

Śuktimatī: A New Coin and History

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The city of Śuktimatī was well known as the capital of Chedī *deśa* during the Mahābhārata period. A coin of Śuktimatī was first published in 1992 by one of us¹ when the city was brought on the historical map of India. This was a small square coin weighing only 1.4 g bearing the legend *Sutimati* that was read by Kulkarni as *Sugimati* and later on corrected by him as *Sutimati*.² This paper generated a lot of interest amongst scholars and collectors and more such coins were found. P.L. Gupta appreciated this paper and wrote more about the provenance of Śuktimatī.³ Recently Amiteshwar Jha included this discovery in his excellent book by illustrating two more specimens.⁴

We are pleased to publish another unique coin of Śuktimati in this paper. This is a larger variety and it matches the fabric of the coins published earlier.

Copper, 22x25 mm, 3.98 gm.



Obverse: Walking horse to right with an Ujjaini symbol above and legend in Brāhmī characters: *sutimati*. A group of three symbols are seen in front of the horse. They include a large śrivatsa symbol, a tank containing two fish and two indistinct objects⁵ and a composite symbol resembling a six spoke swastika.

Reverse: Elephant standing on a pedestal to right with upraised trunk. The animal is surrounded with three symbols: a tree in railing to left, four orbs with a palette in each one above and a standard like object with two more circular orbs to the right.

The beauty of the coin is that it has clear symbols and it is a larger denomination of the squarish coins published earlier. The legend *sutimati* is very clear and leaves no doubt about the attribution. The type is influenced by the coinage of Kauśāmbi as it bears some resemblance to the lanky bull type coins, although the artistic standard is much higher, as we see in the fine depiction of both the horse and the elephant.

The history of Śuktimatī is not known in detail. It can be partly constructed from various sources in the ancient literature. An attempt has been made here to present whatever is known about the city.

Śuktimatī was known as Sothhivati or Sothhivatinagara in the Jātaka literature. The Chetiya Jātaka mentions that, “once upon a time, in the first age, there was a king named Mahasammata, whose life was an *asañkheyya* long. His son was Roja, his son Vararoja, and then the succession was Kalyaṇa, Varakalyaṇa, Uposatha, Mandhātā, Varamandhātā, Chara, Upachara, who was also called as Apachara. He reigned over the kingdom of Cheti, in the city of Sothhivati.”⁶ We can surmise that the location was roughly in the area of modern Bundelkhand, as “the Buddha, having dwelt in the Ceti country, went to Bhaddavatikā, where, at the Ambatittha, Sāgata tamed a Nāga, and from there he went to Kosambī.”⁷ The find spot of the coin, reportedly somewhere in the region of Kosam, corroborates this location.

The Mahābhārata mentions that Śuktimatī was the capital of a king named Dhṛṣṭaketu and it was situated on the banks of the river Śuktimatī which is described as one of the rivers of Bhāratvarṣa.⁸ This river was obstructed by mount Kolāhala in Chedi.⁹ The *Brahmapurāṇa*, *Vāyupurāṇa* and *Matsyapurāṇa* mention that it starts from the Ṛikṣa mountain while the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* mentions the origin as the Vindhya.¹⁰ Pargiter identifies this river with the Ken, a tributary of Yamuna, flowing through Bundelkhand and places the city of Śuktimatī in the neighbourhood of Banda.¹¹ The Kosam inscription of the reign of maharaja Vaiśravaṇa of year 107 refers to Śuktimatī¹² which according to B.C. Law is probably in the neighbourhood of Kosambi. A mountain named Śuktimān also exists but its location is not certain as various authors have tried to trace it in the Chhatisgarh, Kathiawad, Hazaribagh, Manbhūm and even Tippera ranges.¹³ According to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the Śuktimān mountain is one of the *saptakula* mountains in India. *Śrīmad Bhāgavat* mentions this mountain as a part of the Vindhya-chala whereas the *Mahābhārata* states that Bhimasena conquered the range.¹⁴ According to G.P. Singh the city of Śuktimatī originally belonged to the Yadavas. Later on it became the famous capital of the Chedi kingdom. The Jain Purāṇa refers to this city as Śuktimatīnagara. It is also called Sūktipurī. It attained urban status in the early phase of Northern Black Polished Ware era, which reached full bloom during the Kuṣāṇa period.¹⁵

With the discovery of the coins of Śuktimatī, the numismatic evidence supports the literature of that period. The coin should belong to the 2nd-3rd centuries BC as per the paleography of the script.

1. Prashant P. Kulkarni, Śuktimatī: A City-State of Madhya Pradesh, *Indian Coin Society Newsletter*, No. 13, March 1992, p.1.
2. Prashant P. Kulkarni, Śuktimatī Corrigenda, *Indian Coin Society Newsletter*, No. 16, Sept. 1992, p.4.
3. Parmeshwari Lal Gupta, Coins of Erakina and Śuktimati, *Indian Coin Society Newsletter*, No. 18, January 1993, p.4.
4. Amiteshwar Jha, *Bhāratiya Sikke Ek Etihāsik Parichaya*, IIRNS Publications, Nashik 2003, p. 22, nos. 67-68.
5. We speculate that these might represent oysters or fresh water mussels. The word “Śukti” means oyster, and a passage in the *Mahābhārata* supports this. During the asvamedha performed by Yuddhisthira, Arjuna accompanied the sacrificial horse. “Turning round in course of his wanderings at will, the mighty steed came upon the beautiful city of the Chedis called after the oyster. The name of the city was Śuktimatī.” *Mahābhārata*, Book XIV, translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m14/m14083.htm>.
6. E.B. Cowell, *The Jātaka*, Book VIII, 422, New Delhi 2002, p. 272.
7. http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/c/cetiya.htm
8. *Mahābhārata*, III,22; Bhīṣmaparva, VI,9.
9. *Mahābhārata*, VI,9.35.
10. *Brahmapurāṇa* XXVII.32, *Matsyapurāṇa* CXIV.101, *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* LVII.32.
11. N.N. Bhattacharya, *The Geographical Dictionary, Ancient and Medieval India*, New Delhi 1999, p.106.
12. The inscription refers to the consecration of an umbrella in a Buddhist temple by a resident of Śuktimatī. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 147-148. Although this inscription seems to be much later than the period of our coin, it is the previously earliest known inscription relating to Śuktimatī. The coins now seem to pre-date this by several hundred years.
13. B.C. Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, New Delhi 1984, p.128 and p. 262.
14. Vijayendra Kumar Mathur, *Aitihāsik Sthānāvali*, New Delhi 1969, pp. 903-4.
15. G.P. Singh, *Republics, Kingdoms, Towns and Cities in Ancient India*, New Delhi 2003, pp. 196-197.