

Intaglios, Cameos, Rings and Related Objects from Burma and Java

The White Collection and a
further small private collection

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Photographs of the White Collection by
Robert Wilkins



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Intaglios, Cameos, Rings and Related Objects from Burma and Java: The White Collection and a further small private collection

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to spread to south-east Bengal; Dharmavijaya (ca. AD 644-680), king of Arakan and Harikela (Chittagong tract), established mints for his recumbent bull coinage both in Vesali and Harikela.⁷¹ Vesali could be easily reached by the overland route from India and Buddhist images, like those found on Pyu sites, show stylistic links with the art of the late Gupta period of ca.5th and 6th centuries AD. It is recorded that Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka and other centres visited Vesali during the reign of Anandacandra, who ruled Vesali in the 8th century.

Arakan was predominantly Buddhist but Buddhism often became mixed with Hinduism (as elsewhere in Burma). This religious syncretism is well illustrated by the adoption of the bull (the mount of the Hindu god, Shiva) as the symbol of the Candra kings of Arakan who ruled at both Dhanyawadi and Vesali. Although they professed Buddhism, the bull was adopted as their symbol because they claimed to be descended from Shiva. A red sand-stone image of a recumbent bull dated about the 6th-7th century AD was found in a royal shrine at Vesali. The recumbent bull was then to appear for hundreds of years on the coinage of Arakan and then Bengal.⁷²

Three intaglios have been found at Vesali:⁷³ the first, a blue stone with a walking figure similar to types found elsewhere in Southeast Asia; the second, an agate, with the same inscription (*dayadanam*) as on two intaglios from Oc Eo and two from Burma (see p.13 & **App.23**); the third, a cornelian set in a silver ring, is engraved with a recumbent bull (**Fig.6**). This bull closely resembles a 7th century coin of Sasanka, King of Gauda, in 'caricature style' (**Fig.7**). The bull on the other cornelian intaglio from Arakan (**Fig.8a,b**) which is perhaps in its original ring-setting, also appears stylistically related to these two bulls - as does the bull on a ringstone of less usual type from Burma (29 & see p. 59). All have their eyes marked (either as round drill holes or slits) and their legs and hooves are engraved in similar fashion. They also have features in common with the much earlier bull on the 1st century BC Roman coin from Syria (**Fig.4**, p.8).

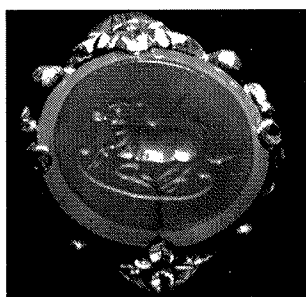


Fig.6 - A cornelian intaglio with a recumbent hump-backed bull, set in a later silver ring; from Vesali, Arakan, ca.7th or 8thc.AD (?); diam.18mm. (Gutman 2001: Pl.8, p.11; Coll. U Oo Tha Tun; photo Zaw Min Yu).

Fig.7 - Shiva seated on a recumbent bull on a coin of Sasanka, King of Gauda, ca. AD 600-630s; ca.2:1 (Mitchiner 2000: no.40, p.39; idem (2) 2004: 5228, p.1239).



⁷¹ Mitchiner 2000: pp.43-4.

⁷² For the meaning of the stone image of the bull found at Vesali, see Gutman 2001: p.11 & idem "Siva in Burma" (forthcoming) (see also note 13, p.4 here); Mitchiner 1998d: p.63ff. - recumbent bulls on Arakan coinage of the Candra dynasty (dated from the 5th century AD); idem.2000: p.62ff. - Kara and Harikela series of coins from 7th century AD.

⁷³ Gutman 2001: p.7, Pls.3 & 4 & p.11, Pl.8; Pl.3 - a walking figure carries a long-necked vessel and so possibly represents the sign of the zodiac, Aquarius (Khumba). Other walking figures on intaglios from Southeast Asia are discussed in Middleton 1999: pp.130-131, figs.9-17; compare also **Fig.12** (p.21 here) & **App.1**, p.148.

Inscriptions (60-62)

See also App.23-4, and the sealing, App.58.

60

Inscription in Sanskrit, 4th-5th century AD.

Sardonyx (layered agate) ringstone; dark brown with several alternating thin layers of white. **Colour pl. II.**

(Slight signs of wear on the face, back quite polished.)

16.5 x 12 x 4.5mm. overall; intaglio face 14 x 10mm.

Shape: F.2 (lower edge very slightly bevelled).



4:1

Publ.: White 1993: pp.128, 130, Fig.6.

Sanskrit inscription: *Nanditavyam* - 'Rejoice'

The inscription is in Deccan style lettering influenced by Gupta Brahmi seal inscriptions. According to Dani (1963: pp.228-9) this style has been recorded on Vakataka inscriptions. It dates to the 4th-5th century AD.

This sardonyx (layered agate) is very similar in type and shape to the stones used for the intaglios with the recumbent bulls, 26 and App.9.

61

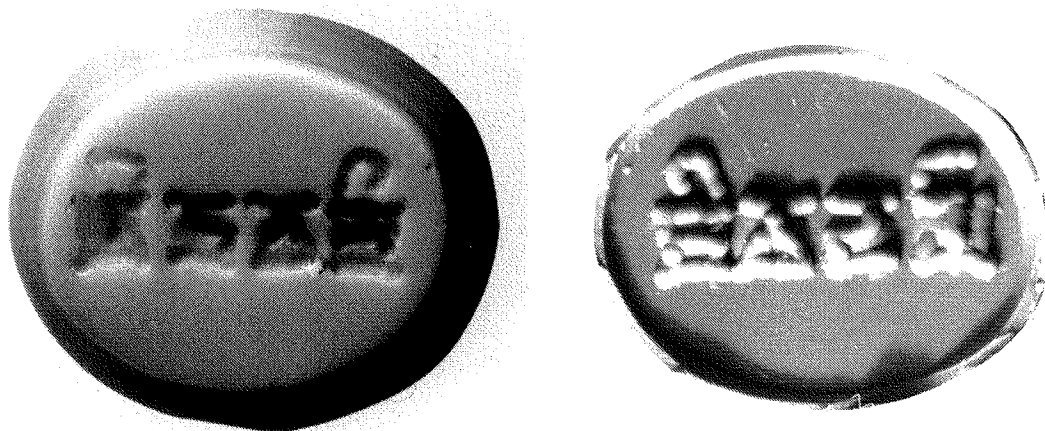
Inscription in Sanskrit, 4th-5th century AD.

Agate (layered) ringstone; a thin white opaque layer on numerous thin opaque golden yellowish-brown layers of different shades. **Colour pl. II.**

(In very good condition.)

17 x 15 x 4mm. overall; intaglio face 13.5 x 11mm.

Shape F.2 (with very slightly lower bevelled edge).



4:1

Publ.: White 1993: pp.128, 130, Fig.6.

Sanskrit inscription: *Jivadayā* - 'compassion for Life'

The inscription is typical Gupta period Brahmi lettering in Deccan style of the 4th-5th century AD. Some of the letter forms appear as early as the 1st century AD but the 'da' is more likely to be 4th-5th century. The lettering is in the same style as **App.23** (*Dayadanam*).

This stone is evenly shaped and the back polished. Its shape and its appearance are very close to the stone used for the recumbent bull, **16**. As this stone is inscribed and therefore datable, it might give some indication of a date for **16** and the other bulls in similar style. See remarks for **16**.

62

Inscription in Sanskrit, 4th-5th century AD; gold inlay.

Glass tabloid, bright blue-green with gold inlay. The glass was analysed by XRF and its composition was found to be consistent with ancient glass. **Colour pl. II.**

(Slight scratches on the face.)

16 x 9.5 x 3mm.

Shape: F.4 (irregular bevelled edges).



4:1

Sanskrit inscription: *Apramāda* - 'non-negligence, care' or 'alertness'.

This inscription is in the Deccan style of the 4th-5th century derived from the Brahmi script of the early Guptas - but in a version influenced by handwriting. The square head marks of the letters are also found in Vakataka inscriptions (see Dani 1963: p.229).

A number of tin amulets from Oc Eo (see Malleret refs. below) have a double ended trident or thunderbolt motif (*vajra*) on one side and on the other, either a conch motif or the inscription '*apramāda*' or *apramādam* ('carefulness' or 'alertness'). Wicks points out that this inscription was non-sectarian; it was used in Brahmanical texts where it constitutes one of the requirements for attaining bliss and was also used by Buddhist teachers to encourage their students to be attentive and thus avert ignorance. The sound of the conch was also supposed to avert ignorance. Thus the inscription, *apramāda[m]*, and the conch motif, which has a similar meaning, seem to have been interchangeable on the tin amulets (Wicks 1999: p.16)

This inscription appears in India as well as several times at Oc Eo:

Dani 1963: pp.228-9, Fig.18 - letter forms comparable to the first group of Vakataka inscriptions (Group C).

Mirashi 1960: pp.88-9, pl.6.4 - flat, rectangular cornelian intaglio with bevelled edges and the inscription *apramāda*; from near Nagpur in the Central Provinces, India; references to other examples of the inscription are given.

Dikshit 1960: pl.5, no.20 - flat, oval cornelian intaglio with inscription in box-headed Central Indian characters of ca.5thc.AD, *apramāda*.

pl.5, no.21 - oval cornelian scaraboid-shaped seal; similar to the above.

Malleret (2) 1960: pl.110, 1-2 (no.662) p.333, no.652 pp.335-6 - lead amulets with the inscription *apramāda[m]* and which always have a double-ended trident or thunderbolt (*vajra*) on the other side.

Malleret (3) 1962: pl.63, no.1261 (p.291) & pl.64,12 - cornelian intaglio with *apramāda*.

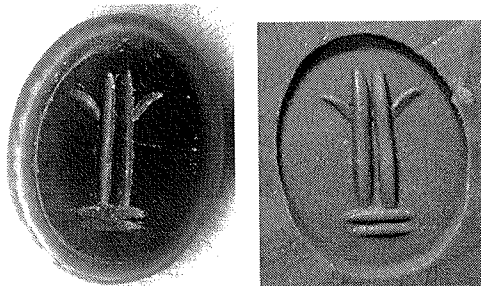
App.22

Symbol resembling two elephant goads (*ankushas*) back to back (or a **fire-altar**?)

Cornelian onyx (*layered agate*), orange/white opaque/light orange.

12 x 9 x 3mm. overall; intaglio face 9 x 7mm.

Shape: F.2



3:1

This uncertain symbol is rather different to **App.20-21** but is similar to the device on the layered agate, **52** (p. 82); both resemble *ankushas* placed back to back.

Inscriptions (App.23-4)

See also **60-62** (pp.90-92). An inscription also appears on a clay sealing, **App.58**.

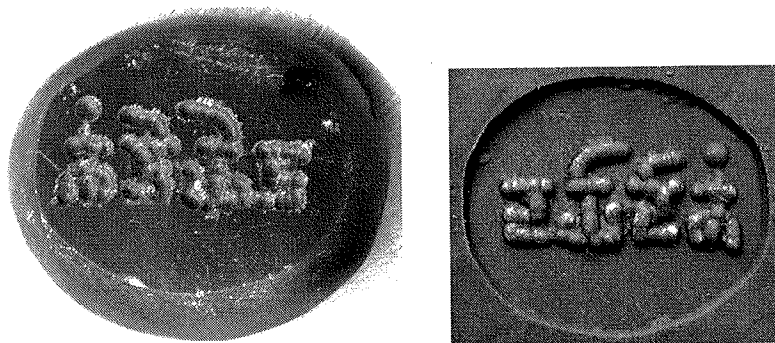
App.23

Inscription in Sanskrit, reading *dayadanam* meaning 'gift of compassion'.

Cornelian.

14.5 x 12 x 4.5mm. overall; intaglio face 11 x 9mm.

Shape: F.2 with slightly bevelled lower edge.



3:1

The inscription is Gupta period Brahmi lettering in Deccan style of the 4th-5th century AD and in the same style as **61** (p.91). This inscription (like *apramāda*, **62**, p.92), appears in Dani 1963: p.228, Group C. It is found on an intaglio from Halin in Burma and on another from Vesali in Arakan, as well as on two others from Oc Eo (see Introduction, p.15). A terracotta sealing with this inscription is also said to have been excavated recently in a Pyu context.

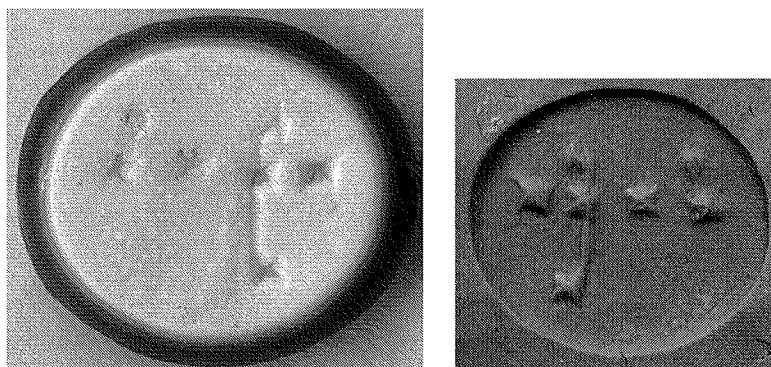
App.24

Inscription in Sanskrit, reading *Dharmmavarma*.

Onyx (layered agate), white on very dark brown.

15.5 x 14 x 4mm. overall; intaglio face 13 x 11mm.

Shape: F.2



3:1

The inscription is engraved in the white upper layer of the stone and does not show up against the dark layer beneath. *Dharmmavarma* is a personal name written in North Indian Brahmi script of the 5th-6th century AD.

Sasanian or Sasanian-related (App.25-8):

As in the White collection there are several Sasanian or Sasanian-related intaglios. (See also 68-76, pp.98-105)

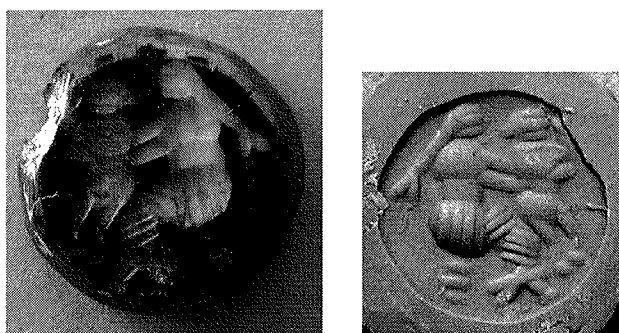
App.25

Female with a long plait, seated on rocks (or on a stool?) reaches out to a smaller figure or child in front of her.

Layered agate, a very thin upper black layer on a mottled grey, crazed ('etched') layer; a chip on the side of the stone with pink showing inside. **Colour pl. II.**

12.5 (diam.) x 4.5mm. overall; intaglio face 10mm. (diam.).

Shape: F.2/4 (Bivar 1969: p.142, Bezel A) irregular; the angle at the bevel is rounded off in places.



3:1

A number of other stones here are crazed (or 'etched') - compare App.1-2, App.26-7 and see remarks for 4 (p.33).

Motif: a *Tamga* (symbol) surrounded by a linear border. This device is reminiscent of a stylised fire - possibly a portable, hinged metal altar. Three globules perhaps represent the flames on the top.

Compare the Mazdaean fire-altars on Sogdian coins of the 4th-5th century AD in Mitchiner 1978: 3352ff.

App.58

Sealing, *clay*; pinkish-orange/grey with some discolouration.

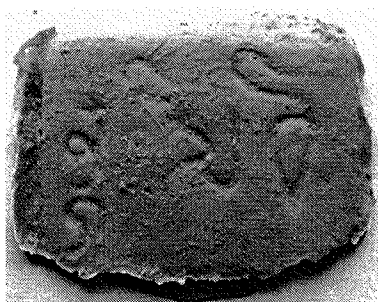
ca.34 x 30 x depth 22mm. Seal impression ca.27 x 23mm.

The sealing has a convex back; one side is broken off to reveal the impression left by the cord.

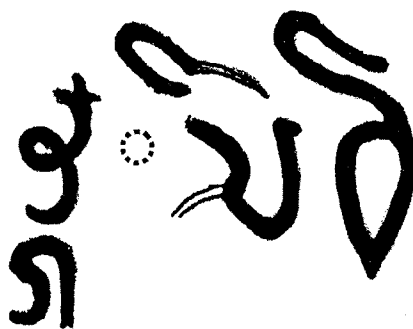
The inscription is in Pali, written in Pyu script which is derived from Brahmi. The sealing is rather worn and parts of the letters are not clear. There may be a small circular letter indicated by the dotted line (see drawing below). The letters on the sealing are compressed and a possible reading has been suggested: *Nagara Thiri* - 'auspicious city'.¹

's' has become 'th'. Srikshetra is pronounced Thiriketteya in Burma today.

Otherwise it might read: *ngasibi* or *ngasidha* (cf. the letters in Dani 1963: pls.22a,b).



impression 1.5:1



App.59

Sealing, *clay*; pale pinkish orange with greyish-buff patches.

ht.23 x diam.ca.18mm.

A smooth, rounded, cone-shaped sealing without a perforation.

Motif: a standing **boar** facing left with a **crescent** above, surrounded by a beaded border. The boar is in relief but the crescent and beaded border are in intaglio which suggests that the image of the boar was impressed first and then the crescent and border were incised afterwards when the clay was still wet.

The boar appears very similar to examples on ringstones here - see **37-41**, pp.67-70; **App.18**. Three standing boars (but all facing to the right) were found on sealings from Akurugoda in Sri Lanka, see Wickremesinhe & Bopearachchi 1999: pl.24, K.30-32 (pp.108-9).

A conical sealing with an indistinct device was found with other objects at Sirkap in a grey schist stupa casket. The casket is dated to the latter half of the 1st century AD (Marshall 1951: vol.3, pl.35g & pl.36e; vol.1, p.192). This suggests that a conical sealing such as this one and **App.60** might also have been left in reliquary caskets.

App.60

Sealing, *clay*; pinkish buff/grey/black.

ht.ca.20 x diam.ca.20mm.

A cone-shaped sealing with unevenly modelled sides and without a perforation.

Motif: a **seated couple** (embracing?), kneeling in front of a high-necked vessel or *purnaghata* (the flowers represented by globules?) within a beaded border. Details are not clearly visible.

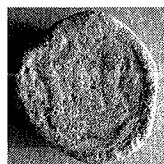
For the *purnaghata* - see the stamp-seals, **79-81**, pp. 108-10 and the ringstone, **App.19**.

See also the remarks for the sealing of similar shape, **App.59**.

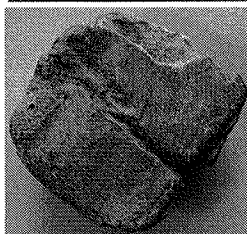
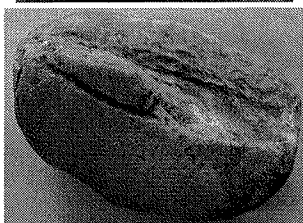
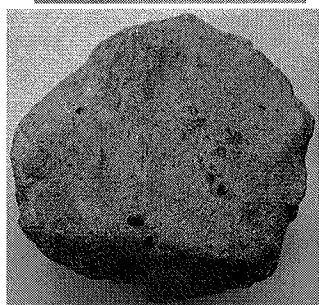
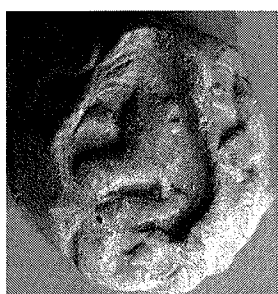
¹ I am grateful to U San Win, Daw Le Le Win and Daw Sanda-U of the Historical Research Centre, Rangoon University for suggesting this possible reading.



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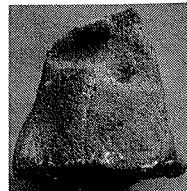
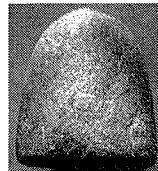
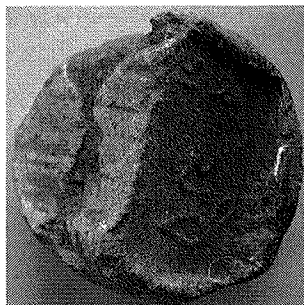
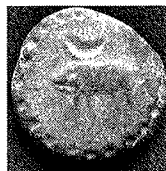
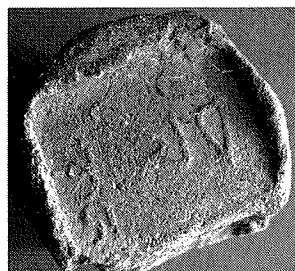
52



53

54

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56

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58

59

60

Sealings and mouldings, App.51-60. Scale ca. 1:1