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## Symbols on ancient Indian coins uncyphered

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### Abstract:

Ancient Indian coins from Pre-Mauryan era has been filled with a certain mystery as well as speculation. The coins in reference are punch marked coins. What is stamped in these coins have long since been considered symbols without really a clear meaning. The only ones which can be clearly understood are the ones which are images of animals such as elephants. What has been in front of our eyes all this time, remained obscured, due to erroneous human thinking. What I have found is characters in Brahmi Script and will show and provide the Sanskrit interpretations on not just a single coin but multiple coins in different periods in Ancient Indian history.

**Keyword:** Indian coins, certain mystery, punch marked coins

### Introduction

Ancient Indian coins were first discovered during colonialism in India. And the people who had the opportunity to write and analyze these coins were of a European background. This isn't only true for coinage but also of Sanskrit as well as written history. We know today, when people are bias, it can distort fact from fiction.

### Coins

The first coinage we will discuss, is the bent bar called the Taxila shatamana bent bar (



**Fig 1).** What is being ignored are the Brahmi letters. In the middle the Brahmi tha and surrounding it are the characters cha. What does make sense in the placement of these characters, is to make sure, however worn out or cut up it got, it'll still be legible and understandable. What makes sense in the meaning of these characters are as follows:

- Tha 'preserve', 'protector', 'auspicious prayer'. Tha also has the meaning of being "as it is".
- Cha 'pure', 'clean', 'fragment', 'divided', 'quicksilver'.



**Fig 1:** Gandhara Shatamana<sup>1</sup>

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To further understand something else about this bar, it's considered to be highly pure silver. What makes sense is when how

cha 'pure' and tha 'preserve' notating the approval and guarantee of this precious metal. Another example is the bent bar in Figure 2. We can see cha with the anusvara (Arrow in Figure 2) giving it the value of /i/ since the anusvara is on the right of cha. This roots chañ to the word in Sanskrit as chanda 'pleasing' or 'alluring' which is the precursor for the Hindi word, chandee (चंदी).



Fig 2: Gandhara Shatamana<sup>2</sup>

Another punch mark coin we can observe is the coin from the Kuru Kingdom in Figure 3. Again we see Brahmi script written in a circular manner. The middle again consists of tha, and the circular pattern around it is ta, tha, and ya.

- Ta 'virtue', 'jewel'; 'passing' or 'crossing'; 'certainly', or 'indeed'.
- Tha 'preserve', 'protector', 'auspicious prayer'. Tha also has the meaning of being "as it is".

- Ya 'join'; 'who', 'that', 'which'; 'to go' or 'carry through';



Fig 3: Kuru Coinage<sup>3</sup>

These characters can be understood in multiple ways in Figure 4. Each way will start at the beginning of the arrow and point to the direction in which it was interpreted.

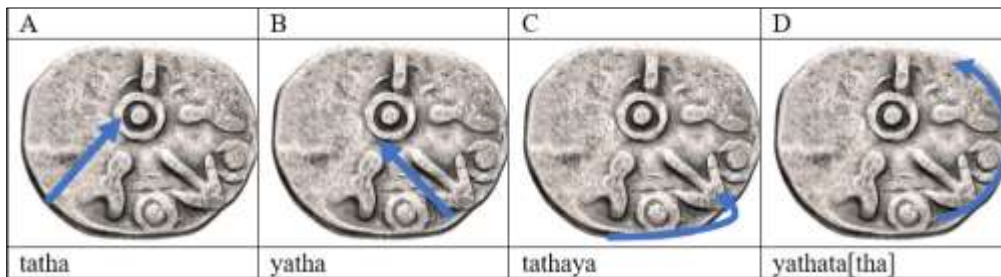


Fig 4: Explained

**Column A:** The word tatha is the word tathā 'exact', 'yes', 'so be it', 'thus', etc. However I cannot find the word value for tatha in Sanskrit dictionaries. To explain why tatha and tathā are similar in semantics we can look at the word, avitatha 'true' or 'correct'. The prefix a- negates the word to which it's joined, vitatha 'false' or 'untrue'. From here we can understand vi- 'separate' or 'apart'. To look at this mathematically and know the variable vi- has the value 'separate' or 'apart' added to the unknown value of the variable -tatha, but we know it sums up to be the variable vitatha (vi- + -tatha) with the value of 'false' or 'untrue', we can therefore conclude the tatha has the value 'true' or 'truth'.

**Column B:** The word yatha is the word yathā 'accurate', 'in a manner', 'knowing', or 'believing'. Again, it's very difficult to find the meaning of this word in Sanskrit Dictionaries. The /y/ actually comes from the Sanskrit i which is third person stem for 'that' or 'this' and when added to the word atha 'rather', 'certainly', etc. it becomes iatha and as per Sandhi rules, i + atha will create, yatha with the similar understanding of 'that certainly' which does relate to yathā.

**Column C:** The word tathaya is the word tathya 'true' or 'being so'. This can be broken down to tatha 'that certain' or 'accurate' and ya 'which' to get two separate word thata ya 'that for which is certain' and giving the notion of 'without any doubt'.

**Column D:** This last word can be described as yathata [tha]. The last tha missing, but the missing section can be predicted due to the pattern on this coin and other similar coins. This

word can be found in Sanskrit as yathātatha 'true', 'accurate', and 'right'. What is more interesting is the exact definition of "conformable to truth or the exact state of the case". I do think this is probably the most accurate notion of this specific stamp.

What can be said of this particular stamp, is the truth and accuracy is not only referring to the mass of this coin but also verifying the metal in its pure state. When these coins were punched or marked, it not only verified the purity of the metal with the markings in Brahmi, but also verified it was soft enough to be punch marked in the first place. When soft metals such as gold or silver are combined with other metals like copper, it strengthens the metal thus making it hard to mark, but also the indentation of an impure metal would look much different. This is also why in history people use to bite into a piece of gold to verify its purity. To also confirm this we can look on the back of the coin (Figure 3) and see in Figure 5 is a symbol described in later Greek coins as triskeles which is the Sanskrit term triḥśukla (त्रिःशुक्ल) 'three white lines'. The word triḥ 'three times' (in reference to lines) and śukla 'bright', 'spotless', 'white', 'pure', and 'silver'. The combination is obvious, 'Three lines of purity, and brightness'. This word is where the Greeks received their word triskelion or triskeles to describe the same sign and first being depicted on Greek Coins and can be seen in Figure 6 Silver Drachma. But some scholars have claimed it was first on shields and pottery, however it had to first come from coinage then eventually dispersed as a symbol afterwards which is also indicating the pottery or objects in question are not an accurate assessments of the dating process in Greek and were likely over dated. And further śukla 'silver' became

the common currency known in multiple languages as shekel.



Fig 5: Kurus Coinage



Fig 6: Silver Drachma<sup>4</sup>

Another coin can offer some more objectivity to rule out occurrence are just based on design. In Figure 6 we have a similar circular shape of similar characters we found in Figure 4. The difference is, this coin Brahmi *ṭha*, instead of *tha* and *ta* found in Figure 4.

- *ṭha* ‘disk’, ‘circular shape of moon or sun’, ‘noise of metallic jar’.
- *Tha* ‘preserve’, ‘protector’, ‘auspicious prayer’. *Tha* also has the meaning of being “as it is”.
- *Ya* ‘join’; ‘who’, ‘that’, ‘which’; ‘to go’ or ‘carry through’;



Fig 7: Pre-Mauryan Coin<sup>5</sup>

From the understanding of above we can notice *ṭha* itself is giving the credibility to the purity of this coin. Not just from the shiny circular shape, but also to telling anyone who holds this coin to test it from the noise it makes when dropping it. This is something which has been practiced for anyone who has needed to test metals like gold and silver because it has a unique sound compared to other metals. This is not only the test of ancient societies but of modern times as well. Adding from the above translation of *ya* ‘carry through’, to tell the holder with confidence, ‘test it out’. And in the center we have *ṭha* ‘preserve’ or ‘protector’.

The coin in Figure 7 has the same remarkable features of Brahmi. There are a few possibilities for what this can be. It seem to be four characters of *va* attached to beginning of the upper line.

- *Va* ‘arm’, ‘auspicious’, ‘strong’, ‘reverence’, ‘ocean’ or ‘Lord Varuṇa’

From reviewing *va* in Sanskrit alone, it seems like the perfect and most simple candidate to the understanding of being *va*. The other possibility is it could be *One* could be *ka* attached to *ṭha*, but seems fitting to be *va* for it’s the simplest solution, and also the meaning of ‘arm’ and there are 4 arms with attach to each character. But another reason is because there are other copies of this coin with *svastika* in the middle of *va*. As we know *svastika* is an auspicious symbol, which is what *va* has in its definition.

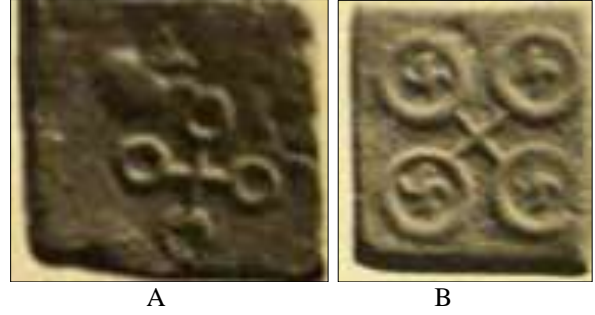


Fig 8: Ujjain Coin<sup>6</sup>

Another coin from the Kabul Valley is the half shatamana found from the Kabul hoard (Figure 8) Column B shows the same coin in Column A but flipped one-hundred-eighty degrees. In the middle of this coin we can start to read this in Brahmi:

**ṛṇ ṭhaḥ**

- *ṛṇ* ‘praise’, ‘verse’, ‘speech’, ‘sacred text’.
- *ṭha* ‘disk’, ‘circular shape of moon or sun’, ‘noise of metallic jar’.

The Brahmi characters are composed of *ṛṇ* and in the dictionary of Sanskrit it points to *ṛc* ‘praise’, ‘verse’, ‘speech’, or ‘sacred texts’. The visarga in the end of *ṭha*, has the meaning of causation, or to ‘send forth’. We can get the idea *ṛṇ ṭhaḥ* means to ‘call out a praise’ being referred to something religious. Or more likely it could refer to text this coin by the noise it makes by translating it as ‘metallic noise this makes shall give the praise of its purity’.

Even in the case there are arguments of the definition of *ṛṇ*, if the anusvara is removed, *ṛ* ‘rise’, ‘go’, ‘move’, ‘to call’ etc. still would project a similar translations.



Fig 9: Kabul Hoard<sup>7</sup>

**Conclusion**

The essence of finding the truth in anything we do in this world, is keeping an open mind. When bias clouds our

judgment, we can be have a hard time seeing what is in front of our face. The stamps or marking on these coins are very common in what we see in currency today. In the American Dollar it's "This note is legal tender..." with two seals in a circular shape, one written "United States" and "Federal Reserve System" and the second stamp, "The Department of Treasury" and "1789" for its legitimacy and in trusting this currency. And for the Indian Rupee it's "I promise to pay the bearer the sum..." with a circular seal stamped on every bill, "Reserve Bank of India" showing its integrity not only by the backing of the government but the Bengal Tiger representing its strength. Nothing has changed because these very basic guarantees are the reason why our current monetary system works.

There are many coins which have a message to tell of not only to us of today but of the actual history of human events. There are many examples of these messages which still needs to be uncovered. There are some assumptions made of on the dating conventions of these coins, but one can argue it could be much older. We can also see how old these scripts are which does date Brahmi as a script and Sanskrit as a Language back even further than was realized. There needs to be deeper studies in Ancient Indian Artifacts, especially when these studies were conducted during colonialism at a time of western discrimination whether it's about race, national background, religion, etc. and its effect has skewed our understanding of artifacts as well as history. If we only view ancient relics with a primitive idea, we will only render primitive results, but if we look at these coins objectively we can certainly find truth hiding in obscurity of a highly evolved ancient culture just waiting to be understood.

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