

COINAGE

from divine figures to military portraits

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Production and use of coinage has accompanied growth of civilization but since the birth of surviving coinage starting from c.2,500 years ago, civilization has been far from civil. Those of peaceful disposition have been united in their revulsion of ‘rulers’ and ‘military commanders’ faces on coinage: commemorating horrors of action, as well as casual disregard of community effort involved in making that coinage.

A selection of coins made over the past 2,500 years is presented here. Dominating themes with the first coinage from Asia minor are ‘divine’ figures and their symbolism instead of



representation of ‘military commanders’ [A: c.460BCE, Mysia, obol: obverse – lion facing backwards, reverse – stylized swastika. 29 grains silver. B: c.530BCE, Sybaris, nomos: obverse – bull facing backwards, reverse – incuse of same. 133 grains

silver] Inscriptions were rarely featured on the earliest coins. However, as time passed, they began to appear (D: c.134-138CE, Rome, denarius: obverse – portrait of Hadrian ‘HADRIANUS AUG. COS. III,’ reverse – Felicitas ‘FELICITAS AUG.’ 51 grains silver.)



with ‘military commanders’ portraits featuring prominently. Portraiture is a theme featured on almost all subsequent western coinage after Rome: from Byzantium to medieval England along with ‘coinage debasement.’ [C: c.867-886CE, Constantinople, solidus: obverse – crowned busts of Basil and Constantine ‘BASILIOS ET COHSTAHT AYGG,’ reverse – Christ seated ‘IHS XPS REX REGNANTIVM.’ 59 grains gold. F: c.1967CE, London, sovereign: obverse – Elizabeth II ‘DEI.GRATIA.REGINA.F:D:,’ reverse – St. George and dragon. 123 grains gold.]



With coinage from Asia major, a similar theme in a move towards militarism and militaristic



inscriptions is found. However, aside from later Greco-Romano-influenced coinage [3: c.35-12BCE, Indo-Scythians, tetradrachma: obverse – Azes seated right on horseback ‘ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΖΟΥ,’ reverse – Zeus Bremetes standing facing. 150 grains silver] portraiture rarely features.

Punch-marked silver coins [1: c.C3rd BCE, [51 grains silver](#)] display various stamps of craftsmen involved in making them without any Gupta portraiture. Similarly, southern Indian coins [2: c.1720, Karnataka, Nayaks of Chitradurga, pagoda: obverse – Durga, reverse – ‘Sri (Prat)apa Kri(shna) Raya.’ [51 grains gold](#)] contained representations of deities and simple statements.

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Mughal coinage displayed dates, imperial names and mintmarks but no portraiture [4: c.1605CE, Ahmadabad, rupee: obverse – Akbar I’s titles, reverse – mint name/month. [177 grains silver](#).] From early C19th, well after British/European ‘traders’ had arrived in the east, we find portraiture being introduced and promoted [5: 1877-1882CE, Alwar, rupee: obverse – crowned Victoria ‘VICTORIA EMPRESS,’ reverse – legend in Persian ‘Maharao Rajah Mangal Singh Bahadur.’ [177 grains silver](#).]



‘Fixing’ of ‘rates’ between coinage

A defining characteristic of ‘the western state’ is the ‘fixing’ of exchange rates between coinage of varying metals by ‘state authority.’ In C17th ‘Denmark,’ 6 copper *pennings* of 9 grains each made ½ *skillings* of 10 grains 156(/1000) ‘silver’ each. 16 impure *skillings* made 1 *mark* of 150 grains 593 ‘silver.’ Finally, 4 *marks* made 1 purer silver *krone* of 260 grains 859 silver. This bewildering display was for nothing more than keeping ordinary Danish citizens confused and ‘subjected.’ Danish ‘landowners’ would have dealt between themselves in purer silver coins whereas impure were meant as ‘payment medium’ for ‘the masses,’ who were considered as chattel on ‘landowners’ land.’

Comparing *pennings* with *skillings*, we can see that ‘state authorities’ fixed silver/copper ratio at c.1/34. Just what a ‘free market’ exchange rate between silver and copper (coins) would have been then is hard to estimate, as nobody in Denmark was [is] free. For comparison, in C17th Britain, 4 copper *farthings* of c.20 grains each made 1 *penny*; 12 of which were ‘tariffed’ to 1 *shilling* of 87 grains silver. ‘State authorities’ in Britain had fixed silver/copper ratio at c.1/11. 34 hypothetical copper coins would have to be earned for 1 silver coin in Denmark, compared to 11 in Britain. For sure, something was/is relatively rotten in ‘the state of Denmark.’ Contemporaneous Indians within the subcontinent were not subjected to such false coinage prevalent in the west: there being no ‘state imposition’ on exchange rates between gold *mohurs*, silver *rupees* and copper *dams*. Ostensibly, ‘fixing’ of rates was meant to ‘facilitate trade’ and was marketed as such, but in reality was a surreptitious act by ‘state authorities’ to keep citizens under control of ‘the state.’

