

COINS OF THE AHOM KINGS OF ASSAM

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The North-East Frontier Areas of India have almost throughout the ancient period remained comparatively obscure. One of the most notable mention of this region is, however, found in the Allahabad inscription of Samudra Gupta wherein Davaka and Kamarupa are mentioned as the frontier kingdoms of the empire of "Samudragupta-Samatata - Davaka-Kamarupa-Nepala-Kartipuradi - pratyantarpatibhir", etc. Davaka has been identified with modern Davaka in the Nowgaon District, Assam, and Kamarupa with modern Assam as a whole. There is, however, no contemporary evidence in the numismatic field to identify the individual entity of this Kingdoms. The Kingdom of Kamarupa was brought into prominence in Indian history during the early part of seven century when the Kamarupa King Kumara Bhaskaravarman made political alliance with emperor Harsabhardhan. It is likely that Kumar Vaskarvarmana struck coins in his name in imitation of his friend and ally Harsavardhana. Gold and copper could be obtained within the kingdom of Vaskarvarman. The art of melting metals and impressing seals on clay or melted metals was known during his time as evidenced by his Nalanda clay seal and Nidhanpur and Doobi copper-plate charters. In the Silimpur stone slab inscriptions of Jayapala (1115-1125 A.D.), the last king of Brahmapala dynasty of Assam, it is mentioned that the king (Jayapala) offered to make a large gift of gold equal to his own weight to a learned Brahmin, Prahasa by name, over and above 900 gold coins-"Yah Kamarupa-nrpatr- Jayapaladeva-namnah tulapurasa-datur achintya dhamnah, hemnam sataninavanirbharam arthyamano". This shows that these Kamarupa king minted gold coins. It is unfortunate that no coins of Harsavardhana and Jayapala have come to light as yet.

It was, however, in the mediaeval period that the definite numistic forms emerge in the History of Assam. In 1228 A.D. Sukhapha invaded Assam after crossing over the Patkai range and established a kingdom in the Saumarapitha (Upper Assam) with its capital at charaido. The first part of the Ahom rule was a period of political uncertainty and it was about 1540 A.D. that Ahoms finally established their power over Assam and since then we have a continuous chain of Ahom coins. Edward Gait and A. W. Botham are of the opinion that suklengmung(1529-1552) was the first Ahom ruler to strike coins in about 1543 A.D. Their statements are, however,

based on superficial collection of Ahom coins. Harakanta Sadar Amin, in his Assam Buranji, (Edited by S. K. Bhuiya), writes that Sudangpha alias Bamuni Kowar (1397-1407 A.D.) struck coins on his accession to the throne, and since then the practice of issuing coins by the subsequent rulers on ascending the coronation building, known as the Singarighar, was continued. The coronation ceremony being enormously expensive, some of the kings used to strike coins even before formally ascending the throne. The Buranji further adds that Suhungmung alias Dihingiya Raja or Swarganarayana (1497-1539), after his successful conquest of Kamata upto the Karatoya river, deputed Chankham Ghar-Sandikai as his envoy to install Kamateswara (king of Kamata) on the throne of Koch Bihar and then to proceed to Jagannath Thakur (Puri) for constructing a tank for the deity. His visit to Jagannatha was arranged by the mission through Vikramasen, the then king of Orissa, and for the mission's expenditure at Jagannatha-kestra a sum of 200 gold muhars was allotted by Suhungmung. This shows that the gold coins were minted by Shungmung also.

Be that as it may, the earliest Ahom coins so far discovered are those issued by Suklenmung in about 1543 A.D. He was contemporary of Koch king Naranarayana who also struck coins in Saka 1477, that is 1555 A.D. The coins of Suklenmung bear Ahom script with Ahom language. For example:—

Obverse :-Cao pha Suklenmung pincao lakni plekni.
The great (cao) king (pha) Suklenmung, reign (pincao) year (lakni) 15th year of the cycle (plekni).
Reverse :- Kao bay pha tara heucu.
I (kao) the king (pha) offer (heucu) prayer(bay) to the Almighty (tara).

Sutamala alias Jayadhvajsimha (1648-1663) was the first Ahom King to become a convert to hinduism, and in the Saka year 1570 he first struck coins in sanskrit in Assamese character. The following is the legend :—

Obverse :—Sri Sri-Svarga-Narayana-devasaya Sake 1570.
Reverse :—Sri-Sri-Hari-Hara-carana parayanasya.
Suhunmung alias Cakradhvajasimha also struck coins in the same manner. The legend of his coins runs as follows :-
Obverse:-Sri-Sri-Svargadeva-Cakradhvaja-Simhasya Sake 1585
Reverse :- Sri-Sri-Siva-Rama-padaravinda-Parayanasya.

The legends of these coins follow closely that of Raja Ganesa Raja Kans) alias Danujamardana Deva and also that of Mahendra,

Deva alias Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah son of Raja Ganesa. Mahe-
ndra Deva's coin has the following legends :—

Obverse :- Sri-Sriman Mahendra Devasys.

Reverse :- Sri-Candi-carana-parayanasya Sakabda 1340 Pand-
unagarat.

From 1671 A.D. a chaotic condition prevailed in the country and there was practically no administration for about 11 years. During this period of political uncertainty a few kings, princes, queens and nobles of the Ahom royal families fell victims to the unrest in the country. In 1681 A.D. Supatpha alias Gadadhara Simha was declared king, and with his accession peace was restored in the country. Gadadhara Simha reintroduced the Ahom language and scripts in his coins. The reading of his coins is :-

Obverse :- Cao Supatpha pinkhum lakni raican.

The great (cao) Supatpha reign (pinkhum) year (Lakni) raican
(33rd) year of the cycle.

Reverse :- Cao bay pha lendan heucu.

I (cao) the king (pha) offer (heucu) prayer (bay) to Indra (lendan).

Sukrunpha alias Rudrasinha, son of Gadadharasimha employed Sanskrit language in Assamese character in his coins, and it is to be noted that he also introduced an annual issue from 1696 A.D. (Saka 1618), the date of the accession to the throne. The legend of one of his coins is as follows :—

Obverse :- Sri-Srimat- Svargadeva-Rudrasimhasya Saka 1618.

Reverse :- Sri-Sri-Hara-Gauri-padambuja-madhukarasya.

The most interesting coins of the series are those minted during the reign of Sivasimha and Rajeswarasimha. The inscription on the reverse gives an impression of the religious belief of the kings. The Ahom kings before Rudrasimha were not staunch saktas and, hence, in the coins of Jayadhajasimha and his son, Chakradhajasimha, we find Hari, Hara, etc., mentioned. Sivasimha was the first Ahom king to embrace the Sakta form of Hinduism initiated by Krisnarama Nyayavagisa Bhattacharya Gosai who was later known as the Parbatiya Gosai. All Ahom kings subsequent to Sivasimha mentioned only Hara and Gauri in their coins. Sivasimha and his queens, Phuleswari (Pramathesvari), Ambika and Sarveswari, marked their devotion to Hara and Gauri in their coins. They,

ofcourse, did not use the same inscription. Phulesvari (Pramatheswari) describes herself an Mahisi, while Ambika and Sarveswari describes themselves as Vallabha of the king. For example, in the coins of Phuleswari (pramatheswari) the inscription on the reverse are respectively Sri-Sri-Sivasimha-nrpa-mahisi-Sri-Phuleswari devyah and Sri- Sri- Sivashimha-nrpa- mahisi-Sri-Pramathesvari-devyah. Again on the coins of Ambika and Sarvasvari the incriptions on the reverses are respectively Sri-Sri-Sivasimha-nrpa-tadvallabha- Srimad-Ambika devinam and Sri-Sri- Sivasimha-nrpa- tadvallabha- Sri-Sarvesvari-devinam. It is interesting to note that unlike coins of other Ahom kings some of the coins of Sivasimha, Phuleswari (Pramathesvari), Ambika and Sarvesvari contained regnal years in imitation of Mughal coins. The first Ahom coin in the Persian script was struck by Pramathesvari. It is a square coin. The legend reads as :—

Obverse :—Shah
Siva Simha
Sikka
Zad Chow mohur

Bahukum Begum Pramathesvari Shah
(King Sivasimha struck coin as the sn by order Queen Pramathesvari Shah).

Reverse:— Maimanut manus
Sane 15 Jalus
Zarb Garhgaon
1651

In the year 15 of the fortunate reign struck at Gargaon 1651 (1728A. D.),

This coin invests a special interest in the numismatic issues of Assam as its obverse legend closely follows that on the coins of Nurjahan issues of Jahangir. The meaning of the legend on Nurjhan's coins is : By order of Shah Jahangir, gained a hundred beauties gold, through the name of Nurjahan Badshah Begum".

Sunenpha alias Pramattasimha again introduced the Ahom language and script in his coins. But while Suklenmung offered prayers to Indra (Lendon), he also used the Sanskrit language and Assamese script in some of his issues. The legend on the reverse of one of his issues reads as Sri Sri- Sivapadaparasya, 'adhering to the feet of Lord Siva'. This signifies that he was a worshipper of Siva.

Rajesvarasimha experimented different forms of coins almost throughout his reign. In addition to the ordinary octagonal coins in Assamese script he struck in the first year of his reign octagonal coins in the Ahom script. He also issued square coins in Assamese script. Besides, he issued octagonal coins with Nagari inscription in 1675 Saka and at least two issues of coins with Persian script were, also struck—a square issue in 1675 Saka and an octagonal issue in 1685. It may be noted here that in a large number of coins of Rajesvarasimha an allegiance to Mahesvari in place of Hara and Gauri is also mentioned. The Persian coin which bears close similarity to some Agra issues of Jahangir bear similar couplet, the meaning in the legend in the Silver issue of Jahangir from Agra dated 1014 A.H. is : (Shah Nuruddin Jahangir, son of Akbar Badshah illumined the face of the coins with the colour of the sun and the moon.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century during the reign of Gaurinshasimha, the Mowamariya (Mayanariaya) Vaisnava sect became rebellious and succeeded in setting up different kings in different parts of Eastern Assam. Two of such kings, namely, Savanandasimha and Bharathasimha issued coins in their names. The legend of the coins of King Sarvananda is as follows:-

Obverse:-Sri- Sri- Savargadeva-Sri Sarvanandasimha- nrpasya Saka 1716 (of the illustrious king Sri-Sarvananda, in Saka 1716.)

Reverse :-Sri- Sri- Krsma-carana-kamala-makaranda-madhukarasya. (of the bee intoxicated with the honey of the lotus feet of Sri-Krisna). The legend in the coins of Bharatasimha is :-

Obverse:- Sri- Bhagadatta- kulodbhava- Sri -Bharathasimhanrpasya Saka 1718.

Reverse :- Sri- Krsna-caranaravinda-makaranda- pramattamadhukarasya.

It is to be noted that Bharatasimha claimed his descent from Bhagadatta of Mahabharatha fame. While minting coins the Mayamariya kings followed the Ahom coins in all respects except in some of the legends noted above. It is said the Mayamariya king Ramakanta struck nine-sided coins. But such coins have not yet come to light. The number nine has a special significance in Vaisnava theology.

After the overthrow of the Mayamariyas the Ahom king Kamalesvarasimha and Chandrakantasimha struck coins in the customary way. But Brajanathasimha who struck at least four issues of

coins was a Vaisnava, as is evident from the legend on the reverse of his coins which runs as follows -

Sri- Sri- Rahda -Carana-kamala-makaranda madhukarasya.
It appears that he was a votery of Krsna and Radha.

The last dated coin in a quarter rupee of Jogesvarasimha dated 1734 Saka (1821 A. D.) Assam ceded to the British empire in 1826 A.D. whence onward special interest in the numismatic field ceases to exist in this state.

The rupee and the gold mohurs of the Ahom kings were struck to the Indian standard of about 170 grains. Rudrasimha introduced half and quarter rupees whereas in eighth and sixteenth both of rupee and of the mouhars were introduced by Rajesvarasimha and a thirty-second by Gourinathasimha.

Different interpretations have been advanced by different scholars regarding the octagonal shape of the Ahom coins. One view is that as the Sumarapitha was eight sided as narrated in the Yagini-tantra (asta konanca saumarayatra Dikkaravasini.) The Ahom kings adopted eight sides in their coins also. But the Ahom king who first introduced coins, whether he be Sudamgpha or Suklenmeng, was not formally converted to Hinduism so as to be influenced by the verses of the Yogini-tantra in the formation of state policy. Another view is that the idea may possibly be derived from the conception of the earth so that the coin might represent the vastness of the Ahom kingdom extending in all the direction. The third view is that the number eight is an auspicious number among the Tais and hence the Ahom kings might adopt eight for the number of sides of their coins.

A short note may be added regarding the dates in the Ahom coins; bearing Ahom script in the Ahom language. The Ahoms commenced their method of reckoning time from 168 A.D., the year in which Khunlung and Khunlai the reputed progenitors of the Ahom royal family, descended from Heaven by means of a golden ladder so that in order to ascertain the corresponding year *ame domini* the number of taocinas should be multiplied by 60, the number of the year in the taocinas added and also 168.

Turning now to the coins, the year of taocina on the coins of Suklenmung is *plekni*, that is 15th year, the number of the cycle is not mentioned, but we know that Suklommung reigned from 1539 to 1552 A.D. We may therefore, assume that it was the 17th taocina. Consequently the English date will be $16 \times 60 + 15 +$

568=1543 A.D. The coins of Supatpha were minted on lakni raican or the 33rd year of the taocin and as Supatpha's date is 1681-1695 A. D. the cycle in question must be the 19th taocina. The equivalent date in our Era will therefore be $18 \times 60 + 33 + 568 = 1681$ A.D. Proceeding in the same way, lakni kakee in the coin of Pramattasimha corresponds to 1744 A.D. which is the first year of the monarch's reign. (Gait : Notes on some Ahom coins, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal 1883, p. 288.)



Shivadol of Sibsagar