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WHOSE COIN IS IT ANYWAY?

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Abstract

Misreadings and misassignments of many coins issued by the local monarchs of the Kauśāmbī region of the post-Kushāṇa epoch by scholars have resulted in misallotments giving rise to misparsings and they mislead and missteer the sequent chronicle. Before the narrative becomes distorted beyond correction, the present paper strives to ameliorate the numismatic understanding of the post-Kushāṇa phase of this region.

Keywords: Coins, Kauśāmbī, post-Kushāṇa

In 1942, A.S. Altekar announced the discovery of nine new kings ruling at Kauśāmbī when he brought to light coins from the collection of Rai Bahadur Braj Mohan Vyas.^[1] A coin, found from Ramnagar but issued from Kauśāmbī, bearing a tree-in-railing in the upper half and circular legend below (IX-III) restored as *Rajanim[itasa]*, was enough for Altekar to justify the pronouncement of a new king named Rajanimitra.^[2] He found the name of the king a little peculiar because the first part of the name is feminine.^[3] The similarity of the tree-in-railing with the coins of Nava and the paleography of the coin also being nearer to him, he concluded Rajanimitra to be one of the near predecessors of the king who issued the coins with the legend *navasa*.^[4] Four years later, A.S. Altekar published a coin from the same collection with a tree-in-railing at the center and a legend below that he read as *Rājabh[īma]*.^[5] According to the learned scholar, the issuer of this coin was either Bhadramagha or Bhīmavarman, with the paleography of the coin pointing more towards the latter.^[6] Altekar, although, was willing to entertain the possibility of the issuer being a hither-to-unknown king of the Magha dynasty, whose complete name can be made out only with the help of fresh future discoveries.^[7] In the same edition of the Journal of Numismatic Society of India, S.S. Roy disclosed two coins from his collection amassed from the different ancient sites of the United Provinces that were either picked up locally in ruins or purchased from the local inhabitants.^[8] The first coin has a tree-in-railing above, a small nandipada below, and a circular legend beginning at IX to the left of the railing in bold Kushāṇa characters, read by the author as “*Rājño Bhīmasena*.”^[9]

In 1963, K.D. Bajpai eliminated the existence of a king named Rajanimitra by correctly pointing out that what has been read as “*ni*” by Altekar is actually “*bhī*” and consequently the legend should be restored as *Rājā Bhīma[sena]*.^[10] He also rectified Altekar’s assignment of



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the coin carrying the legend *Rājabh[īma]* to Bhīmasena.^[11] The fact that the title *Rājā* has not been used by Bhīmavarman, his predecessors like Śivamagha II, Vaiśravaṇa, Śivamagha I, Bhadramagha, Praushthaśrī, and his successors on their coins, axiomatically takes him out of the equation. Bhīmasena seems to be the only local Kauśāmbī ruler of the post-Kushāṇa phase with a name starting with “*bha*” and using the title *Rājā* on his numismatic issues. So, the coin on which Altekar had read *Rājabh[īma]*, has to be the numismatic issue of *Rājā* Bhīmasena. Post-Kushāṇa history of Kauśāmbī is indebted to Bajpai for eliminating Rajanimitra, correctly assigning the *Rājabh[īma]* coin to Bhīmasena and then further publishing two more numismatic issues of this king.^[12] In 1974, Bela Lahiri’s remark “a coin of Bhīmasena has come to light”^[13] and including Rajanimitra in the chronological framework of local Kauśāmbī rulers^[14] can possibly be forgiven owing to her confession of not taking note of all publications post-1964.^[15] In his 2013 work, Wilfried Pieper’s strict adherence to Bela Lahiri’s list of kings comprising Rajanimitra is rather perplexing.^[16] Equally baffling is Bela Lahiri trusting John Allan’s reading of “*Śa*” “*Va*” “*Ma*” on coin no. 59^[17] and consequently assigning the coin to Gautamīputra Śivamagha,^[18] for it is clear from pl. XXI.12 that the two characters “*va*” and “*na*” are quite legible and so a better restoration has to be [*Vaiśra*]vaṇa.

In 1979, Ajay Mitra Shastri published the largest hoard of the Magha coins ever discovered.^[19] This hoard brought to light a coin which allowed the ascertainment of the genesis of the dynastic appellation Magha. This coin, typologically resembling the standardized Magha coins, bore on the obverse the name and regal title of the issuer.^[20] The only plausible restoration of the incomplete legend, as done by Shastri, is “[*Ma*]haraja *Ma[gha]*”.^[21] P.L. Gupta had noted in the 38th volume of the Journal of the Numismatic Society of India,^[22] 1137 Magha coins from the two lots of 552 and 596 copper coins obtained by B.M. Vyas from a villager who resided in the vicinity of the ancient site of Kauśāmbī. Reading the three letters *ra*, *ja*, and *ma* on a coin and considering *Rājā Magha* or *Rājamagha* as two possible restorations, he expressed that there is every possibility of Rājamagha being a proper name. In the editorial note to P.L. Gupta’s paper, A.M. Shastri^[23] correctly pointed out that this coin too belonged to King Magha. Shastri even noted the possibility of the full legend on Gupta’s coin being the same as the legend on the solitary coin of King Magha found from the hoard published by him. On another coin, P.L. Gupta deciphered the three letters as *śrī magha*. S.N. Roy talking about the significance of the aforementioned coin pointed toward the coins recovered from Tripuri impressed with the legend *Śrī Bodhi* which had led K.D. Bajpai to postulate Bodhi being the name of the progenitor of the dynasty and other rulers having adopted Bodhi ending names after the founder.^[24] He sees a direct parallel in Magha issuing coins with the honorific title *Śrī* to be the founder of the Magha dynasty.^[25]

The presence of this progenitor of the Magha family, apart from Kauśāmbī, is made conspicuous in Malhār by a few coins. Lead coins carrying the legend “*Raño Magha sirisa*” and a copper coin reading “*siriyā Magha*” have been discussed by S.B. Majumdar in a monograph on the coins of Malhār.^[26] These aforementioned coins seem to belong to Mahārāja Magha of Kauśāmbī.^[27] *Siri* and *siriyā* are both Prakrit forms of the honorific title



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“*śrī*”. It must be pointed out that coins of Śivamagha are known from Malhār itself bearing the legend “*Sivamagha sirisa*”.^[28] Here *siri* cannot be taken as part of the name of the king, for the stand-alone name Śivamagha from numismatic and epigraphic sources found from Bandhogarh,^[29] Fatehpur^[30] and Kauśāmbī^[31] is already known to us. So *siri*, in the case of *Magha sirisa* and *Sivamagha sirisa*, should be taken as just an honorific term. Similar seems to be the case with *siriyā*. *Siriyā* can be converted to Sanskrit *śriyā*, which itself is the collateral form of *śrī*.^[32] This would then mean that from Malhār we have coins bearing the name Magha with the honorific title *śrī* being used both before and after the name of the regal figure. We have the earliest King and Queen type coins of the Imperial Guptas in which the name Kumāradevī is both prefixed and suffixed by the honorific term *śrī*.^[33] A parallel can be drawn, too, with the coins of Bhavanāga where *śrī* appears both before^[34] and after^[35] the king’s name. The same practice seems to have been followed in constructing the legend on the Malhār coins of King Magha. Thus, it is safe to conclude that we have the progenitor of the Magha dynasty, known to us through his numismatic issues from both Malhār and Kauśāmbī, issuing coins displaying his name being adorned with the regal epithets, viz., *Rājā* and *Mahārāja* and Prakrit variants of the honorific title *śrī*.

Notes and References:

1. A.S. Altekar, “New Kings and Interesting Coin Types from Kauśāmbī” in *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. IV, Part 1, 1942, pp. 1-16.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. A.S. Altekar, “New and Interesting Coins and Seal from Madhyadeśa (U.P.)”, in *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. VIII, Part 1, 1946, pp. 7-14.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*
8. S.S. Roy, “Two Interesting Kauśāmbī Coins”, in *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. VIII, Part 1, 1946, pp. 15-17.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
10. K.D. Bajpai, “The Maghas of Kauśāmbī and South Kosala and the Allied Problems”, *Indian Numismatic Chronicle*, Vol. III, pp. 11-21. S.S. Roy had read the title of the king as “*Rajño*”, but Bajpai pointed out that there is no attachment of *ña* under *ja*, and hence the correct reading has to be *Rājā*.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. B. Lahiri, *Indigenous States of Northern India*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1974, p. 130.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
15. *Ibid.*, p. xi.
16. W. Pieper, *Ancient Indian Coins Revisited*, Classical Numismatic Group, Lancaster, 2013, p. 98. Shailendra Bhandare (*vide* S. Bhandare, “Numismatics and History: The Maurya-Gupta Interlude in the Gangetic Plain”, in P. Olivelle (ed.), *Between the*



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Empires, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 67-112.) has noted the misreading Rajnimitra.

17. J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*, University Press, Oxford, 1936, p. 156.
18. B. Lahiri, *op.cit.*, p. 127.
19. A.M. Shastri, *Kauśāmbī Hoard of Magha Coins*, Nagpur Vidyapeeth Mudranalaya, Nagpur, 1979, p. xi.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *The Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. XXXVIII, 1976, pp. 46-55.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
24. S.N. Roy, "A Numismatic Note on the Founder of the Magha Dynasty", in *The Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. XLVI, 1984, pp. 28-30. In this article, S.N. Roy published two coins belonging to the collection of Shri R.C. Vyas. The legend on the first coin is "Rāja Magha" and the second he restored as "Mahārāja Magha".
25. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
26. S.B. Majumdar, *Coins of Malhār*, IIRNS Publications, Mumbai, 2000, pp. 6-7 and Plate IV, nos. 18-24.
27. A.M. Shastri (*Early History of the Deccan: Problems and Perspectives*, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1987, p. 152) reading the legend as *siri-Yāmagha*, ascribed the coin to a king having 'quite a new and rather strange name among the Magha', Yāmagha. P.L. Gupta ("Three Malhār Coins Revisited", in *Numismatic Digest*, Vol. XIV, IIRNS Publications, Mumbai, 1990, pp. 10-11), however, took *Siriyā* to be part of the name of the issuer. S.B. Majumdar (*op.cit.*, p. 7), too, seems to take *Siriyā* Magha as the king's name.
28. S.B. Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 8.
29. *Vide* Fragmentary inscription of *Mahārāja Śivamagha* from Bandhogarh (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXI, p. 184).
30. Motichandra, "A Hoard of Kausambi Coins from Fatehpur" in *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. II, 1940, pp. 95-108.
31. Coins of Śivamagha I (A.M. Shastri, *Kauśāmbī Hoard of Magha Coins*, Nagpur Vidyapeeth Mudranalaya, Nagpur, 1979, pp. 45-51) and Śivamagha II (*Ibid.*, pp. 58-62) have been reported from Kauśāmbī. A.M. Shastri (*Early History of the Deccan: Problems and Perspectives*, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1987, p. 152) pointed out that a couple of coins resembling closely those of Śivamagha from Malhār, one of them clearly attributable to Śivamagha on the basis of legend, have been reported from the Tripuri region also. Furthermore, two terracotta sealings from Bhīṭā carry the legend *Mahārāja-Gautamīputrasya śrī-Śivamaghasya* (J. Marshall (ed.), *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report, 1911-12*, Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta, 1915, p. 51) and one sealing from Vārāṇasi bears the legend *Rājñā(h) Kautsīputrasya śrī-Śivamaghasya* (in *The Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. XXIII, 1961, p. 412).



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32. M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1986, p. 1100.
33. A.S. Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Numismatic Society of India, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, 1957, p. 27.
34. H.V. Trivedi, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Nāga Kings of Padmāvati*, The Department of Archaeology & Museums, Gwalior, 1957, pp. 31-37.
35. W. Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 360.