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R. Walburg

The Earliest Inscribed "Coins" from Tissamahārāma: Why They Are not Truly Coins

It was in 1996 that a newspaper article first drew attention to an alleged new type of coin said to have been found in the hamlet of Akurugoda in Tissamahārāma (Jayasinghe 1996), Śrī Laṅkā (fig. 1). Six pieces (three each from two different collections) were described, discussed and also illustrated by photographs and line drawings. A depiction of a mould for producing this type of alleged coin was also published. Although no reasons were given for the conclusions that had been drawn, these specimens were dated to the 1st century AD.

This subject was dealt with anew in 1999 by O. Bopearachchi (Bopearachchi 1999, 18f.) and again in the same year – this time in much greater depth – in a monograph by Bopearachchi and R. Wickremesinhe (1999, 15–19: text and 51–64: catalogue). In 2000, the reference section of their book was republished almost unchanged (Bopearachchi/Falk/Wickremesinhe 2000). H. Falk read the legends while Bopearachchi was responsible for the numismatic aspects. The 44 inscribed items under discussion are from the Wickremesinhe collection¹, which had been bought at Galle and Mātara sometime between 1983 and 1991. Both locations are in the extreme south of Śrī Laṅkā, being, as the crow flies, around 60 miles (Mātara) and 75 miles (Galle) south-west of Tissamahārāma. In 2000, when reviewing the monograph by Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe, J. Lingen (2000) recognised that two additional pieces, one bought in Colombo and the other in Māpusa/Goa, India, had been cast from the same mould as a specimen in the Wickremesinhe collection. The latter belongs to a group of objects which Bopearachchi termed "uncertain inscribed coins". Another group, which the author called "uninscribed coins", supplements this one. In discussing Bopearachchi's publications, it will become evident that these pieces – whether "inscribed", "uncertain inscribed" or "uninscribed" – are not truly coins.

Bopearachchi obviously starts from the principle that a round object with design(s) and/or inscription(s) on the obverse and/or reverse is inevitably a coin. Apart from some square specimens and those showing the anomalous shapes of a tortoise or a fish (Bopearachchi/Falk/Wick-

remesinhe 2000, nos. 41–43), for which the author gives no explanation, we are compelled to point out that coins, a kind of money, have to fulfil certain basic requirements. The (apparently unconsidered) statement by Bopearachchi "It is most probable that the lead objects made in the form of Conch, fish and beads were used as money (M. 1–7)" (Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, 32) should not be allowed to stand unchallenged. This view becomes even more compelling since Bopearachchi himself admits that the objects had been chosen from "a great variety of lead artefacts" found in the Wickremesinhe collection. Similar miniature objects made of bronze and silver – a frog, a crab, a tortoise, two fishes (silver) and a conch shell – had been discovered in Anurādhapura beneath the floor of the northern pond (Fernando 1990, 100).

The right to mint or cast coins is normally only the right of a sovereign authority. In the principality of Rohaṇa – or more precisely, in the capital city of Tissamahārāma, where the pieces are said to have been found – this must have been the right of the local ruler. When we start from the principle of a money-based economy, as most modern writers assume was the case for the island in antiquity, the idea of private individuals producing coins on their own behalf (Bopearachchi/Falk/Wickremesinhe 2000, 121) has to be ruled out.

The hard-to-read inscriptions preserved on the objects provide us with a number of names such as Gutta, Guttamagga, Majjima, Pussa, Tissa, Datta, etc. As Bopearachchi correctly observed, these alleged "coins" were not issued by kings. Though some of the names mentioned are attested for Śrī Laṅkā sovereigns, the titles *rāja* or *mahārāja* are generally missing from the objects. He therefore argues "... that local rulers, lords, householders and even individuals were involved in these monetary activities" (Bopearachchi/Falk/Wickremesinhe

¹ Somadeva 2002 added to our knowledge some more specimens from other private collections. All pieces are said to have been unearthed at Tissamahārāma (Akurugoda) too.

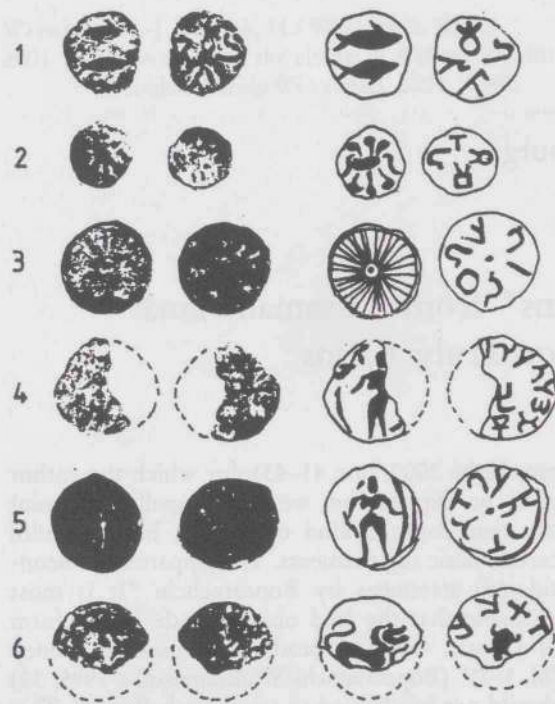


Fig. 1. The objects first published.

2000, 121). As only the terms “lord” and “householder” are recorded in some legends, it is quite unclear who these “local rulers” were, whom Bopearachchi quite incidentally invented. On epigraphical and linguistic grounds, it was concluded that four of the 44 “coins” published by Bopearachchi et al. were struck by “Tamil traders settled in the Tissamahārāma region for inland and maritime trading” and that “The fact that they could issue coins (or trade tokens) in their own names inscribed in Tamil shows that the Tamil mercantile community of the region enjoyed considerable autonomy” (Mahadevan 2000, 154). One of the Tamil names (Cāttan) identified by Mahadevan (2000, 150) by reading anew the inscriptions of some of the “coins” had been also discovered about ten years ago on an Egyptian *ostrakon* which Mahadevan dated to the 2nd century (Salomon 1991, 734). Taking things one step further, Bopearachchi argues that all these pieces were probably issued by merchants (Bopearachchi 2003, 685). And the story continues. Enthralled by the Tamil element, Sitrapalam (2003, ch. IV) reasons that these “coins” might have been struck by one or another of the 32 *Damīla* kings overpowered by *Duṭṭhagāmaṇi* (101–77 BC), as described in *Mahāvamsa* XXV. This unfounded and erroneous conjecture entirely misses the point. Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe (1999, 15) by no means date these objects precisely to the 2nd century BC, as stated by Sitrapalam. In actual fact, they date them to the period between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD. Any linguistic minutiae adduced – for

whatever reason – in an attempt to prove further Tamil elements in the “coins” inscriptions should be abandoned in favour of H. Falk’s thorough readings as given in Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe (1999) and Bopearachchi/Falk/Wickremesinhe (2000). There, two Tamil names are already identified (A. 21 and 37). However, what is the significance of the two, or even more, Tamil names represented on these objects? They merely document the presence of a number of Tamil individuals – a fact which is neither important nor surprising from the point of view of antiquity.

The inscription “Of... (followed by a name and sometimes title or genealogical information)...” on the tokens would seem to indicate a dedication such as “donation/offering of...” or simply a possessive “sign of...” to be used in any general context, but certainly not in a monetary one.

Money, which is intended to be accepted as currency by a community, has to be uniform, well-known and inspire confidence in those who have decided to use particular objects as money. However, in the present case, we have a vast multiplicity of designs and inscriptions represented only by singular or very few pieces and still another new type was published recently (Bopearachchi/Ratnatinga 2004). Nevertheless, together these form a homogenous group, which were certainly not manufactured over a period of several centuries. Confined to a limited area and to a limited period, these objects – if accepted as actually being money – could have been no more than a kind of emergency currency. However, such an interpretation postulates the existence as well as a lack of a developed regular *Śri Laṅkān* currency. Unfortunately, there is not a single shred of evidence to support either of these developments.

Normally, coins were (and still are) produced in certain, generally large quantities. The objects discussed here comprise three groups named by Bopearachchi as “inscribed, uncertain inscribed and uninscribed coins” (Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, A.1–44, E.1–39, and F.1–17). The specimens of the “inscribed” group were evidently cast individually as the type of mould used is documented². In all cases, a single mould³ was used and not a construction combining as many moulds as possible, arranged in turrets or trees, for the economic production of a larger number of specimens in a single casting process. Bopearachchi himself attests the existence of such moulds in Tissamahārāma (Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, L.1–3). The moulds show impressions of

² Jayasinghe 1996; Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, B.1 (= Bopearachchi/Falk/Wickremesinhe 2000, no. 45) and L.6–7.

³ A double-sided engraved mould from Anurādhapura that will be discussed in detail further below is not contradictory to this observation.

Inscribed	Uncertain inscribed	Uninscribed
.	.	0.89
0.97	.	.
1.01	.	.
1.05	.	.
1.07	.	.
1.08	.	.
.	1.12	.
1.31	.	.
.	.	.
1.53	.	.
1.57	.	.
1.58	.	.
1.61	.	.
1.62	.	1.62
.	1.66	1.68
.	1.71	.
1.72	1.72	.
1.73	.	.
1.75	1.81	.
1.84	.	.
1.85	.	.
.	.	1.86
1.87	.	.
1.89	.	.
1.89	.	.
.	1.90	.
1.92	1.92 (2x)	.
1.93 (2x)	.	1.96
.	1.97	.
2.00	.	.
.	2.01	.
2.03	.	.
2.05	.	.
2.06	.	.
2.06	.	.
.	2.08	.
2.09	.	.
2.11 (2x)	2.11	2.11 (2x)
.	2.12	.
.	2.13	.
2.14	.	.
.	.	2.15
2.16	.	.
2.19	.	.
.	2.20	.
2.21	.	.
2.23	.	.
.	2.24	.
2.34	.	.
.	.	2.37
2.40	.	.
2.44	.	.
2.45	.	.
.	.	2.47
.	2.49	.
2.51	.	.
2.54	2.54	2.54
2.56	.	.
.	2.69	.
.	2.78	.
2.83	.	.
.	3.00	.
3.01	.	.
.	3.02	.
.	.	3.10
.	.	3.14
3.20	.	.
.	.	3.30
.	.	3.50
3.65 (2x)	.	.
.	.	3.79
3.85	.	.
.	3.96	.
.	4.06	.
.	4.43	.
4.61	.	.
4.91	.	.
.	5.06	.
.	5.35	.
.	5.63	.
.	.	6.50
.	6.57	.

Fig. 2. Weights of "inscribed", "uncertain inscribed" and "uninscribed" objects.

genuine coins up to a number of at least eight pieces, and they were evidently used for casting imitated punch-marked coins. Moulds in India are known to have enabled the worker to cast a large number of coins in a single process⁴.

Hence, single moulds could have been used only for manufacturing a very limited number of the types known hitherto. We also have to keep in mind the technical process of casting such objects. As was most probably the case, the individuals responsible for issuing the "coins" had no furnace at their disposal, nor did they have any knowledge of metalworking. Therefore, all these objects must have been produced more or less centrally. In other words, they were manufactured upon request by subsequent users. The contractors were presumably goldsmiths and silversmiths used to engraving moulds for casting ornaments and jewellery. The customer, of course, had to pay in kind for the metal and the labour. Metalworkers carried out the melting and casting processes with ease, since they used pure lead, which has a low melting point (327.5 °C) and is thus easy to cast. That pure lead was indeed used, at least in some cases, becomes clear from a number of colour photographs published on the internet in 2001, which show some specimens from the Wickremesinhe collection and were sold to another collector⁵. Two other authors write on this subject also describe the metal as highly leaded bronze (Jayasinghe 1996; Lingen 2000, 6). In this case, higher temperatures were necessary to melt the alloys together and the melting and casting processes became more complicated. This definitely could not have been done by a householder.

In one case, Bopearachchi unwittingly points in the right direction when identifying a mould as having been used for casting ornaments (Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, L.7). Astonishingly, however, he failed to realise that this ornament is the one represented on one side of some of his objects (A.1, A.6, F.4, and F.15), not to mention some other very similar-looking obverses and reverses.

Every regular issue of coins is based on a certain weight standard prescribed by the issuing authority. Moreover, even the simplest monetary systems based on only one metal normally indicate at least a basic value, supplemented by one or more fractions and maybe multiple values. If the "inscribed coins", the "uncertain inscribed coins" and

⁴ Cf. Prakash/Singh 1986, vol. 1, ch. XI: Casting techniques of ancient Indian coinage, esp. figs. 11.1 and 11.11+12. When tenons are clearly recognisable at the "inscribed coins" like at Bopearachchi/Falk/Wickremesinhe (2000, nos. 38 and 39) it is always only one and not two. This, if necessary at all, is a further proof for the individual manufacture of these objects.

⁵ A.26, E.22, and E.30 were bought by K. Ratnatunga, cp. <http://lakdiva.com/coins/>.

the "uninscribed coins" had indeed been money, a certain regularity, at least concerning the weights, should be recognisable. In fact, however, almost every tenth of one gram is represented in the range between 0.9 and 4.6 grams in weight (excluding the lion & swastika coins which will be discussed in more detail below) (fig. 2).

Although the coins used in all ancient monetary systems had a certain degree of weight irregularity, a basic equation is determinable in all cases. With regard to ancient Śrī Laṅkā metrology, however, we are standing on uncertain ground. The only data we have at our disposal, which are reliable to even a certain degree, are to be found in Codrington's book published in 1924 entitled "Ceylon Coins and Currency", which is still regarded as a basic reference work. His calculations (Codrington 1924, 26) with respect to the presumed weight standard of the ancient copper coins yielded results of a kalañju of (rounded) 5.6 g with subdivisions of 2.8 g (½ kalañju), 1.4 g (¼ kalañju) and 0.7 g (1/8 kalañju). Even if we have to accept a certain amount of deviation from the calculated normal weights in either direction, it becomes clear that the known weights are arbitrary. If, despite this observation, one still insists on referring to this monetary system as one of normal coinage used in everyday commercial transactions, then these coins have to be regarded as "credit coins". In this case, the intrinsic value, i. e. the value based on the weight and the kind of metal used, is of no significance. The lightest and the heaviest pieces of one type were given and taken equivalently. However, the coins would have to have displayed at least a certain degree of uniformity in order to guarantee the value set by the ruling authority. The objects discussed here do not fulfil this requirement. Compulsory weight standards with coins of equal design were first introduced in mediaeval Śrī Laṅkā at the late 10th/early 11th century with the creation of a regular coinage⁶.

Assuming for a moment that these tokens are, in fact, coins and that Bopearachchi was correct in stating "On the basis of the palaeography, the coins discussed below can be fixed without much of a risk between the second century BC and the second century AD", then we have another problem to solve. Bopearachchi himself points out that the first inscribed Śrī Laṅkā coins date back to the 10th century. Hence, the dark ages in the numismatic history of the island must have lasted for at least seven centuries and would have gone something like this: after an early and sudden beginning sometime between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD, having already developed a system of combining pictures and legends, which are represented by the pieces discussed here, the rulers abandoned this alleged coinage as soon as it was invented. Instead of artistic and technical advancement, accompanied by the occurrence of the names of those local rulers already introduced

by Bopearachchi, the Laṅkāns would now have only devoted themselves to the method of imitating. The casting of punch-marked coins and the minting of imitations of the late Roman *æs* coins dating back to the 4th/5th century, which are to be found abundantly on the island, are the only recorded monetary activities – the first attested by the existence of the moulds and the latter by the coins themselves. It was not until Vijayabāhu I (1059–1114) that a regular Śrī Laṅkā coinage commenced. Such a scenario is scarcely credible.

Nothing definite is known about the exact locations and circumstances of the finds or about the number of pieces discovered – it is only reported that these tokens are said to have been discovered at Akurugoda in Tissamahārāma. The Commission for General and Comparative Archaeology (KAVA) of the German Institute of Archaeology together with the Archaeological Department of Śrī Laṅkā have been carrying out archaeological excavations there since 1992 under the direction of H.-J. Weisshaar. Hitherto (end of the 2004 campaign), a total of 320 identifiable objects have been unearthed. These include Indian punch-marked coins, specimens from South India, Roman coins and their local imitations, coins from Judaea and Aksūm, Ceylonese ingots as well as goddess votive plaques and maneless lion tokens. Of the alleged "earliest inscribed coins from Tissamahārāma" the excavators hitherto discovered only one single broken specimen in a layer datable to the 1st century BC. If these objects had, in fact, been coins, there should have been some more specimens among the others discovered. If these tokens had indeed all been unearthed at Akurugoda – and there is absolutely no proof for the accuracy of such a statement – their use must have been confined to a given area, maybe in connection with a purpose as yet unknown and hitherto untouched by the excavators. In 1998, at least another five of the discussed objects were published, all of them belonging to the "uninscribed" group (Seyone 1998, 84, nos. 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10)⁷. Although the booklet in which these specimens are shown is to be used only with utmost caution owing to the author's numismatic ignorance, we can be quite certain regarding the accuracy of the quoted provenance of the publicised coins and other objects. The five specimens, all described as made of lead, are said to have been found at Kantarōdai, i. e. in the extreme north of Śrī Laṅkā. Therefore, the alleged exclusive provenance hitherto claimed for

⁶ Cf. the uniformity of weights for the different issues given by Codrington 1924 in his chapter on mediaeval Ceylon.

⁷ No. 5, for example, is definitely of the type Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, A.38.

"Akurugoda, Tissamahārāma" has to be subjected to closer scrutiny. This is all the more the case taking into consideration the fact that a casting mould of the type reported for Tissamahārāma had been unearthed at Anurādhapura (Coningham/Allchin 1992, fig. 16a; Coningham/Allchin/Batt/Lucy 1996, 84f.). With its help, it was possible to produce disk-like objects inscribed *vacadatasa* and *vacadataha*, i. e. "of (or belonging to) Vatsa Datta". The authors interpret this artefact as "stone goldsmith's mould" which can be dated, according to the script, to between the 1st to 2nd century BC (Coningham/Allchin 1992, 165)⁸. Astonishingly, Bopearachchi does not deal with this specimen from Anurādhapura when presenting his own (B.1) from Tissamahārāma (Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, 18. 61), even though the publication Coningham et al. 1996 is mentioned in the bibliography. His failure to do so is incomprehensible if it is realised that the name "Datta" with its twofold last syllable (-*sa* and -*ha* in the Anurādhapura mould) corresponds to that of the specimen Bopearachchi et al. 2000, no. 15 where the authors discuss the name's "modern" ending -*sa* instead of -*ha*⁹. Even in 2002, Bopearachchi only repeats his referring text of 1999 unchanged without discussing the Anurādhapura evidence¹⁰.

The double-sided engraved mould from Anurādhapura cannot be cited as evidence of a mass production already rejected by the arguments presented above. The dialectic difference¹¹ of the name's spelling indicates that this mould served as a universal tool as it was possible to choose which side of the mould and, thus, which form of the name should be used when casting a two-sided object by attaching a second mould with an engraved picture.

It is possible to add one final argument that also runs counter to the assumption that these tokens had a monetary function. Unlike coins, they have never been found in hoards but only as single finds. If they really were coins, and thus served as media of exchange, at least a single small hoard should have been discovered. A striking parallel phenomenon has been reported recently from Tauric Chersonesos (Kovalenko 2002). Twenty different issues of lead tesseræ which had been unearthed exclusively as single finds are interpreted as objects which are likely to have been of cultic and votive significance. As in the case of the so-called "earliest inscribed coins from Tissamahārāma", several issues are known only from one or two specimens. For others, some dozens of pieces are recorded. Their weights are as arbitrary as those of the Śrī Laṅkā lead pieces.

In summary, all of the aforementioned arguments contradict the assertion that these objects, either round or of unusual shape, are coins. Likewise, we are unable to provide a reliable dating for the objects, as we do not possess any precise archaeological data.



Fig. 3. The "lion & swastika" coin from the Tissamahārāma excavations 2002.

In a second step, we now have to eliminate one group from Bopearachchi's "uncertain inscribed coins" (Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, E.1–10). In the course of the 2002 excavations campaign at Tissamahārāma, the excavators unearthed a well-preserved coin of the "lion & swastika" type, and it is only with the help of this singular coin that this task can be undertaken successfully (fig. 3).

The basic type to be discussed here was first documented in 1919 by Pieris for Kantarōdai in the north of Śrī Laṅkā, and later incorporated by Codrington into his list of coin types attested for Śrī Laṅkā (Pieris 1919, 56 and pl. XIV no. 19; Codrington 1924, 22.15 and pl. 11)¹². The obverse of our coin shows a lion standing to the right with his tail curved over its back. Beneath the lion, there is a three-arched hill, and the entire picture is surrounded by an inscription. On the reverse, a railed swastika is depicted with a triangle-shaped object on the right side.

Additionally, nine specimens allegedly also from Tissamahārāma and one piece allegedly from Anurādhapura are made known by Bopearachchi (Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, E.1–10). A coin with a definite Anurādhapura provenance will be discussed below. Amazingly enough, the author attributes these specimens to a group which he names "uncertain inscribed coins". No hint is given regarding the coin illustrated in Codrington 1924 pl. 1 no. 11, which is the correct reference for this type, i. e. "lion & swastika". At least in the case of his nos. E. 7, 8, and 10, Bopearachchi should have realised that by their sizes and weights these are connected with the Kantarōdai specimen depicted by Codrington¹³.

⁸ Unfortunately, a more precise dating is not possible as the mould came from the fill of a Polonnaruwa period robber pit.

⁹ Perhaps it also would have been helpful for Rajan/Bopearachchi 2002 to have consulted Coningham et al. 1996 in general and esp. pp. 90ff. when preparing their study on graffiti in India and Śrī Laṅkā.

¹⁰ Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, 17f. = Bopearachchi 2002, 68f.

¹¹ Coningham/Allchin 1992, 162, think of North Indian Prakrit and Śrī Lankan.

¹² Seemingly, these specimens are not identical.

¹³ The coin in Codrington is not depicted exactly 1:1. It measures 12 × 14 mm and its weight is 1.65 g.



Fig. 4. Details of the "lion & swastika" coin from the Tissamahārāma excavations 2002.

The coin unearthed at Tissamahārāma definitely belongs to the group of specimens allegedly also found at this site. According to Bopearachchi, all the pieces from Tissamahārāma cited in his publications are made of lead. Nothing is known about the material of the Kantarōdai coins. The outer appearance of the struck (not cast) specimen from Tissamahārāma is informative with regard to the metal from which this coin was manufactured. The smooth, dark green patina indicates the presence of copper. A closer examination using a microscope reveals small edge areas and small parts of the surface showing copper red metal. A part of the

edge is broken horizontally. Deep in this crack as well as in other smaller ones, a light green corrosion is visible, which is typical for a copper alloy. The crack and its neighbouring areas seem to indicate that the coin was manufactured from an inhomogeneous metal. It looks like the numerous layers of a flaky pastry. The visible observations are supported by a physical examination. The specific weight determined is 8.265 g/cm^3 which testifies that the coin contains a high percentage of copper (pure copper has 8.9 g/cm^3 ; pure lead has a specific gravity of 11.34 g/cm^3). The one inhomogeneous edge section reducing the specific weight is taken into account. At best, if at all, we can think of a very low to insignificant lead content since this coin leaves no traces when it is rubbed on a sheet of paper. Specimens containing lead in a certain amount can be used to "write" on paper. The edge damage with its flaky appearance is thus due to a bad or failed cast of the blank and not to an inhomogeneous alloy of different metals. Therefore, it is certain that the lion & swastika coin found during the excavations at Tissamahārāma is made of copper and not of lead or a highly leaded bronze.

Unlike Bopearachchi (Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, 19 section E), who refuses to give "hazardous readings which would mislead the reader", I thought it worthwhile to take a closer look at the obverse legend of the Tissamahārāma specimen. The reverse bears no legend. The crucial part of the legend, written in Brāhmī letters, is clearly legible (fig. 4).

The inscription starts with Ma Ha (or Hā) Ra Dhi [Thi]¹⁴ Sa, which identifies it unequivocally as belonging to the Indian Mahārāṭhis of the southern Deccan. Find spots of Mahārāṭhi coins are mapped in the appendix of Kamalakar/Veerender (1991). The area extends from Jogipet (N) to Chitaldrug (S) and from Brahmapuri (W) to Nelakondapalli (E)¹⁵. Known since the late 19th century from inscriptions and since 1903 from coins (Rapson 1903, 296–301)¹⁶ as feudatories of the Andhra Dynasty, many details are still obscure. Even the derivation of the title "Mahārāṭhi" is unclear (Rapson 1903, 296–301; 1908, xx–xxii)¹⁷. In all probability, it denotes the rank of a high official, maybe a governor over a part of the kingdom or even some kind of a viceroy of a province (Rapson 1903, 300; 1908, lxxxii). In Sanskrit rāṣṭrika/rāṣṭriya and in Pali, raṭṭhika may refer to "an official of the kingdom" (PTS 562). The following part of the legend is somewhat difficult to define as in some cases the upper parts of the *akṣaras* are unclear. Though errors cannot be ruled out, a tentative reading is given. The complete legend would run MaHaRaThiSaPuJaYa [RaJa] PuTaSa ... Ga. The two syllables "RaJa" are taken from Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe (1999, E.9). The preceding syllables on that specimen are roughly in accordance with the reading here given. Confirmation and final completion of the legend can be gained from a specimen discovered in the citadel area of Anurādhapura. The readable part of the obverse legend runs "...ya raja putasa Naga" (Somadeva 2002, 308, no. 10). The part of the legend reading *putasa* is known from other Mahārāṭhi coins and seals also showing a lion or a swastika (Kamalakar/Veerender 1991, 46, no. 8; Reddy/Reddy 1983, 58)¹⁸. Thus, we have to read *mahārāṭhisa pūjya raja putasa naga*, identifying the second word as the Sanskrit expression "an honourable man" (*pūjya*). A different reading based on two additional pieces allegedly from Tissamahārāma runs "- va - - - - va - ya ra ja pu ta se na" (Jayasinghe 1997). A conjectural translation is given as "a son of raja - va - - - - va -".

Having identified the Tissamahārāma coin as belonging to the Mahārāṭhi series, another difficulty arises. Although it has been found in certain numbers in Śrī Lankā, this peculiar type seems to be missing in Indian hoards or as single and site finds. Judging from the main device – the lion – this type seems to be connected with the "Lion Mahārāṭhis" (Mitchiner 1978, nos. 4977f.) located by this author in the south-eastern Deccan. S. Bhandare kindly drew my attention to the comparable lion coins of the kings of the Sada dynasty, whose coins had been found in the south-eastern Deccan, too, especially at Amarāvati (Reddy/Reddy 1985) and in the Vaddamanu excavations (Bai 1987), i. e. close to Amarāvati. This dynasty terminates about the middle of the 2nd century AD. According to the prominent swastika design on the

reverse of our coin, Bhandare thinks of a Śrī Lankā imitation on the pattern of the Sada coins. This seems to be possible but the good style of our coin together with its obverse legend argues more strongly in favour of an Indian origin. Nevertheless, we find common ground in the Indian region from where this coin type originates, i. e. in the south-eastern Deccan. The realm of the issuing authorities is to be found most probably in the region Jogipet – Sangāreddi – Kondapur – Hyderabad, and perhaps even further towards the south-east in the Amarāvati region.

The design of the Tissamahārāma specimen is almost identical to the small coin from Kantarōdai illustrated by Codrington (Codrington 1924, pl. I.11). On one side, a lion standing to the right is depicted with his tail curved over its back. In front, there is a triangular object pictured on the Tissamahārāma Mahārāṭhi coin on the reverse. The reverse of the small Kantarōdai specimen likewise has only a railed swastika. The Kantarōdai coin looks like a fraction of the Tissamahārāma specimen¹⁹. By analogy with the relationship between the large "Lion Mahārāṭhi" coins and their presumed small fractions, I would like to point to the existence of some also very small specimens of the "elephant & swastika" type. Three coins are reported from Vallipuram and another two from Kantarōdai (both Jaffna Peninsula, Northern Province). As in the case of the lion coins, their design is reduced to the animal on the obverse and the railed swastika on the reverse. Are these maybe the fractions of the "Elephant Mahārāṭhi" coins from the Deccan?

Both "denominations" of the lion type are closely connected with an uninscribed specimen from the Veerapuram excavation in India, which also yielded many other Mahārāṭhi coins (Kamalakar/Veerender 1991, 31 no. 13). These seem to have been in use from around the middle of the 1st century BC to about the middle of the 3rd century AD and, according to another proposal, even to the beginning of the 5th century (Kamalakar/Veerender 1991, 12). The small coin (1.05 cm, 2.17 g) shows on its obverse a lion standing to the right with an upraised tail and on the reverse an

¹⁴ Kamalakar/Veerender 1991, read this syllable as "Thi", for example nos. 23 and 24.

¹⁵ For Mahārāṭhi coins discovered further south in the coastal region of Andhra Pradesh cp. Gupta 1993.

¹⁶ With references concerning the lithic inscriptions.

¹⁷ For comparable coins bearing the title *mahāsenāpati* cp. for example Siddiqui 1994.

¹⁸ For the vast multitude of comparable Mahārāṭhi coin legends cp. Reddy/Reddy 1983, passim and the compilation in Mitchiner 1978, 620f.

¹⁹ Three additional specimens, Bopearachchi/Wickremesinhe 1999, E.7, 8, and 10, also have to be identified as fractional pieces.

object commonly called "triangle headed standard", exactly the same as that depicted on the Tissamahārāma coin's reverse in the field right of the railed swastika and on the obverse of the Kantarōdai fraction. Thus, we may presume that the Mahārāṭhi lion coins in general, like the uninscribed lion coin and the Mahārāṭhi elephant coins at Veerapuram, may have been in use from about the middle of the 1st century BC to about the middle of the 3rd century AD. Lion and triangle together with the legend "Sada Kanajahaya Maharatisa" are found on the obverse of another Mahārāṭhi coin from Sangāreddi (NW of Hyderabad) having on its reverse a railed tree (Reddy/Reddy 1992, nos. 5 and 6). A newly discovered variant of this type allegedly has on its obverse "Maharathisa Pusavarunasa" and the triangle symbol has been placed on the reverse on the right side of the rail (Angal 1997) – just like in the case of our coin where it is placed on the right side of the swastika. The best specimen, however, to be compared with our coin is the one discovered at Hyderabad (Reddy/Reddy 1983, 66)²⁰. Its obverse shows all the characteristics known from our coin: The main design is a lion standing to the left. Below the lion there is the three-arched hill, above it the triangle standard and the legend reads (Ma)harathisa. The reverse shows the "Ujjain" symbol, a cross whose bars each terminate in a circle or a globule. Another very similar-looking coin belonging most probably to the Kondapur region reads on the obverse "Maharathi Putasa" and shows a lion, a swastika, and a "triangle standard" (Reddy/Reddy 1983, 51).

Apart from the lion, the three-arched hill and the triangle standard, only the swastika has to be discussed. This symbol occurs on coins discovered at Zahirābād, north-west of Hyderabad. The obverse shows as the main design a stylised tree surmounted by a swastika closely resembling the "railed swastika" design. The reverse has only a three-arched hill (Reddy/Reddy 1992, nos. 1 and 2). From Sangāreddi the same authors depict a coin (no. 3) with a large swastika as the obverse design and a three-arched hill on the reverse. As a comment on this coin, the authors mention a sealing from Kondapur with the same design and legend as on the obverse of coin no. 3. The best coin for comparison, however, was published earlier (Bopearachchi/Pieper 1998, 133, no. 3). The obverse shows as its only design a large swastika, surrounded by a legend. The authors are a little bit too cautious when reading only the first two *akṣaras*. Without too much difficulty, it is possible to identify the next two syllables from the photograph. The legend thus starts *Maharathi*, thereby confirming the authors' tentative attribution to the Mahārāṭhis. In the same context, the authors published another coin (no. 4) which has only a swastika within a circle on its obverse. This they also attributed – most probably correctly – to the

Mahārāṭhis. Therefore, there appears to be justification for interpreting the swastika as a symbol closely connected with the Mahārāṭhis.

From a metrological point of view, it has not been possible to say anything definite hitherto. With its weight of 10.01 g, our coin has approximately double the weight of all "Lion Mahārāṭhi" coins known hitherto (Reddy/Reddy 1983, 48–51, 60–62). On the other hand, it matches exactly the standard weight of 10–11 g determined for the specimens struck by the "Horse Mahārāṭhis" (Pieper/VanArsdale 2002, 7).

In summary, we have to state that, with regards to the design and the legend, the new coin type of the "Lion Mahārāṭhi" series has a lot in common with the other known Mahārāṭhi coins from India, but does not exactly match any of them. Likewise, it has to be pointed out that their obverses closely resemble those coins from southwestern Deccan – lion to the left with a three-arched hill beneath – attributed to the Junnar-Kolhapur region, and dated to the second half of the 1st century (Mitchiner 1998, 89f.). Be that as it may, the coin discussed here must have been struck somewhere in the Deccan, presumably in the Kondapur/Hyderabad/Amarāvati area and most probably in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, perhaps even between the 1st century BC and the early decades of the 3rd or 4th century.

We have to return to the geographical distribution of the specimens discovered in Śrī Lanākā. Ascertained are Tissamahārāma and Kantarōdai. A link between the north of Śrī Lanākā and that part of the Deccan where the "lion & swastika" coins most probably originate is indicated by another archaeological discovery. In 1950, a small ivory carving showing a chariot drawn by four horses – thought to be the oldest known chessman – was excavated at Tirukēśvaram (von Schröder 1990, pl. 5A). Dated to the 2nd/3rd century AD, it is said to reveal close parallels with terracotta objects from Kondapur (Ray 1996, 358), which is also a find spot of "Lion Mahārāṭhi" coins.

Contacts between Śrī Lanākā and India during the first two centuries, which are attested by the coins and the ivory carving, are also supported by the literary tradition. After having fled to a region somewhere on the Coromandel Coast, Iṅanāga (93–102) returned from there to reconquer the throne in Anurādhapura (Mhv. XXXV.26–29 and 35). Here, the Mahāvamsa is instructive in several ways. The king embarked at Mahātittha and took refuge on the east coast of India, "... on a ship (that brought him) to the western shore of the sea..." Returning to Śrī Lanākā, Iṅanāga disembarked in the haven of Sakkharasobbha, which is situated on the coast of Rohaṇa, most probably close to Tissamahārāma (Mhv. 321; Nicholas 1959, 66). Obvi-

²⁰ Unfortunately, the actual size of this enlarged depicted coin is not given.

ously, it had been quite a long journey as the king's men were unable to fight with full strength "Since their bodies were exhausted by the sea-journey". The "personal connections" of Iṅanāga to South India are confirmed by the name of his consort, Damiḷādevī, i. e. Tamil queen or Tamil goddess. One of her sons and the heir to the throne was named Candamukha Siva, which hints at the Hindu faith to which he obviously adhered. A second story would appear to confirm the existence of a certain relationship between Śrī Laṅkā and East Indian realms. In the 2nd century, 12,000 men allegedly "had been sent to work to Kāvēri on the Coromandel Coast" (Codrington 1939, 23 and 34)²¹. Likewise, Sinhalese inscriptions dating from between the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD, discovered on the east coast of India and in West Bengal (Mahadevan 1995), attest to early links between these two regions.

The coin from the Tissamahārāma excavations, which was discovered in a layer datable from about 450 to 550, would seem to present contradictory. It is scarcely imaginable that such a well-preserved specimen was in continuous circulation from the time of its supposed manufacture until the 5th or 6th century. There is a twofold solution to this problem. We can assume a later minting date than during the first three centuries AD and, instead, follow the proposed late dating of the Mahāraṭhis (to about the beginning of the 5th century) deduced from the Veerapuram excavations as well as the evidence of a recently discovered (and still unpublished) inscription from Jētavanārāma at Anurādhapura. This records that "... two merchants from Agodi, having spent money from Āndhra country gave one hundred *kahāpanas* for the benefit of the *bikkhu-sangha* of the Devanapiya-Tisa monastery" (Dias 2001, 98). The inscription has been dated to the 5th or the first half of the 6th century and is thus absolutely in line with the stratified coin from Tissamahārāma. It not only demonstrates the presence of Indian merchants in Śrī Laṅkā, but also indicates that local Indian coins could have been used on the island. Besides, punch-marked silver coins were used as a universal currency in the whole region. A second possible solution is that an intruder haphazardly survived the ages in a very well preserved state. In any case, more stratified pieces are necessary to provide a plausible answer to this question.

To put it in a nutshell, we are forced to state that Bopearachchi when trying to establish the "earliest inscribed coins" as a new kind of early Ceylonese coins regrettably did not apply even the most elementary numismatic methods. Otherwise, he would have recognised immediately that these tokens lack all features, which characterise coins.

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²¹ Codrington only generally refers to Pūjāvaliya and Rājāvaliya as sources for this narrative.

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