of a Buddhist Stupa and a Vihara at Devanimori near Shamalaji, North-Gujarat, Journal of the Oriental Institute, Vol.IX, No.4, June 1960, Baroda, pp.454-459.

Gradual spread of Gandharan influence in Sind (Percy Brown, Indian Architecture, p.54) through which this influence has reached upto Devanipori seems to be a guiding factor in this.

Now, there is one obvious question. Whether this piece is an imported Western piece or a local manufacture. If it is an imported piece, it might have come either via Arabian Sea port of Broach or by land route through North-Western region of India.

But, the Indian tinge in the form and style clearly indicates that this piece is most probably manufactured in India. Now, if it is manufactured in India, question arises whether it is a local product or not. In all probabilities it is. Chemical study of the metal of this statuette by Shri Hegde^{12A} has clearly proved that the ore used for the metal was quarried from the geological deposits of Rajasthan.

If the architects and artists who could erect and adorn a magnificent lofty Stupa (66' x 66' - Ht. about 50' to 55') embellished with majestic panels of half life-sized Buddha images, arches, medallions and pilasters even in terracotta, it is not a difficult task for them to cast a metal statuette as well. No doubt, the sculptor must have

12A. Hegde, K.T.M. "An Analytical Examination of a metal Image from Shamalaji", Journal of the Oriental Institute, M.S. University, Baroda, Vol. XIII, December, 1962.

been trained under direct or indirect Greco-Persian influence through Gandharan traditions. Although it should be noted that inspite of this, Atlas statuette from Shamalaji does differ from the well-known Gandharan bronzes like Hercules from Begram (Afghanistan), and Harpocrates from Taxila (N.W.frontier,Pakistan)¹³ which bear prominent Greco-Roman features..

The art activities at Shamalaji seems to have continued through Gupta, Maitraka and Caulukyan traiditions also¹⁴. Scores of Early Historic sculptures collected from Shamalaji and Devanimori area and several temples structures clearly support this assumption.

In absence of a direct chronological evidence, absolute dating of an art-piece is very difficult. This statuette is no exception to this handicap. But in the light of the above discussed archaeological evidences, and stylistic ground, it seems that this statuette belongs to third to Early fourth century A.D.

After the Poseidon from Kolhapur (middle of 2nd century A.D.) which is supposed to be a Western product imported from Alexandria¹⁵, this is the second Early Historic statuette discovered from Western India, and first of its kind from Gujarat.

13. Marshall, Sir John, Taxila, Vol.II, p.605.

14. See U.P.Shah, op.cit.

15. Khandalawala, Karl, Brahmapuri, Lalit Kala, No.7, Bombay, 1960, pp.56-58.

From the above discussion, it will be clearly evident that this statuette of Atlas is a unique piece of its kind from the East. It is an ideal specimen of a metal statuette in which Greek, Persian and Indian art traditions have been blended in a well proportionate balance and soothing harmony.

Sir Mortimer Wheeler has singled out Poseidon from Kolhapur and Harpocrates from Taxila as "The most noteworthy work of its kind from the East"¹⁶. Can we put this metal statuette of Atlas from Shamalaji in this category? Most probably we can !

16. Wheeler, Sir Mortimer, Rome beyond Imperial Frontiers, London, 1954, p.152.