

Some Recently Discovered Yaudhey Coins Throwing Fresh Light on Their History and Polity

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Abstract: The Yaudheyas were one of the prominent republican tribe of ancient India who were settled at and around modern Rohtak in Haryana when they started issuing copper coins of bull-elephant type from about the middle of the second century BCE the evolution of which can be traced from pieces bearing the Brahmi legend *yaudheyānām* only on the obverse which subsequently developed to *yaudheyānām* with bull on the obverse and elephant on the reverse and ultimately to *yaudheyānām bahudhāñake* with bull tied to railed sacrificial post on the obverse and elephant with *nandipada* and banner on its back on the reverse. These coins have been found from various places at and around Rohtak. Some recently discovered coins throw fresh light on their history and polity and form the subject of this paper.

Keywords: Bull-elephant type, Chakra-type, Rohtak, Yaudheya, *yaudheyānām bahudhāñake*.

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INTRODUCTION

Amongst the ancient Indian republican tribes the Yaudheyas occupy a prominent position for having issued the largest number of coins as well as for having been remembered for a long period in history. Though only one specimen each of gold (Handa 2011) and silver (Cunningham 1970: 143; 1891: 79, Pl. VI.9) specie is known, the Yaudheyas issued copious copper currency of various types at and around Rohtak (Haryana) during second-first century BCE (Bull-Elephant Type with the legend *Yaudheyānām Bahudhāñake*, A in the map), hex-cephalic Kārttikeya-Shashṭhī and Kārttikeya-Deer type in the Garhwal region (with divergent legends, B in the map) where they had to shift for safer refuge under Śaka-Kushan supremacy during first-second centuries CE and monocephalic Kārttikeya-Devasenā type with the legend *Yaudheya-ganasya Jaya* (C in the map) when they occupied a very extensive area after the retreat of the Kushans to Peshawar region during the third-fourth centuries CE (Fig.1) (Allan 1936: cxlvii-cliii, 265-278, Pls. XXXIX.5-22 & XL.1-15; Handa 2007: 149-217, Pls. XXXVIII-LXXIII).

Their definitely attributable earliest coins datable to circa second-first century BCE come from Rohtak and the area around. The evolution of these coins may be traced from some rare pieces which have come to light till now. The earliest known so far are small uniface square/rectangular pieces showing a bull to right with the Brahmi legend along its upper edge reading *Yo(Yau)dheyānām*. The

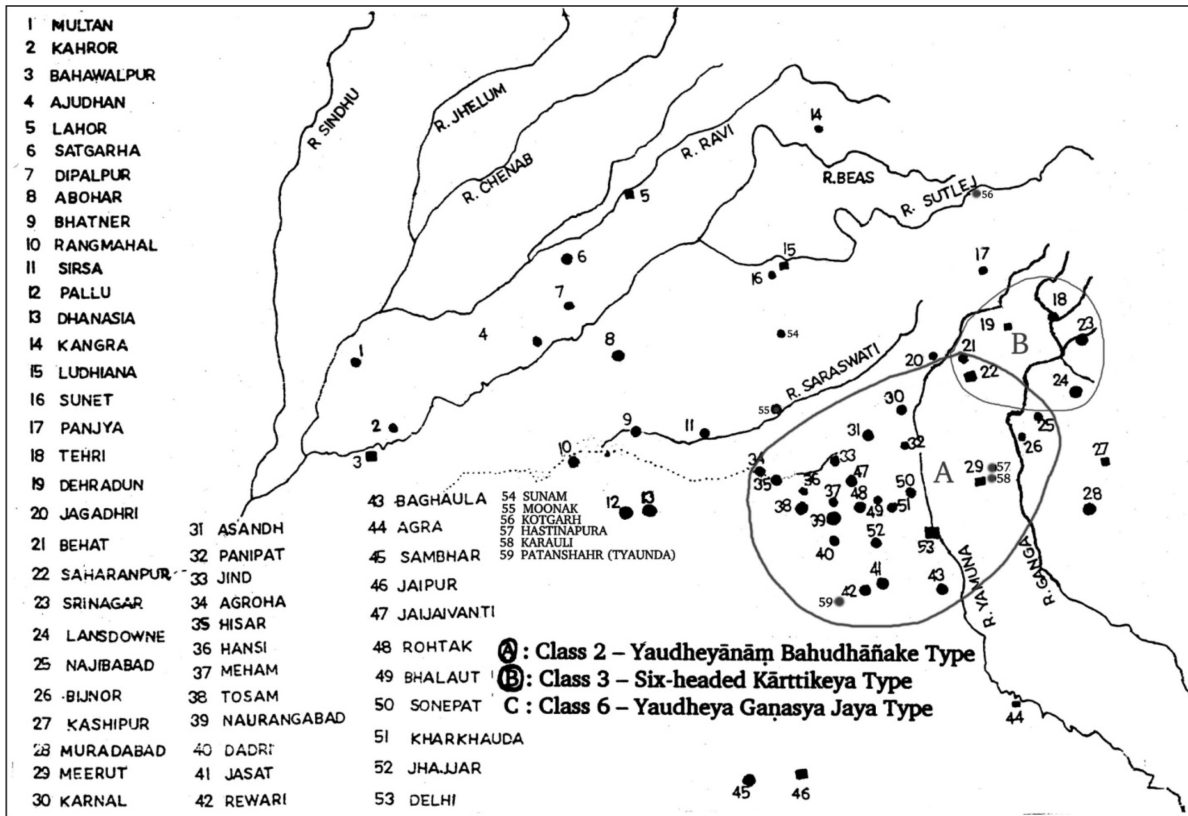


Fig.1. Distribution of Yaudheya coins

next stage is represented by a roughly round piece bearing the Brahmi legend *Yo(Yau)dheyānām/Bahudhāñake/e* ('coin' of the Yaudheyas of Bahudhānyaka 'the land of plenty corn' or circulating in Bahudhānyaka region) in two lines with blank reverse. Pieces bearing the legend *Bahudhāñake/ Yo(Yau)dheyānām* ('coin' of the Yaudheyas of Bahudhānyaka) are also known. Next we have other rare specimens which bear the figure of bull to right and Brahmi legend *Yodheyānām* above and *Bahudhāñake* below it on obverse and an elephant to right on the reverse. A coin showing bull to left with the legend *Yo(Yau)dheyānām/Bahudhāñake* running continuously around on the obverse and elephant to left on the reverse is also known. Finally they depict a humped bull before a sacrificial post in railing with Brahmi legend *Yo(Yau)dheyānām/Bahudhāñake*, above and below the animal on the obverse and an elephant with *nandipada* and a pennon or flag-like symbol above on the reverse. Different stages of the evolution of these coins may be seen in the illustration given below (Handa 2007: Pl. XXXVIII) (Fig.2).

Though the commonest variety shows both animals to right examples of the two animals facing to both left and right are also known (*Ibid*, Pl. XXXIX) (Fig. 3).

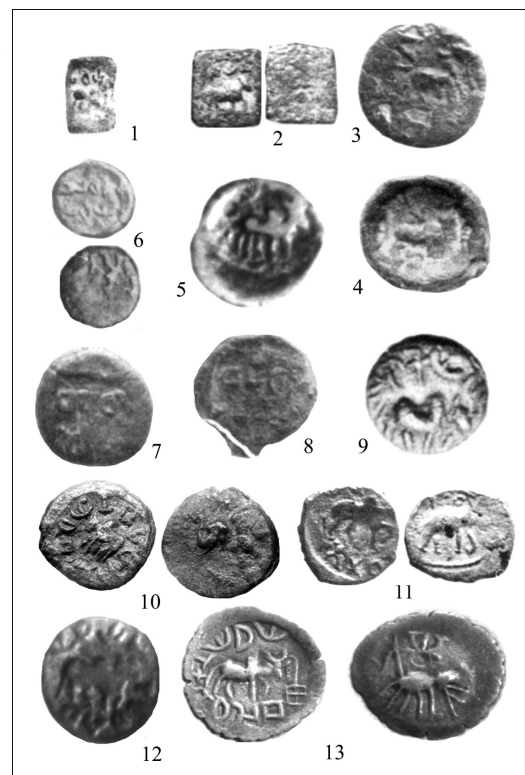


Fig. 2: Evolution of early Yaudheya coins



Fig. 3: Bull-Elephant coin-types

Solanki collection belonging to two brothers Ajay and Vijay of Jhajjar has been enriched recently with two very interesting die-struck copper coins of the tribe. The first one belongs to the Bull/ Elephant type showing on the obverse bull trotting to right with Brahmi legend *Yo(Yau)dheyānām* above and *Bahudhāñake* below. The sacrificial post in railing on right is missing here. The reverse shows elephant walking to left. Since the coin is in an indifferent state of preservation we are not sure if there were any symbols like the pennon and *nandipada* on its back (Fig. 4). Without the sacrificial post before the bull this is an interesting and rare type representing an intermediary state of evolution of the Bull/Elephant type.



Fig. 4: Yaudheya coin with bull to right and elephant to left

The second coin weighing 2.29 g in this collection represents an altogether new type (Fig. 5). It is squarish with rounded corners and shows on its obverse a tree in railing as the central device with Brahmi legend *Bahudhāñake* put vertically from top to bottom along the right edge. The coin has suffered a slash mark a little below the upper edge obliterating a part of the first letter of the legend and cutting the uppermost branch of the tree. The railing betrays nine compartments which is a new feature not noticed on any Yaudheya coin known so far. Since the part of the flan near the left edge is obliterated it is uncertain if the word *Yo(Yau)dheyānām* was there. The reverse shows an animal, probably an elephant, to left.



Fig. 5: New type Yaudheya copper coin

The existence of a tree in six-compartmented railing and the legend put vertically are the unique features and the coin thus presents a unique new type. It represents a stage when the Bull/Elephant type had not been standardized and like some other tribes the Yaudheyas put the *sthala-vriksha* 'regional tree' on their coin. This tree of the land may have been the Rohitaka tree after which was named Rohtak that became their metropolis later. It also represents an evolutionary stage of the transition from early square to round types.

Mr. Kapil Bhradwaj of Jind has obtained from the ancient site of Mughalpura adjacent to Uklana a lead circular coin weighing approximately 1.0 g which bears on the obverse a wheel as the central device with Brahmi legend around and having dotted border. The legend beginning at about 8.30 o'clock position may be read as *Bahudhāñaka Parishada* running around the wheel. Though the very rare wheel type Yaudheya coins are known to us even earlier this type of legend is witnessed for the first time on this coin. The reverse shows traces elephant to left with perhaps bold Brahmi legend *Y(o/au)dheya* above and some symbols or letters on left (Fig. 6).

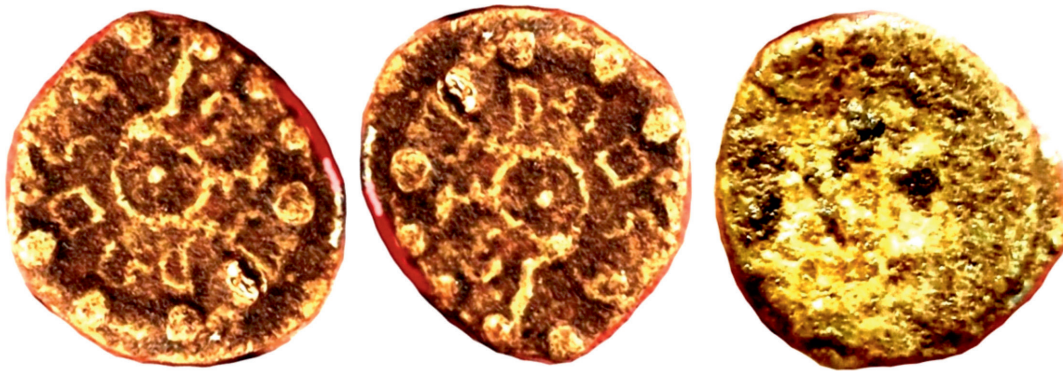


Fig. 6: Wheel type Yaudheya coin with new legend

The legend indicates that it was struck or issued by Yaudheya *Parishad* and thus throws fresh light on republican polity. As noted above coins were generally struck in the name of Yaudheyas, Yaudheyas of Bahudhāñaka and Yaudheya gana or in the name of their tutelary deities Kārttikeya and Chitreśvara (Handa 2007: 245-56; 2022:70-83). Dr. K.P. Jayaswal has dealt with the tribal polity at length and has compared the term *Parishad* with *Samiti* 'assembly' which was 'Supreme' and an age-old institution. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* (VI.1.) refers to a young man who had just completed his education and presented himself before the *Samiti*, also called the *Parishad* of the Pañchālas (*Pañchālānam samitimeyāya, Pañchālānām parishadamājagāma*) (Jayaswal 1955: 14). The assembly

of the Yaudheyas may just be compared with the modern day Vidhāna or Loka Sabhā which choose their leader to act as the Chief Minister or the Prime Minister. Similarly the tribal *Parishads* too may be assumed to have elected their leaders or Rājā ‘ruler’ or the ruling authority. Though some Yaudheya epigraphs give us the names of their elected chiefs (*Yaudheya-gana-puraskrita*) and their titles (*Mahākshatrapa Mahāsenāpati*) yet no coins bearing individual names were ever struck. The elected authority issued coins in the name of the tribe. This coin thus represents a stage when a leader could not be elected because of certain reasons like hung assemblies or non-agreement of members on a particular name and the *Parishad* was authorized to run the administration. This coin thus represents a unique discovery,

The three coins published here bear evidence to the fact that in spite of numerous discoveries made during nearly the last two centuries there are still chances of fresh material coming to light and we should look forward to them.

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