

Coins of Mathura Ruler Gomitra

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Abstract: Amongst ancient Indian coins those issued by Mathura rulers during third-second century BCE are known from the days of Alexander Cunningham but it was John Allan who catalogued them properly in 1936. He, however, listed among them four coins of Gomitra which were found from Bulandshahr by Cunningham which are typologically different. Later discoveries have revealed that they belong to king Gomitra of Varana, Barana of the Muslim chroniclers, about a hundred km from Mathura, which was independent of Mathura. Another Gomitra who actually belonged to Mathura has also issued copper coins of square and round shapes and palaeographically regarded as the earliest ruler of Mathura to have issued coins. Very few coins of this ruler have come to light after Allan and the present paper lists new pieces from some private collections which betray variant and novel features and are important not only historically but also culturally and iconographically.

Keywords: Mathura, Bulandshahr, Gomitra, Lakshmi, Cunningham, Allan, P.L. Gupta

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Introduction




Allan had published four copper coins dated to late third century BCE on palaeographic grounds belonging to Gomitra as the earliest inscribed coins of Mathura. These copper coins of 15 to 17.5 mm square weighing between 66 and 89 grains (4.28-5.77 g) bear four symbols (𑀓𑀲𑀓𑀲) in the centre with *Gomitasa* in early Brahmi characters (𑀧𑀲𑀓𑀲) above and *yananam?* below on the obverse and tree in railing in a square of dots on the reverse (Allan 1936: cviii and 169, nos. 1-4, Pl. XXIV.20-21). Actually Cunningham had obtained these four coins at Bulandshahr and had read the legend *Gomitasa* and *Baranaye* above and below the main device on the obverse (Cunningham 1878-79: 147; 1891: 88, Pl. X.8). These coins form part of the British Museum collection and Allan attributed them to

the Mathura series without assigning any reason. The issuer was named as Gomitra I as some more square and round copper coins of a crude fabric showing an enface standing female figure identified as Lakshmi holding a lotus in her uplifted right hand with typical Mathura tree () on left,  and  on right with  below and the legend *Gomitasa* along the edge above the goddess, the whole in a circular die on the obverse and depicting a facing elephant with rider holding goad flanked by similar ones in three-quarters profile on the reverse had also come to light from Mathura. This latter king was named as Gomitra II (Allan 1936: cix and 170-72, Pl. XXV.1-11). Variety b of this type showed the goddess holding lotus in her left hand and Var. c carried the figure of the goddess facing to left and tree in centre with Ujjain symbol below the tree and the Brahmi legend *Gomitasa* reading downwards on right (Ibid: 171, no. 18, Pl. XLV.1). Base metal (potin) round coins weighing between 32 and 46 grains ((2.073 to 2.980 g) of Gomitra II constitute Var. d and show bull to right before tree in railing and Ujjain symbol at the end of the legend (Ibid: 172, Pl. XXV.8-11). The different symbology of the coins of Gomitra I and II certainly distinguishes them as separate entities. Dr. P.L. Gupta found a better preserved square copper coin of Allan's Gomitra I type in the collection of the American Numismatic Society which clearly showed the legend *Gomitasa* above and *Varanaye* below the four central symbols (   ) and attributed it to king Gomitra of Varana (Barana of the Muslim chronicles). He believed that 'Varana would have been a principality independent of Mathura' (Gupta 1989: 9-11). Symbols and the legends clearly distinguish these coins from the coins of Mathura rulers and therefore should not be regarded as coins of Mathura henceforth. Allan has also listed a square copper coin of another Gomitra which he believed to have belonged to a different dynasty. It carries a rude figure with arms uplifted, a taurine symbol on right and the legend *Gomitasa* on the obverse with a three-branched tree in railing on the reverse (Allan 1936: 169, no. 5, Pl. XXV.3). Bela Lahiri (1974: 153) thought that the palaeography of the legend on the square coins of Gomitra (I) and that of Gomitra of another dynasty as visualized by Allan is similar to that of Mora Well inscription, so these coins should belong to a similar date of first century BCE and that "the two Gomitras seem to be identical." Gomitra who issued both square and round coins seems to be the earliest amongst the Mathura rulers who struck the regular Mathura type coins of round shape bearing the figure of female deity generally identified as Lakshmi holding a lotus and four symbols (, ,  and ) on left, right and below with Brahmi legend above showing the name of the issuer, He was followed by some other rulers like Brahmamitra, Dridhamitra, Satamitra, Suryamitra and Vishnumitra who all bore *mitra*-ending names. These Mitra rulers were followed by kings bearing *data*-ending names (Bhavadata, Kamadata, Purushadata, Ramadata, Seshadata and Uttamadata) who replaced the Ujjain symbol with Brahmi cerebral sibilant *sa*-like symbol () on their coins (Allan 1936: cx and 176-82; Lahiri 1974: 155 ff). Smith (1906: 190) had observed that the coins of Gomitra among some others, though sometimes obtainable at Mathura are scarce. Coins with crude reverse are slightly later. Very few coins of these rulers have been published after Allan and this prompts me to bring to light some newer specimens of these coins which have come to my notice in the recent years in private collections or documented in trade (**Plate I**).

The first coin (**Pl. I.1**) with one corner clipped bears the impression of a round die on square planchet. It shows the typical female deity with globular breasts identified as Lakshmi bearing *chhatrakara* 'umbrella-shaped' coiffure, wearing dhoti, *uttariya* 'upper garment', bangles and perhaps other ornaments, standing slightly turned to her left holding a flower (lotus) in her raised right hand

with left hand resting on the hip. A hitherto unnoticed feature is a symbol or part thereof on the left shoulder of the goddess. Is it an end-part of the braid? We have to wait for a future discovery for a better and clearer specimen to be sure. This feature is visible even in the coins described below. Since the lower portion has worn out the position of the feet and the symbol with fishes if it was there are not clear. The typical Mathura type tree on left is visible but the Ujjain symbol on right has left only traces while the symbol below that has worn out completely. The legend in bold early Brahmi letters above the head of Lakshmi, however, is completely intact. The vowel marks are clearly attached to the first two letters and the right leg of the letter *ta* is longer to prompt us to read it as *tra* and decipher the legend as *Gomitrasa*. The reverse is obliterated and may have carried three elephants with riders as found on other specimens. As such it belongs to Allan's Gomitra II, Variety a dated to early second century BCE. The second coin (Pl. I.2) is much better preserved and its obverse clearly shows the goddess as above with tree () on her right, legend above, *Srivatsa* () on her left. The Ujjain symbol above it and the last letter of the legend are out of flan but the symbol with fishes () below the goddess is clear. The deep round die impression on the square flan indicates that the planchet was adequately heated before being struck resulting in clearly visible features. However, the reverse has lost all features and nothing is clear.


The third square coin (Pl. I.3) has been struck with circular die on a cast planchet and is broken on its right. The figure of the goddess is more realistic and seems to wear a trouser-like lower garment besides the usual dress and ornamentation. She stands slightly turned to her right. Her coiffure shares the braid-end feature noticed above. The Brahmi legend in early characters above her head is very clear though its last letter *sa* has been taken away by the broken part. Vowel marks with *Gomita(sa*)* are clear. The typical Mathura tree on her right is deeply impressed with its base covering the molded ledge. Traces of the symbol with fishes may be made out through its traces. The Ujjain symbol with *Srivatsa* below it has also survived only in traces.

The next coin is round in shape (Pl. I.4). Made of copper it has a diameter of 20 mm and weighs 8.0 g. Its reverse is blank and the obverse shows goddess Lakshmi standing enface with right hand holding a lotus at the level of the shoulder and left hand akimbo, feet splayed completely sideways, halo of dots around the head, Ujjain symbol () having the vertical leg of a triangle-headed symbol (*Indradhvaja*) between the two upper orbs and traces of a nandipada symbol above on left, tree in railing on right and Brahmi legend *Gomitasa* from 1 to 4 o'clock position (Handa 2022: 56-57). Allan had published a coin weighing 5.37 g with legend on left replacing the Mathura type tree (Allan 1936: Pl. XXV.4; Pieper 2021: 191, no. 1263) and Mitchiner regarded a coin showing the deity with Ujjain symbol superposed by a different type of tree and the legend on her left (Mitchiner 1975: 982c; Pieper 2021: 191, no. 1264). The coin shows some interesting features. The goddess is shown with feet turned to right angles and bears *prabha-mandala* 'aureole' of dots, the earliest depiction of the nimbus known so far (Pl. II). This coin thus furnishes evidence of the earliest introduction of this feature in Indian art. The Ujjain symbol is shown with multiplication-like cross having two circles horizontally placed at top and the other two below rather than with circles in cardinal directions as seen on other coins. An inverted *Indradhvaja* is shown above it. These symbols are shown on the proper right of the goddess whereas all known coins of this ruler show Ujjain symbol () placed above the *Srivatsa* () to the proper left of the goddess. *Srivatsa* has been replaced by an inverted *Indradhvaja* on our coin. The tree in railing also occurs on the proper left of the goddess and not on her right as seen on published specimens known so far. It is not the standard Mathura type tree in railing which shows the fruits

above the horizontal branches but shows them as hanging from the branches. The Brahmi characters are almost similar to Mauryan letters and betray an early date. Obviously this coin seems to have been struck before the standardization of the type. As such the coin may have been the earliest round coin-type of Gomitra and it belies the general belief that square coins are earlier than those of round shape.

The next round copper coin (**Pl. I.5**) weighs 9.2 g and the obverse follows the pattern of square coins described above. The lower half of the goddess shows the legs bent and feet turned slightly to her left though the bust is enface. She holds a lotus in her right hand raised to the level of the shoulder and the left hand touches her left shank. The figure has been drawn artistically with thin waist, massive buttocks and round face with inverted semicircular parasol-like coiffure and bold crescent with thick dot as braid-end (?) near her left shoulder. A bangle on the wrist of her left hand is very clear and dhoti, upper garment and scarf may be guessed by their traces. The typical Mathura tree on her right is partially visible and most part of it is out of flan. *Srivatsa* except its base with Ujjain symbol with a bigger circle at the lower end above it along the right margin and the legend in bold Brahmi letters above the head of the goddess are accommodated in the round die struck on the round flan. The right limb of *ta* is engraved longer to render the legend as *Gomitrasa*. The reverse may have carried the crude figures of three elephants with riders only one of which has partially survived in this specimen. Almost complete main device and accompanying symbols are accommodated on the obverse of the next copper coin (**Pl. I.6**) which may be better seen in the enlargement of its obverse (**Pl. I.7**). The goddess stands in *samapada-sthanaka-mudra* 'frontal pose' on the curved fishy channel holding the lotus in upraised right hand with left suspended, Mathura tree on her right and *Srivatsa* superposed with Ujjain symbol on her left and the Brahmi legend in bold early characters as *Gomitrasa* may clearly be discerned on the obverse. The reverse too seems to bear the impression of a different obverse die but is not very clear.

The last copper piece 15 mm in diameter and weighing 2.34 g (**Pl. I.8**) bears the description as given below -

Obverse: Bull to right facing tree in railing, traces of Ujjain symbol  at the back at 9 o'clock position, Brahmi legend in early Mauryan characters *Gomitasa* along the edge from 10 to 1 o'clock position

Reverse: Human figure with right hand raised to the level of the shoulder and left hand suspended, symbols on right and left are blurred and not clear

The coin gives the impression of having been over struck but the under type with legend is quite clear on the obverse which resembles the Var. d potin specie of Allan's Gomitra II (Allan 1936: 172, nos. 19-25, Pl. XXV.8-11). Gomitra's potin coins are of plain reverse but our coin shows a human figure with some symbols on the reverse. This thus constitutes a newer variety of his round copper coins. Another very important fact revealed by this coin is that the obverse and reverse were prepared separately on thin flans and then joined together by adding baser material between the two layers to bring them to a standard weight. In this case the faulty joining of the obverse and reverse layers is very clear. The coin thus betrays a new technique of preparing coins in Mathura and the region around as seen on many other coins of Mathura and the Bull/Elephant type coins of the Yaudheyas in their neighborhood (Handa 2022: 57-59). We thus see that newer varieties of Gomitra's square and round coins published here throw new light on the forms and placement of symbols, technique of manufacture and show the earliest appearance of nimbus around the head of Lakshmi in Indian art.



Pl. I. Coins of Mathura ruler Gomitra (not to scale)



Pl. II. Coin of Mathura ruler Gomitra (enlargement of Pl. I.4)

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