

Shinkot-Bajaur relic
casket inscriptions of the
time of Menander and
Vijayamitra : Part 1
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The relic casket



Introductory

- ▶ The inscriptions are etched on a steatite casket, which was discovered by some tribal people while digging the foundations of a new fort at Shinkot, in the Bajaur region, at a place about 20 miles to the northwest of the confluence of the rivers Panjkora and Swat.
- ▶ The steatite casket is reported to have enclosed a silver casket, which contained a gold reliquary and some ashes; the silver and gold articles are no longer traceable.
- ▶ The language of the inscriptions is the northwestern variety of Prakrit.
- ▶ The script is Kharoshthī.

Labelling of the inscriptions

- ▶ N G Majumdar, who first published the inscriptions, has labelled them as under :
 1. A, arranged along the rim of the lid;
 2. A1, engraved around the centre of the lid;
 3. A2, found on the inner face of the lid;
 4. B, engraved on the inside of the casket;
 5. C, the second inscription around the centre of the lid;
 6. D, the second inscription inside the casket; and
 7. E, on the back of the casket.

State of preservation

- ▶ Only a few portions of the lid have been recovered.
- ▶ As such, it has not been possible to restore the entire text of the inscriptions engraved on it, namely Majumdar's A, A1, A2, and C.
- ▶ The bowl is in a fair state of preservation, with just some slight cracks.
- ▶ As such, the text of the inscriptions engraved on it, namely Majumdar's B, D, and E, have been completely made out.

Two groups of inscriptions

- N G Majumdar : The inscriptions may be divided into two groups—Group I comprising inscriptions A, A1, A2, and B; and Group II comprising inscriptions C, D, and E.
- This is indicating by the palaeography of the two groups.
- The letters of the first group are comparatively larger, bolder, and deeply incised.
- The letters of the second group are comparatively smaller, shallow, and not so deeply incised.

Dates of the two groups of inscriptions

- The first group of inscriptions refers to Menander, and may be assigned to the mid-second century BC, the date of that Indo-Greek ruler.
- N G Majumdar : There was a gap of over 50 years between the engraving of the two groups of inscriptions.
- D C Sircar (earlier) : There was no long gap between the engraving of the two groups of inscriptions, and both of them may be assigned to the end of the second century BC.
- D C Sircar (later) : There was a gap of over 50 years, as originally suggested by N G Majumdar.
- Konow : The first group should be assigned to the second century BC, while the second group cannot be older than the first century BC.

Dates of the two groups of inscriptions

- The inscriptions of the second group refer to year 5 of Vijayamitra.
- The Indravarman reliquary inscription is dated to Azes year 63, that is *c* 5 AD.
- This is year 25 of Vijayamitra.
- If year 25 of Vijayamitra is *c* 5 AD, he would have ascended the throne *c* 20-19 BC.
- Thus, the second group of the Shinkot-Bajaur inscriptions, which refers to year 5 of Vijayamitra, should be dated *c* 15 BC.

Object of first group of inscriptions

- N G Majumdar : The object of the first group of inscriptions is to record the consecration of the relic of the Śākyamuni Buddha, on the fourteenth day of the month of Kārttika of a certain year, which is lost in the inscription, in the reign of *Mahārāja* Minadra (= Menander), by *Apracharaja* Viyakamitra.

Menander as overlord of Viyakamitra

- Viyakamitra refers to Menander while recording the consecration of the relics by himself.
- This seems to show that he was a feudatory of the Indo-Greek ruler.
- It also shows the hold of Menander over the Swat valley.
- Konow : The mention of Menander in the context of the consecration of the relic by Viyakamitra, seems to indicate that the original consecration was evidently done at the request of Menander, who is known for his Buddhist leanings.
- But there is no definite evidence to support this.

Interpretation of the name, Viyakamitra

- N G Majumdar : Viyakamitra may correspond to Vīryakamitra or Vijjaka.
- D C Sircar accepts this, but suggests that, alternatively, it might be rendered into Sanskrit as Vīryāṅkamitra.
- Konow does not agree with the rendering of Majumdar.

TRADITION OF MENTIONING MONTH IN INSCRIPTION

✘ The tradition of mentioning the month in the inscription was initiated by foreigners, like the Indo-Greeks.

A vertical bar on the left side of the slide, consisting of several colored segments: a small black rectangle at the top, followed by a thin grey line, a yellow segment, a pink segment, and a larger pink segment at the bottom.

Thank you