

A CARNELIAN INTAGLIO SEAL FROM GUDAR NEAR JAMRUD: NUMISMATIC PARALLELS AND THE ICONOGRAPHY OF MANAOBAGO IN KUSHAN ART

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ABSTRACT

Glyptic artifacts are an important yet understudied component of northwestern South Asian material culture. This study examines a newly reported carnelian intaglio seal discovered in 2022 at Gudar near Jamrud, District Khyber, Pakistan. The seal, recovered from a non-stratified context, depicts a centrally enthroned male figure whose iconography is closely comparable with Kushan divine imagery known from coinage. Comparison with the Manaobago type on Kanishka I's gold coinage reveals close correspondences in posture, enthronement, attributes, and symbolic vocabulary, while its distinction from later Huviska-related investiture imagery suggests an earlier or more iconic stage of this visual tradition. The seal is therefore best interpreted as a glyptic object whose closest parallels point to the Kanishkan phase of Kushan visual culture, probably in the early to mid-second century CE. Beyond its chronological attribution, the find illustrates the extension of imperial iconography from coinage into portable glyptic media, where such imagery may have functioned as a marker of authority, identity, or elite affiliation. This study highlights how numismatic comparison can inform the interpretation of undocumented artifacts while emphasizing methodological caution for objects lacking stratified provenance.

Keywords: Seals, Kushan, Kanishka, Huviska, Gandhara, Buddhism, Numismatics, Coins.

INTRODUCTION

Seals and engraved gems occupy a pivotal position in the study of ancient material culture, serving both practical administrative functions and symbolic roles in the articulation of authority, identity, and religious ideology. As portable objects bearing condensed visual signs, they often preserve forms of imagery that circulated between official, religious, and elite social contexts. Within the cultural milieu of Gandhara and the northwestern frontier of the Indian subcontinent, glyptic artifacts are of particular significance,

reflecting the region's role as a dynamic zone of interaction among Hellenistic, Iranian, Central Asian, and South Asian traditions during the Kushan period, especially between the first and third centuries CE. This intercultural setting is especially visible in Kushan visual culture, where coinage, sculpture, and minor arts frequently combine Iranian, Hellenistic, Central Asian, and Indic elements within a single imperial idiom. The prosperity and artistic development of Gandhara reached a major phase under Kushan rule, when the region became one of the important centers of

Buddhist and urban cultural production (Rahman & Falk, 2011).

Despite the abundance of Kushan numismatic and sculptural material, glyptic evidence remains comparatively underexplored. This imbalance is significant because coinage represents official and widely distributed imperial imagery, whereas seals and engraved gems can reveal how similar visual formulas were adapted for smaller, portable, administrative, or personal objects. Kushan coins are especially useful for such comparison because they preserve a wide range of royal and divine images, including deities drawn from Iranian, Hellenistic, and South Asian religious spheres. For undocumented or non-stratified objects, numismatic evidence cannot replace archaeological provenance, but it can provide a controlled comparative basis for assessing relative chronology and iconographic affiliation.

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses the following research question: Does the Gudar intaglio seal represent a localized adaptation of Kushan imperial iconography, or does it reflect participation in a standardized visual and ideological program associated with the reign of Kanishka I? More specifically, can the seal's enthroned male figure be understood in relation to the Manaobago¹ type known from Kanishka I's gold coinage, and what does such a comparison reveal about the transmission of imperial imagery from coinage into glyptic media? To address this question, the study employs a comparative framework that situates the seal within the broader corpus of Kushan numismatic and glyptic traditions. By correlating the iconographic features of the seal with securely dated numismatic types, it seeks not only to assess its chronological attribution but also to examine the mechanisms through which imperial imagery was transmitted across different media. The comparison is therefore concerned not merely with visual resemblance, but with the repeated use of compositional schemes, divine attributes, royal-

divine symbolism, and the adaptation of imperial iconography to objects of smaller scale.

Several important seals from the region have previously been documented. Among these, the intaglio seal studied by Mukherjee in 1966 and subsequently re-examined by Gul Rahim Khan and Naheed Zahra represents a significant example of Kushan glyptic art associated with royal and religious iconography. That seal, depicting an interaction between a royal figure and a deity, has been interpreted through comparison with Kushan coinage. The Peshawar seal is particularly relevant here because it demonstrates that not all Kushan seals follow the same visual formula: some present narrative or investiture scenes, whereas others may preserve more iconic, single-figure divine types. Khan and Zahra's reassessment of the Peshawar seal is especially relevant because it demonstrates how numismatic comparison can refine the interpretation of Kushan glyptic imagery (Khan & Zahra, 2016).

The present study examines a newly reported carnelian intaglio seal discovered at Gudar near Jamrud, District Khyber, during the construction of a house foundation in the vicinity of a natural spring. The seal was originally documented as part of the author's PhD research on the cultural profile of District Khyber, Pakistan, and is examined here independently through numismatic and iconographic analysis. The findspot lies within a historically significant landscape connected with routes linking Peshawar, the Khyber Pass, and Central Asia. Although the seal was not recovered through controlled archaeological excavation and therefore lacks secure stratigraphic provenance, its stylistic and iconographic features provide valuable evidence for the study of Kushan artistic practices and the wider cultural milieu of Gandhara. Its attribution must therefore be approached cautiously and based primarily on comparison with securely dated Kushan numismatic material rather than on findspot evidence alone. By situating the seal within Kushan visual and

¹ Manaobago has been associated with the Kushan deity Mao by Mukherjee (1966, pp. 61-62), while Jongeward describes Manaobago as a "god of good

mind," whose name has been connected with Avestan ideas of mind, wisdom, and understanding (Jongeward, 2020, p. 160).

numismatic traditions, this study argues that the Gudar specimen is not an isolated glyptic object, but a witness to the movement of royal-divine imagery across media, from coinage to engraved stone (Strauch, 2012, pp. 602-603).

Description of the Seal

The seal is an oval-shaped carnelian intaglio (Fig. 3), carved on a finely polished, translucent gemstone of deep reddish-orange hue. Carnelian, a variety of chalcedony, was widely utilized in antiquity for glyptic production due to its durability, smooth texture, and visual appeal. The present specimen exhibits a high-quality polish and relatively uniform coloration, suggesting the use of carefully selected material and deliberate workmanship.

The design is executed in intaglio technique, whereby the image is incised below the surface of the stone to produce a raised impression when stamped in a malleable medium such as clay or wax. This technical feature is significant because it indicates that the object was designed not only to be viewed as an engraved gem, but also to generate impressions, possibly in administrative, personal, or symbolic contexts.

At the center of the composition appears a four-armed, nimbate figure, here identified as Manaobago, rendered in a predominantly frontal posture with the head turned to the right. The figure is seated on a raised, cushioned stool with curving legs, and the feet rest on a distinct footstool, indicating a formal enthronement schema. The frontal enthronement gives the figure a hieratic and authoritative presence, while the turned head introduces a limited degree of movement without disrupting the overall symmetry of the composition.

The figure wears a diademed, crested helmet, and lunar horn-like projections are visible at the shoulders, supporting its interpretation as a divine or semi-divine figure. The arrangement of the four arms is iconographically structured: the lower right hand appears to rest on the hip, the upper right hand holds a cluster of objects, possibly coins, the upper left carries a mace-sceptre, and the lower left holds a torque-like element. No royal tamgha is visible on the Gudar seal, and this absence is

methodologically significant. If a Kushan royal tamgha had been present, the attribution of the seal could have been approached more directly through comparison with the dynastic symbols or tamgha's used on Kushan coinage. In the absence of such an explicit royal marker, however, the identification and chronological placement of the seal must depend primarily on iconographic, stylistic, and numismatic evidence, including the figure's posture, attributes, enthronement schema, costume, and parallels with the Manaobago type known from Kushan coins.

The figure is dressed in characteristic Kushan attire, including a belted tunic and heavy boots, consistent with representations found in Kushan coinage and sculpture. Behind the shoulders, subtle radiating or curvilinear motifs are visible; these may represent stylized flames, wings, or another form of divine radiance, although their precise identification remains uncertain. Such details should be treated cautiously, since the small scale of the engraving and the condition of the surface may affect the certainty with which these motifs can be identified.

The overall composition is centrally organized and hieratic, with a balanced arrangement of figure and attributes. The engraving demonstrates clarity of incision and controlled execution, suggesting the work of a skilled artisan familiar with Kushan visual conventions. The image is not crowded with subsidiary figures or narrative elements; instead, it presents the deity as the sole focus of the composition. This compositional simplicity is one of the most important features distinguishing the Gudar seal from more elaborate investiture scenes. Taken together, the frontal enthronement, multi-armed structure, attribute arrangement, Kushan dress, and absence of subsidiary figures provide the basis for comparing the seal with the Manaobago type known from Kushan coinage. Since the seal was recovered from a non-stratified context, this identification and its proposed chronological placement must remain based on iconographic and stylistic comparison rather than archaeological association.

Methodology

In the absence of a secure archaeological context, this study adopts a comparative iconographic and numismatic methodology as its primary analytical framework. The attribution and interpretation of the Gudar seal are based on the systematic evaluation of its formal, iconographic, and stylistic features in relation to well-classified Kushan numismatic and glyptic material. Since the seal cannot be dated through stratigraphy or associated finds, its chronological and cultural placement must be argued through visual comparison, typological correspondence, and stylistic assessment.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, the seal is examined iconographically, with attention to the composition, posture, regalia, attributes, enthronement schema, and arrangement of the four arms. These features are treated as diagnostic elements within Kushan visual culture and are used to assess whether the seal corresponds more closely to an iconic single-deity format or to a narrative investiture composition. This distinction is important because the Gudar seal lacks the kneeling royal figure and attendant that characterize the Peshawar intaglio seal (Khan & Zahra, 2016).

Second, the study employs numismatic correlation as a chronological and interpretive anchor. Kushan coinage, especially the gold issues of Kanishka I and the coinage of Huvishka, provides a ruler-attributed corpus against which the seal's imagery can be compared. Through this comparison, the representation of Manaobago, the configuration of attributes, and the formal treatment of enthronement are assessed in order to establish typological parallels and divergences. Kanishka I's Manaobago type is used as the principal comparative model, while Huvishka's related issues are considered as a later development within the same iconographic tradition.

Third, the study considers stylistic and typological features, including the quality of engraving, balance of composition, treatment of dress and regalia, and clarity of divine attributes. These features are not treated as independent proof of date, but as supporting evidence when combined

with iconographic and numismatic parallels. The Gudar seal is also compared with the Peshawar intaglio seal in order to clarify the difference between single-figure divine imagery and multi-figure investiture scenes. Since the seal was recovered from a non-stratified context, the conclusions of this study are necessarily probabilistic rather than absolute.

Numismatic Evidence and Iconographic Attribution

Because the Gudar seal lacks a secure archaeological context, numismatic comparison provides the most reliable framework for assessing its iconographic affiliation and probable chronological position. Kanishka I has generated wide scholarly attention across the cultural, political, religious, and numismatic history of the Kushan Empire. In Rosenfield's study of Kushan dynastic arts, the reign of Kanishka receives more attention than that of all other Kushan rulers combined. Rosenfield describes Kanishka as a figure of primary importance in Asian history, "exceptional in his ability to consolidate a great empire while also encouraging the release of his peoples' creative energies" (Rosenfield, 1967, pp. 27-58). His reign is therefore rightly regarded as a pivotal phase in the history of Central Asia, Gandhara, and northern India, marked by major developments in architecture, sculpture, Buddhist textual traditions, and religious art (Jongeward, Cribb, & Donovan, 2014, p. 3).

The most compelling parallel for the identification of the enthroned deity is provided by the gold coinage of Kanishka I, particularly the Manaobago type classified by Göbl as no. 59. On the reverse of this type, Manaobago is depicted as a frontal enthroned deity with the head turned to the right, wearing Kushan dress and associated with divine attributes and dynastic symbolism. The presence of the Bactrian inscription **MANAOBAΓO** confirms the identity of the deity on the coin. For the present study, the importance of this type lies not only in its inscriptional identification, but in the visual formula through which Manaobago is represented: frontal enthronement, four-armed configuration, formal regalia, divine attributes, and a controlled, hieratic composition.



Fig. 1. Reverse of Kanishka I gold dinar, Manaobago type, Göbl 59; drawing of Manaobago I.

The deity wears a wide-rimmed helmet derived from the Boeotian type, commonly associated with Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek royal imagery, distinguished by a decorative band and a prominent crest, likely reflecting a localized adaptation of Hellenistic prototypes. Flowing diadem ties, a three-dotted earring, and high patterned footwear further define the figure's iconographic profile (Sinisi, 2019). The combination of Hellenistic helmet form, Kushan dress, and Iranian divine identity demonstrates the composite nature of Kushan imperial iconography, in which multiple cultural traditions were integrated into a single visual language. A prominent crescent positioned behind the shoulders serves as a primary identifying feature, linking the deity to the Zoroastrian Māh (Göbl, 1984). The four-armed configuration, reflecting Indian iconographic influence, is shared with other Kushan deities such as Oešo and Bazodeo. The deity holds a diadem, an unidentified object, a sceptre with ploughshare, and a chakra; while the object in the rear right hand is often interpreted as a diadem, its precise identification remains uncertain due to inconsistencies in its rendering. This uncertainty is important methodologically, since the identification of individual attributes should not be treated in isolation but considered within the complete iconographic structure of the figure.

The plough-sceptre is depicted with curved ends and a globular finial, whereas the chakra appears as a circular device marked by central and peripheral dot patterns. The throne constitutes a significant element of the composition, consisting of a cushioned seat supported by curved legs resembling feline forms, with the feet resting

within an integrated and balanced throne structure. This arrangement shows close parallels with enthroned royal imagery, particularly that of Vima Kadphises (Sinisi, 2019), while the presence of the royal tamgha and the Bactrian inscription **MANAOBAGO** confirms the identity of the deity. For the present study, the most important point is not merely the inscriptional identification of Manaobago on the coin, but the way this identification is visually expressed through frontal enthronement, divine attributes, royal costume, and dynastic symbolism. Further support for this identification is provided by gold fractional issues, for example Type 3, MK 151, which preserve the same iconographic scheme in reduced but consistent form.

In contrast, the Manaobago II type (Fig. 2) associated with Huvishka exhibits a distinctly different stylistic and compositional treatment. While the general posture and four-armed configuration are retained, the execution becomes more schematic and less naturalistic. The attributes differ notably, with the introduction of a torque in the rear left hand and a dotted circular object, possibly representing coins in the front right hand, indicating a shift in symbolic vocabulary. The rendering of details is simplified: the helmet loses the elaborate crest and diadem characteristic of Kanishkan issues, and the throne, although retaining curved legs, no longer displays the naturalistic feline articulation observed earlier. The crescent remains present but is rendered less precisely, and the overall composition reflects reduced refinement, making the interpretation of smaller iconographic features more difficult. These differences suggest that Huvishka's Manaobago type should be understood not as a

simple repetition of the Kanishkan model, but as a later adaptation of an already established divine image.



Fig. 2 Reverse of Huvishka gold dinar, Manaobago II type, MK 151; ANS Kushan 715.

A key diagnostic distinction lies in the treatment of enthronement. In Huvishka's coinage, the deity is consistently depicted with the feet resting on a clearly defined footstool, supported by a cushioned seat with curved legs. This represents a later development in the iconographic rendering of enthroned divinity, introducing a more explicit and formalized emphasis on the seated posture. By comparison, in Kanishka's coinage the figure is integrated within a more unified and balanced throne structure, without the standardized and prominently articulated footstool seen in Huvishka's issues. However, the presence or absence of a footstool should not be used as a single determining criterion. Since the Gudar seal also appears to show a distinct support beneath the feet, this feature must be weighed alongside other elements such as the overall composition, the treatment of the deity, the absence of narrative figures, the arrangement of attributes, and the degree of formal coherence.

When the Gudar seal is considered in light of these distinctions, certain isolated features may appear to resonate with later developments, especially the more explicit articulation of the seated posture and the possible torque-like attribute. However, the overall composition, coherence, and iconographic consistency align more closely with the Kanishkan model. The Gudar seal presents Manaobago as a single, centrally enthroned, self-contained figure rather than as part of a narrative investiture scene. This is significant because Huvishka-related comparisons, especially in the Peshawar seal,

depend heavily on the presence of a kneeling royal figure receiving authority from a deity. Khan and Zahra's reassessment of the Peshawar seal specifically emphasizes the kneeling king and its parallels with Huvishka's copper investiture coinage, whereas the Gudar seal lacks this relational composition (Khan & Zahra, 2016).

These observations are supported by previous scholarship, including Göbl and Rosenfield, which emphasizes differences in execution, attributes, and compositional structure between the coinage of Kanishka and Huvishka. Taken together, the evidence indicates that while both Kanishka and Huvishka employed the Manaobago type, the Kanishka version represents an earlier, more refined, and formally stabilized expression of this iconographic tradition. The Gudar seal is therefore best interpreted as being closer to the Kanishkan Manaobago tradition than to the later Huvishkan narrative-investiture mode. This conclusion remains probabilistic rather than absolute, but it offers the strongest available explanation for the seal's iconography in the absence of stratigraphic evidence.

Comparative Glyptic Analysis: The Gudar and Peshawar Intaglio Seals

A meaningful comparison may be drawn between the Gudar seal and the intaglio seal from Peshawar originally published by Mukherjee in 1966 and subsequently re-examined by Gul Rahim Khan and Zahra in 2016. The latter represents one of the most important examples of Kushan glyptic art from the Gandharan region and provides a

valuable framework for contextualizing the present specimen. The Peshawar seal is especially relevant because it has already demonstrated how Kushan glyptic objects may be interpreted through comparison with numismatic imagery.

The Peshawar seal is characterized by a complex narrative composition, depicting a four-armed enthroned deity, identified here as Manaobago, in interaction with a kneeling royal figure accompanied by an attendant. This arrangement has been interpreted as an investiture scene, wherein the deity confers authority upon the king. Khan and Zahra's reassessment, particularly in light of Huvishka's copper coinage, emphasizes the close correspondence between the kneeling figure and numismatic representations of royal submission before divine authority. On this basis, the seal has been attributed to the reign of Huvishka, reflecting a developed stage of Kushan ideological expression centered on divine legitimization.

In contrast, the Gudar seal presents a fundamentally different compositional structure. The imagery is limited to a single, centrally enthroned four-armed figure, without the inclusion of a kneeling king or attendant figures. This absence of narrative elements distinguishes it from the Peshawar seal and suggests a shift from an investiture scene to a more iconic and self-contained form of divine representation. Rather than illustrating an event of divine authorization, the Gudar seal emphasizes the direct and unmediated presence of the deity. Its meaning therefore depends less on action and more on presence: Manaobago is not shown conferring authority, but embodying it.

The methodological distinction between the two interpretations is important. Khan and Zahra's reassessment of the Peshawar seal relies primarily on narrative and contextual parallels with Huvishka's investiture coinage, whereas the present study emphasizes the structural and iconographic coherence of the Gudar seal in relation to the gold coinage of Kanishka I. The Peshawar seal presents Manaobago within a relational scene of royal authorization, while the Gudar seal presents the deity as an isolated, centrally enthroned figure. This difference

suggests that the two seals belong to different representational modes within Kushan glyptic art: a Huvishkan narrative-investiture mode in the case of Peshawar, and an iconic Kanishkan mode in the case of Gudar. The proposed Kanishkan attribution of the Gudar seal should therefore be understood as a reasoned iconographic placement, not as a secure archaeological date.

The comparison also suggests that Kushan glyptic art was not uniform. In the Peshawar seal, Manaobago functions within a relational context, actively engaging in the conferment of authority upon a royal figure. In the Gudar seal, however, Manaobago appears as a self-sufficient symbol of divine sovereignty, occupying the compositional field without narrative mediation. This distinction strengthens the argument that Kushan seals could employ different visual strategies: some expressed royal legitimacy through narrative interaction, while others presented divine authority through autonomous, iconic imagery.

Discussion

The foregoing analysis situates the Gudar seal within the broader visual and ideological traditions of the Kushan period. Its importance lies not only in its probable attribution to the Manaobago iconographic tradition, but also in demonstrating how Kushan imperial imagery moved beyond coinage into glyptic media. While coinage provides the most systematic and securely dated corpus of Kushan royal and divine imagery, seals such as the Gudar specimen show that similar visual forms could circulate in smaller, portable, and possibly administrative or elite contexts.

The comparison with the Peshawar seal confirms that Kushan glyptic art employed more than one representational mode. Whereas the Peshawar seal belongs to an investiture tradition, the Gudar seal preserves an iconic single-deity format centered on Manaobago.

The seal therefore supports the view that Kushan visual culture operated through a shared vocabulary of power, legitimacy, and religious affiliation across different media. The close relationship between the Gudar seal and the Manaobago type of Kanishka I's gold coinage suggests that numismatic imagery could serve as a

model for glyptic representation, though not through direct copying alone. Rather, imperial motifs were adapted and recontextualized according to the function, scale, and medium of the object.

At the same time, the attribution must remain cautious. Since the Gudar seal lacks a secure stratigraphic context, its chronological placement cannot be treated as definitive. The proposed association with the Kanishkan phase rests on comparative iconographic and stylistic grounds, especially the seal's closer correspondence with the iconic Manaobago type of Kanishka I than with the later narrative-investiture mode associated with Huvishka. Thus, while the seal's iconographic dependence on the Kanishka I Manaobago type, particularly Göbl 59, appears strong, this association is further supported by the wider Kushan-period character of Gudar, where abundant Kushan material and Kanishka coins have been reported. Nevertheless, the seal's precise archaeological context must remain open because it was not recovered through controlled stratigraphic excavation.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis suggests that the Gudar seal is best understood as belonging to, or closely reflecting, the Kanishkan phase of Kushan visual culture rather than a later Kushan development. Its central image, an enthroned four-armed deity, corresponds most closely to the canonical Manaobago type represented on Kanishka I's gold dinars, particularly Göbl 59. The centrally enthroned posture, controlled arrangement of the arms, divine attributes, Kushan costume, and association with dynastic symbolism collectively support this attribution.

The Gudar seal shows no decisive dependence on Huvishka's later narrative-investiture imagery. Its single, centrally enthroned Manaobago figure is best understood as a glyptic rendering closely derived from the Kanishka I Manaobago type. The Huvishkan material remains useful only as evidence for the later continuation and adaptation of this divine image, not as the primary model for the Gudar seal. Unlike the Peshawar intaglio seal, which presents a narrative investiture scene

involving a kneeling royal figure and a deity, the Gudar seal presents Manaobago as a single, autonomous, and centrally dominant divine figure. This distinction strengthens the argument that the seal belongs closer to the iconic Manaobago tradition of Kanishka I than to the later Huvishkan narrative-investiture mode.

Accordingly, the seal is best interpreted as an early and formally stabilized expression of the Manaobago type in Kushan glyptic art. Its iconographic association with the Kanishka I Manaobago type, particularly Göbl 59, is strong; however, its precise archaeological date and original context cannot be treated as definitive, since the seal lacks stratified provenance and was not recovered through controlled excavation. The argument therefore rests on comparative iconographic, stylistic, and numismatic evidence rather than on archaeological context.

The significance of the Gudar seal lies not only in its chronological and iconographic placement, but also in its demonstration that Kushan imperial and divine imagery circulated beyond coinage into glyptic media. As a portable object, the seal may have carried symbols of authority, legitimacy, or elite identity into administrative, personal, or regional contexts. It therefore contributes to a broader understanding of Kushan visual culture as an interconnected system in which royal-divine imagery moved across media while retaining recognizable ideological meaning. More broadly, it also highlights the importance of seals as a valuable corpus for the study of early Indian and Gandharan culture, religion, and history, as emphasized by Strauch (2012, p. 606).

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Figures and Comparative Iconographic Plates

Manaobago: Gudar Seal and Numismatic Comparanda



Fig. 3. Carnelian intaglio seal from Gudar near Jamrud, District Khyber, Pakistan; frontal view.

Kanishka I



Fig. 4. Digital line drawing of the Gudar seal.

Huvishka



Fig. 5. Reverse of Kanishka I gold dinar, Manaobago type, Göbl 59.



Fig. 6. Reverse of Huvishka Type 3 Manaobago gold half-quarter dinar, MK 151, from Baqarabad pump station, Jamrud (Afridi & Qazi, 2025).



Fig. 7. Additional Kanishka I Manaobago reverse for comparison.



Fig. 8. Additional Huvishka Manaobago reverse for comparison.