

Soul and Semantics of Animal Motif Employed in Ancient Jewellery

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Abstract

Each jewellery item worn had symbolic purpose derived from common life and myths. Like for protection ancient people wore amulets and to animate that piece of jewellery with spirit and magical power they would imply it with an image. All images had relevance with celestial beings and were used to influence divine to shower its bounties, blessings and protection. These symbols are evident in selection of metals, stones, signs like circle, square or cross, even or odd numbers, colors, flowers etc. However, most enchanting of all are Zoomorphic and avian images found in jewellery, incorporated as apotropaic images.

Key words: Symbols, Zoomorphic, avian, Jewellery, Culture, Myth

Introduction

One of the most ancient forms of adornment is the art of jewellery which is a magnificent source imbued with secular and spiritual contents to process cultural and historical information. To decode purpose, status, mechanics and process of jewellery in ancient cultures, modern art historians and archaeologists have made the following hypotheses.

A

- The art of jewellery making is the result of human vanity and desire for appearing attractive.
- Jewellery is an indication of social, cultural and economic development of a society.
- The level of material development from basic elements to processing of metals and embellishment with stones

B

- Role of nature in the development ritual jewellery, which is deeply entrenched and profusely used by the artists throughout the history. Point B is the main focus of the present paper.

However, in this scheme point B is not a separate phenomenon rather integrated with three points of A to make them tangible

Since time immemorial art of beautification has been prime modus operandi of humans to surpass others in looking attractive. For this sake, they adopted various methods ranging from using natural elements. Later on art of ornamentation touched its epoch when shapes of fruits, herbs, flower, foliage, birds, animals and astral bodies were intricately employed in jewellery articles by various techniques. Jewellery makers carefully selected metals like gold, silver, alloy and precious to semi-precious stones, glass and enamel to animate body depicted in jewellery.

Buddhist and Hindu legends speak about zoomorphic and avian images. Peacocks, turtle, bull, horse, elephant and lion are zoomorphic symbols of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Buddhist literature narrates past lives of Buddha Shakyamuni in the image of a monkey, bird, deer... (Neva 2010: 78). On birth of Siddhartha, he received toys in shape of animals as legend narrates "Everyone now delighted in bringing him precious gifts. They gave him toys that would amuse a child of his age: tiny animals, deer and elephants, horses, cows, birds and fish..." (Khan

2013: 46). Fish, tortoise, boar, narasimha (half lion and half man) are incarnations of Vishnu, possessing super natural powers to save the world (Gupta 2004:13). Bull, lion, tiger, parrot, mouse, peacock, goose or swan, eagle and serpent are vehicles or vahana of Hindu Gods (Renard 2012: 209). Another favourite theme usually seen in ancient Paintings employed in jewellery and engraved in gems is hunting scene and a combat between animals like horse, deer, wolf, tiger, leopard and eagle etc. A heavy girdle found at Pattan in KPK, and a hollow bangle shows animal art (Pl. 1, 2).

Animals employed in jewellery are categorised in two types natural and mythical. Among natural animals are lions, goats, crocodiles and birds. Images of mythical or natural animals had sacred properties and were used in jewellery to guard the wearer.

1. Lions and Kirtimukhas

Lion is the king of all beasts is emblem of power and protection in ancient India. There are numerous references of lion in Buddhist and ancient Indian literature. Buddha seated on a throne supported by eight lions portrays his sovereignty and lion is also vehicle of many vajrayana deities (Beer 2003: 63). Lion was a symbol of great heavenly power and was connected with attributes of bravery and virtue. However, lion also symbolises the destroying or negative power of female deity (Neva, 2008: 75). Lion motif is seen on headdresses, earrings, bracelets and belts in Gandhara and archaic world worn by imagery and on actual pieces found during excavation as a token of social status of a wearer and as an icon of virility and strength.

1.1 Headdress

Lion motifs are used in headdresses in various enchanting styles and most attractive of lion image employed in headdress is that of strings of pearls issuing from mouth of lion (Kirtimukha). Kirtimukha has its origin in a Shaivite legend from the Sakanda Purana (Beer 2003: 78) According to Schmidt this motif may probably bespeak of the benefits derives from the voice of Buddha (Schmidt 2008: 4) and is abundantly used in various ornaments worn by bodhisattvas. Turban of Bodhisattva from Butkara-I is adorned with this motif (Faccenna 1962, Vol. II, Pl. CCLXXXVI, no.3154). Lion as a symbol of ferocity and strength is seen on a headdress of four armed Harithi from Sahri Bahlol (Pl. 3 a, b). As this symbol complements, rather robust and dreadful appearance of Harithi with fangs, strong limbs and multiple hands. She is wearing a crown draped with beaded strings. Base of crown is decorated with chess board pattern. In the centre front of crown are kirtimukha vomiting beaded strings forming loop with a bead in centre incrustrated in crown. On right side flower with leaves is attached with a crown. Lion motif on headdress was indicative of higher or celestial status of a wearer.

1.2 Earrings

Earrings adoring imagery from Gandhara are equally ornamented with lions and beads motifs in three specific styles. In one case earrings are composed of recumbent lions with heads on pierced lobe and in second standing lion and finally strings of pearls replace legs of beast or issue from its mouth. Bodhisattva from Swat is wearing earrings in shape of recumbent lion without strings (Pl. 4). An interesting example of

lying lion motif is seen worn by bodhisattva from Lahore museum who is sitting on a simhasana. Silky hair growth on chest of lion on earrings is combed sideways neatly which recedes towards its belly (Pl. 5). Meditating bodhisattva from Lahore museum is wearing earrings in shape of standing lion, but these earrings are worn against ear lobe, probably with a hook (Pl. 6). Bodhisattva from Nigiram is wearing earrings of second variety (Kurita 1990, Vol. II: 10, pl. 8). In this case, beast seems clutching strings of beads releasing from both sides of jaws. However, bodhisattva from Sikri is wearing detailed standing figure of lion with head and legs pierced through lobe at front and hind legs are visible at the back of the ear, beaded strings replaced legs of beast (Pl.7) (Fig. 2). Bodhisattva from Tahkt I Bahi is also wearing earrings with lion proteome vomiting strings of pearls (Zwalf 1996, Vol. II: 52, no. 79).

Earrings of any style discussed above were most probably worn to protect the opening of an ear from evil finds support from Stavisky, who says, "These earrings were worn in peculiar manner. When putting them on and hooking those up, the head of an animal is placed by the edges of ear as if protecting its opening like animal head placed on a hand of a vessel that hold the edge of a vessel in their mouths" (Neva 2010: 25), (Fig. 3). Handle of a gold vessel from Bactria is provided with a head of a lion whose jaws are squeezing the rim of the vessel. Similar handles are seen on vessels from Crete, Greece, Etruria and Persia (Neva 2008: 24).

1.3. Beads

Lion carved out of semi-precious stones have been found from various sites. Indian wore beads in shape of animals probably with the belief that

it will protect them from attack of lion (Chandra 1979: 55). Beads in shape of lion have been found from Dharmarajika- Taxila (Marshall 1951, pl. 748) (1st century B.C.), kept in Peshawar Museum (Pl. 8). However, longitudinal perforation in all these pieces suggests them to be worn as pendants in neck.

1.4. Bracelet and bangles

Lions were also employed in bracelets for purpose of protection, as in ancient times bracelets were themselves worn to protect the wounds from swords (Fig.4). Such bangles in different metals have been found in Gandhara. Four gold bangles terminated in Lions heads had recovered from Taxila, these are made of thin beaten sheet of gold on a core of shellac or mastic. The lion's heads are made separately, and manes of lions are beautifully crafted with wavy lines and are finished at back with double plaited borders. Marshall is of view that these bangles belong to early Second Century B.C, Such bangles were popular in Eastern Greece and survived down to Roman times (Marshall 1951, Vol. II: 364), similar bangles were found in Oxus treasure (Dalton, 1905, pl. XVIII 120) (Pl. 8). Since Zoomorphic images used in jewelry carried symbolic significance, use of lion in bangles indicates a protector of a wearer.

2. Snake

In ancient times snakes were feared, reviled and worshipped. They are commonly used in jewellery of early classic times in Gandhara, India as well as in west. As Snakes were part of apotropaic images and were symbol of underworld as Hermes, leaders of spirits into the underworld, wore a snake headed herald's wand (Lippitz 1996: 17, 18). Ancient art of Mesopotamia and Iran is replete with images of snakes. In Iran snakes

appear in pottery, stone vessels and reliefs, on seals and roundels (The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin: 21). According to ancient mythology, fertility was associated with snake. Srivasta symbol in the form of two opposing 'S' shapes, recalls somewhat two raised hood of nagas known from Vedic times, as guardians. It is due to the property of defense that this symbol is included as one of thirty three mahapurusalaksanas which shows a great man at birth (Banerjea 1965: 607-8). This sign is seen on chests of saints at Kankali Tila (Smith 1901, Pl. x c). Snakes as characters of mythical stories and protectors frequently appear in ornaments worn on different part of body in Gandhara. Royal figure standing under an arch is wearing an armlet with a Srivatsa (Pl. 9 a, b) and devotee from Butkara (Faccenna 2001, C-B.3496).

2.1. Headdress

Nagas and Nagni appear on headdresses of Bodhisattvas in Gandhara as a character of mythical stories related to Greeks and Indian legends as manifested in turban worn by Bodhisattva from LM (Robert 2003:78) (Pl. 10) (Fig. 5) which portrays Greek myth of the abduction of a Ganymede by Zeus in the form of a large eagle (Schmidt, 2008, b: 5 and 6) and Indian myth of the great bird Garuda carrying away his enemies the Naga (Haughton 2009: 285-6). The bird is Garuda and human figure is anthropomorphic representation of a female deity Nagi, or rarely its spouse Naga. There are numerous references of animity between Garuda and Nagas in Hindu and Buddhist literary and religious documents. This motif appears in Gandharan repertoire too often and has mythological significance (Jhyung Rhi 2009: 147-8).

2.2. Armlets

Spiral shaped armlets looking like a coiled snake are seen worn by sculptures in Gandhara, India as well as in west. According to Ayyar armlets resembling a snake was known as ananta (Ayyar 1987: 159) or angadas (Robert 1996: 488) and are compared to snake coiled around a branch of a sandal tree (Robert 1996: 160). This type with three tight coils is worn in one arm by royal donor from Butkara III Diadem in centre front of his turban resemble a snake hood (Pl. 11) Siddhartha in marriage scene is wearing a coiled armlet which closely resembles with a snake (Pl. 12 a, b). Even females are seen wearing such armlets as we have examples of female from Sirkap (devotee) Jamrud (Yashodra), Madhaya Pardesh (Ardhanarisvara, Nachna) where females are adorned with spiral armlet (Marshall 1951: 211, no.4 a, b) (Kurita 1988, Vol. 1:1-5, pl. XII), (Ellen Goldberg, 2002, fig. 1.4). Modification is seen in armlets in case of Yaksha Manibhadra who is wearing armlet of three spiral rings with rosette embossed over it (Ayyar 1987: 53). We have an actual example of coiled snake armlet in gold from Rome, dated to 1st century BC is kept in Dallas Museum (Lippitz 1996, cat.no.99a) (Pl. 13).

2.3. Earring

Snakes are also implied in earrings probably for protection of ears as in case of lion shaped earrings discussed earlier. We have examples of such earrings from Gandhara and Central Asia. An earring from Dalverzin tepe is shaped as snake (Neva 2008: 53) and from Sirkap a small silver earrings is shaped as a snake. But in this case snake has a scaly body (Marshall 1951, Vol. II: 626).

2.4. Bracelet

Use of snake heads in jewellery portrays snakes as defender of wearer. Snakes are often used in bracelets as a protector against evil spirits and eyes (Fig. 6). However we have example of this type from Rome where small snake shaped bracelet is kept in Dallas Museum (Lippitz, cat.no.99d).

3. Crocodiles or Makras

There are numerous references of crocodiles in ancient Indian literature and appear on seals, architecture as well as in jewellery to animate the object with the spirit of strength. In Hindu mythology Ganges is associated with the crocodile (Makara), and the long headed Gharial, commonly used on Indus seal, represented with a fish in mouth, may have been associated with Indus as a river God or Goddess (Dikshit: 34). Makra is the vehicle of Vedic God Varuna and the river Goddess Ganga and appeared on several Vajrayana weapons as a symbol of strength (Beer 2003: 77). On top architrave of toranas of an ivory plaque from Begram is the makra motif with garland issuing from its mouth (Coomaraswamy 1931: 47-56). Makra is included in motifs on a mace held by Kanishka, denoting fierceness and munificence (Rosenfield 1967: 179, Pl. 2 b)

Makra like creatures are seen on necklaces worn by Bodhisattvas. These necklaces are composed of multi strings of beads with cylinders in both ends, terminated in two monsters heads (makras, dragons or ibex) gripping a gem in incisors, with a small cord attached on both side of gem. Bodhisattvas from Taxila Museum and Peshawar Museum are wearing large heavy flexible necklace that terminates in two flutes attached with heads of snouty monsters. These monsters have long horns and are quarreling for a barrel shaped bead, which

they are clutching in their mouths with the help of cord attached with it (Pl.14, 15) (Fig. 7).

4. Dragons and Gryphons

Among mythical animals employed in jewellery, dragons and gryphon are quite famous and emphasized protection against evil powers and magic. Gryphon originated in early Greeks myths and was a bird with the body of a lion and beak of an eagle. In Iranian mythology Gryphons were called shirdal which means lion- Eagle and were used in ancient art of Iran during 2nd Century BC (Sadreddin 2017). This image penetrated into art of Central Asia during 5th century BC from Achaemenian Iran (Neva 2007: 4). Indian counterpart of Gryphon is probably Sardula, literally means 'an animal made by art' (Stella 1946: 333), it has a parrot beak, head of a lion and has an arching neck and had an authority over the three spheres- the water, land and the air (Coomaraswamy 1931: 50-53). Winged lion roundel dated to 6th-5th Century BC is beautiful Achaemenid Persian animal style (Pl. 16). The symbol of Chinese dragon first appeared in Neolithic carving dated to the 5th millennium BC and are thus considered as a one of earliest representational symbol of mankind (Robert 1996: 69). In Buddhism dragon is vehicle of Vairocana, the White Buddha (Robert 1996: 72). In fairy tales of Japan dragons secure auspicious place unlike in West where they are considered fearsome (Clayton 2018: 3). From Gandhara dragon like animal is employed in turban of bodhisattva.

4.1. Headdress

Bodhisattva from Mardan is wearing skull cap turban with separate usnisa, turban is composed

of three crisscrossed twisted bands tied in side knot forming two decorated panniers and fixed with a knot shape ornament in center front. From both sides of knot hang small strings of beads. The ends of the bands are fixed with ornamental terminals in the shape of lions, with lifted curved back and acanthus wings and remaining surface adorned with round gems in bezel and strings of pearls (Pl. 17). These animals could be compared with the motif of the gryphon and other beasts as heraldic lions, and birds spreading their wings. As according to Schmidt "The arching of spine and flowing lines of torso and hips of the winged lion forms on the turban plaque exhibits features reminiscent of the feline forms seen on a number of Scythian manufactures..." (Schmidt 1990: 191)

5. Leech

The word leech is derived from Anglo Saxon *loech* which means 'to heal'. The leech was used for medicinal purpose of 'local depletion' (bloodletting) from ancient times in Greece, Rome and Arabia (Hyson 2005: 25, 26). According to creation myth from India, sun god, Sing Bonga is married to moon and brings forth a tortoise, a crab and a leech and asks them to bring soil from sea bed to create the land (Leeches in creation Mythology). It seems probable that leech shape was employed in jewellery for cure of disease. This shape was also used in Etruscan jewelry items, belonging to the Orientalizing period from 730 B.C. to 630 B.C, as leech shape (*sanguisuga*) also known as little boat or *navicella*, is employed in Etruscan gold *Fibulae* (Lippitz 1996: 32). Leech shape appears in earrings in Gandhara which were later modified to crescent.

5.1. Earrings

Leech shape earrings of smooth surface are worn

by Maitreya from Swabi (Pl. 18) (Fig. 7). Many small leech like gold earrings have been found in Taxila (Marshall 1951, Vol. II Pl.191, nos. d-36,37 e-44,45: 626, 36-41) (Pl. 19) and were part of three hoards of jewellery found from the largest Iron Age site in Israel, Tel Migne_ Ekron (<http://www.academia.edu/AmirGolani/>," : .58-311)

6. Fish and Dolphin

In Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions sacred symbol of pair of fish is common and represent happiness, freedom, spontaneity, fertility and abundance. According to Chinese traditions keeping a pair of gold fish attracts wealth (Beer 2003: 5). In India fishes were used both for ornamental and amuletic purposes since earliest time and this motif is used on punch mark and tribal coins as well as on finger rings from Taxila. Four necklace terminals of gold in form of two small fishes with one tail have been found from Sirkap (Marshall 1951, Vo. II: 629).

6.1. Necklaces

In Indus valley fish shape was used as amulets as a beautiful necklace found from Taxila is consisted of six sets of realistically made fish in triplets with a disc in center ornamented with a floral design. These fish are made of stamped pieces of gold and are hollow and joined with transverse strips of gold. Holes on their mouths and tails are for threading. In another set fish are bigger than the former one. Their mouths, eyes, scales and tails are minutely created (Chandra 1979: 52, pl. XIV-h) (Pl. 20). Another beautiful necklace with confronting dolphins in pendant is also found from Taxila. To the tails of these dolphins are attached three rings, from which hang chains with discs. From the mouths of dolphins a cylindrical piece raise above to the ball. The dolphins are made out

of thin sheet of gold and necks are soldered separately with the body (Chandra 1979: 53, and Pl. XV- a).

Conclusion

Animals frequently appear in ancient jewellery because of their characteristic features, grace of their movement, their close relationship with humans, totemism and cult of animal worship. Jewellers and artist were active members of social and religious circles of ancient society that is why myths, epos and apostrophic images were not alien to them. They invested these ideas and concepts in their specimen of art either on request of a client or per as their own choice. Employment of Zoomorphic, avian and other images were done to influence Gods and celestial powers to bestow protection, resurrection, mystic powers and fertility to wearer.

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Pl. I. Hollow bangle from Pattan, Kohistan



Pl. II. Bangle from Pattan, Kohistan



Pl. III (a, b) Four armed Harithi Sahri Bahlol



Fig. 1. Recumbent lion shaped earrings



Fig. 2 Lion shaped earrings with string of pearls



Fig. 3. Lion shaped handle of a Jug



Pl. VI. Bodhisattva from Lahore Museum



Pl. IV, Bodhisattva from AMS



Pl. VII. Bodhisattva from Sikri



Pl. V Bodhisattva from Lahore Museum



Pl. VIII. Lion shaped bead from PM



Fig. 4. Lion headed bangle



Pl. X Bodhisattva Shahbaz Garhi

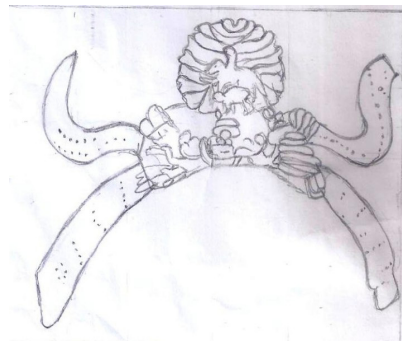


Fig. 5 (Pl. X)



Pl. IV (a-b) Love scene under an arch from AMS



Pl. XI Donor carrying bouquet Butkara-III

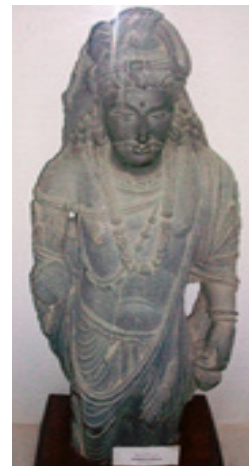
1. The Garuda and the Nagil Naga in the Headdresses of Gandharan Bodhisattvas: Locating Textual Parallels, Bulletin of Asian Institute, Neil Kreitman Foundation, fig.1



Pl. XII (a- b) Plaque showing marriage scene PM



Pl. XIII. Coiled Snake bracelet Dallas Museum



Pl. XIV. Bodhisattva from TM



Pl. X Bodhisattva from PM



Fig. 6 Snake headed bracelet



Fig. 6 Necklaces ended in Makras



Pl. XVI Winged lion roundel



Pl. XVIII. (a- b) Bodhisattva from Swabi



Pl. XVII (a- b) Bodhisattva from PM



Fig. 7 Leech shape earring



Pl. XIX Leech shape ear pendant from Taxila

2. CAIS Images of Ancient Iran Available at: <http://www.caissoas.com>.

www.caissoas.com/CAIS/virtual_museum/achaemenid/Artefacts/metal-work.htm, Accessed 28 March, 2019.



Pl. XX Necklace from Taxila