

TWO ENGRAVED GEMS WITH COMBINATION MONSTERS FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract

The article describes two engraved gems from Cambodia. The first is a rock-crystal perforated stamp-seal with a convex back – a distinctive type which has been found at Oc Eo and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The surface is engraved with a *makara* and it is tentatively dated to the 7th century AD or later. The second gem, set in a large gold ring, is a flat dark brown sard or onyx ringstone engraved with a *gana* or Ganesha/horse combination and probably dates to about the 9th or 10th century AD. The seals illustrate motifs which are found on Khmer stone lintels in Cambodia and Thailand.

Introduction

The two gems described below were acquired in Bangkok and are said to have come from Cambodia. They form part of a large collection but, as they are of exceptional interest and quality, it seemed worthwhile describing them separately. The first (Figure 1) is a rock crystal stamp-seal, perforated for suspension, which has a *makara* engraved on the flat surface in intaglio. The second (Figure 4) is a large filled gold finger ring, set with a dark sard intaglio, showing an elephant-headed creature (possibly a *gana* or Ganesha) riding his own trunk which turns into a horse. Both are variations on motifs which appear on stone lintels in Thailand and Cambodia.

The *Makara* (Figure 1)

This rock crystal pointed ovoid stamp-seal has the intaglio engraved on a raised flat oval surface measuring 25.5 x 22.0mm. It has a convex back rising to a ridge running along its length and a wide perforation (c.7-8mm diam.) across its width. The overall measurements of the gem are: length 33 x width 26 x depth 17mm. It weighs 15.4g. There is one chip on the right-hand point, and another on the back which runs from the edge up to the perforation. The whole surface has a matt finish – possibly caused by burial.

The rock crystal gem group

Most examples belong to a distinctive group of rock crystal stamp-seals (as well as different types of intagli found so far in Indochina). Most are recorded as coming from Oc Eo in South Vietnam, but others have turned up on various sites in Cambodia and Thailand – that is, in the main areas where the Funan kingdom (1st century AD to c.AD 550) had extended its territories. Oc Eo is believed to have been a port in the Mekong Delta for the Funan kingdom and an important trading centre on the maritime route for Indian, Chinese and later Persian ships engaging in commerce round the Indian Ocean (see Briggs 1951: 12ff.).

These rock crystal ovoid (or 'coniforme') seals are described by Louis Malleret (1951: 189-99, pl.46.8.14, pl.47.7,9-10 (= Malleret 1962: 275ff., pl.71 nos.1296-98, pl.72 nos.1299-1300; Malleret 1952: 349-58, pl.40.3-5; Malleret 1963: 99-116, pl.3.5-6, pl.4.1-3). Malleret suggests that the form of these rock crystal seals (Figure 2b) was adapted from the natural mineral structure of flattened bipyramidal prismatic rock crystals (Figure 2a), and in order to economise both on work and material the gem cutter had little more to do than to round off the apex and the angles where the faces of the crystal meet (Malleret 1952: 356-7, figs.39 and 40; Malleret

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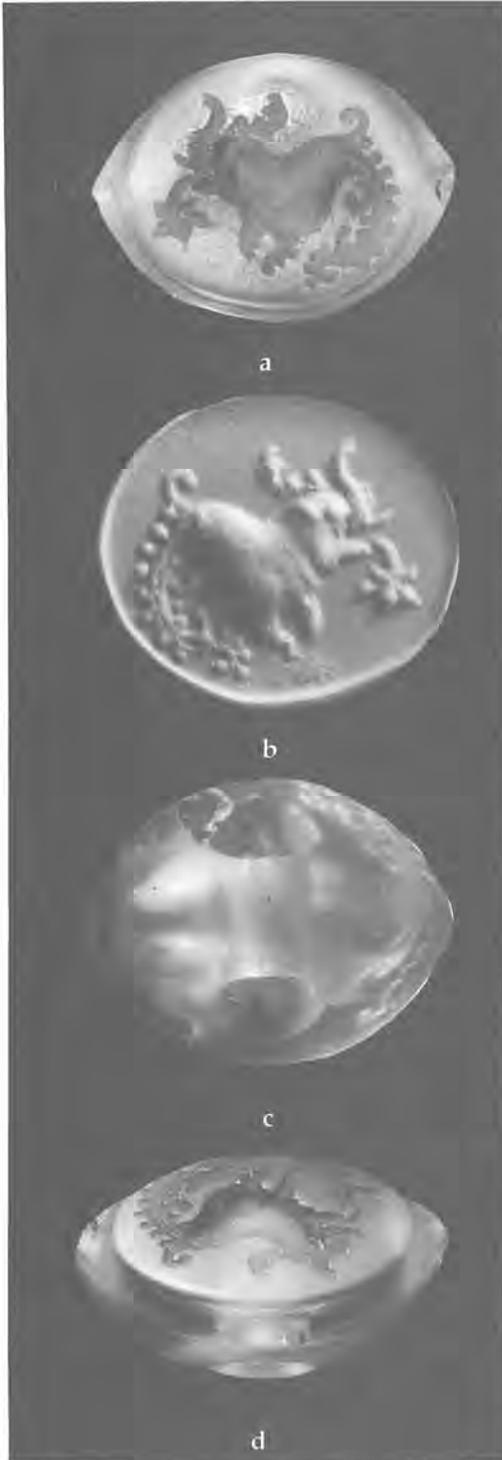


Figure 1. *Makara* – rock crystal stamp-seal (c.7th century AD?) 33 x 26 mm x 17 mm high – a) Intaglio face, b) impression, c) back view, d) side

1962: 187-8, 193-5, fig.40). But they also reflect the shape of finger rings: compare the similar profile of the gold finger ring described here with its heavy shoulders and raised bezel (Figure 4) which resembles rings of Hellenistic type (Figure 5a) as well as a ring made entirely of rock crystal from Wat Pra Pathom in Bangkok Museum, Figure 2c (Malleret 1963: pl.4.1-3) and the bronze ring with intaglio from Cambodia, Figure 2d (Malleret 1952: 357, fig.40).

In Cambodia early gems (sometimes reset) were placed with later objects in sacred deposits under the foundations of temples and *sema* boundary stones – see for example the rock crystal ovoids excavated at Chhba Ampu pagoda, Kien Svay Province, and at Phnom Bakheng, Angkor (Malleret 1952: 351, 353, pl.40.4-5; Malleret 1963: 100). Although the original significance and function of these seals was probably forgotten, they were regarded as precious objects. Elsewhere clay impressions from seals appear to have been sometimes used as *ex voto* offerings.

Two motifs seem especially popular and turn up several times on rock crystal seals from Oc Eo and Cambodia: there are three zebras and five examples of a frontal seated figure – perhaps a noble or a king – in the *maharajalilasana* or ‘royal ease’ position (Malleret 1951: pl.46. 8,14, pl.47. 7, 9, 10; Malleret 1952: pl.40. 3, 4, 5). Two seals from Thailand belonging to this group have more unusual motifs: one seal shows a standing figure holding a branch; another intaglio on a ring, Figure 2c, made entirely of rock crystal (and with a shape which relates it to this group) shows a fish with a piece of seaweed or foliage emerging from its mouth (Malleret 1963: pl.3. 5-6 and pl.4. 1-3). An impression of a ship was possibly also made by a seal of this shape – Malleret 1963: pl. 5.10.

Malleret thinks the figure seated in *maharajalilasana* position on the seals may represent the ruler of Funan. A passage describing the customs of Funan in the *History of the Liang Dynasty* (AD 502-556) says that ‘When the king sits down, he squats on one side, raising the right knee, letting the

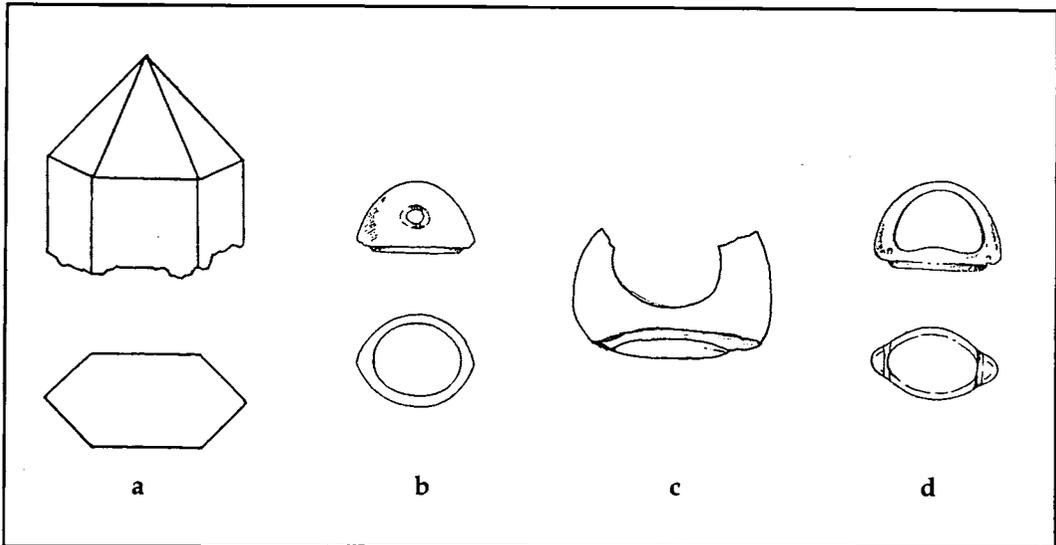


Figure 2a Flattened bi-pyramidal prismatic rock crystal (Malleret 1952: 356, fig.39)

Figure 2b Profile and face view of rock crystal stamp-seal (Malleret 1952: 357, fig.40)

Figure 2c Profile view of rock crystal ring from Wat Pra Pathom, Bangkok Museum (after Malleret 1963: pl.4.1)

Figure 2d Profile of bronze ring with intaglio from Cambodia (Malleret 1952: 357, fig.40)

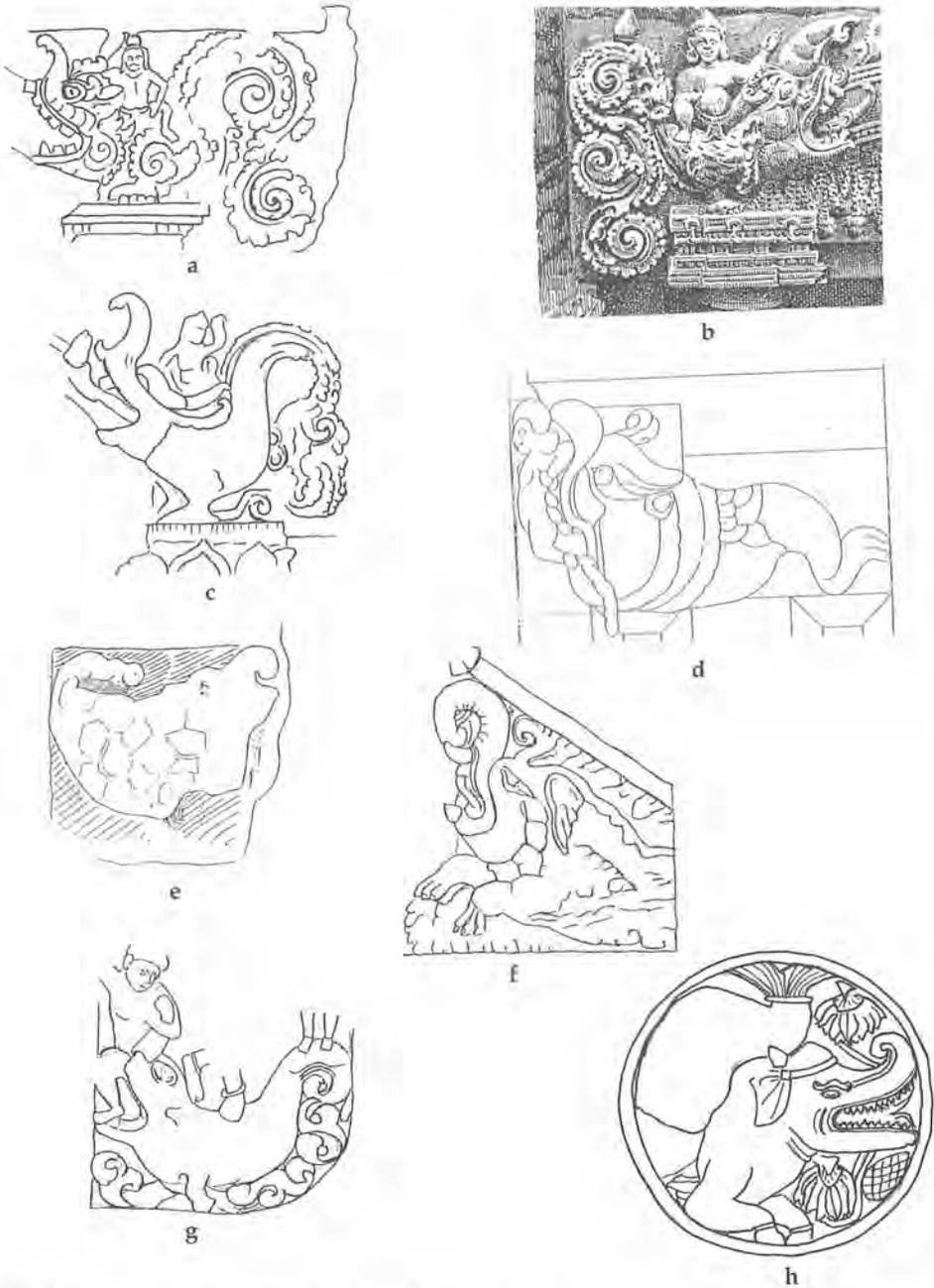
left knee touch the earth. A piece of cotton is spread before him, on which are deposited the gold vases and incense burners' (Briggs 1951: 29; Malleret 1951: 192). Malleret points out that the figure on the seals fits this description and also that a number of bronze amulets from Oc Eo show the same seated figure with objects in front of him which possibly represent the vases described. On the reverse of these amulets there is often a hump-backed bull and Malleret suggests a possible connection between the motifs on the two sides (Malleret 1960: 337-8, nos. 669-72, pl.110. 3 & 4); a rock crystal amulet has these motifs on either side.¹

Before the introduction of the cult of Shiva into Southeast Asia, the zebu or hump-backed bull could have been a symbol of kingship and power as it was in India until the 4th-5th centuries AD (Malleret 1951: 192-3). If Malleret's theory is correct (and the seated figure represents the ruler of Funan) it would help support a Funanese provenance and date for at least a number of these rock crystal seals. Malleret points out that a number of unfinished ringstones at Oc Eo probably indicate a local gem engraving

industry (Malleret 1962: 278). Although several of these seals have the same motif, the iconography of the group as a whole is eclectic and the quality of engraving seems uneven; the common factor is their shape and material (Figure 1a, c-d, Figure 2b).¹

The *makara* (Figure 1a-b) faces to the right (in impression) with his trunk raised and the tip turned forward; he has a short tusk, two or three large teeth and a crest-like scroll of foliage on the top of his head; a lotus flower hangs out of his mouth; he has a small ear and small round eye; his unpatterned body is heavy and smooth with three thick folds on his chest; he has short front legs with three-clawed feet; his scroll-like tail trails underneath him; the point where the tail emerges from the body is marked by a ring and a small volute curling forward.

Rock crystal (quartz, SiO₂; Hardness scale 7) is particularly difficult to work and the slightly rough and pitted surface inside the motif suggests that it was hollowed out by micro-chipping, a method which was used in Western Asia for thousands of years from c.3000 BC (Sax and Meeks 1995: 28-9). The engraving is of high quality and there ap-



Figures 3a-h Makaras - on lintels and other reliefs:

- 3a Lintel, Prasat Khao Noi (7th century AD), Thailand (after Smitthi et al. 1992: 81)
- 3b Lintel, Prasat Dap (7th century AD), Cambodia (Parmentier 1927: 265, fig.82)
- 3c Lintel, Sambor Prei Kuk, N.21 (7th century AD), Thailand (Benisti 1970: fig.69)
- 3d Corner of building, Wat Pra Pathom (7th century AD), Thailand (Dupont 1959: Figure E)
- 3e Laterite pond relief, Dong Si Maha Pot, (c.7th century AD or earlier?), Thailand (Lajonquière 1909: 214, fig.10)
- 3f Jain Temple relief, Aihole (Western Chalukya, 8th century AD), India (after Sivaramamurti 1983: fig.115)
- 3g Lintel, Beshnagar (Gupta, c.AD 500), India (after Vogel 1929-30: pl.35c)
- 3h Elephant-fish, Bharut (2nd century BC), India (after Viennot 1954: pl.1)

pears to be more detailing than on other seals in this group (see Malleret 1951-63 and the earlier references). The *makara's* large body has been carefully hollowed out to show a powerful shoulder and the folds on its neck; a round drill has been used for 'a *globolo*' details of the tail and eye.

The *makara* is a mythical marine monster which seems to have had its origin in India but is found in numerous variations and 'mix and match' combinations over a vast area in time and space. During its later development in India (i.e. in the early centuries AD) it was influenced by the Greek *ketos*, a different marine monster from the west (Boardman 1986: 447ff.), while later, elements of its iconography were to influence art as far east as China. In the early centuries of the Christian era the *makara* motif spread from India to Southeast Asia where it became extremely popular on lintels of the 7th century AD. They are closely related to Indian post-Gupta types but certain characteristics developed locally.

Early Indian examples have been shown to derive mainly from the elephant and the crocodile (Viennot 1954: 190). J.P. Vogel (1929-30) makes a distinction between the elephant-fish (or *jaleba*) and the true *makara* (*magara* or crocodile in Sanskrit, and *magar* in Hindi) which is closer to the crocodile. However, divisions are often not clear-cut. Both types appear at Amaravati in about the 3rd century AD, but the crocodile type was to become the more popular model in India.

The *makara* on this seal is unusual. It combines both the 'elephant-fish' and crocodile types of *makara* in more or less equal proportions but is not very close (to my knowledge) to any one extant example in India or Southeast Asia. It shows a number of both Indian and Khmer features which appear on reliefs and lintels of varying styles and dates in India and Southeast Asia.

Early wooden buildings have disappeared and few *makara* seem to have survived on small objects. Only a terracotta fragment and a bronze lamp in the form of a *makara* have been recorded from Oc Eo – neither similar to this example (Malleret

1959: pl.73b; 1960: pl.90). One is, therefore, confined to making comparisons with *makara* on surviving stone lintels, reliefs and other architectural fragments in India and Southeast Asia. In an architectural context the *makara* has a precise decorative and functional purpose and therefore their portrayal on buildings is restricted to some extent by convention and the space to be filled; they conform to a number of types and can be grouped into distinctive styles – but they do show considerable variations in detail. *Makara* also decorated other objects, including jewellery, and so gem engravers must have had a variety of models to copy and interpret as they wished.

Benisti (1970: 18ff.) has compared in detail characteristics of *makara* as they appear on lintels in Indian and Khmer art. This example superficially resembles some *makara* on early Khmer lintels in Thailand and Cambodia of about the 7th century AD. One can compare, for example, Figure 3a from Prasat Khao Noi (Smitthi et al. 1992: 81); Figure 3b from Prasat Dap (Parmentier 1927: 265, fig. 82; Benisti 1974: fig. 22); Figure 3c from Sambor Prei Kuk, N.21 (Benisti 1970: fig. 69).

The heavy triangular body-shape of the *makara* on the seal is similar to a 7th century AD example (Figure 3d) on the corner of a building at Wat Pra Pathom (Dupont 1959: Fig. E and p.82) – and although the *makara* here has scales, a fish tail and no trunk, it also has a scroll on top of its head. Fragmentary *makara* of about the same date (Figure 3e) as the last example are among the relief carvings on the laterite wall of the pond at Dong Si Maha Pot (Lajonquière 1909: 214, fig.10; and Phiraphon Phitsanuphong 1993: 101-28)². Most *makara* on lintels in the Sambor Prei Kuk style (Figs. 3a-c) are more stylised, have heavily patterned bird-shaped bodies suggesting scales or feathers – unlike the smooth body and naturalistic appearance of the creature on the gem. However, confronting 8th century AD elephant-like *makara* in a Western Chalukyan style Jain temple at Aihole are perhaps more comparable (Figure 3f): their bodies, less patterned, fit into a triangular space, they have similar small

legs with three-clawed feet, longish trunks and a tusk – but their foliate tails are very different (Sivaramamurti 1983: fig.115; compare also fig.116 where the tail coils round under the *makara*).

The *makara* on the seal has a long elephant trunk turned forward and a tusk or incisor (like those in the Sambor Prei Kuk style and the Indian examples Figs.3a-c,f). This type of trunk (rather than the earlier curled back variety) seems to have first appeared towards the end of the Amaravati period in about the 3rd century AD (Viennot 1954: pl.4.5) and continues in the Gupta art of the Ajanta caves and Northern India (c.4th-5th century AD).

The scroll on top of its head is unusual and most resembles the scrolls over the eyes of *makara* on the Khmer lintels (Figure 3a) in the Sambor Prei Kuk style (mid 7th century AD) at Prasat Khao Noi in Thailand, (Smitthi et al.1992: 81) or the rather similar example (Figure 3b) in the same style at Prasat Dap in Cambodia. Other examples are slightly different and have scrolls growing out of large round eyes (Marchal 1951: 39, fig. 56, Sambor Prei Kuk) or the horn-like feature over their eyes (Benisti 1970: fig. 96, Thala Borivat). Indian examples with horns and scrolls are fewer and not very similar. Compare Benisti (1970: fig.214, Sivalaya Temple Badami; fig.199, Cave 3, Kanheri) – here the *makara* appears to have feathery tufts behind its eye; sometimes the scrolls appear to function more as background filling motifs, for example at Aihole (Figure 3f) (Sivaramamurti 1983: fig.115).

On Khmer lintels the *makara* are usually planted firmly on the ground on large feet which support their heavy bodies. Here the feet (Figure 3f) are small in comparison but resemble those on a lintel of the upper temple at Shivalaya, Badami, 7th century AD (?) (Benisti 1970: fig.214) or the 7th and 8th century Jain examples at Aihole (Figure 3f).

Early *makara* had a fish tail. The foliate tail first appeared in India in about the 6th century AD and became very common in Southeast Asia. Indian influences had reached Southeast Asia in the early centu-

ries AD but seem to have been greatest during the 6th century AD when the foliate tail was introduced (see Coral Rémusat 1934: 247).

The frond-like appearance of this tail is perhaps a simplified version of the Sambor Prei Kuk, or Prasat Dap style tails (Figures 3a-c). There is also one of similar style in Cave 27 at Ajanta (Benisti 1970: fig.167). The round drill holes in the seal give the same effect as the dentil edges of the sculpted versions. On Khmer lintels, however, *makara* never have pendant foliate tails, and only seldom do the tails fall below the level of the creature's feet as they do at Prasat Khao Noi and Prasat Dap (Figures 3a-b). The tail of the *makara* on the seal trails underneath its body – more like the tail on an early 6th century AD Gupta *makara* at Beshnagar, but there the large scrolls are very different in style (Figure 3g) (Vogel 1929-30: pl.35c). Quadrupe-d horned monsters, though, have similar tails scrolling in two rows of small volutes underneath them on a 9th century AD Pratihara period temple at Nachna (Snead et al. 1989: 190, pl.170).

Although this elephant-like *makara* has no elephant feet or fish tail and its ears are rather small, it shows several features which recall the much earlier elephant-fish types at Bharhut and Sanchi. It has a heavy smooth body, folds under its chin and even a ring round its tail like the example on the 2nd century BC medallion from Bharhut (Figure 3h) (Viennot 1954: pl.1.3; also pl.1.2,4). Like the elephants at Bharhut it carries a lotus flower in its mouth (Vogel 1929-30: fig.1). The association between elephants, lotuses and water is referred to again on these early reliefs where elephant-fish have lotus tendrils growing out of their mouths, Figure 3h (Viennot 1954: pl.1). A true elephant fish appears on a 2nd-1st century BC Indian black steatite stamp seal in the British Museum (AF 318).

There appear to be no surviving close prototypes (to my knowledge) for this eclectic *makara* combination. The main indicators, therefore, for a date and context for this gem are the shape and material of the seal



Figure 4. *Gana*/horse combination or Ganesha? – Sard intaglio set in a gold ring (c.9th or 10th century AD?) a. Intaglio face (ht. 29 x diam. 30 x shoulder 37mm). b. Impression (scale: x 3) c. & d. Profile views of ring (29 x 23mm)

itself, and the *makara's* foliate tail. If, as Malleret suggests, this distinctive group of rock crystal seals can be placed in a Funanese context (i.e. between the 1st century AD and 500 AD), and as foliate tails on *makara* do not appear in India earlier than the 6th century AD, this seal could perhaps be tentatively dated at the earliest to about the 6th or 7th century AD.

A *Gana* or Ganesha/Horse Combination

This black-brown sard or onyx (quartz, SiO₂; Hardness c.6.5) ringstone intaglio (Figure 4) has a flat face and bevelled edge and measures 29 x 23mm; it is set in a filled gold ring and the overall measurements are: ht.29 x diam.30 x 37mm across the widest point at

the shoulder. It weighs 23.9g. The hoop is plano-convex in section but forms a ridge on the outside as it expands upwards towards the shoulder which finishes in a small point where it joins the bezel. The oval intaglio is set in a gold band above the level of the pointed oval bezel.

A *Gana*-like figure (half elephant, half dwarf) with pointed foot rides to the left (in impression) on his own trunk which has turned into a horse's body underneath him (Figure 4a-b). The *gana* has two tusks – the far one pointing upwards; he has both hands raised above his head holding a tendril(?) which follows the contour of the gem and frames the motif. He appears to wear only a belly band with two tails flying out behind, rather than the more usual *sampot* (no pleats

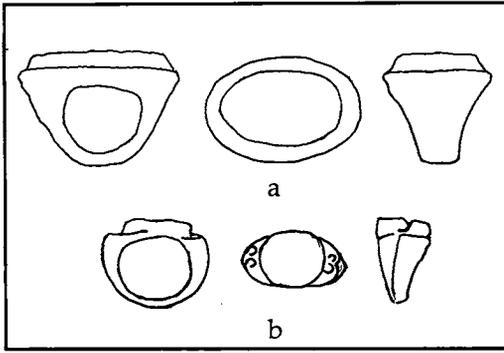


Figure 5a Views of 3rd-1st century BC Greco-Roman ring, (after Henkel 1913: pl.44, no.1101). **Figure 5b** Views of 3rd century AD Roman ring (after Henkel 1913: pl.11, no.220).

or hem are visible). The headless horse kicks its right front leg in the air and vegetation sprouts from its chest.

The size and shape of this ring (Figure 4c-d) is reminiscent of large rings of Hellenistic and Greco-Roman type of c.3rd-1st century BC, Figure 5a (Henkel 1913: pl.44, no.1101) and compare also a later 3rd century AD Roman ring with raised bezel and hoop with central ridge, Figure 5b (Henkel 1913: pl.11, no.220) but its profile, the pointed oval of the setting, the ridge on the shoulder and the raised oval bezel also relate it closely to the shape of the rock crystal stamp seal group and related rings described here, Figures 2b-d (see Malleret 1952: 357, fig.40 for profiles; Malleret 1963: pl.4.1-3).

The gem is in excellent condition and of a high quality. The lively and pleasing composition and skilled engraving are an indication that techniques learnt much earlier in India from the west had not been forgotten. Wheel drills of different sizes have probably been used for hollowing out the large areas and a bouterolle or round drill for 'a globolo' details of vegetation. Traces of the final polishing are shown in fine striations following the contours of the body. The style of the elephant's head and torso on the ringstone resembles early sculptures of Ganesha in mainland Southeast Asia and the engraving shows a similar naturalism and simplicity. Like the early examples the elephant on the

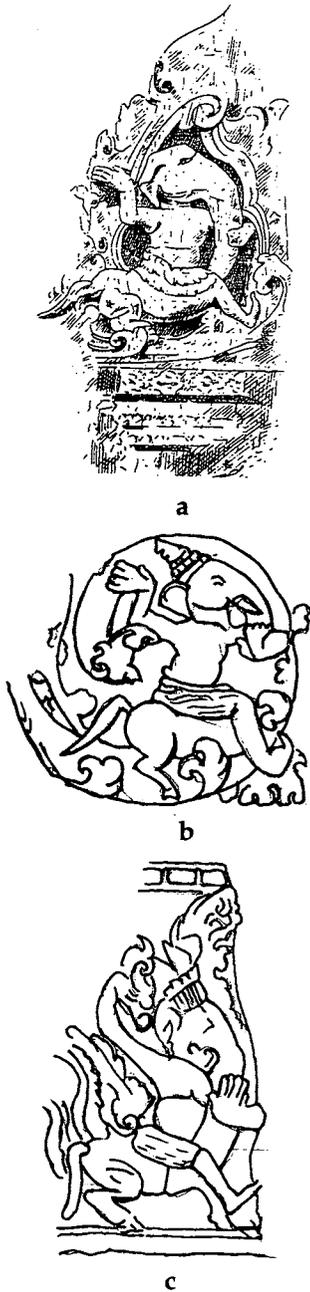
gem has a high-domed head which is joined to its body without a neck; the transition is shown instead by a plain band representing a roll of flesh (see Brown 1991: 171-233, and compare especially the statues of Ganesha which date from the late 6th to 8th century AD – figs.1, 2 and 18).

Indian images of Ganesha comparable with those from Cambodia and Thailand date from about the 5th century AD or earlier and so pre-date the Southeast Asian versions by about 150 to 200 years. Southeast Asian figures of Ganesha (like the *gana*/horse combination on lintels) usually wear the *sampot* unlike their Indian counterparts who are shown unclothed (Brown 1991: 172-6 and compare figs. 8 and 9; fig. 8 shows Ganesha (Mathura Mus. no.758) wearing only a serpent belt, reminiscent of the belly band worn by the *gana* on the gem).

The monster combination on this ringstone is a version of a motif which (like the *makara*) appears on stone lintels in Cambodia and Thailand. *Ganas* (dwarf-like figures) were servants of the god Ganesha, but this *gana*/horse combination – rather like a centaur – does not appear, to my knowledge, in India and is most probably an indigenous creation. These lively monsters gallop amongst scrolls of foliage at either end of lintels – sometimes turning into foliage or with only part of the horse's body shown. The *gana* on the ring is a freer version of these monsters; he is shown in humorous fashion skittishly kicking a leg in the air and appears to fend off an invading tondril (rather as dancing Ganesha holds a serpent over his head) – but vegetation is taking over and sprouting from his chest.

These elephant-headed riders or *ganas* occur quite often on Khmer lintels in Cambodia and Thailand, but until 1971 (see Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: 170-81³) they had been seldom mentioned and seldom illustrated. There has been some uncertainty over the identity of these figures and they have been variously described as fanciful creations, *ganas* or even Ganesha himself. For example:

a) Lajonquière illustrates 'cette figure de



Figures 6a-c Lintel reliefs showing the *Gana*/ horse combination:
 6a 'figure de *monstre fantastique*' (c.9th century AD?), Phum Prasat (no.568), Cambodia (Lajonquière 1911: 256, fig.76)
 6b '...l'*éléphant (Ganesa?)*' Mébon Oriental (10th century AD) Angkor, Cambodia (after Jacques 1990: 75)
 6c *Gana*, Prasat Muang Khaek (9th-10th century AD), Thailand (after Smitthi et al. 1992: 94)

monstre fantastique' on a fragment of a lintel (c.8th-9th century AD) from Phum Prasat (no.568) in Khet Siemreap, about 30km east of Angkor, Figure 6a (Lajonquière 1911: 256, fig.76), and describes another nearby at Prasat Khla Kraham (254, no.566).

b) Parmentier, describing the Mébon Oriental (AD 952) at Angkor, refers briefly to the motif remarking that '*Ces linteaux offrent le curieux personnage à tête d'éléphant chevauchant sa trompe, spirituel motif qui met un peu de fantaisie parfois dans la monotonie de l'art classique*' (Parmentier 1919: 62, n.1). Figure 6b shows an example from the Mébon Oriental illustrated in Jacques 1990: 75 as '*Éléphant (Ganesa?)*'; Lohuizen de Leeuw 1973: fig.145).

c) Boisselier (1966: 298, n.3) noted that the elephant-headed *gana* (which he says should not be confused with Ganesha) appeared to have been popular at Preah Ko (c.875-893 AD), Bakheng (c.893-935 AD), and Pre Rup (947-965 AD) in Cambodia and drew attention to the '*curieux arrangements de nombreux linteaux où le gana chevauche sa trompe transformée plus ou moins complètement en cheval aux extrémités de la branche*'.

In Thailand the same *gana*/horse combination motif is also found on either end of stone lintels: at Prasat Muang Khaek in Koh Ker style, c.940 AD, Figure 6c (Smitthi et al. 1992: 93-4 (illus.); Suksvasti 1988: 34-5; Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: fig.147). These Khmer *gana* figures from Cambodia and Thailand resemble each other quite closely, gesture in more or less the same way and occupy the same position on the lintels; some, though, lack front legs or have hands dissolving into foliage. Of these examples, only the *gana* from Phum Prasat, Figure 6a (Lajonquière 1911: no.568, fig.76) and another on a lintel dated to about the mid 10th century from Baksei Chamkrong (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: figs.142-4) are bareheaded like the one on the ring; all the others wear diadems.

J. E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw believes the elephant-rider combination 'is obviously meant to represent Ganesa' (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: 177) and illustrates a lintel from

the region of Battambang which explains the origin of the motif: 'a normal Ganesha riding a normal horse' (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: 180-1, fig.148). The horse (*asva*) is numbered among Ganesha's mounts; Ganesha is described in the *Ganeshapurana* as riding a blue horse in his incarnation as *Dhumraketa* (Martin-Dubost 1997: 231, 234, 242). However, apart from their elephant forms, these riding figures on lintels appear to have none of

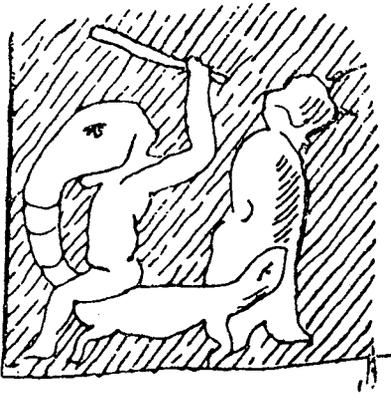


Figure 7. Elephant-headed monster wielding a baton and riding a tortoise? Prah Theat Prah Srei (no.114) (c.9th century AD) Cambodia (Lajonquière 1902: 145, fig.97; and Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: 177, fig.146).

Ganesha's attributes – except perhaps the example from Baksei Chamkrong if he brandishes an *ankusa* rather than stick or baton as the author suggests (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: 177-8, figs.143-4). A lintel at Prah Theat Prah Srei in Thbong Province shows a related motif: an elephant-headed monster wielding a baton and also riding its own trunk; but here the trunk turns into a turtle which has its head at the rear, Figure 7 (Lajonquière 1902: 145, no.114, fig.97); van Lohuizen de Leeuw suggests that Lajonquière's sketch is inaccurate and that he mistook the horse's tail here for a turtle's head (Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: 177, fig.146). It seems probable that the elephant-rider/horse combination (which must have developed from the *gana* or Ganesha riding a normal horse) is intended to represent Ganesha.

The iconography of Ganesha underwent various changes in Cambodia and indigenous inventions appeared which do not seem to occur in India – such as the divine triad with Shiva on a lion, Skanda on a peacock and Ganesha on an elephant (Indra's vehicle) carved on a 10th century AD stone stele (Brown 1991: 184-5, fig.20); and then, in a later development, on two small bronze triads (dated 12th and 13th century AD) Ganesha is shown in pure human form riding his elephant (Brown, *ibid.*, figs.22-3). In India he usually rides a rat but he has a number of other vehicles, including the elephant and horse (Martin-Dubost 1997: 231).

The *gana* or Ganesha/horse combination often appears on the ends of lintels in association with Indra as the central motif on his (usually three-headed) elephant, Airavata; or with Vishnu Vamanavata on a lintel at Prasat Muang Khaek (Smitthi et al. 1992: 93). It seems that the characters on the lintels (as well as the motif on the ring) might be linked to one variant of the myth which describes how Ganesha received the head of Airavata, Indra's elephant (*Brahmavaivarta Purana* 3.20.57-61)⁴. In this story Indra incurs the wrath of the sage Durvasas (an incarnation of Shiva) by throwing the *parijata* flower (which Durvasas had just given him) over Airavata's head. As a result Airavata becomes wild and rushes off into the jungle abandoning Indra. Vishnu then cuts off the head of Airavata and places it on Ganesha's body. The *parijata* flower is said to 'remove all obstacles ... whoever wears it shall be worshipped as the best among the gods.' By receiving Airavata's head which had been touched by the obstacle-removing *parijata* flower, the powers which once belonged to Indra were transferred to Ganesha (see Courtright 1985: 37-8).

The plant which the *gana* or Ganesha/horse combination holds over his head on the ring is difficult to identify. A number of flowers and fruits are mentioned as attributes of Ganesha but not, to my knowledge, the *parijata* flower⁵ (cf. Martin-Dubost 1997: 191-7) although he is associated with it in the version of the myth recounted above. Could

the plant here be a stylised and simplified representation of the *parijata* flower; perhaps a local addition to Ganesha's attributes based on the myth? If so, it could be considered as a symbol of the transference of power from Indra to Ganesha. Or is he just fending off the invading foliage?

Just as Ganesha sometimes rides Indra's elephant vehicle, so the *gana* or Ganesha/horse combination sometimes holds Indra's truncheon (see Suksvasti 1987: 86-7; and compare Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973: figs.142-4, 146). Indra, an ancient Vedic god was 'Hurler of the Thunderbolt', and god of the sky and rain. It has been pointed out that Indra as the rain-giver had a particularly important place in Khmer culture – especially in the arid areas of Cambodia and Northeast Thailand. The links between Ganesha, Indra and the *gana*/horse combination seem clear; and if the tendril on the intaglio represents the *parijata* flower, it would support the theory that the elephant-rider/horse combination is intended to represent Ganesha.

On both the rock crystal stamp-seal (Figure 1) and on this ringstone it appears there is an allusion to the association between the elephant, water and fertility. The lintels with the *gana* or Ganesha/horse combinations⁶ are dated to the 9th and 10th centuries AD and perhaps a similar date should be suggested for the ring.

Notes

1. A number of ovoid (as well as conoid) rock crystal perforated stamp-seals with convex backs from Ta Keo (Ta Kev) have recently come to my notice. These gems appear related to the distinctive group described here but should perhaps be dated slightly later. They are similar in shape but none has the intaglio on a raised oval surface surrounded by a bevelled or stepped edge (described by Malleret as an 'étroit chanfrein antérieur') which is usual on the rock crystals from Oc Eo; also, edges round the engraved surfaces and the ridges along the backs of the gems appear more rounded. Divinities and dancing figures seem more usual but a few have

motifs similar to those from Oc Eo: for example, a two-sided rock crystal tabloid pendant has a female(?) figure (an ascetic?) seated in *maharajalilasana* position (engraved in similar fashion to the figures on the Oc Eo gems) with staff in his/her right hand on one side, and a running zebu on the other side. A number of seals of this type (also from Ta Keo but mostly smokey quartz) and dated 7th-13th century AD are illustrated in Spink 1997: 101.

2. Henry Ginsburg kindly looked through this article for me and translated the title.
3. I am very grateful to Robert L. Brown for drawing my attention to this article by J. E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw.
4. I am also grateful to J. L. Brockington for checking the Sanskrit text.
5. There seems to be some uncertainty over the identity of the *parijata* flower: *parijata* is translated as 'mandara or Coral tree' (Monier Williams 1964: 620) although in other publications the two plants are given quite different botanical names. This is one of the five trees in Indra's paradise.
6. The motif appears to have spread from Cambodia to Java where it appears slightly later on a stone gargoyle (11th-13th century AD), a relief (13th-15th century AD), and bronze lamps (c. 14th or 15th century AD). See Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1973, figs:139-41.

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