

Urban Life in Early East Punjab - Rupnagar (Ropar): An Ancient Town on the Bank of River Sutlej

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Introduction

Ropar (Rupnagar or Rugar) town is situated in the Shivalik hills on the left bank of river Sutlej at a distance of about 40 kilometers from Chandigarh, and the archaeological excavations here show the presence of an urban settlement from the Harappan period to the present times with intermittent (apparently short) episodes of desertions. This town is located at a point where River Sutlej enters into the plains, and due to the narrow width of the river here, people could cross it easily to reach the settlements in Northwest India. The archaeological remains are spread over an area of about 12 hectares in Ropar adjacent to the Government College ground, and presently, a brick structure (locally called Nalagarh Kothi) is situated as a landmark on the elevated portion of the mound here.¹

Yagya Datt Sharma led a team of the Archaeological Survey of India (hereafter, ASI) to excavate 21 meters 21-meter-high mound at Ropar from 1952 to 1955, but he never published a detailed excavation report. We only have short reports and articles by Sharma on archaeological remains from Ropar for the study of this town's historical past.² In the absence of a detailed excavation report, we do not have much information about the context of the artifacts that are found in the excavation here. Therefore, this paper proposes that by adopting an artefact-centric approach, we can develop a better understanding of urban life in ancient Ropar.³ Following this presumption, it is proposed that the artifacts found in the excavation can be used as evidence by identifying its purpose, significance in human life, and consumption pattern, to uncover the complex character of the urban life in early Ropar. Several artifacts that are found in Ropar

are similar to the artifacts that are discovered in several contemporary sites in the Ganga Valley and Northwest as well as Central India. This scenario allows us to analyze the artifacts from Ropar in the light of previous studies on similar artifacts from other sites, and based on this analysis, an attempt has been made in this paper to reveal early to the late historical past of this town with a focus upon its urban life.

Urban Settlement

The three mounds that were found in Ropar had been named north (n.), south (s.), and west (w.) by Yagya Datt Sharma. Out of these three mounds, only mounds n., and w. were vertically excavated since the s. mound was -and is still- situated beneath the present town. Based on archaeological evidence, six cultural phases have been identified at Ropar:

Period I - Harappan culture, *circa* 2100-1400 BCE,

Period II - Painted Grey Ware culture, *circa* 1000-600 BCE,

Period III - Northern Black Polished Ware (hereafter, NBPW)/Early Historical, *circa* 600-200 BCE,

Period IV - Middle to Late Historical, *circa* 200 BCE-CE 700,

Period V - Late Historical/Early Medieval, *circa* 700-1200 CE,

Period VI - Medieval, *circa* 1200-1700 CE⁴

The Period III is further divided into Sub-Period IIIA (NBPW) and Sub-Period IIIB (Mauryas). In the same manner, Period IV is divided into Sub-Period IVA (Shungas), Sub-Period IVB (Shaka-Kushanas), Sub-Period IVC (Guptas), and Sub-Period IVD (Post-Guptas).⁵ Compared to material remains of Periods I to IV, the remains of the following Periods (V and VI) are stray, and they are sketchily recorded because the

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settlement remains of these Periods are located just beneath the present town. Whatever information we have about the settlement of Period V and VI is based on a small-scale excavation in the courtyard of a house in the present town, and the remains that are found in this small-scale excavation include houses of kiln-burnt bricks, pottery (jar, cooking pot, bowl, handled incense burner), and glazed polychrome ware. Remains of walls made of *lakhauri* bricks and dated to the Mughal times were observed in the exposed sections of the s. mound and a kiln of the *lakhauri* bricks were also identified at the northwest corner of the n. mound. Coins of Mubarak Shah, Sultan of Delhi (died 1434 CE), and Ibrahim Lodi-II (1517-1526 CE) were discovered here⁶, which attests to the presence of a settlement at Ropar in the medieval times as well. According to a local legend, this town was founded in the 11th century CE by a king named Rokeshwar, who named it Rupnagar after his son, Rup Sen.⁷ In the light of available evidence it is not possible to ascertain the validity of this local legend.

Commenting on Periods III and IV, Y. D. Sharma records that 'Although there is no perceptible break in occupation at the end of the Mauryan rule, the new traditions in art and industry suggest that circa 200 BC may be taken as the beginning of the new period.'⁸ The division of the material remains from Ropar into Periods III and IV is artificial and it does not imply a break in occupation of the site. New ideas and people appear to have become a part of the urban population of Ropar when east Punjab came under different political powers (the Greeks followed by the Shakas, the Parthians, and the Kushanas) after the fall of the Mauryas. The townsmen of Ropar are likely to have assimilated new cultural elements into their lives without entirely relinquishing their previous artistic and cultural practices. Both continuity and change appear to have shaped the urban life of early Ropar in Periods III and IV. In excavation, a burnt-brick retaining wall of Period IIIB is found. Since this wall proceeds in a curve at the exposed ends, it is likely to have enclosed an oval-shaped reservoir and this is speculated based on an inlet through the wall, which appears to have fed the reservoir with rain-water. This wall is 3.65 meters in width and it 'has been traced to a length of 75 m [i.e., meters], beyond which it could not be followed as it lies below the present town.'⁹

River pebbles (*kankar*-stone), which could be easily procured from the riverbed of Sutlej, were used in the construction of buildings in Period III by setting them in mud-mortar. Remains of houses of mud-bricks and kiln-burnt bricks are also identified by Y. D. Sharma, according to whom, the upper level of occupation (i.e., Period III B) has yielded soak-wells lined with terracotta rings¹⁰, and these ring-lined soakage wells are found here

in clusters.¹¹ The soak-wells/ring-wells had been part of sanitary arrangements in early historical cities in India, and the 'most characteristic feature of the ring-wells is the use of terracotta rings inside a circular shaft to forestall the collapse of the sides.'¹² Similar to those ring wells that are found in Ropar, several other contemporary urban centers, for instance, Taxila (Bhir mound), Kaushambi, Prahadpur, and Ujjain, have yielded it at NBPW levels. Their distribution is noticed in a large area 'extending from Shahbazgarhi in the north-west to Arikamedu in the south and Mahasthangarh in the east.'¹³ However, the 'maximum occurrence of ring-wells is in the Ganga-Yamuna doab with a lesser concentration in the Taxila region in the northwest and the western Deccan.'¹⁴ The available archaeological remains suggest a close similarity in the town planning of Ropar with contemporary cities in the Ganga Valley and Northwest India.

Artifacts- Makers and Buyers

The ancient town of Ropar was linked to West and Central Asia through the settlements across the Sutlej in Northwest India, and the trade routes connected it to settlements in the Ganga valley. The remains of the NBPW are found at Ropar, which makes this town a part of the trans-regional trade networks that had facilitated the distribution of this pottery type from its origin center in the mid-Ganga valley (more precisely, eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar) to different parts of early India. The remains of NBPW that are found in Ropar include 'the dish with sagger base, bowl, goblet with slightly averted rim, close-fitting flanged lid with a flat terminal, spouted jar and rimless carinated cooking pot (*handi*).'¹⁵ At present, almost 1500 NBPW sites have been identified and these sites are geographically distributed from Udegram in Swat, Taxila, and Charsadda in Northwest India to Chebrolu, Amaravati, and Dharnikota in Andhra Pradesh, and from Prabhas Patan in Gujarat to Bangarh, Tamluk, and Chandrakhetugarh in West Bengal.¹⁶ NBPW is considered the hallmark of second urbanization in India by scholars, according to whom, this pottery type was a deluxe pottery and was mainly used by the aristocrats and elites of the society as tableware. This pottery was expensive and some of its remains found at Ropar, Bairat, Sonapur, and Kumrahar, are riveted by using copper wire or pins to enhance its life.¹⁷ Along with NBPW, remains of plain Red Ware (bowl, jar, dish, beaker, pot, and basin) and thick Grey Ware (dish, bowl) found in the excavation are suggested to have been produced locally.¹⁸

A large number of small antiquities of everyday use, for instance, beads, terracotta as well as metal objects are found in the excavation, and several of these small antiquities are dated to Period III. Although Sharma does

not provide much information in his reports and articles, about these antiquities of Ropar, any visitor can spot them in the Archaeological Museum at Ropar, the variety of artifacts of daily use on display includes terracotta figurines of animals and birds (elephant and humped bull), and toy carts (both animal and birds) with wheels. Dice and gamesmen that are displayed in the Museum suggest the popularity of gambling among the townsmen of Ropar in Period III. Likewise, necklaces made of a variety of beads along with artifacts made of iron, copper (including a bowl), bronze, ivory, and antlers that can be seen on display in the Museum indicate the presence of a market for these artifacts in ancient Ropar (Period III).¹⁹ The remains of terracotta figurines (females, animals), animal toys with wheels, and a terracotta dagger from Period IV are also found in the excavation. In addition, the remains of a copper figurine of a man, iron implements and a bowl, silver utensils (a cup and a spoon), a copper vase, and ivory artifacts (base of a pedestal, a seal, a stopper with a procession of elephants, combs, hair-pins, antimony rods, dice, and styli) that are discovered in excavation are dated to Period IV, and currently these all are on display in the Archaeological Museum, Ropar.²⁰

Stone artifacts (e.g., a conch, medallions) that are on display in the Museum and belong to Period IV, were either locally produced by stone-workers or were imported from other areas for sale in local markets in ancient Ropar.²¹ Several inscribed shards as well as a spouted pot and a variety of beads that would have been used to make ornaments and are discovered in excavation, have been dated to Period IV.²² Such diverse artifacts suggest the presence of expert metallurgists, ivory workers, potters, bead-makers, jewelers, and so forth in the ancient town of Ropar. The same is supported by the discovery of the remains of a smithy's workshop of Period III with traces of the manufacturing of beads of agate.²³ A small ivory seal is found inscribed with the word Bhadrapalakasa (in Sanskrit, Bhadrupalakasya, i.e. seal of the protector of the good) in the Mauryan Brahmi characters²⁴ and it suggests the likely use of Brahmi script by the townsmen of ancient Ropar. The presence of a literate class in Ropar is further supported by several terracotta sealings that are found in excavation here, and these sealings carry writings in characters of the 5th-6th centuries CE (Period IV).²⁵

Metallic currency and a coin hoard

The markets in early Ropar were well monetized, which is evident from the discovery of several Punch Marked coins and unscripted coins along with the remains of NBPW (Period III) here. In the same way, the coins of the Gana-Samghas, the Indo-Greeks, the Indo-Parthians,

the Kushanas, and the Guptas are discovered, and these are dated to Period IV (see for details, Appendix). Except for one Gupta gold coin of Chandragupta-I (circa 319-335 CE) and Kumaradevi type, all the other coins from Ropar are either silver or copper and lead. The most remarkable discovery from Period IVD is a coin hoard that contains 660 coins, which had been issued between circa 200 BCE and CE 700. This hoard contains coins of the Kushana rulers, the Gana Samghas, the Guptas, and also the Indo-Sasanian coins.²⁶ Based on this coin hoard, one can infer that the residents of ancient Ropar must have used multiple types of currency during diverse commercial transactions in the local markets. The coins with rudimentary Sasanian fire alter (Indo-Sasanian coins) and coins of the Alchon Huna rulers, viz., Toramana (circa 500-520 CE) and Mihirakula (circa 520-550 CE) are also reported from Ropar (Period IVD).²⁷ Based on the discovery of their coins from east Punjab (sites such as Ropar, Sanghol, Hoshiarpur)²⁸ and west Punjab (sites such as Taxila)²⁹, the Hunas appear to have had early Punjab in the 6th and the early 7th century CE. Contrary to earlier studies that tend to portray the Hunas as savage invaders, several recent studies have highlighted their positive role in the integration of Northwest, West, and parts of Central India in the Central Asian economic networks in the middle of the first millennium CE.³⁰

Artefacts for *Nagarakas*

One of the 64 arts that a learned townsman (*nagaraka*, i.e., man-about-town) was supposed to master, according to Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* is, 'playing musical instruments,' and music as well as singing which is prescribed as an integral part of a *nagaraka's* pleasure activities in the evening.³¹ The *Kamasutra* that is an urbane treatise par excellence characterizes a *nagaraka* as a person of knowledge, intelligence, character, and wealth: in other words, he is a person, who could afford to carefully cultivate every aspect of his personality including body, mind, spirit, senses, and etiquette.³² Worth noticing here is a reference in the *Kamasutra* to lute (*vina*) as one of the several artifacts that a *nagaraka* was supposed to keep in his house.³³ If seen in the light of the *Kamasutra*, then the *nagarakas* or townsmen of Ropar, particularly the aristocrats and elites, were likely to have been aware of the musical instruments like *vina*. They probably patronized *vina*-players, whose presence in the ancient Ropar may be speculated based on a terracotta figurine of a female *vina*-player (see Figure 1) found in the excavation. This *vina*-player is one of the most remarkable terracottas of the Gupta period (Period IVC) from Ropar, and Arundhati Banerji has described it as follows:

'With her head slightly bent down on her right, she sits gracefully with a *vina* lying between her thighs and breast in the act of playing. With her delicate fingers, she plays the strings of *vina* in a very charming style. The folds of her drapery could be seen near her feet. She sits in a very elegant manner with her legs crossed and eyes open. Modeled with an attractive coif consisting of a bun at the back, falling at her back on the shoulder... She has hair parted in the center, with a faint curl, it is slightly tied up. She appears attractive with her ornaments comprising bangles (*valaya*) and round ear stud (*kundala*). Also marked are the traces of drapery on her right arm, below her shoulder, and an upper garment ... covering only the upper part of her breasts below the shoulder bones...'³⁴

This terracotta representation of a female *vina* player exhibits the expertise of an unknown but probably a local artist, who had taken inspiration for his creation either from some real female musician or from similar artistic works of other places, or both. The *vina* represented in this terracotta figurine is a stringed musical instrument, that looks like an arch-type harp, and it contains several parallel strings.³⁵ This terracotta figurine reminds us of the Gupta monarch Samudragupta (*circa* 335-380 CE), who is depicted on his lyrist-type gold coins as *vina*-player; he is shown sitting cross-legged to left on a high-backed couch and playing on a bow-shaped harp or lute/lyre (*vina*), that lies on his knees beneath which a couch is placed on a pedestal or foot-stool.³⁶ A similar depiction in stone of a female *vina* player is found in Manasa, Mandasor (in Madhya Pradesh), and she is shown playing a bow-shaped lyre. This sculptural representation of *vina*-player is currently on display in Triveni Museum, Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, and it is dated to the 3rd century CE.³⁷ A terracotta plaque showing a man playing a lute that is housed in the British Museum³⁸ is comparable in style to the image of a *vina* player from Ropar, and this plaque is dated to the 5th century CE. Similar depictions of *vina* and *vina*-players are found in the sculptural reliefs at Bharhut (Madhya Pradesh, *circa* 200 BCE), Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh, *circa* 200 CE), and Pawaya (Madhya Pradesh, *circa* 400-600 CE).³⁹

Several decorative pieces that probably adorned the houses of *nagarakas* are found in the excavation, for instance, a few broken circular stone plaques of Period IVC are found in Ropar, and they carry quite realistic representations of elephants. One of these stone plaques also depicts a remarkable stag-hunting scene.⁴⁰ These stone plaques exhibit the artistic expertise of their makers, and one can guess the wider demand for such artistic artifacts among the aristocrats and elites of ancient Ropar, who alone could have afforded these decorative pieces. Another beautiful decorative piece (Period IVC) that is found in the excavation is a 'bronze disc, with perforated bosses at back, showing a winged

griffin', and a similar representation of a griffin can be seen on stone toilet trays found in Taxila.⁴¹ For example, a toilet tray of micaceous schist from Taxila is divided into two compartments, and a winged griffin depicted in the upper compartment exhibits Persian influence. Similar is the case with another toilet tray of micaceous steatite, which has a circular depression in the center with four compartments, and in each compartment is depicted a seated winged griffin, which stylistically exhibits Persian influence. We also have depictions of a winged lion and a fish-tailed griffin on toilet trays from Taxila.⁴² The griffin is a mythical creature that is depicted with a lion's body, curved beak, and wings of an eagle. This mythical creature is also depicted in sculptural reliefs at Sanchi, Bharhut, and Mathura, which are dated to the late centuries BCE and/or early centuries CE.⁴³ While the depiction of an eagle-headed griffin on a bronze disc is from Ropar, both eagle-headed and lion-headed griffins are shown frequently in the Sanchi reliefs.⁴⁴ The eagle-headed griffin and lion-headed griffin first appeared in the artistic works sometime in the second to the first millennium BCE in West Asia (Mesopotamia and Iran)⁴⁵, and from there they might have entered into Indian artistic works.

The presence of brahmins in early Ropar is suggested by a small bronze image of a *yajnika* brahmin, who is depicted with the sacred thread (*yajnopavita*) and a turban (Period IVB). The silver utensils, viz., ladle, spoon, and a pedestalled cup that are found in the excavation were possibly for ritual use⁴⁶, and so is the case with the stone conch, a copper vase, and a terracotta votive tank that are displayed in the Archaeology Museum, Ropar.⁴⁷ Both the spoon with a handle of the entwined rod and the pedestalled cup are unique due to their distinctive design. Unlike the silver goblets with carinated waist from Taxila, which are without handles, the pedestalled cup from Ropar (Period IVC) has a handle, and the fine chase-work on this cup exhibits subdued yet effective decoration. This pedestalled cup is similar to Hellenistic *kantaros* (drinking vessels), and noticeable here is the discovery of similar clay vessels in Ropar.⁴⁸ The drinking cups made of bronze, silver, clay as well as stone are also reported from Taxila in large numbers⁴⁹. The use of Hellenistic *kantaros* for wine drinking is well evident from the sculptural art from Gandhara, which displays bacchanalian scenes (men and women drinking wine, dancing, and making music). The Greeks followed by the Shakas and the Kushans popularized the wine drinking in Gandhara and Mathura. Wine-drinking scenes are noticed in sculptural reliefs associated with the Buddhist monuments and shrines in Gandhara, and likewise, Sanghol in east Punjab is argued to have been associated with wine production in the early centuries CE.⁵⁰

Commenting on the wine-making at Buddhist monastic establishments in Gandhara, Sanghol, and Mathura, Harry Falk argues that the worship of Yakshas and Yakshinis (particularly Hariti and Panchika) involved wine-cum-merry-making festivals. Such festivals were widely popular among people in early Northwest India, and Buddhist monasteries are argued to have hijacked the organization of these festivals to mobilize the support of the people for Sangha.⁵¹ Sanghol is at a distance of about 32 kilometers from Ropar and this neighboring town of Ropar witnessed the presence of Buddhist monastic establishments and production as well as consumption of wine in the early centuries CE.⁵² Noticeably, Sanghol like Ropar too was located in ancient times on the bank of Sutlej that has now shifted away to a distance of about 10 kilometers. Although the material remains that are found at Ropar do not throw any light upon the presence of Buddhists here, but still, we may still speculate the presence of wine-drinking among the elites (*nagarakas*) if we study the pedestalled silver cup and similar clay vessels from early Ropar in the light of the material remains connected to winemaking and consumption from contemporary urban sites in Gandhara, Sanghol, and Mathura.

Beliefs and Ritual Practices

Although the winged griffins that are found at Sanchi and Bharhut have been integrated into the religious architecture of the Buddhists, no such religious affiliation is evident in the case of the bronze disc with a winged griffin from Ropar. However, we do have several artifacts, viz., ringstones and terracottas that reveal the beliefs and ritual practices of the residents of early Ropar. Terracotta had been one of the most popular mediums of artistic expression among people in early India. According to S. K. Saraswati, 'Objects and artifacts in terracotta were intended chiefly for domestic use and worship, for household decorations, for children's toys, for popular religious and magical practices', and these were produced to satisfy the demands of the poor and the humble folks.⁵³ The association of terracotta art with poor and humble people alone in Saraswati appears to be misleading. The available material evidence suggests that both rich and poor consumed terracotta products: the rich likely preferred refined and sophisticated terracotta objects and crude and less sophisticated products were mainly available for the poor. On the other hand, Devangana Desai has associated terracotta art with second urbanization in early India, and in her view, 'Terracottas of ancient India are the art and ritual objects of an urban culture that flourished from about 600 BC to AD 600.'⁵⁴

A fragment of the ringstone, with typical Mauryan polish, is found at Ropar (see Figure 2), and it is 'minutely carved with figures and motifs associated with the cult of the goddess of fertility'⁵⁵ (Period- IIIB). The ringstone from Ropar has a hole in the center and a convex profile; it is wider at the top and smaller at the bottom. The inward-curving surface is included in the design, while the outer face as well as the inner face of the ringstone is uncarved, and the carving on this ringstone is in low relief. An aged man (ascetic?) is shown seated in front of a leafy hut (a shrine of a goddess?) with a spherical object in his hands on the ringstone from Ropar, and according to Y. D. Sharma, he is approached with a desire for progeny by a female (devotee)⁵⁶, who is heavily draped and has a long-plated pigtail. Similar types of ringstones and discs, with varied designs, are discovered at Taxila (7 examples), Patna (21 examples), Kaushambi (12 examples), Varanasi (6 examples), Mathura (6 examples), and single finds are reported from Vaishali, Chirand, Bhita, Sohgauna, Jhusi, Sankissa, Haryana and Purna Qila (Delhi). These all are roughly dated to the late centuries BCE, and despite some regional variation, the central features of all these are common throughout. The naked female figures that regularly appear on the ringstones have generally been identified as goddesses. A female is shown standing frontally on the ring-stone from Ropar, her arms are loosely hanging and her hands appear to be extended. One can notice her with a prominent coiffure and heavy circular earrings.⁵⁷ Commenting on the ringstones, F. R. Allchin says:

'...either the ringstones and discs may have been used as forms for the manufacture of repousse gold plates which could later be filled with lac, to give the impression of solid gold earrings, conveniently without the weight that would involve; or that they may have been covered with gold plate and employed in some esoteric manner connected with a cult...'⁵⁸

Allchin further adds that the ringstone series may have formed part of a religio-sexual cult, which involved the use of large earrings 'either for votive purposes or for actual wear'⁵⁹; and for manufacturing these earrings, it was told that these ringstones and discs were likely used in early India.⁶⁰ Besides a fragment of a ringstone, several terracotta figurines of women and men are found (Period IVA) in excavation, and these are generally identified as Yakshinis and Yakshas. Noticeable is a terracotta figurine of a female, who appears to be standing under a tree. She exhibits a cherubic expression and is shown with rich ornaments as well as elaborate headdresses.⁶¹ What is particularly noticeable in this female figurine is the depiction of five weapons (*ayudhas*) in her head (see Figure 3). Devangana Desai identifies her as a goddess, who may be called Panchachuda for convenience, and

the wider popularity of her cult is underlined by Desai based on her terracotta figurines that are reported from a large geographical area from Bengal to Punjab. This Panchachuda goddess is represented with her partner in plaques from Ahichchhatra and Chandraketurgarh, and in Desai's view, it suggests that 'she was a fertility goddess whose ceremonial or symbolic marriage was celebrated for the general welfare of the community and agricultural and vegetation fertility.'⁶² In the same way, a terracotta figurine of 'another vegetation goddess' with 'elaborate hair dress with palm fronds or corn sheaves' is found at Ropar, Mathura, Kaushambi, Ahichchhatra, and Rajghat.⁶³

Although the terracotta figurines that are found in Ropar were locally produced, they were manufactured following the standard of terracotta art that had developed in early historic North and Northwest India. In addition to handmade terracotta figurines, the use of the molding technique is well evident in early Ropar from the discovery of a mold and mold-casted male figurine. Noticeable here is a broken terracotta plaque (Period-IV) with the depiction of a goddess, who is seated side-saddle on a lion, and facing frontally (see Figure 4). Since the upper part of the plaque has broken off, the head of the goddess is not visible; however, the goddess appears to be dressed in Indian style and the lion is depicted almost as cat-like.⁶⁴ Based on the similar depictions of a goddess along with a lion on coins, seals, and plaques from Northwest India, Madhuvanti Ghose has identified her with an Iranian goddess Nana, who was widely popular throughout the Kushana Empire in the early centuries CE. The assimilation of Nana into the iconography of Durga is argued to have started from the late 2nd century CE onwards, and it caused Durga to take over Nana's martial role.⁶⁵ Following Ghose's study, it appears that the cult of Nana reached Ropar under the Kushana rule possibly through the new settlers including officials and perhaps traders of Central or West Asian backgrounds. By the time the Guptas came into power, the assimilation of Nana's iconography into Durga was completed, and it is well indicated by her depiction as sitting on a lion on the reverse of a gold coin of Chandragupta-I and Kumaradevi from Ropar.⁶⁶

Conclusion

When the artifacts from Ropar are analyzed in the light of identical material remains from contemporary sites in Northwest and Northern India, then these narrate a story of an urban Centre that was situated in the panoramic landscape on the left bank of river Sutlej in early historic Punjab. This was a city that thrived from the early to the late historical period despite frequent political changes

under the Mauryas, the Greeks, the Shakas, the Kushanas, the Guptas, and the Huns. Owing to its strategic location on the Uttarapatha at a place, where Sutlej could be crossed easily, this city received people, goods, and ideas from West and Central Asia via Northwest India as well as from the Ganga valley. Ropar exhibits the same urban characteristics, viz., NBPW, ring wells, use of burnt bricks, etc., that are identified by scholars as distinctive characteristics of the second urbanization in early India. Townsmen (*nagarakas*) of Ropar used a variety of objects including jewelry made of beads; artifacts made of iron, bronze, and copper; ivory and terracotta products; and different pottery types in their day-to-day lives, and they procured these artifacts either from local markets and manufacturers or through trans-regional trade networks, or both. The population of Ropar was likely to be of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and even the presence of Brahmins is indicated here by a small bronze image of a *yajnika* Brahmin. The elites of Ropar had developed a refined aesthetic taste; they were erudite and used the Brahmi script in writing. They decorated their homes with beautifully carved stone plaques and bronze discs and were aware of musical instruments (e.g., *vina*/lute/harp) and likely to have patronized music players as well as some of them who might have acquired some expertise in *vina*-playing. They possibly consumed wine, and perhaps took an active part in wine-cum-merry-making festivals, and believed in fertility cults linked with Yakshas and Yakshinis (e.g., Panchachuda goddess). They must have learned about griffins, and Iranian goddess Nana from people of West and Central Asian backgrounds, with whom they came in contact under the regimes of the Greeks, the Shakas, and the Kushanas. The markets of Ropar were well monetized, and residents of this town used multiple currency types (e.g., gold, silver, copper, and lead) in commercial transactions. To sum up, early Ropar appears to be a town that was open to new ideas, people, and goods, and people of refined aesthetic taste lived here as well as enjoyed a cosmopolitan way of life.

Notes

1. V.N. Prabhakar, and Shahida Ansari, 'Recent Archaeological Investigations of the Harappan Site of Rupnagar, Punjab', in *Puratattva- Journal of the Indian Archaeological Society*, No. 45, 2015, p. 154.
2. See, Y. D. Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Ropar', in *Lalit Kalā: A Journal of Oriental Art Chiefly Indian*, Nos. 1-2, 1955-1956, pp. 121-129; Y. D. Sharma, 'Explorations of Historical Sites', in *Ancient India: Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. 9, 1953, pp. 116-169.
3. 'Artefacts cannot exist without humans, and humans do not

- exist without artifacts. In other words, artifacts are created and used by humans, and humans do not live otherwise than using artifacts and in their active environment.' Evzen Neustupny, 'The Archaeology of Artifacts', in *Anthropologie* (1962-), Vol. 51, No. 2, 2013, p. 171.
4. See, Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Rupar', pp. 122-129; A. Ghosh, (ed.) *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology, Vol. 2: A Gazetteer of Explored and Excavated Sites in India*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989, p. 377.
 5. Ghosh, *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, pp. 379-380.
 6. Ghosh, *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, p. 381.
 7. Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by Excavations at Rupar', p. 129; Prabhakar and Ansari, 'Recent Archaeological Investigations, p. 154.
 8. Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Rupar', p. 126.
 9. Ghosh, *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, p. 380.
 10. Sharma, 'Explorations of Historical Sites', pp. 123-126.
 11. Ghosh, *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, p. 380.
 12. K. M. Shrimali, *The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution, c. 700- c. 350 BC*. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2011 fourth edition, p. 17.
 13. Shrimali, *The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution*, p. 17. See also, A. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study in association with Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1990 reprint, pp. 70-71.
 14. Shrimali, *The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution*, p. 17.
 15. Ghosh, *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, pp. 379-380.
 16. Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Delhi: Pearson, 2009, p. 260; Shrimali, *The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution*, pp. 72-75.
 17. Sharma, 'Explorations of Historical Sites', p. 119; Sachchidanand Sahay, 'Origin and Spread of the Northern Black Polished Ware', in B. P. Sinha (ed.) *Potteries in Ancient India*. Patna: The Department of Ancient Indian History & Archaeology, Patna University, 1969, p. 146.
 18. Ghosh, *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, p. 380.
 19. Based on a personal visit to the Archaeology Museum, Ropar (Punjab).
 20. Based on a personal visit to the Archaeology Museum, Ropar (Punjab).
 21. Based on a personal visit to the Archaeology Museum, Ropar (Punjab).
 22. Based on a personal visit to the Archaeology Museum, Ropar (Punjab). See also for details, Ghosh, *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, p. 380.
 23. Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Rupar', p. 125.
 24. A. Ghosh, (ed.) *Indian Archaeology 1953-54—A Review*. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1993, p. 6; Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Rupar', p. 126.
 25. Sharma, 'Explorations of Historical Sites', p. 126.
 26. For details regarding the coins found at Ropar, see: Sharma, 'Explorations of Historical Sites', pp. 123-126; Ghosh, *Indian Archaeology 1953-54- A Review*, p. 7; Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Rupar', p. 127. These coins are displayed at the Archaeological Museum, Ropar (Punjab), and some details that are not recorded by Yagya Datt Sharma in his reports are based on a personal visit of the author to the museum.
 27. In his report, Yagya Datt Sharma has placed the coins of the Huna king Mihirakula in the assemblage of Period V, and as the fifth settlement lies beneath the present town, he could not excavate a large scale. See, Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Rupar', pp. 128-129. The information about Period IV therefore is very sketchy and incomplete. On the other hand, the brochure of the Archaeological Survey of India, which was written by C. Doraji in English and translated into Hindi by Arvind Munjal, for the Archaeology Museum, Ropar dates the Huna coins to Period IV. See for details, C. Doraji, *Brochure for the Archaeology Museum, Rupar* (translated into Hindi by Arvind Munjal). Chandigarh: Archaeological Survey of India, Chandigarh Circle, 2013.
 28. Devendra Handa, 'Coins of Vidisagupta and Other Huna Rulers', in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 42, 1981, p. 671.
 29. Contrary to John Marshall, who accused the Huns of destroying Taxila, Ahmad Hasan Dani argues that 'the evidence about the Hun invasion [of Taxila] is hardly conclusive and even less so when it is applied to the whole group of the Buddhist monasteries.' In Dani's view, although the Hun invasion did happen, it did not destroy Taxila, which remained occupied and came under the Hindu Shahis in subsequent centuries. See for details, Ahmad Hasan Dani, *The Historic City of Taxila*. Paris: UNESCO, and Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1986, pp. 75-78. Here it is noticeable that the Kidara rulers, who have been identified as Kushanas by Dani, were actually a branch of the Huns, and they were followed by the Alchon Huns in Northwest India in the 5th century CE. See for details: Hans T. Bakker, *The Alkhan: A Hunnic People in South Asia*. Barkhuis: Groningen, 2020, pp. 9-28.
 30. See for details, Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011, pp. 159-170; Bakker, *The Alkhan: A Hunnic People in South Asia*, pp. 79-80; Ashish Kumar, 'The Huns ('Hunas') in India: A Review', in *Studies in People's History*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2021, pp. 182-196; Ashish Kumar, *Beyond Borders: Indo-Sasanian Trade and Its Central Indian Connections (Circa CE 300-700)*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 40-46, 58-60.
 31. Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar, (eds. & trans.) *Vatsyayana Mallanaga, Kamasutra: A new, complete English translation of the Sanskrit text*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 14-15, 18.

32. Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010, pp. 131-135.
33. Doniger and Kakar, *Vatsyayana Mallanaga, Kamasutra*, pp. 17-18.
34. Arundhati Banerji, 'Unique Vina-player from Ropar', in Arundhati Banerji (ed.) *Ratnasri: Gleanings from Indian Archaeology, Art History and Indology (Papers Presented in Memory of Dr. N. R. Banerjee)*. New Delhi: Kaveri Books, 2015, p. 133.
35. Banerji, 'Unique Vina-player from Ropar', p. 134.
36. Radha Kumud Mookerji, *The Gupta Empire*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2017 fourth reprint, p. 35.
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40. Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Ropar', p. 126.
41. Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Ropar', p. 127.
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46. See also for details, Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Ropar', pp. 126-127.
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48. Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Ropar', pp. 126-127; Ghosh, *An Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, p. 381.
49. Marshall, *Taxila*, Vol. II: Minor Antiquities, pp. 416-417, 492, 589-590, 612. See for illustrations, Plate 124 and 129 (pottery), 143 (stone objects), and 174 (copper, bronze, and lead objects) in Marshall, *Taxila*, Vol. III: Plates.
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55. Sharma, 'Explorations of Historical Sites', p. 123; Ghosh, *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. 2, p. 380.
56. Sharma, 'Past Patterns in Living as unfolded by excavations at Ropar', p. 125.
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APPENDIX

Coins Found in Excavation at Ropar

PERIOD III (CIRCA 600-200 BCE): Copper bar coins; Punch Marked coins of copper, silver, and cast coins of silver.

PERIOD IV (CIRCA 200 BCE- 700 CE): Indo-Greeks: Antialcidas, circa second half of the 200 BCE; a clay mould prepared from a coin of Apollodotus-II, circa 100 BCE; 'Nameless' Indo-Parthian king with the title, Soter Megas, circa CE 100; Coins with Taxila symbols (circa 100 BCE-CE 100); Shaka-Kshatrapas: Hagamasha and Rajuvula (circa 100 BCE-CE 100) rulers of Mathura; Gana-Samgha coins: Audumbaras, Kunindas, Yaudheyas (late centuries BCE- early centuries CE); Kushanas: Vima Kadphises, Kanishka-I (circa 78-101 CE), Huvishka (circa 106-138 CE), Vasudeva (circa 142/5-176 CE); Guptas: gold coin of Chandragupta I (circa 319-335 CE), and copper coins of Chandragupta II (circa 380-414 CE); Alchon Huns: coins of Toramana (circa 500-520 CE) and Mihirakula (circa 520-550 CE); Coins with rude Sasanian fire alter (Indo-Sasanian coins).



Figure 1: Terracotta figurine of a *Vina*-Player from Ropar (Archaeological Museum, Ropar, Punjab)



Figure 2: Terracotta Ringstone with Mauryan polish from Ropar (Archaeological Museum, Ropar, Punjab)



Figure 3: Terracotta figurine of Panchachuda goddess from Ropar (Archaeological Museum, Ropar, Punjab)



Figure 4: Terracotta figurine of Iranian goddess Nana from Ropar (Archaeological Museum, Ropar, Punjab)

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