

SOME UNLISTED COINS OF THE BENGAL PRESIDENCY

By Pankaj Tandon⁵⁴

In sorting through a group of Bengal Presidency coins recently, I came across a few that were not listed in Pridmore⁵⁵ and so it seemed worthwhile to bring them to the attention of researchers and collectors.



Fig. 1 Murshidabad rupee, AH 1185, RY 11, 11.53 gm, 23 mm

The first coin (fig. 1) is a Murshidabad rupee in the name of Shah Alam II, carrying a crescent mintmark. The unusual aspect of this coin is that the AH date on it is 1185, while the regnal year is 11! Since the regnal year 11 of Shah Alam II spanned AH 1183-84 (coins with RY 11 are known for both these AH dates ... see Pridmore 109-110), this coin must be a mule where an old reverse carrying the RY 11 date was used along with a current AH 1185 obverse.



Fig. 2 Banaras rupee, AH 1195, RY 17/23 11.27 gm, 24 mm, with leaf sprig mark



circle mark

Fig. 3 Normal Banaras rupee of AH 1195

The second coin (fig. 2) is a Banaras rupee dated AH 1195, with the frozen RY 17 along with the current RY 23. Pridmore shows all the mintmarks and other ancilliary marks that he identifies as *dārogā* marks on these coins and shows that the AH 1195 coins had a new *dārogā* mark. A circle replaced the leaf sprig that the entire series had featured, dating back to the pre-British issues of Awadh. The circle is seen clearly in the normal AH 1195 coin (see fig. 3). However, on the subject coin (fig. 2), the circle is not present. Rather, we have the usual leaf sprig in that position, a variety not noted by Pridmore. Since the leaf sprig was present in

¹ I wish to thank Paul Stevens for helpful comments and for furnishing me with a table showing the date distribution of a significant hoard of Banaras rupees (see note 3).

⁵⁵ F. Pridmore: *The Coins of the British Commonwealth of Nations, Part 4, India, Volume 1: East India Company Presidency Series c. 1642-1835*, London: Spink & Son, 1975.

years before and after AH 1195, this coin fills a gap in the series and suggests that the circle mintmark was a temporary deviation rather than a real change in the composition of the coin design.

It seems to me there are two possible explanations for the circle mark and its brief life. One possibility is that the Company decided to change the *dārogā* for the issue, but ended up unsatisfied with his performance and re-employed the *dārogā* of the leaf sprig. The other is suggested by the fact that, as Pridmore notes, the mintage of AH 1195 was particularly large. There were over 2.2 million rupees minted at Banaras that year, as compared to just under 670,000 in AH 1194 and just over 250,000 in AH 1196. The *dārogā* of the leaf sprig may not have been able to handle the large demand, and so the Company could have diversified their sources by retaining the *dārogā* of the circle. Original documents in London might be able to resolve this issue.



Fig. 4 Banaras rupee, AH 1198, RY 17/25, 11.31 gm, 24 mm

The third coin (fig. 4) is another Banaras rupee. This one is dated AH 1198, with a RY of 17/25, a combination unrecorded by Pridmore or KM.⁵⁶ A curious feature of the Banaras coinage is that, for the first several years of issue, there is only one AH date for each regnal year date. Since the AH year and RY did not coincide exactly one would have expected two AH years for each RY, as is the case for the Murshidabad coinage (see Pridmore 87-115). However, for the Banaras series, Pridmore records only one AH year for each RY until RY 26 and for most of the years after that, Pridmore records coins with two AH dates for each RY. There are two AH dates for each of the regnal years 26, 27, 29, 30, and 33-49 (at which point the RY freezes at 49). Regnal years 28, 31 and 32 have only one AH date associated with them. Our coin 3 pushes back the start of this dual-dating to RY 25. The most likely explanation is that the volume of coinage had increased significantly. As mentioned earlier, Pridmore records a mintage of roughly only a quarter million in RY 24. But in RY 25, the mintage spiked to nearly 1.8 million, and it remained well over 1 million for the next two years (RY 26 and 27). The larger output may have necessitated production on a wider range of dates, and therefore both AH dates corresponding to the regnal year are recorded. The mintage fell to less than 50,000 in RY 28, and this would explain the single AH date for that year. Pridmore does not record the levels of mintage for any of the subsequent years, but the evidence of the coins suggests that the mintages must have been low in RYs 31 and 32, but relatively high in all other years.⁵⁷



Fig. 5 Banaras rupee, AH 1200, RY 17/27, 11.17 gm, 24 mm

⁵⁶ This date combination does not appear either in a date distribution table of 771 Banaras rupees, recorded by P. Kulkarni and kindly furnished to me by Paul Stevens.

⁵⁷ Of course, it is also possible that coins with the missing date combinations 1204/31 and 1205/32 might still be found, which would be consistent with larger mintages in the RYs 31 and 32.



New daroga mark
Fig. 6

Finally, coin 4 is yet another Banaras rupee, AH 1200, RY 17/27, that fills a gap in Pridmore's listing of the *dārogā* marks on the coins of this series. Specifically, for AH 1200, RY 17/27, Pridmore has a question mark in the column of illustrations of the *dārogā* marks. Perhaps he did not have access to a coin which was clear enough for the marks to be seen clearly. Coin 4 here shows the *dārogā* marks clearly, and, in particular, indicates the appearance of a new mark (see fig. 6) in place of the leaf sprig. The new mark consisted of a central pellet, surrounded by four curved pellets. Pridmore's table (and my own observation) shows that the leaf sprig reappeared in RY 28, so the 5-pellet mark was another short-lived one, like the circle mark of RY 23.

AN UNRECORDED DOUBLE TOLA GOLD COIN OF NEPAL

By Nicholas Rhodes

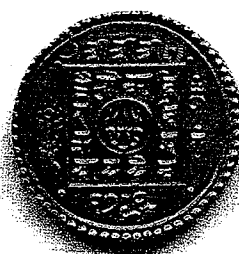


Fig. 1 obverse



Fig. 2 obverse

Obv: *Śrī Śrī Śrī Trailokya Vi/ra Vi/krama/ Sāha Deva/ 1796.*
Rev: *Śrī 3/ Bhavā/nī* in central circle, *Śrī Śrī Śrī Gorakhanātha* in petals around.
Diam: 26mm Wt: 23.05 g



Fig. 1 reverse



Fig. 2 reverse

Obv: *Śrī/ Śrī Śrī Sure/ndra Vi/krama/ Sāha Deva/ 1794.*
Rev: Same die as last.
Diam: 26mm Wt: 23.00 g

In the Hong Kong Coin Auction (Baldwin, Ma, Gillio & Monetarium, Catalogue 42), on Thursday, 30 August 2007, a remarkable Nepalese gold coin was offered as Lot.703 (Fig.1 above). Fortunately for me, as the ultimate purchaser, the cataloguer, and presumably the previous owner, did not realise the full importance of this coin. It was catalogued as a gold coin of King Surendra, of a rare denomination and an unrecorded date, 1796 Saka (1874 AD). This description was not fully correct, as the coin is in the name, not of the king, but of his eldest son, the

Crown Prince, Trailokya Vir Vikram Shah. As such, this is a completely new and unexpected coin. Two coins were issued in the name of the young prince in 1771 Saka (1849 AD)⁵⁸, when he was about two years old, but this new piece was issued twenty five years later, and does not obviously celebrate any of the events in his life when coins might have been issued in his name⁵⁹. In 1860 AD he was married to the daughter of the Prime Minister, Jang Bahadur Rana, Lalit Kumari. Then, on 8 August 1875 AD, Lalit Kumari gave birth to a son, the future King Prithvi Vir Vikram Shah. Finally Prince Trailokya died suddenly and in mysterious circumstances on 30 March 1878 AD, three years before his father and before he could ascend the throne. One can only speculate as to why this coin was struck in 1874 AD.

One possibility is that the coin was struck while Jang Bahadur was out of the country, and risked political intrigue. In late 1874 AD, Jang Bahadur left Kathmandu for his second visit to Europe, the first having been in 1850-51 AD. Unfortunately, on 3 Feb. 1875 AD, while in Bombay, he was thrown from his horse and sustained chest injuries. It was decided to cancel the visit, and the party returned to Kathmandu soon after. It could be that this coin was struck for Jang Bahadur to present to VIP's on his trip to Europe⁶⁰, to celebrate the fact that the Crown Prince was his son-in-law, or it could have been struck in Kathmandu as part of a complex and unrecorded plot for Trailokya to replace his father on the throne. Prince Trailokya was a well-educated and cultured individual, and is known to have been involved, willingly or otherwise, in some palace intrigues after the death of Jang Bahadur in February 1877 AD, but this was too late for the issue of this coin⁶¹.

The new coin is illustrated at the head of this article, along with a coin of the same denomination struck in the name of his father, King Surendra, dated 1794 Saka (1872 AD) (Fig. 2 above). The coins are identical in size and fabric, and indeed share the same reverse die, so they must have been officially struck in the same mint. The different form of the numeral "9" in the date is also found in silver and copper coins of this date, and is to be expected. One unexpected feature of the new coin is that the oblique milling slopes in the opposite way from all the known gold coins in the name of King Surendra (see illustration), and it may be that this was a secret code to distinguish the coins not struck in the name of the ruling King.



In conclusion, this new coin is a most exciting new discovery, but further historical research is necessary before we can be sure as to exactly why, and on what occasion, this unique piece was struck⁶².

⁵⁸ RGV 938 & 978, gold and silver respectively of this 2 tola weight.

⁵⁹ As with all Nepalese gold coins from this period, this piece would have been struck for presentation purposes, on some special occasion, rather than as normal currency.

⁶⁰ It is worth noting that the only known earlier gold coin in the name of Trailokya was given by Jang Bahadur to Queen Victoria during his first visit to Europe, and was given by the Queen to the British Museum. However, no other gold coins are known with this date, so Jang Bahadur did not strike other gold coins for presentation during his trip, as he seems to have done in preparation for his earlier visit to Europe.

⁶¹ The historical background for this article is largely taken from *Nepal Under the Ranas*, by Adrian Sever. Sittingbourne, UK, 1993.

⁶² The provenance of this coin gives no hint as to the reason for its issue. It was reportedly consigned for auction by a British coin dealer, but its earlier history is not known.