

## An enigmatic coin from Mewar

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My purpose in this short note is to bring to the attention of scholars an enigmatic copper coin that may be the first known coin of Rāṇā Raimalla of Mewar (ruled 1473-1509). The coin is illustrated in Figure 1 and described first, and a brief commentary then follows. Apart from filling a numismatic “gap” by providing a coin for a known king, the coin also suggests a line of thought that would account for the apparent rarity of the coins of Rāṇās Kumbhā and Raimalla.



**Figure 1: The subject coin, a copper half falūs<sup>2</sup>**

**Obverse:** Two line legend: *śrī rā ... / ... ?maḷa*

**Reverse:** Remnants of Persian legend, perhaps *sultān bin sultān*, heart-shaped mintmark, normally thought to be of Chanderī.

**Weight:** 3.67 gm.

**Dimensions:** 11 x 13 mm.

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<sup>1</sup> Boston University. I wish to thank Shailen Bhandare, John Deyell, Deepak Dhaadha, Harry Falk, Stan Goron, Lakhan Gusáin, Jan Lingen and John Smith for helpful email exchanges discussing this coin. All the views expressed here are my own.

<sup>2</sup> A full-color detailed photograph of the coin is available online on the Mewar page of the CoinIndia website: <http://coinindia.com/galleries-mewar.html>.

The coin appeared in a Stephen Album auction (16, lot 957, held on March 18, 2013), identified as a coin of Saṅgrām Singh (Rāṇā Sāṅgā). Several experts I consulted<sup>3</sup> agree with this attribution. However, it is hard to reconcile it with the legend on the coin. The first line of the legend quite clearly reads *śrī rā* ..., which no doubt could be completed as *śrī rāṇā x*, the *x* representing the first letter of the king's name. This is non-controversial, and would be consistent with the legend for Saṅgrām Singh, with the *x* then being the letter *sa*. The second line, however, is problematic for the attribution. Figure 2 shows a coin of Saṅgrām Singh, and we see that the second line reads *grama saha*, for *grāma śāha*. All of Saṅgrām Singh's coins carry this legend. But on the subject coin we see something quite different. There is a partial first letter that does not appear to be *gra*, since the two vertical strokes in the letter are joined by a horizontal stroke, suggesting that the letter could be *pa*, *ma* or *ya*. Next comes a letter *ma*, which we do see in Saṅgrām Singh's coins, to be followed then by the letter *sa*. But the next letter does not appear to be a *sa*. For it to be read as a *sa*, we would have to take the first "circle" in the letter to be a large loop used in the formation of the letter. But such a loop is never seen on the letter *sa* in Saṅgrām Singh's coins. They always feature a letter *sa* without a loop, as in the coin in Figure 2. Even if the letter *sa* was inscribed with a loop, it is difficult to reconcile this with the second loop or circle visible in the letter. Thus this letter does not appear to be a *sa*; instead we have a retroflex *la*, *ळ*. The presence of this letter makes an attribution to Saṅgrām Singh quite impossible.

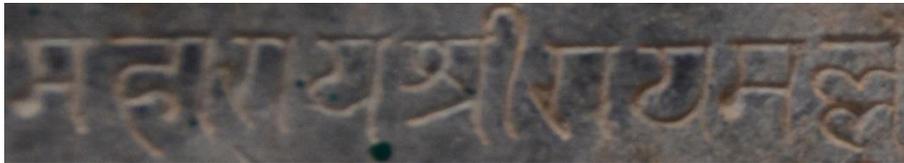


**Figure 2: Copper coin of Saṅgrām Singh**

<sup>3</sup> These included Shailen Bhandare, Stan Goron and Jan Lingen. However, John Deyell agreed with the attribution to Raimalla. Some people familiar with Rajasthani scripts, such as Lakhan Gusáin, also thought the reading as Raimalla was highly plausible.

So that leaves us wondering whose coin this is. Looking over the lists of the Mewar kings yields only one plausible candidate: Saṅgrām Singh's father Rāṇā Raimalla. As yet, no coin of Raimalla is known, making this coin difficult to compare but of some historical importance. Coins of Raimalla's father, Rāṇā Kumbhā, *are* known, although they are rare, and coins of his son Saṅgrām Singh (Rāṇā Sāṅgā) are also known. It therefore seems very plausible that Raimalla would have issued coins during his relatively long reign of 38 years (1473-1509). Indeed, it is surprising that no coins of his are known so far and one purpose of this paper is to bring this coin to notice so scholars and collectors can look over the known coins to see if there are other coins similar to this which have been misattributed and which may help in completing the legend on this coin. But I also offer an explanation for the rarity of Raimalla's coins in what follows.

Returning to the coin, my first inclination was to attribute it to Raimalla on the basis of the retroflex *la*. Many words ending in *la* are spelled with a terminal retroflex letter in Marwari and Marathi today, and the same may have been true in medieval Mewar. Several people knowledgeable in Rajasthani script agreed with the reading of Raimalla's name. However, I looked for corroboration in contemporary inscriptions that name Raimalla. Here, unfortunately, I was unable to obtain the needed confirmation. In the well-known *praśasti* of the Mewar kings at the Ekalinga Temple near Udaipur, Raimalla's name is spelled with a double-*la* at the end, not a retroflex-*la*. Figure 3 shows a detail of Raimalla's name from this inscription.<sup>4</sup> So the evidence from the inscription does not prove the attribution to Raimalla.



**Figure 3: Detail of Raimalla's name from the Ekalinga Temple inscription**

Nevertheless, I feel it is more likely that a die-cutter mis-spelled Raimalla's name as रामल instead of रामल्ल, than that this is a blundered legend of Saṅgrām Singh. Mis-spellings are common on Mewar coins. For example, the coin in Figure 2 spells the name Saṅgrām as सग्रम instead of संग्राम. Further, to my eye, the style of the lettering on the present coin seems different from all coins of Saṅgrām Singh that I have seen or that are listed by Goron and Goenka in their catalogue.<sup>5</sup> I would therefore argue that we should tentatively assign this coin to Raimalla. We must await more specimens of this coin type to get a better fix on the legend and

<sup>4</sup> Photographs of the Ekalinga Temple inscription are not readily available. I owe thanks to Bob Largey and Padmaja Kumari Parmar for their assistance and Bhupendra Singh Auwa for actually obtaining the photograph for me.

<sup>5</sup> Stan Goron and J.P. Goenka: *Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001, types M262-270.

its attribution. Even if the coin is indeed an issue of Saṅgrām Singh, it would constitute a new variety and the succeeding discussion is still largely germane.

If the coin is of Raimalla, it would be of some importance. Apart from being the first known coin of that ruler, thereby filling a gap in the numismatic sequence, it would shed light on the use of the heart-shaped mintmark seen on the reverse of the coin. This mintmark has been understood to be of Chanderī and is seen on many coins of Saṅgrām Singh and his successors. Now Chanderī is almost 500 km east of Chittorgarh and has not traditionally been a part of the territory of Mewar. It therefore seems odd that it appears on Mewar coins. However, around 1519-20, Saṅgrām Singh briefly took possession of Chanderī by defeating in battle the Sultān of Mālwa, Mahmūd Shāh II, although he quickly restored his lands to him. The fact that Chanderī was held only briefly by Saṅgrām Singh and by none of his successors, makes it quite clear that the heart-shaped mintmark was not literally a Chanderī mintmark in the case of the Mewar coinage, since it appears on the coins of Saṅgrām Singh's successors even though they never issued coins in Chanderī.<sup>6</sup> But since Saṅgrām Singh did briefly hold Chanderī, it could be speculated that he began putting the heart-shaped mintmark on some of his coins at that time, and that its use then just continued unquestioned. However, if the subject coin is an issue of Raimalla, it would clearly pre-date the time when Mewar held Chanderī. It would then have to be the case that it was not the brief possession of Chanderī that inspired the use of the heart-shaped mintmark on Mewar coins.

We must therefore search for a different explanation for the use of the Chanderī mintmark and, to do so, we should question why Mewar coins have a Mālwa style reverse in the first place. The mintmark does not appear on any of the coins of Rāṇā Kumbhā,<sup>7</sup> and, indeed, this is to be expected as Rāṇā Kumbhā ruled only until 1468 and, according to Goron and Goenka, the first occurrence of the heart-shaped mintmark was on Mālwa coins in AH 900, or 1494-95 CE.<sup>8</sup> However, this date falls well within the reign of Rāṇā Raimalla. Assuming our coin is an issue of Raimalla, its date would then be sometime between 1494 and 1509.

The most logical explanation for the use of the mintmark is that Raimalla, and later Saṅgrām Singh and his successors, were imitating coins of the Mālwa Sultanate, and the mintmark happened to be on prototypes that were being imitated. But then the question that would arise is, why did the Mewar kings imitate Mālwa coins? A possible explanation is suggested by some events detailed in Ferishta's history of the Deccan. Ferishta tells us that "in the year 850" (1446-47 CE), faced with the army of the Mālwa Sultanate, Rāṇā Kumbhā agreed

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<sup>6</sup> It also appears on a very high proportion of Saṅgrām Singh's coins, too high a proportion to be consistent with their all being issued from Chanderī.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, no Persian legend coins are known for Rāṇā Kumbhā, a fact which in and of itself requires explanation. For a catalogue of coins of Rāṇā Kumbhā, see Roshan Lal Samar: "Coins of Mewar-II," *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. XXV, 1963, pp. 65-69.

<sup>8</sup> Goron and Goenka, *ibid.*, p. 428.

to pay to Sultān Mahmūd I “a large amount in jewels and specie.” Subsequently, in the year 858 AH (1454-55 CE), Mahmūd marched on Chittor again, and Kumbhā,

in order to avert the approaching calamity, met the King on the road, and made a large offering of money coined in his own name. This circumstance so incensed Sooltan Mahmood that he returned the whole sum, and prosecuted his march to Chittoor, having detached Munsoor-ool-Moolk to lay waste the country of Mundsoor. He also threatened, at the same time, to leave his own governor in those provinces, and to build a town to be called after his own tribe, Khiljipoor. Rana Koombho, fearful of losing his country, sent messengers to Sooltan Mahmood in order to appease him, declaring he was willing to pay him any sum he was able rather than relinquish his territory, and promised henceforward to acknowledge himself a tributary of the Malwa crown. The monsoon coming on at this time, the King consented to receive a sum of gold, which he himself named, and then retired to Mando; where having remained some time, in the year 859, he returned to Mundsoor, when dividing the army into detachments, he entirely occupied the whole district.<sup>9</sup>

Thus it appears that Kumbhā was forced into vassalage of the Mālwa Sultān and that coinage minted “in his own name” was not acceptable for the tribute payments.

We know that all of the Mewar coinage from the period of Saṅgrām Singh onwards features a Persian legend on one side, normally reading *sultan bin sultan* in the style of the Mālwa coinage. It is quite plausible that the seeds of this practice may have been sown in Kumbhā’s time. Although we do not know of any Persian legend coins issued by Kumbhā, it seems reasonable to suppose, on the evidence of Ferishta, that Kumbhā stopped issuing coins in his name, rather issuing imitations of Mālwa coins on both sides, with no indication of Kumbhā’s name. These coins would be indistinguishable from the normal Mālwa issues, which would explain why they are unknown. The practice may have continued in the time of Raimalla, accounting for the apparent rarity of Raimalla’s coinage also; we simply can’t distinguish his issues from the regular Mālwa coinage.

At some stage, the Mewar king may have felt secure enough to shake off the Mālwa yoke, re-introducing his own name in Devanāgarī on one side. In the present state of our knowledge, we would assume that this innovation would have taken place during the reign of Saṅgrām Singh. However, if our coin is of Raimalla, as I propose, the change would have taken place during that king’s reign, perhaps sometime after the death of Ghiyāth Shāh in 1500, when rivalry between his sons for the succession would have weakened the hold of Māndū, the Mālwa capital, over the vassal states. In either case, the Mewar rāṇā appears to have hedged his bets by leaving in place the Persian legends on one side of the coin, and the heart-shaped mintmark may have appeared there purely because it had been on the Mālwa prototype that was being imitated.

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<sup>9</sup> Ferishta: *The History of the Rise of Mohammedan Power in India*, translation by John Briggs, London, 1829, Volume IV, Chapter 42, consulted online on November 16, 2013 at: <http://persian.packhum.org/persian/main?url=pf%3Fauth%3D69%26work%3D001>.

This argument is necessarily speculative. It suggests to experts on the Mālwa coinage to look to see if a particular group of apparently Mālwa coins may be separated from the rest by style or other feature as possibly being issues of Mewar. For example, we might ask whether certain types of Mālwa coins are found disproportionately in areas where the Mewar kings held sway. It also suggests that scholars and collectors need to look carefully at coins they have assigned to Saṅgrām Singh to see if they might be issues of Rāṇā Raimalla instead.