

# A Terracotta Mould from Sainth (Jammu & Kashmir- India): Issues of its Identification and Historical Significance

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## Abstract

*The paper investigates the historical significance of a terracotta mould from Jammu region, which bears the impression of a female deity/goddess. Stylistically it can be dated between 6th and 8th century A.D. Interestingly such a specimen has not been reported either from Jammu or its adjoining areas. It appears that its original piece was carved in relief either on wood, ivory or stone before the cast was taken on clay and fired. The figurine stands in an elegant pose, appearing to be a deity but its identification becomes a little difficult mainly owing to her blurred out attributes. This article discusses the issues of basic identification and argues that the figure can be tentatively identified as that of Yakshi or Lakshmi.*

**Keywords:** *Archaeology, Jammu, Terracotta, Mould, Goddess, Kashmir, Karkotas, Buddhism, Buddhist Deities, Pauranic Deities*

## Introduction

The present paper deals with one of the curious findings from the site Sainth in Jammu, a terracotta mould not reported hitherto. The site of Sainth (32°46'34"N; 74°30'45"E) is located on the right bank of the river Chenab, hardly one km away from the international border of India and Pakistan. It rises about 3mts above the surrounding plains and measures approximately 60 metres North- South and 60 metres East-West. The mould was discovered in an exploratory survey conducted in the area by the first author as a part of her Ph.D. research. The associated finds with the mould mainly include ceramics: Red ware, Red slipped ware, Black on Red ware with painted and incised designs on the rims and body (Fig 1). Typo-technologically they belong to a time span that ranges between Early Historic and Medieval Period. Therefore, it is safe to put the mould in the same time bracket as far as its chronological context is concerned.

## Description of the Mould

The mould is in a near perfect condition, oval in shape and well fired. It has an exterior and an interior side, well defined by an undulating margin and a border of two lines filled with embossed dots. The exterior side measures 4.44 cm in breadth, 7.4 cm in length and 1.87 cm in thickness whereas the interior side (the negative impressed side) is 6.09 cm in length and 2.81 cm in width (Fig II and III).

It seems that mould was made by taking the impression on clay, of a female figure originally carved in relief either on wood, ivory or stone. This was then baked. The mould bears the negative impression of the figure, probably of a deity. Both clay and m-seal (a fine synthetic plastic material that is used for making casts) casts are prepared to examine the descriptive features of the female figure depicted in the mould (Fig III).

The specimen, a standing figure, is encircled by a bead like decoration that forms the border of the mould and at its centre is the standing female figure with the following attributes

1. The three lobed crown as seen in the *Vaikuntha Vishnu* (four headed aspect of Hindu God Vishnu) images from Kashmir, flanked by two lotuses.
2. Hair tied in a *dhammila* (side bun), above the left shoulder (as seen in Postel *et al.* 1985: 91 fig 5)
3. *Kundala* (earrings) in the ears.
4. Is probably wearing an arm band on the left arm/ Part of the veil (?)
5. A long *hara* (long string of beads) loosely on the chest and flows down between the breasts (ibid).
6. Is probably wearing a tunic.
7. The *vanamala* (garland), ascending through the left arm goes behind the neck and descends from the right side to complete itself. (Figure IV and V)

Physiognomic features of the figure are as follows:

- a) Oval shaped face with closed eyes.
- b) Prominent round breasts.
- c) The left arm rests on the left thigh.
- d) The right arm is raised to the level of the face and is holding a flower that closely resembles a lotus. .
- e) The right leg is stretched straight towards the left side and some unidentified object (probably a bird?) rests on it.
- f) The left leg bends sharply and crosses the back of the right leg and therefore rests on the right side.

The figure therefore stands in the *asokadhadakrida* pose (gesture associated with fertility goddesses (e.g yaksi, Shalabanjika) (Czuma 1985: 119) (Figure VI).

## **Chronology**

The chronology of the figurine can be assigned to the time bracket ranging between 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D (Karkota dynasty of Kashmir), based on its following attributes:

- 1. Posture
- 2. Physiognomic feature
- 3. Crown
- 4. Veil?

## **Posture**

The female figure in the specimen is standing in a graceful posture with slender waist and heavy hips and thighs. These attributes of the figure can be compared to the metal image of Durga Mahisasuramardini found from the Chamba hills. Huntington (1985 fig. 17.26) mentions about the slender waist of the figure contrasted against the full hips and thighs, characterising the stylistic type that was heavily dependent on the Post-Gupta tradition. Similar reference is made by Siudmak (2013: 251) who describes the posture

of the two armed dancing Mother Goddess, probably *Kaumari* (see Siudmk 2013 plate 115a), as a new Post-Gupta idiom and which resembles the posture being discussed above. These evidences support the proposed time bracket of the specimen.

### **Physiognomic Feature - Face**

The face of the specimen appears oval shaped.

In this regard, Pal (1975: 30) mentions that the face of the Kashmiri figures have a round and bloated appearance after the eight century A.D unlike the oval faces of either Gandhara or Gupta figure, hence confirming the time bracket assigned for the specimen. One of the interesting things to note here is that Lalitaditya (ruled from 699 to 736 A.D according to Kalhana, Stein 1900: 88) of the Karkota dynasty is said to have brought Odisha under his control (Stein 1900: 90). This conquest must have had implications in the art and architecture of that time. Can the roundish appearance of the face in sculptural art after the eight century A.D be seen under the light of the above intercultural influences?

### **Crown**

The crown of the specimen is vertically tripartite in shape, structurally similar to those found in Vaikuntha Vishnu images in Kashmir.

A detailed study of the image enabled in understanding its stylistic parameters. The textual and image surveys from within the region allowed comparability of the crown with that of the known ones. On the basis of stylistic considerations, Postel *et al.* (1985: 89) have proposed a fourfold chronological sequence in the evolution of crowns in sculptural art in the Chamba region. These are:

Period I: Early 6<sup>th</sup> to early 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D

Period II: Early 8<sup>th</sup> to end of first quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> Century A.D

Period III: End of first quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> Century A.D to 11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D

#### Period IV: 11<sup>th</sup> Century to 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D

According to him, besides the classical southern Kashmiri crown of Iranian and Gupta variety (for description see *Postel et al.* 1985: 91) (Variety 3A) continued from the end of Period I until the end of Period III (early 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D) and a typical north western Kashmiri three vertical pointed diadem (Variety 3B) came into use from 9<sup>th</sup> century up-to the present day and further slight modification of the same variety (Variety 3C) is found in about 15-16<sup>th</sup> century A.D (Figure VII)

Further Pal (1975: 34) adhering to *Postel et al.* statement, opines that coronet with three medallions had definitely become an established feature of eighth century sculptures.

Besides, a close examination of the crown of the specimen revealed small full-blown flowers as decorations flanking the crown (Figure VIII). This is significant in assessing the date of the specimen in the light of *Postel et al.* (1985: 91) observation that the full-blown flowers became part of the headdress only after around 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The crown therefore seems to be falling under either the 3A category (if period is taken into consideration) or under 3B (if the shape of the crown is considered). Apparently, it is close to the variety 3B with flowers flanking the crown. It can therefore be hypothesised that the pointed crown variety might have started to appear somewhere around the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D with the reminiscence of the preceding tradition of flanking the crown with the flowers (Figure IX).

#### Veil

Another interesting feature to note here is the presence of a veil or at best a poorly camouflaged veil in the figurine. Apparently the 'fashion' of veiling the hair under a scarf appeared as a well-established item of dress in Kashmir from the sixth century onwards (Siudmak 2013: 477; *Postel et al.* 1985: 90).

#### Distribution of Moulds

A cursory survey of the literature would reveal that moulds belonging to different periods are reported from several sites across the country. It is reported from the

excavation at Devnimori in Gujarat (Mehta & Chowdhary 1966), Sanghol in Punjab (IAR 1988-89: 73, plate XXXIX B ), Gilund in Rajasthan (IAR 1959-60: 46, plate XLVI), Vaisali in Bihar (IAR 1961-62: 7, plate VII C), Rajbadidanga in West Bengal (IAR 1963-64: 63, plate XLVII C ), Yeleswaram in Andhra Pradesh(IAR 1964-65: 4, plate III ), Mathura in Uttar Pradesh(IAR 1974- 75: 49, plate LXI A), Thanesar in Haryana (IAR1987-88: 29, plate IX B), Naranag in Srinagar (1988-89: 104, plate LII B-C), Adam in Maharashtra(IAR 1990-91: 50, plate XXXVI A ), Taxila in Pakistan (IAR 1991-92: 68 ), Ambaran in Jammu (IAR 1999-2000: 62, plate 57). They however do exhibit remarkable variation in their theme, style and attributes depending on what is being depicted. In that sense the specimen from Sainth described above also shows its own regional style.

## **Discussion**

This part essentially deals with the identification of the specimen in the backdrop of cultural and religious milieu. Deductive methodology is applied for reaching the tentative conclusions.

The very purpose of a mould is repeated productions of images/casts having standardised features. The question that arises then is the identity of the image and its cultural attributes that made it a popular item of possession. Would this be an item of reverence, something such as a totemic emblem? The other possibilities are its use as part of some decorative panel or in some ritual practices, for both of which there are no reference found from Jammu or Kashmir till date. Although references to the usage of votive images for religious purposes are not uncommon in the historical and ethnographic contexts (e.g. Golu Bommai - South Indian Navaratri where votive figurines are kept for reverence- Personal communication K Krishnan), images similar to the above are absent in the archaeological material from the area under the current study. Nevertheless, the specimen, because of its iconographic attributes appears to represent a celestial being of some social significance.

It probably belongs to some cult as Agarwal (1965:122) mentions about the predominant iconography of the cult images, although he essentially talks about the early Indian art.

The standing figures, he explains, with their right hand raised and the left on the hip belong to some cult. Sometimes the right hand had a flower, or *Chauri*, or weapon; sometimes the left grasps the robe, or holds a flask, but the position of the arms is constant.

In the light of the above observation the attributes of the semi divine deities (Yakshi and Apsara/ Surasundari) as well as divine deities (Buddhist deities like Tara, Mayadevi; Pauranic deities like Ganga, Yamuna, Parvati and Lakshmi) were compared with the specimen for ascertaining its identification.

The possibility of the specimen being Surasundari/Apsara is ruled out because of the presence of the crown. The surasundaris usually have an elaborate headdress in place of a crown.

Regardless of the fact that Tara was a flourishing cult in 8<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir and there was literature (*Devitarakuvakyadhyesana nama stotra*, *Aryatarasadhana* and *Astabhayatranatarasadhan*) dedicated to her (Naudou 1980: 76) by the 8<sup>th</sup> century author named Sarvajnamitra (Joshi 1967: 25), the possibility of the specimen being Tara is ruled out on following grounds: Firstly there is a general paucity of tangible evidence of Buddhist deities (including Tara) in the area, as stressed by Pal (1975: 27) and secondly, the dearth of Tara images in *Asokadhadakrida* pose, the pose in which the figure in the specimen is depicted. Tara is essentially the saviour goddess, a sea goddess for traders (Gupte 1964: 104-106), implying that the deity was not directly related to fecundity.

The specimen is comparable to Mayadevi on the other hand, only if her pose is taken into consideration in the Buddha's birth panel. But in the formation of that panel, many divinities play the role, which is lacking in the case of the specimen under current study.

It is therefore more or less certain that the specimen does not represent any of the deities discussed above. The other set of divinities whose attributes are comparable to the specimen belong to the Pauranic sect. In this regard, a study by Shikasree Ray (2014) gives an interesting insight to the present study.

In her analysis of the sculptures depicted on the temples of Odisha, Ray talks about a

rare variety of crown termed by her as "*trishul shaped crowns*". According to her, nine deities – one major and eight minor – dating from 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D (Sailodbhava and Somavamsi period respectively) are seen to have been wearing this crown and all are apparently 'Brahmanical deities' (Figure X).

Interestingly, there appears to be striking architectural similarities between the temples of Odisha and Krimchi temples of Jammu (personal observation). These temples roughly belong to 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The march of Lalitaditya against Odisha (Stein 1900: 90) as has been already discussed seems to be a logical explanation to this resemblance. It can further explain why there are similarities in these crown types.

On this ground, the features of the major Pauranic deities are compared to the specimen. The preposition of the specimen being Ganga or Yamuna (River Goddesses) is untenable on the ground that, save the posture, there is no commonality between the specimen and attributes of these two goddesses.

Considering the iconographic features, the specimen is unlikely to be Parvati, despite the fact that she is occasionally depicted with lotus (Chandra 1998:246). In Kashmir, the most popular emblem of Shiva, the supreme deity of the Shaivites, is the phallus (Pal 1975: 14). Pal quotes Kalhana (ibid) who says that the majority of the Shiva temples in Kashmir originally contained linga as the principal icon and not in the human form. The point to consider here is if Shiva is not revered in his human form, the chances of worship of Parvati in the human form further decreases.

This deductive exercise was beneficial in demarcating two deities – Yakshini and Lakshmi - whose iconographic depictions are closely comparable to the one from Sainth. But it may be noted that the comparison is not fully compatible, as all the features of these deities do not match with the specimen.

As far as the identification of the image with Yakshis or Yakshinis is concerned, they are benign deities connected with fertility and since the figure depicted in the mould stands in the *asokadohadakrida* posture associated with fertility, they can be related.

Many Yakshis and Yakshas found their association with the area. For example, *Pandika*



and *Harita* are associated with Gandhara, *Kunti*, *Nali*, *Udarya*, and a nameless *Yakshini* of Kashmir (Misra 1981: 58). Mahamayuri refers to *Pancika* as the tutelary deity of Kashmir (c.f. Misra 1971: 170). Sialkot (*Sakala*<sup>1</sup>) also had a tutelary deity named *Sarvabhadra* (Misra 1981: 168), although he is not sure of the proper identification of the area as Sialkot. (Refer to Appendix I (Misra 1981:167 to 171) for further details).

However the absence of their iconographic representations from the area, and also the statement by Misra (1981: 105) that the iconographic texts lack the information about Yakshas because they were composed at a time when Yakshas had ceased to have an independent status should be taken into account before identifying the specimen as Yakshi.

The second hypothesis on identification of the specimen as Lakshmi is based on the following observations:

Apparently, image of Lakshmi (?) is depicted on the coins of Indo-Greek rulers, Agathocles and Pantaleon. She is seen holding a lotus, which is quite similar to the one in the Sainth specimen. Banerjea (1956: 124) quotes Coomaraswamy who has identified the “dancing- girl” on the coins of the Indo-Greek kings Pantaleon and Agathokles, as Sri-Lakshmi. Banerjea believes her to be an equine-headed Goddess – ‘Yaksini Asvamukhi’

Further Banerjea (1956:123) records that Lakshmi is represented without the attendant elephants, either seated on a full- blossomed lotus or standing with a lotus flower in her hand (emphasis by the author), on the coins of Ujjayini Janapada. It should however be remembered that for the present study only standing Lakshmi with lotus in her hand is considered for investigation. Whitehead (1914: 129) describes one of the female figures on the coin of Azes as Goddess Lakshmi, “standing to front with flower in the raised right hand”. Banerjea (1956: 149), however, identifies her as Durga Simhavahini.

An interesting point to note here is that post-Gupta period in Kashmir till the reign of the

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<sup>1</sup>The area from where the mould has been found is very close to Sialkot, therefore the tutelary deity of Sialkot probably had impact on that area also.

Harshadeva (1089-1111 A.D) has witnessed the monotonous depiction of Lakshmi on the reverse of the coins (Vanaja 1983: 19-20), making the deity a clear choice among the most revered deities at that time in Kashmir. It can therefore be assumed that Lakshmi was a popular deity and commonly worshipped in the region. On that basis it is plausible that the deity in the mould could be Lakshmi.

Further, this is supported by the fact that the crown she is wearing is very typical of Vaikunta Vishnu images in Kashmir and adjoining areas. She therefore can be related to Vishnu, who was presumably a popular deity among the local population. This is supported by the observation by Shali (1993:155) that during the time of Lalitaditya, the majority of the population were followers of Vaisnu and the Buddhists and Shaivites were minorities. The fact that Vishnu was the most venerated deity and also the family deity of the Karkotas (Shali 1993: 155), it should not be surprising that Lakshmi was also worshipped on a grand scale in Kashmir and the surrounding areas as well.

Though the circumstantial evidences pointing towards the identification of the female figure as *Lakshmi* is overwhelming in the present research, one cannot really be certain unless some other definite evidence is discovered in the future. The point to note here is that the deity/figure under investigation is depicted in *asokadohadakrida* pose, which is not the usual pose for Lakshmi. But if we consider the fact that Lakshmi is related to fertility in some parts of the country (e.g. some villages in Andhra Pradesh in India (Padma 2013: 84), the change proposed for Lakshmi in this case may be seen as a regional variation, affiliating the deity to fertility cult.

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## Figures

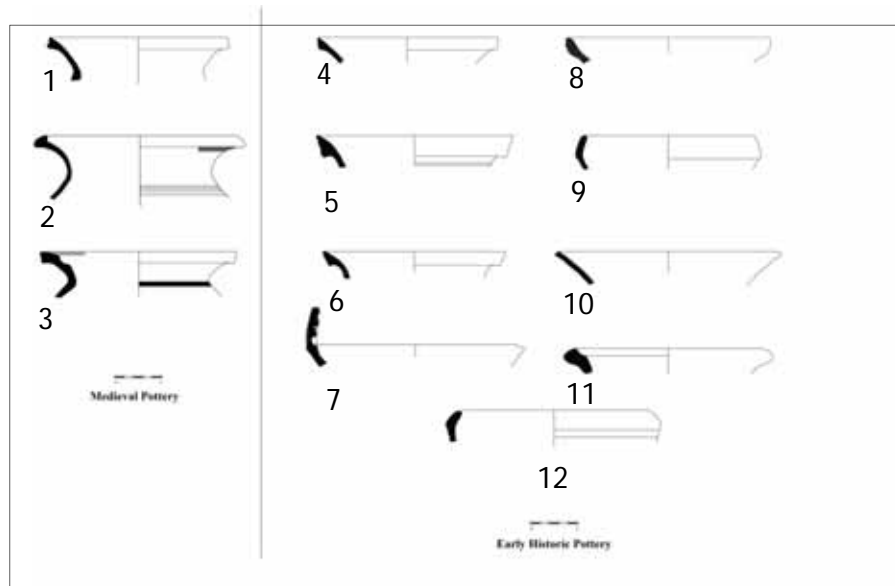


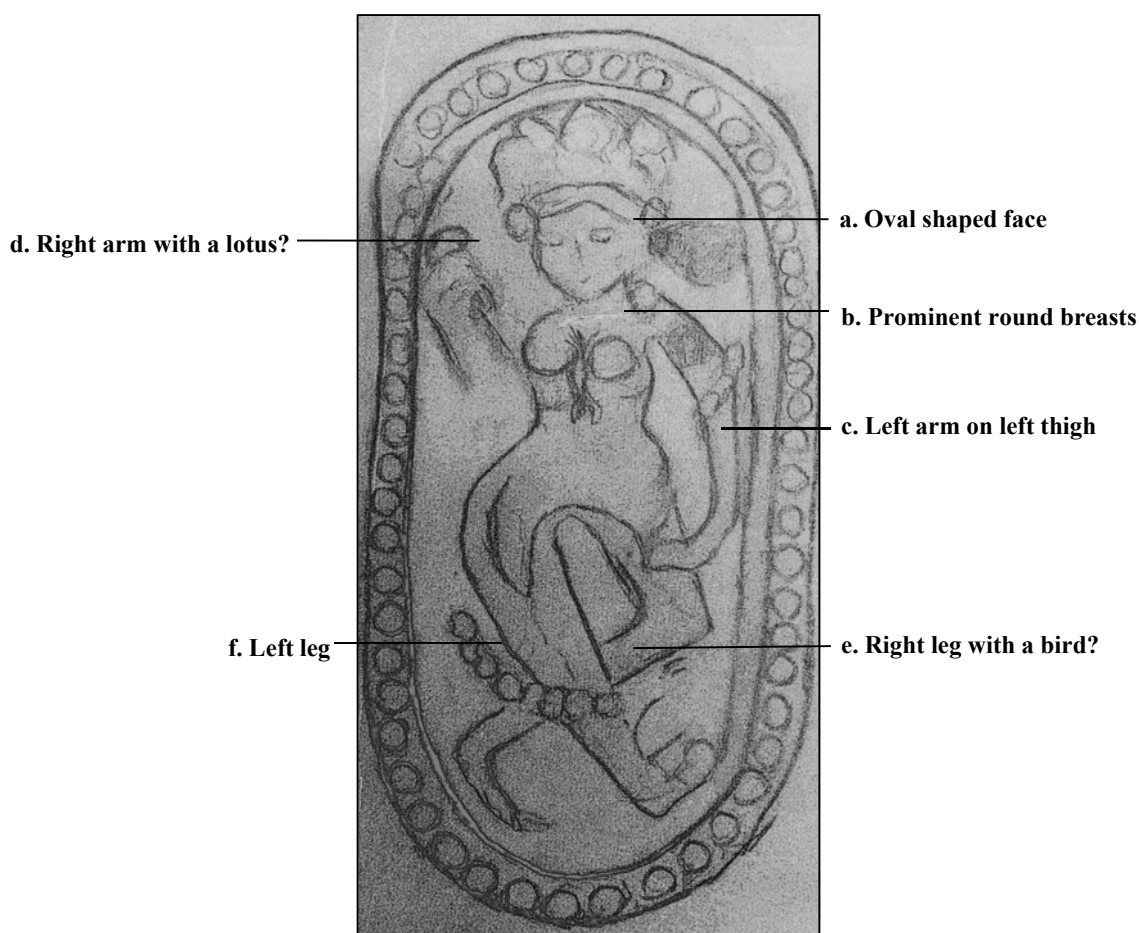
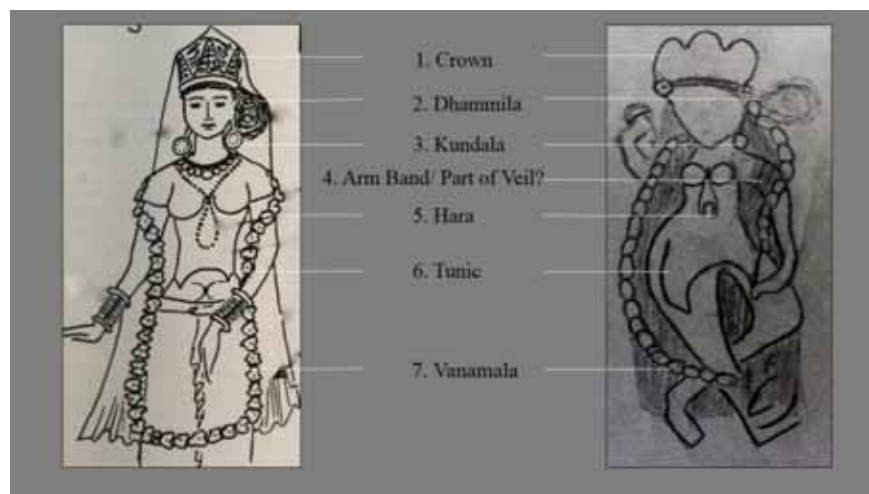
Fig. I- Pottery from Sainth: 1-2. Red ware 3. Black on red ware 4. Red Slipped Ware 5. Red ware 6. Red Slipped Ware 7. Black on red ware. 8- 12. Red slipped ware



Fig II- Terracotta mould



Fig III- Cast of the mould made on m-seal



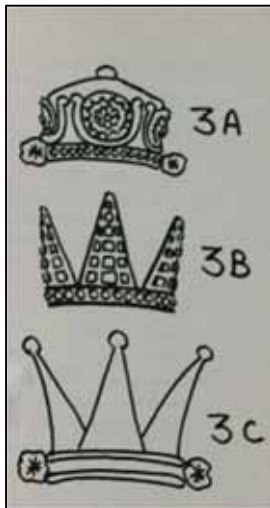


Figure VII- Stylistic crowns from Chamba

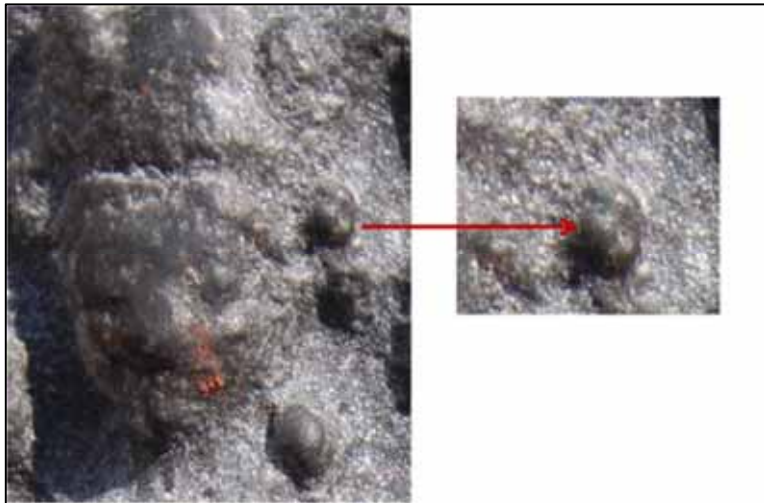


Figure VIII- Flowers flanking the crown



Figure IX- Comparison of different crowns as discussed by Postel et al. with the specimen

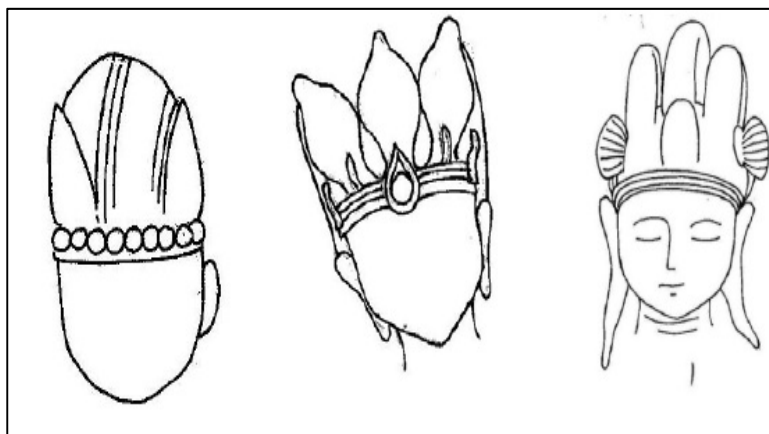


Figure X- Trishul shaped crowns from Odisha (Ray 2014)