

**UNPUBLISHED GOLD COIN OF ŚAŚĀŅKA IN THE  
BANGLADESH NATIONAL MUSEUM**

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This short article is aimed at drawing the attention of scholars to four hitherto unpublished gold coins of Śaśāᅇka, are preserved in the reserve collection of the Bangladesh National Museum. These coins were collected by the museum from South-East Bengal in 1973-1976. The acquisition history of these coins is not recorded in details in the museum document. The exact find spots of these gold coins are not known. Three coins were collected from somewhere in Kachua police station of Comilla District along with other Post-Gupta gold coins. It is most likely that these coins were discovered from a hoard. The local coin dealer collected these coins from a jewelry shop and sold these to the Museum. The other gold coin came from North Bengal, though the exact provenance is not known.

Among these four pieces, the first three gold coins are clearly Samatata type and another is the normal gold coin of Śaśāᅇka. It is interesting to note that one gold coin has the unique characteristic feature which discloses some new facts in the history of ancient Bengal. These numismatic sources demand a fresh assessment of the Post-Gupta history of ancient Bengal.

The typological and symbolical features of these coins are as follows:

1. Accession No. 73.1506  
Weight: 5.03 gram.  
Find place: Kachua, Comilla.  
**Obverse:** Within a circle of large dots, Siva reclining on a couchant bull with the trident held in the upraised left hand. Under the bull, the legend 'Sri Jaya' is written in Brāhmī script.  
**Reverse:** Within a circle of large dotted border, a goddess is seated on a lotus, presumably Lakᅇmī. She holds a lotus bud in her left hand,

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while an unknown object in her right hand. The legend is in Brāhmī 'Śrī- Śaśāṅka'.



Obverse



Reverse

2. Accession No. 73.1795  
Find place: Kachua, Comilla  
Weight: 5.5 gram.

**Obverse:** Within a circle of large dots, Siva reclining on a couchant bull with the trident held in the upraised left hand. Under the bull, the legend 'Vijaya' is written in Brāhmī script.

**Reverse:** Within a circle of large dotted border, a goddess seated on a lotus, presumably Lakṣmī. She holds a lotus bud in her left hand, while an unknown object in her right hand. The legend is 'Śrī-Śaśāṅka' on the left field of the deity.



Obverse



Reverse

3. Accession No. 76.1016  
Find place: Unknown, collected from a coin dealer of Dhaka.  
Weight: 5.83 gram.

**Obverse:** Within a circle of large dots, Siva reclining on a couchant bull with left hand upraised holding a trident. Under the bull, the legend 'Śrī-jaya' is written vertically in Brāhmī.

**Reverse:** Within a circle of dotted border, goddess Lakṣmī is seated on a lotus. She holds a lotus bud in her left hand, while an unknown object in her right hand. The legend is in Brāhmī character 'Śrī-Śaśānka'.



Obverse



Reverse

4. Accession No. 75.1102

Weight: 9.34 gram.

Find place: Unknown, probably collected from Dhaka.

**Obverse:** Siva, nimbate, reclining on a couchant bull with his left hand upraised; 'Śaśā' in Brāhmī script written vertically in the right field and the legend 'Jaya' is under the bull.

**Reverse:** Goddess Lakṣmī, seated on lotus and two elephants are pouring water over her head; the legend: Śrī-Śaśānka.



Obverse



Reverse

**Implication:** Among these above noted four coins, the first three coins are rare and are different from the normal coin of Śaśāṅka, king of Gauḍa. Only one piece of such coin has hitherto been published by Jahar Acharjee<sup>1</sup> and B. N. Mukherjee.<sup>2</sup> This single piece was discovered from southern Tripura and this is preserved in the Rajendra Kirtisala Museum of Agartala in Tripura. It is interesting to note that the normal coins of Śaśāṅka do not have any dots, but these coins bear the large dotted border like the other coins of Samatata, such as the coins of the Ratas, the Khāḍgāṣ and the Early Devas. Most of the normal coins of Śaśāṅka weigh 9.4g. But the weights of these coins are around 5.7g. It is interesting to mention that goddess Lakṣmī of the coin is holding an object in her right hand that is very similar to the object in the hand of the deity depicted on the normal coins of Samatata. These coins are fairly good metal, thinner and broader flan and the figures are well punched like the other Samatata coins. Comparing these characteristics with the Samatata coins, this coin has rightly been assigned to Samatata type gold coin of Śaśāṅka by B.N.Mukherjee.<sup>3</sup> N. G. Rhodes has supported B. N. Mukherjee and gave a clear description of the Samatata type gold coin of Śaśāṅka.<sup>4</sup>

However, our new findings show variations among the Samatata type coins of Śaśāṅka. In the above noted pieces, it is observed that no. 2 bears unique legend 'Vijaya' in place of 'Jaya', and this is a unique feature of the gold coins of Śaśāṅka so far discovered and published. Variation in the posture of Siva, sitting or reclining on the bull, indicates the artist power of innovation.<sup>5</sup> This coin also suggests that Śaśāṅka issued several coins from Samatata.

Banabhatta refers to Śaśāṅka as the king of Gauḍa, while Huen Tsang mentions him as a king of Karṇasūvarṇa (in present Nadia district). The Rohatāgarh seal, the three copper plates of Śaśāṅka (two Midnapur and Egra copper plates)<sup>6</sup>, and the Ganjam copper plate of Madhavavarman II, vassal of Śaśāṅka, all these are located in ancient Rādha sub-region. The provenances of most of the published normal coins of Śaśāṅka were in ancient Rādha and Gauḍa and no coin of this king had been discovered in the past from South-East and North-Bengal. So, it was thought in the past that Śaśāṅka's kingdom was confined to the areas of ancient Rādha and Gauḍa.

It is only reported in the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa*<sup>7</sup> that “there was a king Soma of the Brahman caste. The king *Ra* of the Vaisya caste was as much powerful as Soma. *Ra* was killed by a king of the low caste. *Ha*, the younger brother of *Ra* went to the city of Puṇḍra to fight with Soma. He defeated Soma.” Some scholars identify the kings *Ra*, *Ha*, and Soma with Rayavardhan, Harshavardhan and Śaśānka respectively. Only on the basis of this mention, it is decided that north Bengal was under the sway of the kingdom of Gauḍa in the Post-Gupta period. But the historicity of this literary text has been questioned. Hence, there was no definite evidence to the scholars in the past to prove that Śaśānka could make himself lord of the whole of Bengal. But these above noted coins clearly show that South-East as well as North Bengal was within the kingdom of Śaśānka as these numismatic evidences may be taken as corroborative sources for the account in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*.

These coins clearly show that Samatata was within Sasanka’s empire and he issued gold coins from this place. On the other hand, the legend ‘Vijaya’ of one gold coin apparently suggests that this was issued as a mark of victory of Samatata. It may also be taken to mean that Śaśānka conquered Samatata and issued gold coins from there as a mark of his victory. The rival of Śaśānka might have been Bhāskarvarman, the ruler of Kāmarūpa. It is reported in the *Harsacarita* that Śaśānka was antagonist of Bhāskarvarman who made alliance with Harsavardhan, the rival of Śaśānka. The *Dubi* copper plate of Bhaskarvarman reports this conflict and a battle between the kings of Gauḍa and Kāmarūpa.<sup>8</sup>

Now from the coins reported above we can substantiate the suggestion of B. N. Mukherjee who assigned this first in the Tripura Museum collection as Samatata designed gold coin of Śaśānka. The above noted coins suggest that Śaśānka was king of the whole of Bengal. However, these coins demand fresh assessment of the history of Śaśānka and these numismatic sources need to be incorporated in the history of ancient Bengal.

## References

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