

TENTATIVE READING OF AN UNREAD ‘PĀRATARĀJA’ COIN

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In my catalogue of the coins of the Pāratārājas (2010: 15-31), I included a coin (number 75) as “an example of one other coin type that sometimes appears with other Pāratārāja coins and features the reverse swastika typical of the coins of this series.” I noted that the legend on the coin remained unread and also my belief that “this coin was issued much later than the coins discussed so far and may not even be a Pāratārāja coin at all” (*Ibid.*: 22). More examples of the type have been appearing in trade or at auction, and recently I set myself the task of seeing if the accumulation of coins was now sufficient for a reading of the legend to be possible. I was able to gather images of 25 coins, and have a tentative reading based on several examples. This note is to report on the results of my enquiry.



a. Tandon collection 653.32



b. Zeno.ru no. 108246

Fig. 1. Examples of the coin type being examined

Two examples of the type are illustrated in Figure 1. They differ in one important way: coin 1a has a legend that must be read from the inside, while coin 1b has a legend read from the outside. Of the 25 coins in my archive, five have legends that are read from the inside and 20 have legends that are read from the outside. As far as I can tell, the legends are the same on all coins, with some minor variations that I will discuss below. With that caveat, the coins can be described as follows:

Obverse: Bearded bust of king right, wearing rounded crown adorned with crescent at the brow and prominent rectangular ear-ring, diadem ends streaming behind; strands of hair arranged in ringlets protruding diagonally behind the head, all within a dotted border.

Reverse: Central swastika turning to right, Brāhmī legend around: *śrī rājño śāhi vijayapotasya*,¹ all within a dotted border.



Fig. 2. Reconstruction of the whole legend from five different coins²

Figure 2 is a reconstruction of the entire legend, drawing from five different examples of the type. Judging from the coins in my archive, it appears the reading is correct, in which case the name of the king can be taken to be Vijayapota; the meaning of this, however, is uncertain. The word *pota* in Sanskrit refers to the young of any animal. Although we do not know of its application to the young of humans, it is tempting to speculate that that is what is intended here, so that the name would mean ‘the son of Vijaya’. Harry Falk, in an email exchange, proposed a relationship to the Avestan *pōi*, “to protect”, which would make the name a synonym of the more usual *Vijayapāla*. However, Nicholas Sims-Williams, also in an email exchange, asserted that the “development of the vowel *ō* in such a word is peculiar to Avestan” and that therefore it was unlikely to be relevant to this name. We are left therefore with considerable uncertainty as to the meaning of the name and of course cannot rule out that an alternative reading is necessary.

a. CNG e145.144	b. Karan Singh collection	c. Ashmolean 0036285	d. Waleed Ziad

Fig. 3. Examples of the *o* diacritic on the letter ‘pa’

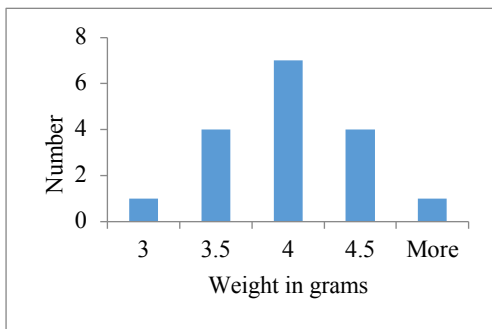
It is tempting to read the legend as *vijaymitasya*. However, on no coin is an *i* diacritic clearly visible on the letter following the *ya*, while on four coins, two of which use the same reverse die, the *o* diacritic on the letter is very clear; this is illustrated in Figure 3. On two other coins, there appears to be an *o* diacritic, although it is not as clear. Also, *ma* and *pa* both seem possible readings of the consonant; *vijayamota* appears to be a less sensible reading than *vijayapota*. The following letter, being read as *ta*, could conceivably be *na*; *ga* could be thought of as another possibility, but can be ruled out because of a clear vertical connector between the top line and the lower one on several coins.

Since none of these alternatives seem to provide a more plausible reading, I have chosen Vijayapota as the likely name. We cannot, of course, rule out the possibility of two different legends, although this seems unlikely. Nor can we rule out the possibility of an unfamiliar, non-Indian suffix to *vijaya*. The Appendix provides photographs of all 25 coins in my archive in order to assist researchers to explore the reading.

Metrology

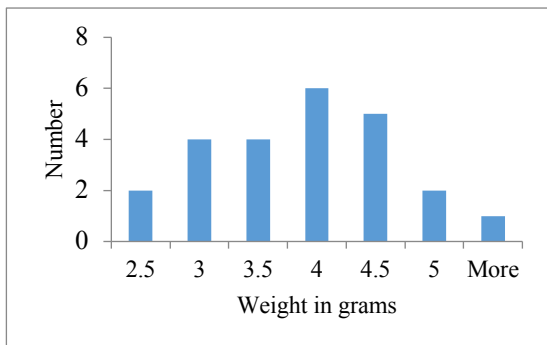
Of the 25 coins in my archive of images, I have the weights for 17 of them. The average weight is 3.75 g, although the spread is quite great; the lightest coin weighs 2.7 g and the heaviest 5.00 g. Nevertheless, a look at the distribution of weights (see Graph A) shows no indication of multiple denominations; there is a clear mode in the interval between

3.50 and 4.00 g, so the average of 3.75 g seems very representative. The target weight at the mint may have been a little higher, with wear and tear then accounting for the variation in the observed weights.



Graph A. Distribution of coin weights for the coins in the sample

By way of comparison, I looked at the weights of the didrachms of Datayola II, the last known Pāratārāja, who ruled c. 280-300 CE. The average weight of the 24 coins of this king in my collection is 3.60 g, with a minimum of 2.40 g and a maximum of 5.08 g. Figure 5 shows a histogram of the weights. We see that the spread is a little greater than the coins of Vijayapota, but the two distributions are otherwise quite similar, and the averages of 3.60 g versus 3.75 g are also not that different. It would be reasonable therefore to identify the Vijayapota coins also as didrachms.



Graph B. Distribution of coin weights for Datayola II

Dating the coins

There are two features in the design of the coins that help to date them. The first is the presence of the crescent at the brow of the king. This was a feature introduced by the Sasanian emperor Yazdgird I (ruled 399-420) and we can therefore be quite sure that the Vijayapota coins date from after c. 400 CE. It would be impossible to imagine him having introduced a feature that the Sasanian emperor imitated. See Figure 4a for a drachm of Yazdgird illustrating the crescent on the crown.



Fig. 4. Coins that help date the Vijayapota coins

The second feature of the coins that helps to date them is the treatment of the hair. As we see in the photographs, the Vijayapota coins have an unusual representation of the hair, streaming out from under the diadem behind the ear in radial lines rather than the traditional bunches. This representation of the hair was introduced, as far as I can tell, by the Kushano-Sasanian king Varahran, who ruled after Shahpur II (ruled 309-379) and so would be slightly earlier or roughly contemporary with Yazdgird I. Coins b and c in Figure 4 show the detail from a gold dinar and the obverse of a copper unit of Varahran Kushanshah, in which we see the rather unusual treatment of the hair. Thus, a dating of the Vijayapota coins to early in the 5th century seems consistent with the two rather unique design features on the coin.

Who was Vijayapota?

Having established fairly confidently a date for these coins, we can begin to ask the question of who exactly this king was. In the trade, the coins are referred to as Pāratārāja coins and are said to be found with other coins of that series. The presence of the swastika as the central device on the reverse certainly suggests this identification. Also, sources in the trade almost universally say that the coins are found in the Lorlai area, the same place where the coins of the Pāratārājas are predominantly found.³ So both of these factors argue that Vijayapota may well have been a Pāratārāja. Against this, however, are several other factors. Firstly, the coin legend does not identify him as such. Most of the (other) known coins of the Pāratārājas bear legends that state that the king belonged to the tribe; a typical legend would announce the name of the king, followed by his patronymic, followed by his title *Pāratārāja*. That title is notably absent on these coins. Secondly, the last known Pāratārāja coins are of the king Datayola II, who can be dated to c. 280-300. Thus, the Vijayapota coins date from more than a century later and it would be natural to wonder whether a dynasty caught between great powers such as the Sasanians and the Kushano-Sasanians could have maintained itself while issuing no coins for a century. Thirdly, the name Vijayapota does not show any affinity to the names used by the Pārata kings.

Given the fact that there are factors that argue both sides of this question, none of which can be refuted, I have to conclude that it is impossible to identify Vijayapota with any degree of certainty. The most likely possibility, however, is that he was a scion of the remnants of the Pārata dynasty, a

dynasty which had fallen on hard times by the end of the 4th century and perhaps enjoyed a brief recovery a century later. Certainly, the prominent swastika and the Loralai find spot argue strongly for this conclusion. The lack of affinity to the names of other Pārata kings could be explained by the fact that the dynasty, which already showed some Indian influence in the names Arjuna and Bhimarjuna, had become increasingly Indianised. No other dynasty presents itself as a real possibility. Remember that at this time the Sasanians had taken possession of Sind and were issuing coins there, so Vijayapota must have been a local ruler who somehow managed to avoid Sasanian domination and maintain his Indian identity. It is worth noting that the two titles present on the coin, *rājño* and *śāhi*, are consistent with titles known to have been used by the Pāratarājas. Of course, all their coins identify them as *rāja*. In addition, the title *śāhi* is known to have been used by Yolamira on at least one known coin and on potsherds found at Loralai by Aurel Stein.⁴ Further, the metrology of the coins seems to be quite close to the coins of Datayola II, the last known Pāratarāja.

I therefore come to the tentative conclusion that Vijayapota was indeed a Pāratarāja, or belonged to a successor dynasty that drew much of its inspiration from the Pāratarājas. However, we must await further information before we can reach a definite conclusion on this enigmatic king.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Shailendra Bhandare for a helpful online discussion of the legend reading discussed here and for providing me with images of the coins in the Ashmolean Museum, and David Kaplan, Bhushan Kapadia, Wilfried Pieper, and Karan Singh for sharing images and thoughts with me. Thanks are also due to Harry Falk and Nicholas Sims-Williams for email exchanges on the meaning of the name revealed in the legend on this coin. I remain responsible for any errors contained in this paper.

References

1. When I put out an appeal on Facebook for images of this coin type, Shailendra Bhandare responded with a partial reading: *śrī rājño* (or *rājñāh*) *śāhi vijaya.....ya*. Although I had seen most of these letters on the coins, I had not yet attempted to put them together as he had.
2. The five coins from which the images are taken are, in order: Tandon collection 701.37 (ex-CNG e246.200), Zeno.ru no. 108246, Aman ur Rahman collection x46, Waleed Ziad collection, and Tandon collection 477.09.
3. For example, Karan Singh, in an email message, informed me that coins 18 and 19 in the Appendix had appeared in the market along with a coin of Koziya and another of Datayola II; all the coins had the same patina, suggesting that they had indeed been found together.
4. See Tandon, *op. cit.*, coin 4 and the discussion around that coin on p. 17.

Bibliography

Tandon, P., 2010, 'The Coins of the Pāratarājas: A Synthesis', *Supplement to the Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society 205 (Autumn 2010): A Seminar on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Numismatic Society of India*, pp. 15-31.

Appendix: Reverse images of all Vijayapota coins in my archive

				
1. Tandon 477.08	2. Tandon 477.09	3. Tandon 649.39	4. Tandon 653.32	5. Tandon 653.65
				
6. Tandon 701.37	7. AurRahman x01	8. AurRahman x46	9. AurRahman x055	10. Ashmolean 0036285
				
11. Ashmolean 0036286	12. Ashmolean 0036287	13. CNG e145.144	14. Bhushan Kapadia 1	15. Bhushan Kapadia 2
				
16. Bhushan Kapadia 3	17. Karan Singh 1	18. Karan Singh 2	19. VAuctions 31.488	20. Waleed Ziad
				
21. Wilfried Pieper	22. Zeno 14367	23. Zeno 27630	24. Zeno 97942	25. Zeno 108246