The Numismatic Chronology of Mathura and its bearing on Art

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'Mathura' is synonymous in the history and discourse about Indian Art with the school that produced a great many masterpieces from the so-called 'Sunga' to the 'Gupta' periods (c.200BC-500AD). Made from the typical and conspicuous mottled sandstone quarried locally from the environs of the Braj region, the sculptures of this school have contributed immensely to our understanding about the development of Art in ancient India. But Art does not thrive in isolation; it bears the context of complex religious, social and political movements and phenomena around it. When it comes to a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive study that unravels the many aspects surrounding the Mathura School, there is no contribution of greater importance than the publication, 'Mathura: The Cultural Heritage', published in 1989 by the American Institute of Indian Studies. Doris Meth Srinivasan edited this seminal volume (referred to hereinafter as "MCH") and made her name, as I have many times fondly called her, "Lady Mathura". Later in 1997, Doris came out with another masterpiece, "Many Heads, Arms and Eyes: Origin, Meaning and Form of Multiplicity in Indian Art" in which she took her particular interest in Mathura forward by re-emphasising the position of the school in the evolution of one of the most discernible features of Indian iconography - one that lent Indian deities the sobriquet "Much Maligned Monsters", the title of another famous contribution by Partha Mitter. Apart from such sterling contributions, Doris has consistently contributed to the discourse on ancient Indian Art and iconography through a number of other papers and lectures.

It is therefore with great admiration for her scholarship, and also from a personal note of fondness to the 'fun person' she is to be with, that I offer her this paper. "The road treaded by Great Men, IS the road" says an old Sanskrit adage (महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थः) but significant as past contributions on a subject like Art history can be, the context and the interpretations

around it constantly evolve and force us to rethink and refashion the ‘road’ walked by the ‘great men’.

Any reinvestigation into coins attributed to Mathura must start with perhaps the most important contribution on coins of the Mathura region: the chapter “Early Coins of Mathura Region” contributed to MCH by the doyen of Indian numismatics, Dr P L Gupta (Gupta 1989). In the years following MCH, we have had many significant advances in research on the Mathura School – for example, Sonya Rhie Quintanilla’s study of the pre-Kushan art at Mathura (Rhie Quintanilla 2007) has given us much new ‘fodder’ to understand its genesis and early evolution. The contributions of Harry Falk, Richard Salomon, Nicholas Simms-Williams and Joe Cribb in the subjects of epigraphy, philology, language and coinage have broadened our horizons of studying Mathura considerably. There is an overarching need therefore, to contextualize the art of Mathura within the ambits of these new findings and also to underline how important subjects like numismatics have furthered or added on to the discourse of Art history.

A common methodological critique of Art historians is their deployment of ‘style’ as an analytical device to draw chronological conclusions. It is particularly important to corroborate, or indeed refute, these inferences from other ‘material’ evidence like coinage, because after all ‘style’ is entirely a visual construct, created with an ‘a posteriori’ rationalising about refinement and quality of artistic expression, and as such a qualitative and subjective analytical device. It is often bolstered with literary and epigraphic evidence but seldom with coins, particularly because numismatics is often perceived to have several limitations because of the very nature of the objects the science revolves around. Be that as it may, I will attempt in the following pages, an analysis of some significant observations when it comes to coins of Mathura which I hope will argue for a rethinking of some of the inferences made earlier, not only by art historians but also by scientists such as archaeologists, who have worked on aspects of material evidence available at Mathura and other constituent ‘centres’ of the school, such as Sanghol or Ahichchhatra.

Mathura: The earliest localised coinages

Coins attributed to Mathura first featured collectively in John Allan’s British Museum catalogue of coins of Ancient India (Allan 1936: cvii-cxvi). By far, the earliest of these coins are a series of silver ‘punch-marked coins’ attributed to the pre-Mauryan state of ‘Surasena Janapada’ (FIG 1). These were extensively studied, from a numismatic standpoint, by Peter

Anne van't Haaff in a monograph published in (van't Haaff 2004). However, both the attribution and the nomenclature of these coins need some reviewing. Firstly, they are not exactly 'punch-marked' as they bear a single-die impression, which sometimes shows the margins of the die. They conform to a ½ *Karshapana* weight standard but that alone would not befit their categorization as 'punch-marked'. Secondly, their association with Mathura and inter alia to 'Surasena Janapada' is somewhat dubious. Of the few specimens of this sort in the British Museum collection, only one was found at Mathura - indeed, Allan in his catalogue does not make any mention of the coin-type he lists as having any more specific a provenance than "Northern or N.W. India" (Allan 1936: xvii). The attribution of these coins to 'Surasena Janapada' appears squarely to rest with P L Gupta, who advocated the approach of identifying many of the pre-Magadhan coin series as issues of 'Sixteen Mahajanapadas' of the Buddhist and Sanskritic tradition. Gupta mentioned in his contribution to 'Mathura' (Gupta 1989:124) –

"coins of this type were found in a hoard, many years ago, at Sonkh…the entire hoard soon disappeared; but by chance a few coins of this hoard somehow reached B D Seth who was the District Officer at Mathura. By chance I saw these coins".

This evidently is not data which has been scientifically retrieved, nor can it be wholly relied upon. However, Gupta continued,

"…not long after that a small lot of twelve coins was acquired by the Mathura Museum…I suspect these coins belong to this very Sonkh hoard. I am thus inclined to attribute these coins as the issues of Surasena Janapada. In my opinion, they testify to the existence of an independent state at Mathura before the rise of the Magadha Empire under the Nandas".

It is clear that the information on the basis of which the attribution of these coins to 'Surasena Janapada' is thus very tentative, based on a much subjective interpretation and mainly on Gupta's personal opinion rather than any verifiable evidence. It is worthy to note that these coins are also found in other regions – Gupta himself mentions finds stretching as far afield as the ancient sites of Rajgir in Bihar, Ujjain / Bhilsa in Malwa and Pawaya on the Malwa-Bundelkhand borderlands. But according to Gupta, these finds are merely "indicative of intercommunication between Mathura and these places" (Gupta 1989:135, fn.9).

Needless to say, these views need a careful reassessment so far their applicability in attributing the coins is concerned. But in absence of a state-run system to record coin-finds in India, one has many times to rely on information from coin dealers and accession registers of

local museums where it is recorded in a haphazard and often perfunctory manner. Moreover, recently Gupta's approach of equating areas in which the supposedly pre-Magadhan coins found with the 'Sixteen Mahajanapadas' has itself come under criticism and other avenues of attributing these coins, particularly those concerned with emergence and spread of trade networks, are fast becoming a part of the discussion (Mitchiner 2004). The chronology of these coins is also a matter of controversy. Gupta himself attributed the inception of many of these coin series to the period antedating the imperial expansion of Magadha, to circa 400BC, the 'Surasena' coins being no exception (Gupta 1959). Van't Haaff, taking into account political alignments mentioned in some Buddhist texts, proposed even an earlier date of c. 500BC (van't Haaff 2004: 68). However, archaeological and textual references to the region around Mathura being urbane enough to sustain such a prolific and organized coinage at such an early date is lacking. It has been shown that Mathura was only a small settlement in the pre-Mauryan times (Thapar 1989, Härtel 1993), and even in Mauryan times it was not a city that attracted much attention, being only cursorily mentioned in texts like Megasthenes' *Indica*. Only in the late Mauryan times, from c. 2nd century BC onwards, does the site flourish into an urban centre of some importance. Judging by these factors it is extremely unlikely that the region around Mathura – 'Surasena Janapada' as it may have been called – could have had such an extensive coinage in centuries well before the Mauryan period. It is quite likely that these coins probably belong to a localised series which circulated parallel to the Magadha-Maurya 'Karshapana' coinage, from c. 300BC onwards. Mitchiner (2004: 940) has placed them in the bracket 350-315BC which seems to be more plausible dating.

But leaving aside the attributional and chronological debates, if we do take Gupta's view as a numismatic 'starting point', we have to agree that this is perhaps the earliest example of a localised monetary system being functional in the Greater Mathura region. The coins are of many different varieties and thousands of individual dies appear to have been employed in generating its output. They are struck in two or three different denominations (Mitchiner 2004: 940-946), with the smallest being equivalent to the 1 *Mana* (0.1 gm). It is therefore plausible that the so-called 'Surasena Janapada' coins, irrespective of their attribution as such, constitute an evidence for extensive and complex money use. This can only be concomitant with the generation of an economic surplus, which in turn must have served as a stimulus for rapid urbanization. The art that proliferated in the centuries after these coins circulated must have greatly drawn on these social processes. As such, these coins are important in our understanding of how the conditions which sustained such a magnificent

flourish of art were created. Needless to say, the study pioneered by van't Haaff needs to be taken forward using other numismatic techniques, such as die analysis, to have a better understanding of this coinage.

Further in his contribution to MCH, Gupta described the 'imperial' type of *Karshapana* coins found in Mathura region (Gupta 1989: 124-127). Unlike the coins described above, these have five punches and are conspicuously found all over the Indian subcontinent. Although Gupta agrees that there is no "official record of the finds of the silver punch-marked coins of the Nanda-Mauryan imperial period from Mathura and its vicinity", he mentions "several lots of this coinage" in the Mathura and Lucknow Museum collections which are "obtained from Mathura residents or dealers". The Karshapana currency must therefore have continued the practice of money use in the Greater Mathura region that was either initiated by (if we follow Gupta and van't Haaff's argument) or concomitant with (if we do not) the use and spread of the localised ½ *Karshapana* coins. Long before the MCH contribution, Gupta had published moulds for making punch-marked coins (Gupta 1954). It is noteworthy that similar moulds were also recovered from Sonkh excavations (Härtel 1993: 316) in levels corresponding to the late Ksatrapa to Early Kushan periods.

Gupta was perspicacious in noting one of the symbols on the Karshapana coins as having a special affinity to the Mathura region. This was a peculiar sort of tree, which had two cross-bars or branches, attached to a vertical shaft, or trunk, and leaves emanating at right angles to the crossbars. Gupta noticed that in his scheme of classification, this particular tree symbol was shared by coins that he regarded as 'pre-Mauryan' amongst the Karshapana series, and coins which are attributed to the monarchical issues of Mathura, evidently post-dating than the punch-marked currency. Since on these later coins the association of the symbol is almost certainly as a mint-location indicative, Gupta suggested that this symbol most likely served a similar function on the earlier punch-marked coins too. He thus concluded, "this symbol may be called 'the Mathura symbol'" (Gupta 1989: 127)

Gupta then continued to corroborate his inference with a "later variety of punch-marked coins" he noticed in the collection of the Mathura Museum, "on which, there is, along with the above mentioned symbol, another symbol – a standing human figure holding a plough in his left hand and a long stick in the right hand". The other symbols on these coins were the 'Mathura tree' and a bull, along with the standard Karshapana marks of a sun and a six-armed symbol. He then compared this icon with the famous silver drachmae of Agathocles

unearthed at Aï Khanoum which have the depictions of Samkarshana Balarama and Vasudeva Krishna. He identified the figure as a schematic representation of Balarama, judging from his attributes, and proceeded to comment, "if the identification of the figure on the punch-marked coin is admitted as Samkarshana (Balarama), this would be his earliest anthropomorphic representation". Implicit in this statement is Gupta's view that he dates these punch-marked coins to a period after the fall of the Mauryas, but before the reign of the Agathocles (c. 190-185BC). He therefore speculated that the issuers of these coins could well have been the Vrshni clan, who revered Balarama as a hero, and who might have succeeded the Mauryas in the locale of Mathura soon after the fall of the Mauryan Empire (Gupta 1989: ibid.)

How Gupta dated the punch-marked coins to a very specific epoch of c. 220 – 190BC is unclear, but he states that in his view, the issue of punch-marked coins ceased in c. 200-175BC. He enlists evidence from excavations at Sonkh that they were in circulation in the Mathura region until 150-100BC. When Gupta published his seminal work, co-authored with Terry Hardaker, on the classification of the 'Magadha-Maurya' *Karshapana* coins (Gupta & Hardaker 1985), the coin was fitted into the 'Gupta-Hardaker' or 'GH' system in the sequence GH497-499; all coins in the sequence have the principle symbols which Gupta noted in the MCH publication, including the 'Mathura tree', the 'Balarama' figure (not always showing the attributes clearly) and a 'bull', all of which form a 'regiospecific' attributive assemblage.

Nearly two decades after the Gupta took notice of this coin type in his contribution to MCH, sometimes in the early 2000's, a hoard of very similar punch-marked coins was unearthed somewhere in the vicinity of Mathura. It was first noticed by Paul Murphy (Murphy 2002) and later, Elizabeth Errington contributed a detailed paper on 50-odd coins she had an opportunity to examine (Errington 2011). The coins published by Errington indeed add much more to the context outlined by Gupta, not the least of which is the fact that they all share the 'Mathura tree' symbol. In all, the packet comprised of five types of punch-marked coins, sharing certain attributes like obverse or reverse symbols, and barring one stray coin (GH-540, listed as Type 1) it is quite clear that they are all part of the same 'currency picture' and must have circulated alongside each other. Their average weight is pretty close to the *Karshapana* standard; however, they apparently are struck in debased silver with some coins showing evidence of silver coating over a copper-alloy core. Based on her analysis of the coins, Errington concluded that the packet comprised:

Type 2 - 3 coins of type GH476,

Type 3 - 17 coins of a type derived from GH497 (which she designated as GH497a),

Type 4 - 8 coins of yet another derivation of GH497 (designated as GH497b) and

Type 5 - 21 coins of an entirely new type which was not represented in the GH system.

The most interesting aspect of these coins, however, is that apart from the stylized icon already identified as 'Balarama' by Gupta, they show a number of other stylized iconic depictions. Some of these are akin to the 'Balarama' noted by Gupta, inasmuch as the figure holds aloft a plough. In some cases, it is not clear to ascertain what the figure holds aloft but its posture is very conspicuous – the legs are flexed at knees and the arms are held high alongside the head (FIG 2). Apart from this figure, there are other stylized icons: there is a standing figure holding a staff and a water-pot (FIG 3), there is a human figure standing atop a bull (FIG 4), and there is another standing figure, ostensibly without any attributes but with hair tied behind the head in a bun (FIG 5). The figure with staff and water-pot is akin to the one seen on a different type of *Karshapanas*, GH566, which does not have the 'regiopecific' type attributes, like the 'Mathura tree', that the coins in the packet Errington analysed have. Gupta and Hardaker have opined that this figure on GH566 might represent Shiva or Karttikeya (Gupta & Hardaker 1985: 24, 80, type VI.IV.C142).

Alongside the coins in the packet, Errington also published some other coins, which are ostensibly related to the others. These are stray examples drawn from private collections. One of these coins (FIG 6), which shares the motifs of 'Mathura tree' and the 'bull' symbol with the others, helps to add more figures to the repertoire of stylized icons seen from other coins. This coin clearly bears not one but two human figures in the same punch, standing in exactly similar fashion, with one showing the plough attribute clearly. It is indistinct what the figure on the right holds but comparing it with a similarly executed figure on types listed as GH496 and GH504, it is pretty clear that the object held aloft by it is a wheel or Chakra. In iconography this makes perfect sense because the associate of Balarama holding a plough would be Krishna, holding a wheel. On the reverse of this coin we see a standing figure holding a hand raised high, and a water-pot – even in its stylized rendering, it is shown as prominently ithyphallic. There is little doubt, therefore, that this is a representation of Shiva. In fact, Errington has remarked that this representation, along with depictions seen on other coins, suggest a "pattern of development of the Shiva image" - coins of Type 5 show him without any conspicuous attributes, barring the bun of hair; the punch on the reverse of type

4/GH497b show him with staff and a water-pot, akin to GH566 and the obverse of the same coins show him above a bull, which might be a hint to his association with Nandi (Errington 2011: 113).

Chronologically, Errington places the Mathura coins to a phase at the very end of the issuance of punch-marked coins. Not falling into the trap of following a 'dynastic' label for attribution, she attributes them to a phase when the "(punch-marked) coins begin to show a regional bias (viz. in their symbolic assemblage and typology), but before the point … when the hoards comprise of one predominant type, the designs become fixed, the symbols degenerate, the metal becomes debased and/or the weight standard reduces". Given this assessment, we can be sure that we are looking at a coinage that was issued around 200BC at the latest.

The stylized iconic figures should be considered remarkable for this early date. Evidently, they were chosen from imagery that was already in circulation and familiar to the users of these coins. The coins therefore serve as testimonial that in the region of Mathura, iconic representations and their most visible characteristics such as the attributes, albeit as stylized expressions, long before they become evident in stone sculpture. The repertoire appears to draw from various religious cults; the Vrshni heroes like Samkarshana and Vasudeva are represented alongside an ithyphallic Shiva. The simple style and rendering of the figures can yield itself to multiple attributions - indeed, there can be other explanations to what Errington believes to be manifestation of a 'development of Shiva image'. For example, the standing figure on the obverse of her Type 5 coins could well be a female figure, probably representing Ekānamsā, the sister of Balarama, that appears in many later sculptures, as an individual deity as well as part of a proto-Vaishnava triad. Although Errington has commented that the figure shown above a bovine animal is 'Shiva and Nandi', it is possible to see it as a depiction of a local 'cow-herd' hero, a sort of 'proto-Krishna', whose cult could plausibly have merged into Vasudeva to give us a composite cultic figure that is a pastoral deity and a 'wheel'-wielding hero at the same time.

Apart from the so-called 'Surasena Janapada' coins and the localised *Karshapanas* bearing the 'Mathura tree' device, there are a couple of other numismatic categories we need to deal with before we move to the more significant series of Mathura coinage – the monarchical series. Excavations carried out by Herbert Härtel at Sonkh yielded uninscribed cast coins (from levels 34-33) and copper punch-marked coins (from levels 33-32) (Härtel 1993: 309-

310) P L Gupta offered his remarks on this assemblage in MCH, but also published the copper punch-marked coins as a separate article (Gupta 1975). A significant aspect of the copper punch-marked coins was that a group of 42 were found as a small hoard in an earthen vessel. According to Gupta, "…they may be placed in the first half of the second century BC, sometime between 180 – 160BC, or latest in 150BC".

Gupta cogently observed that "most likely, the silver and copper punch-marked coins as well as the cast coins, were concurrently in use at Mathura even though they might not have originated simultaneously". He identified the particular kind of copper punch-marked coins found at Sonkh as "local issues", as they are "unknown outside the Mathura region". He also remarked that as issues attributed to the period "when the Magadha Empire had crumbled into small principalities", these copper punch-marked coins "explode the long-standing belief that the Sungas had occupied the entire Mauryan empire after the coup d'état of Pushyamitra". This inference of Gupta gets us to a core question in art history – how can we justify the use of dynastic labels while describing art, when the dynasty in question was never present there? Elsewhere I have problematized the widely (and wildly!) held belief that the Sungas emerged as an 'imperial power' succeeding the Mauryas (Bhandare 2006), and that the post-Mauryan epoch can be viewed as a convenient linear progression, from Mauryas to Sungas to Kanvas, as received wisdom often dictates. Gupta's comment about the local punch-marked coins not really representing a 'Sunga currency' in Mathura corroborates these doubts. Yet, we continue to talk about a 'Sunga phase' in the Art of Mathura. One would wonder how valid it is to use this label, when there is not much evidence of a Sunga presence at Mathura. These questions illustrate the dilemmas we have confront when we discuss the chronology of art vis-à-vis the numismatic chronology at Mathura.

The Monarchical Coinage of Mathura Region:

The next phase of coinage at Mathura is characterised by a shift in the nature of coins – instead of punch-marked and cast coins which are largely uninscribed, we now have inscribed die-struck coins which bear names of kings. Smaller, possibly uninscribed fractions bearing similar devices, like those unearthed at Sonkh (Härtel 1993: 311), also form a part of the same currency picture.

The monarchical coins of Mathura were first discussed in some detail by Allan in his British Museum catalogues (Allan 1936: cvii-cxvi). He classified them into two broad categories – the first comprising what he regarded as issues of "local Hindu dynasties" and second

consisting of coins of their successors, “a dynasty or dynasties of Saka satraps”. At least one type of both these categories shares a common device – the figure of a standing goddess on obverse. In this section, we will confine our discussion only the first series, of the so-called “Hindu” kings.

The “Hindu” coins consists mainly of two series – the first where the name of the ruler ends in ‘-Mitra’, and second, wherein the rulers have ‘-Datta’ ending names. In the first group, we encounter the names - 1. Gomitra (both square and round coins FIG 7) 2. Brahmamitra (FIG 8) 3. Drdhmitra 4. Suryamitra (FIG 9) 5. Vishnumitra (FIG 10); the second category is represented by 1. Purushadatta (FIG 11) 2. Sheshadatta (FIG 12) 3. Bhavadatta (FIG 13) 4. Uttamadatta (FIG 14) 5. Kamadatta (FIG 15) 6. Ramadatta (FIG 16). Additionally, there are some coins which appear to be closer to coins bearing ‘-Mitra’ ending names, insofar as their appearance, choice of design and weight is concerned, but they do not have a ‘-Mitra’ name on them; instead they carry the names ‘Balabhuti’ and ‘Apalata’.

Precisely how these were interrelated to one another is difficult to ascertain. Allan did not offer any more precise a chronology for these rulers, other than saying they “cover the period from the end of the third to the middle of the first century BC” (Allan 1936: cxi). Allan’s contention stems basically from the facts that by middle of the first century, the Saka presence at Mathura becomes well-established owing to inscriptional evidence and the end of the third century is widely regarded as the epoch when the Mauryas passed into oblivion and issuance of the punch-marked *Karshapanas* gradually came to an end. Some of these rulers carry a royal appellation (*Rājan*, or ‘King’; inscribed in its genitive sixth-case form *Rājño*) before their names and some do not. This fact was considered by Allan to propose a tentative internal ruling order – while most ‘-Mitra’ rulers do not have the royal title in their legends, the ‘-Datta’ rulers do, and one ‘-Datta’ ruler, namely Ramadatta, strikes coins both with and without the royal title. The coins of Ramadatta with and without the royal title also show some small differences in execution as well as the symbolic program (FIG 17). These facts made Allan speculate that ‘-Mitra’ rulers in all likelihood must have preceded ‘-Datta’ rulers; he also toyed with the idea that the ‘Ramadatta’ coins with and without the royal title were struck by two different rulers named ‘Ramadatta’, the one holding the royal title being the later of the two.

Allan’s speculations were proved more or less to be correct by evidence unearthed at Sonkh – the stratigraphy of the coin finds suggested without any doubt that amongst the ‘-Mitra’

rulers, Gomitra was the earliest and he was followed by Suryamitra, Brahmamitra and Vishnumitra in that order (Härtel 1993: 17, 85-86). Coins of Ramadatta were found in the next stratigraphic layer, alongside coins of the Saka satraps. This prompted Härtel to remark that Ramadatta was perhaps the last of the "Hindu" rulers at Mathura, and he was followed by the Sakas. Interestingly, coins bearing the name 'Ramadatta' with and without the royal title are found in the same layer, and therefore indicative that he was one and the same person. It is plausible that he might have adopted the royal title at a later stage. P L Gupta, while discussing the order of '-Mitra' and '-Datta' kings, proposes to place Ramadatta as the second ruler of the line after Purushadatta, and before Kamadatta (Gupta 1989:130). Like Allan, he also voices the possibility of these two rulers being different ones. It is therefore evident that he has not taken on board the fact that coins of both the varieties are found in the same layer at Sonkh. Another significant aspect revealed from a coin in the Ashmolean Museum's collection (FIG 18) is that Ramadatta appears to counterstrike coins without the royal appellation with the device having a legend that has the royal appellation. It is therefore more plausible to interpret this as the same person revalidating his earlier issues after adopting the royal title, rather than seeing them as two different individuals.

As proposed by P L Gupta, Purushadatta might be regarded as the earliest ruler of the '-Datta' kings, because he does not bear the royal title and thus could be regarded as the immediate successor of the last '-Mitra' ruler. Ramadatta's coins, without the royal title would come next, followed by his coins with the royal title. Since Kamadatta's coins are very similar to Ramadatta's coins and as he holds the royal title too, he might have been a close successor of Purushadatta. Sheshadatta also fits in with this group in terms of general appearance and characteristics. This leaves Uttamadatta and Bhavadatta, whose coins are not exactly similar to the other rulers. Like Ramadatta, Uttamadatta too issues coins with and without the title 'Rājan'. Whether these rulers are part of the same numismatic sequence as the other three '-Datta' rulers, is not clear. It is also plausible that within the greater Mathura region, these rulers might have occupied and ruled over different domains, clustered around different urban centres, of which there are many. Thus, instead of viewing them in a strictly linear fashion, it is plausible that at least some of them might have ruled parallel with each other from different locales. The fact that no other '-Datta' rulers are encountered at Sonkh except Ramadatta might be taken as an indication of this proposition as well.

One of the main problems concerning the various series of North Indian monarchical coins, is the occurrence of homonymous kings. Across the Yamuno-Gangetic plains, there exist four

major series, centred around the ancient cities of Mathura, Ayodhya, Kausambi and Ahichchhatra respectively, that all comprise coins that have a '-Mitra' ending name inscribed on them. We have no evidence to know what were the territorial extents of these monarchies, but given the fact that they were all located in a large contiguous area, one would imagine that they must have shared boundaries, most probably defined by some geographical feature, at some point in time. It is also possible to imagine that these boundaries must have changed owing to expansion of one monarchy into the other. Such assumptions, plausible as they are, have given raise to some uncertainties and hesitations in attribution of these coins. Sometimes, new evidence has helped in discerning between homonymous rulers. A good example is of a king named 'Gomitra'. Allan when he published his catalogue, assumed that there were two rulers named 'Gomitra' in the greater Mathura region as evident from coins. 'Gomitra I' issued rectangular coins with inscription *Gomitasa …rānāye* on it, whereas 'Gomitra II' struck goddess-type coins like other '-Mitra' rulers of Mathura (Allan 1936: cviii-cix). P L Gupta in MCH largely tagged along with this assumption and even speculated that the word following *Gomitasa* was a sixth case feminine form of 'Rana', which he tentatively suggested was the same as 'Raya', a site near Mathura prompting a further speculation that 'Gomitra I' would have ruled here first, and "later shifted his power to Mathura" (Gupta 1989: 129). However, few years later Gupta spotted an example of the same type in the American Numismatic Society's collection, where the legend was clearly readable as *Gomitasa Vārānāye* (Gupta 1988-89). Gupta therefore rightly concluded that this Gomitra was a ruler at Vārānā, or 'Baran', the ancient name of the town known in Islamic times (and to date) as Bulandshahr, and he had nothing to do with 'Gomitra' of the Mathura coins. Gupta's observations found corroboration in the fact that the British Museum coins, which Allan had attributed to 'Gomitra I' of Mathura, had been collected by Alexander Cunningham from Bulandshahr. The theory about two Gomitras ruling at Mathura was thus put to rest, with one of these rulers firmly identified as a ruler of ancient Baran.

Gupta spent a number of paragraphs engaging with other issues involving homonymous kings and speculated over historical developments around coins bearing these names might indicate. He first contended that some rulers with '-Mitra' ending names, known from coins found during excavations at Rairh (Tehsil Newai, District Tonk, Rajasthan) in 1931, "seem to be closely connected with Mathura" because the coins share a "common symbol, which may be the dynastic symbol of the Mitra rulers" (Gupta 1989: 129). One of these rulers is named 'Suryamitra', a name known from Mathura coins, and a coin of Brahmamitra, exactly of the

same type as found at Mathura in large numbers, was also discovered at Rairh. But the 'Suryamitra' coins of Rairh show two different qualifiers preceding the name, unlike the Mathura kings – they are '*Udehaki*' and '*Sudavapa*'; of these the latter is shared by another ruler at Rairh, namely Dhruvamitra. Gupta takes these prefixes to be the names of locales, thereby suggesting that the 'Suryamitra' were in fact two different individuals, each identifying himself with a different prefix as a 'descriptor loci'. In this contention, he contradicts his own suggestion that these rulers had a Mathura connection. This contradiction in Gupta's analysis is surprising to say the least. Moreover, the 'common symbol' he puts forth as evidence to propose a connection between rulers at Mathura and Rairh is nothing but a common 'Ujjain'-symbol, which is found on scores of coin-series from Northern, Western and Central India. There is no imperative to regard it as a 'dynastic emblem' of the Mathura Mitra rulers. It is therefore evident that both the 'Suryamitras' at Rairh and the Suryamitra of Mathura were different individuals.

Gupta then engaged with some coins with the names Gomitra, Suryamitra and Brahmamitra, that are attributed to the 'South Pancala' or Kanauj area (Gupta 1989: ibid.). He one again tried, on the basis of the fact that all these coins have the 'Ujjain'-symbol in their symbolic programme, to connect them with coins of Mathura and suggested that "the Mitra kingdom of Mathura seems to have extended its power into South Pancala". But once again, there is no apparent need to identify a commonly occurring symbol as a 'dynastic emblem' in any respect here – so any contention to connect these coins with Mathura, let alone the historical inference drawn from such a similarity, is implausible. The coins appear only to be issued by kings who coincidentally had the same names as some of the rulers of Mathura, and there is no need to see too much history into this coincidence. Many other names ending in '-Mitra' are known from monarchical coins, and it is indeed natural for the name pool to be shared by different individuals who were more or less contemporary with each other. Notwithstanding this, the subject of homonymous kings and the confounding resulting thereof has had an impact on an art historical debate about attributing some sculptures. I will discuss this below, after discussing inscriptional evidence at Mathura vis-à-vis the pre-Saka coins, partly because the debate also involves an inscription.

Precious little corroboration is available from inscriptions about the rulers who struck coins before the Sakas arrived at Mathura. Among stone inscriptions, there is one mentioning a donor (ruler?) named Dhanabhuti; it was published by Cunningham but its present whereabouts are unknown. Rhie Quintanilla, following Cunningham's original assertion,

used this inscription to link the Dhanabhuti with a homonymous king mentioned in a well-known inscription on one of the gateways of the Bharhut Stupa, and as such it formed a major bench-mark in her analysis of early sculptures at Mathura (Rhie Quintanilla 2007: 10-13). Here again, there is no imperative, neither sufficient evidence to suggest that these two persons named 'Dhanabhuti' were the same - the only material aspect that helps to draw this inference is the fact that the Dhanabhuti of Bharhut is known to be a *Vachhiputa* or 'son of Vatsi' (a woman of Vatsa *gotra*), and the partly destroyed metronymic of Dhanabhuti in the Mathura inscription is also ….*tsiputra*. Other arguments, such as Dhanabhuti donated multiple gateways and an entire Vedika, so he must be rich enough to afford such a donation and therefore of a royal descent are not empirical enough to draw the inference that he was the same as the king mentioned at Bharhut. However, Rhie Quintanilla's attempt to identify and attribute a 'Bharhut Style' at Mathura was certainly bolstered through the exercise of suggesting that the flourish was indeed linked through a royal connection. She went on to suggest that if these two personages were the same then the possibility of a "royal pilgrimage" to both these sites can be envisaged and "a cultural link between Mathura and Bharhut can be established" (Rhie Quintanilla 2007: 13).

Be that as it may, Rhie Quintanilla does not mention or discuss the fact that the Dhanabhuti in Mathura inscription could well have been related to 'Balabhuti' known from coins. Once again, the credit of making this link much before Rhie Quintanilla's work, goes to P L Gupta, who mentioned it in passing in his contribution to MCH (Gupta 1989: 130). He also contextualised a clay sealing in the Mathura Museum that bears the name of 'King Balabhuti' with the coins having the same name and title. It is far more logical to consider Dhanabhuti of the stone inscription related to Balabhuti of coins and the seal inscription, particularly because we know of other lineages from Mathura sharing the name endings such as '-Mitra' or '-Datta'. Gupta hesitated to make this connection on the basis that there is no royal title accorded to Dhanabhuti in the inscription, whereas Balabhuti is a 'Rājan' on both the seal and coin legends. However, the inscription is severely damaged, possibly because the stone appears to have been recycled as evident from the illustration provided by Rhie Quintanilla (after Cunningham) and it is plausible that the mention of a royal title was lost in the damage. As Balabhuti's coins are closely related in appearance, fabric and typology to the middle '-Mitra' kings, it is plausible to regard Balabhuti (and therefore Dhanabhuti) as contemporary with Suryamitra and/or Brahmamitra. As we have seen in case of '-Datta' rulers, it is not necessary to view Balabhuti and Dhanabhuti in order of linear succession with any other ruler

group – they could well have been independent rulers in a different locale in the region of Greater Mathura, ruling coterminous with other rulers.

Sometimes a single coin can provide exciting additional information to enrich the context we already know from other sources, and also to pose more questions! In his MCH contribution, Gupta has referred to an inscription found on a large number of bricks at Mora near Mathura, which reads *Jivaputāye Rājabhāryāye Bṛhasvātimitasa Dhitu Yashomataye Kāritam* ("Deed of the royal wife, Yashomati, the one who had produced a son, and who was the daughter of Brihasvatimitra"). These inscribed bricks were noticed by Vogel in his report on 'Explorations at Mathura' (Vogel 1911-12). As explained by Gupta, this donor named Yashomati was ostensibly a wife of "some ruler of Mathura" and her father Brihavasti/Brihaspatimitra is a well-known ruler of Kausambi, as evident from his coins found there (Gupta 1989: 130) which carry his name as *Bahasatimita*. From inscriptions in a cave at Pabhosa, near Kausambi, we know that his maternal grandfather was a king named Vangapala, who was a ruler of Ahichchhatra (Pancala) (Sircar 1965: 95-97). Gupta did not comment who among the rulers of Mathura was Yashomati's husband because his main focus lay in refuting the contention that rulers of these disparate states might have been collaterals belonging to the same family (which he rightfully does, proving it on the basis of the fact that Yashomati's father and husband could not have been from the same family as consanguineous marriages were forbidden in India). However, recently one coin of Kausambi was offered at a numismatic auction in Mumbai (Bombay Auctions, auction 8, lot 30, 6.48 gm, FIG 19) - this has the *Bahasatimitasa* legend but it is clearly counterstruck on a Mathura coin. The undertype is pretty much obliterated under the strike of Bahasatimita coin, but from the extant details, one can hazard a guess that it is a coin of Ramadatta. In the least, we can be certain that it is a '-Datta' coin and not a '-Mitra' issue, as evident from the traces of the symbol which looks like the Brahmi letter 'Sha', which occurs only on '-Datta' coins. This counterstrike corroborates the 'Yashomati' inscription from Mora and ties Bahasatimita of Kaushambi in a numismatic isochronism with Ramadatta of Mathura.

Some discussion about the ruler named 'Bahasatimita' is pertinent here. In the Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela, the king of Mahameghavahana dynasty of Kalinga, we find the mention of a 'Bahasatimita', whom Kharavela made 'touch his feet'. The same inscription mentions 'Satakani' of whom Kharavela 'didn't even think of', when his armies marched 'to the West'. A 'Yavana' king named 'Dimita' is also mentioned in the inscription, and he is said to have 'retreated to Mathura' after Kharavela's armies marched Northwards.

Unfortunately, the condition of this inscription is not good and the names of both ‘Bahasatimita’ and ‘Dimita’ are not very well preserved. Allan, for instance, disagrees the name of Bahasatimita even exists in the inscription (Allan 1936: xcviii). The date of these events and personages is suggested to be c. 100BC (Bhandare 1999: 193-194).

As evident from the coin, Ramadatta could have existed only as a contemporary or a predecessor of Bahasatimita who counterstruck his coin, but not as his successor. The Sonkh excavations suggest Ramadatta to be the last ruler before the Sakas take over and as such this interphase cannot exist much earlier than c. 30BC-10AD. So it transpires that the date for ‘Bahasatimita’ known from the Hathigumpha inscription is a bit too early for these developments. Allan contended that there were two rulers named ‘Bahasatimita’ from coins – an earlier one, who might have ruled “not later than the first half of second century BC and might even be as early as the third century”. The second Bahasatimita, according to Allan, must have ruled at the “end of second and first century BC” (Allan 1936: xcvi). However, the coin ascribed to ‘Bahasatimita I’ by Allan has now proven to be of Suktimati, a city state near Kausambi, the legend on it being *Sutimati* (Kulkarni & Tandon 2004). It is therefore clear that there was only one ‘Bahasatimita’ and the dates accorded to him by Allan are largely commensurate with the dating of Kharavela and the Hathigumpha inscription (even though, as stated earlier, Allan does not regard such a mention ever to exist). Wilfried Pieper acknowledges the reattribution of Allan’s coin of ‘Bahasatimita I’ to Suktimati but strangely enough, still regards the other Bahasatimita coins as of ‘Bahasatimita II’! (Pieper 2013: 97-98).

The facts that our coin is struck on a coin of Ramadatta and has a type very different than what Allan has listed for his ‘Bahasatimita II’ (Allan 1936: xcvii), rekindles the debate whether there was more than one ruler named ‘Bahasatimita’. One might have existed towards the end of second century BC and might have been synchronous with Kharavela. The other, evident on our coin, might be a later ruler, ruling towards the end of the 1st century BC, to have counterstruck a coin of Ramadatta.

Which of these two was the father of Yashomati of the Mora brick inscriptions would be a good question. Allan suggests that the palaeography of the Mora inscriptions is “much earlier in the date” and therefore suggests his ‘Bahasatimita I’ to be Yashomati’s father. Since ‘Bahasatimita I’ as per Allan’s contention has been proven to be a mistaken identity, we must discard this identification. We will shortly see how arguments made exclusively on the basis

of palaeography can be dangerous, so it is better to assume that the ruler counterstriking the coin of Ramadatta must be a different Bahasatimita than the one regarded by Allan as 'Bahasatimita II'. Whether he can be considered Yashomati's father, remains to be satisfactorily answered.

The Suryamitra Inscription: Style versus Substance in Analysis

The Ashmolean Museum has in its collection a coping stone fashioned from typical Mathura red mottled sandstone (accession number EA1983.24), which must have adorned a railing that surrounded a sacred enclosure. Curiously enough, many more fragments of the same railing are known from other museums and private collections. In a recent article, Peter Skilling has listed fifteen fragments scattered over the globe (Skilling 2010-11). Two fragments exist in the National Museum, New Delhi; one in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, one in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, and one in the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore. All have a donative inscription carved on them; barring one piece in a private collection in Kolkata, all others have it in a truncated form.

Härtel discussed nine pieces of the railing with the inscription known to him in great detail (Härtel 1986). Fully restructured from nine fragments, and the single complete version, the inscription reads *Raṃño Gopalyī(yā)putrasa Suryamitrasa Pīthamadena Kāshīputrena Yashakena Kāritam* ("caused to be made by Kashiputra Yashaka, the confidant of King Suryamitra, the son of Gopali" – as translated by Härtel). As a convenient point of departure for discussion, I reproduce the object entry from 'Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum' (Harle and Topsfield 1987: 9) below:

"The inscription provides evidence for the date and less clearly, for the original location of the railing. Professor Härtel has argued, on epigraphical grounds as well as from the style of the carving, for the less well-documented of two kings named Sūryamitra, who reigned in Pancāla, north-east of Mathura, in the first half of the 1st century A.D. The relatively small scale of the railing argues for an early date but the frieze, in spite of its leaping lions separated by palmettes which distantly echo older western Asian motifs, is in a style quite compatible with an early 1st century A.D. date. The railing may have stood in Ahicchattra, the principal site in Pancāla, from which has come sculpture in the same style and distinctive stone at that of Mathura, and for which a sub-school of sculpture has been postulated; on the other hand, almost identical carved copings were excavated from the Kankālī Tīlā site in Mathura".

Nearly everything said in this note needs a revisitation following new information published since Härtel 's publication of the railing. Firstly, Härtel asserted that the king Suryamitra mentioned in the inscription could not have been the king of this name known from Mathura coins, and also from Sonkh excavations, in these words –

"In case one identifies the Suryamitra of the coping stone inscriptions with the Suryamitra of Mathura, the stones should not be dated later than in the first half of the first century BC…. that would mean, to bring them in the closest neighbourhood of the coping stones of the Stupa of Bharhut. Such an early dating does not require discussion, as it is simply impossible"

This claim that a discussion is not required, because the proposition is "simply impossible" is astonishing, and it tainted all the analysis Härtel subsequently presents. He notes the similarity of the railing with coping stones of the Jaina stupa at Kankali Tila, which are dated "not older than the second half of the first century BC". He contends that since the "artistic execution of the decoration on the Kankali Tila coping stones is however much more lively and imaginative than that of our inscribed stones which one must qualify as more simple reproductions as a whole". Judging by these "cursory deductions on stylistic considerations", Härtel dates the inscribed railing pieces to "the Christian Era and thereafter with certainty" (Härtel 1986: 105)

Härtel then attempted to corroborate these considerations on palaeographic grounds. According to him, the facts that "verticals of *pu*, *tra*, *sa*, *na* and *ka* tend to arrow heads of increasing strengths" and "the style of writing *ma* in *–mitra* and *–madena* has a round body in inscriptions 1-9 and a triangular one in 10" (Härtel 1986: 106). Härtel identified both these palaeographic features as diagnostic of the first century AD. He was particularly convinced about the form of the letter 'Ma' – "if one examines the occurrence of the round and the triangular *ma* in Mathura inscriptions and coins, one comes to the conclusion that the round *ma* is used exclusively in all the inscriptional evidence of the Mitras of Mathura. The transformation ends in the dynasty of the Dattas. Raja Ramadatta and Raja Kamadatta used clearly the triangular form of *ma* while the preceding Uttamadatta adopted the round form still". He then notes that on all Kshatrapa coins and inscriptions, the *ma* is triangular and infers, "I dare to say that in Mathura the transformation of ma is complete during the rule of Ramadatta/Kshatrapas". He even proposes, on the basis of this evolutionary sequence that railing part 10, which has the triangular ma, might actually have been produced later than

parts 1-9 and judging by roughness or even incompleteness in its finish, there might have been a hiatus in the making of the railing – "the work might have been stopped in between till the insistence on completion brought about a somewhat hasty finish". Härtel stands convinced that this event "would be dated in the beginning of the Christian Era" (Härtel 1986: ibid.) As such, the Suryamitra of the inscription could not have been the ruler of Mathura, as he would long have been a past entity by the time the Datta-Saka political interface at Mathura had begun unfolding.

The search for a king named 'Suryamitra' in the 50BC-50AD bracket prompted Härtel to look elsewhere – an area which fits in nicely is Pancala, located to the East of Mathura. Ahichchhatra, the ancient capital of Pancala was a centre of the Mathura school of art too. Going via the evidence offered by the Pabhosa inscriptions (Sircar 1965: 95-97), Härtel contended that Suryamitra of the railing inscriptions must have been the same as a ruler of Pancala named Suryamitra. Coins of this Suryamitra are well-known – they are listed by numismatists like Allan and Mitchiner (Alan 1936: cxvii, Mitchiner 1987: no. 4547) and most importantly for Härtel, employ the angular form of ma in their legends. He adds that the provenance of the railing is not proven and wonders whether it actually is from Mathura. This doubt perhaps led to the speculations that Ahichchhatra might have been the place where the railing once stood and hence the reference to that site in the object note of the Ashmolean Museum.

Härtel 's identification of Suryamitra thus rests on two grounds – style and palaeography, and both are rather tenuous methods to arrive at very specific dating. Firstly, Härtel's assertion that the railing is "simply impossible" to be of a date corresponding to the period of Suryamitra of Mathura depending on its style is difficult to agree with. Rhie Quintanilla dates the earliest Mathura sculpture to the 'Bharhut Phase' of around 150BC based on the collective evidence of literary, archaeological and epigraphic sources (Rhie Quintanilla 2007: 13-14) She has also illustrated coping stones showing decorations of a very similar style which she dates to c.100BC – all these, and particularly the one illustrated as fig. 77 by her, share the main decorative features of jumping feline animals separated by vegetal motifs, above which is placed a row of bells and tassels (Rhie Quintanilla 2007: 76). One stone illustrated by Rhie Quintanilla also bears a donative inscription of Gotiputa Utara, a goldsmith which shares palaeographic style with the Suryamitra inscription. Curiously enough, Rhie Quintanilla makes no mention of the 'Suryamitra' inscription, nor does she discuss the pieces of the coping stones which Härtel published earlier on.

Härtel's palaeographic analysis, and his postulation to place the progression of the letter ma from a rounded form to an angular form is almost mathematically precise and such an approach cannot really be taken as an evidence for so precise a dating sequence, simply because it does not lend itself to such a treatment. Writing styles evolve and change with variable speeds and the technology of engraving inscriptions on stone could also have a significant impact on the way the letters are engraved. Härtel relies on A H Dani's view the 'nail-headed' inscriptional style emerged out of the use of a specific sort of quill which the Sakas used (Härtel 1986: 106) but the Sakas had been a presence in Kashmir, Punjab and Gandhara since around 150-100BC and for a writing implement to have been in use, there is no particular need for the Sakas to be actually present at Mathura – the transmission of technology and implements could have happened even at an earlier date and thus the emergence of a 'nail-headed' style could have been at any moment between 1st century BC to 1st century AD.

By far the most significant challenge to Härtel's view to date the Suryamitra inscription in the towards the early part of the Christian era came from the so-called 'Yavanarajya' inscription, discovered near Mathura in 1988 (Rhie Quintanilla 2007: 255-256), which is inscribed in "the year one hundred sixteen 116 of the Yavana Kingdom". If we agree with Rhie Quintanilla and other scholars to reckon this date in the 'Yavana Era' of 186/185BC (Salomon 2005), it follows that the inscription was engraved in c. 70-69BC. In this inscription the letter forms already show the slight angular or 'nail-headed'-ness in the top of the verticals and most importantly, shows the angular form of *ma*. It is therefore not necessary to hold on to Härtel's view that the transformation of ma from rounded to angular form could have happened only towards the end of rule of the indigenous kings and completed in the Saka period of mid-late 1st century AD.

Going by the discussion above, it will be evident that there is no imperative to consider that Suryamitra of the railing inscription was not the same as Suryamitra of Mathura who ruled around 150-100BC. The need to consider him as a later ruler, and to identify him as a ruler of Pancala, vanishes if Härtel's views are reconsidered on the basis of more recent researches. The final straw comes with knowing the provenance of the railing pieces. As admitted by Härtel, he was not sure if the railing had actually been found at Mathura, although 'Mathura' does feature in the title of his paper. But commenting on a piece of the same railing from the collection of the late Suresh Neotia of Kolkata, which now forms the core of collections at Jñānapravāha Centre for Cultural Studies and Research (Varanasi), noted art historian R C

Sharma, who had been a former director of Mathura Museum, clearly mentions – "…many more pieces of this nature were registered from Mathura in the office of Registering Officer, Agra, in 1976. It appears that a Stupa was built in the vicinity of Mathura and the donor of this complex was one and the same." (Sharma et al 2006: 13) With this comment, the question about the provenance of the railing can finally rest and we need not speculate if it actually stood at Ahichchhatra, instead of Mathura.

This entire discussion about Härtel's analysis makes us aware of the limitations of 'style' as an analytical device. Had he not assumed 'style' to be the primary factor to not allow any discussion as to if the railing had been of an earlier date, his entire contention about identifying the ruler to be of a later date would not have arisen. Thus, solely on the hunch that stylistically a work of art cannot fit a particular chronological bracket prompted Härtel to stray away from ascertaining the identity of Suryamitra as a ruler of Mathura to being the ruler of Pancala, in spite of the fact that archaeological and epigraphic evidences were ambivalently disposed towards such an identification. There is nothing to suggest that Suryamitra should be considered as a ruler of Pancala; available evidence makes Suryamitra of Mathura fit the bill pretty well.

The Sakas at Mathura: New Numismatic Findings and their Impact on Chronology

As demonstrated by archaeological evidence from Sonkh, the Saka Kshatrapas followed the "Hindu" rulers at Mathura. Their coins have been well-known and discussed by Allan. Some of them bear Scythian names – like Hagana, Hagamasha – whereas some are known to have adopted Indian names. The coins of these Saka rulers are similar to the issues of '-Mitra' and '-Datta' kings, except that on the reverse, they all uniformly bear a horse. At Sonkh, coins of Ramadatta and Hagamasha (FIG 20) were found in the same level (Härtel 1993: 86). Hagana and Hagamasha appear to have rules jointly; their coin legend reads *Khatapānā Hagāna Hagāmashasa* (FIG 21). Shivadatta and Shivaghosha (FIG 22) are Kshatrapas with Indian names – it is interesting to note that Shivadatta appears to have a '-Datta'-ending name and he might have been related to the '-Datta' rulers in some sense. The internal chronology of these rulers is not yet clear but stratigraphy at Sonkh suggests that they might have preceded the rulers of the Rajuvula family.

After a long while since the coins of the aforementioned rulers were published, a new ruler whose name is not satisfactorily ascertained as yet has come to our knowledge through his coins. The coins are undoubtedly a part of the same series as the other Saka Kshatrapas and

share all their most characteristic features, such as symbols on obverse and the figure of the horse on the reverse. The name of the ruler has been variously read (B N Mukherjee suggested 'Vajalatajama'; see Mukherjee 1977) but appears to be 'Vasutatakuma' as seen on the coin illustrated here (FIG 23).

These Saka rulers were followed by Mahakshatrapa Rajuvula and his son Shodasa as indicated by chronology at Sonkh (Hartel 1993: 17). It is worth mentioning that irrespective of the evidence at Sonkh, P L Gupta holds that the Kshatrapas other than the those of the Rajuvula family must have succeeded them, and not preceded. He treats the fact that coins of Hagamasha were unearthed at a level below Rajuvula and in association with coins of Ramadatta as of no consequence in ascertaining where the political interface between the two different ruling entities happened, because "levels in an excavation represent the cultural sequence and not the political changes. Cultural life was not necessarily affected by political changes" (Gupta 1989: 132). He cites the evidence of a hoard of mixed copper coins – three of Hagamasha, five of the preceding Mitra/Datta kings, and one of Rajuvula/Shodasa – found at Ursan in the vicinity of Mathura to argue that all these coins remained in circulation alongside the Rajuvula/Shodasa issues and as such it is difficult to agree with Härtel's rigid sequences. However, it is unlikely that Hagamasha, or any of the other Kshatrapas who share a distinctly different reverse than those of the Rajuvula family's coins, might have succeeded them because it is now very clear that the Kushans were the successors of Rajuvula's family at Mathura. Chronologically, Cribb has convincingly shown that Rajuvula arrived at Mathura following his defeat by Gondophares in the Jammu region by c. 30AD (Cribb 1999: 195). At the end of their sequence, coins of the king mentioned as 'Soter Megas' briefly make an appearance at Mathura (Härtel 1993: 314), suggesting a political interface. 'Soter Megas' is now taken to be the Kushan king Vima Takhto, the Kushan king, who ruled c. by about the end of the 1st century AD (Cribb 1995-96). The rule of the Rajuvula family at Mathura can therefore be taken to have lasted between c. 40 – 90AD. Their coins show pretty much the same obverse as the other Saka rulers, but the horse on the reverse is replaced by the motif of 'Abhisheka Lakshmi' (FIG 24, FIG 25).

The dating of these coins depends a great deal on inscriptional mentions of eras and personages. A significant marker for this is the so-called Amohini *āyāgapaṭa*, the date on which is read either as 72 or as 42 (Rhie Quintanilla 2007: 171). There are variant views about which of the two proposed readings the date fits with, and which era is this dated in – two major approaches exist for both. Many art historians, like Rhie Quintanilla, follow

Lüders' reading and take it to be 72, dated in the Azes/Vikrama Era. On the other hand, Cribb (1999: 195-196) takes it to be 42 and as a reference to regnal years of Shodasa. Consensus lies in treating the Amohini *āyāgapaṭa* as a 1st century AD object but views on where in the century should it be placed vary – proponents of 72 being in Azes/Vikrama Era find the object dated in early 1st century AD and thus Shodasa moves with it toward the early decades of 1st century AD. As a fallout, Rajuvula has to be dated even earlier. This is at variance with numismatic evidence, which suggests Rajuvula's ouster from Jammu region by Gondophares by c. 30AD. Treating the date as 42 in an individual regnal reckoning makes it possible to move it without tying it to any particular era. From a numismatic viewpoint, it is evident that the Kushans arrived in Mathura during the reign of Vima Takhto (c.80-110AD) more likely towards the end of his rule, and the Kushan rule was consolidated in the reign of his successor Vima Kadphises (c.110-127AD). So it is likely that Shodasa's rule might have ended sometimes towards the end of 1st century AD or in the first decade of 2nd century AD. Thus from a numismatic viewpoint, the reading of the date in the Amohini *āyāgapaṭa* inscription favours the '42 as regnal reckoning' view.

The other major piece is a pillar-capital now in the British Museum collection, which has long inscriptions written all over it. These inscriptions mention various names of people which were ostensibly Saka. They have most recently been discussed by Harry Falk (2011) and Stefan Baums (2012: 219-222). Falk convincingly demonstrated that the inscription is actually composed of two texts. He also proposed some changes to previously read words which change the context of the inscription significantly. Most significantly he proposed a different reading for the bit which was read to be a reference to the Indo-Scythian king Maues (Falk 2011: 125) He also proposed to read what was earlier thought to be a reference to 'the honour of Sakastana', as a collective reference to the 'honour of everyone, wherever he may be' and thus part of an altruistic 'veneration to all' kind of text (Falk 2011: 129).

The first text mentions Mahakshatrapa Rajuvula and his chief queen Yasi Kamui, who makes a donation of a piece of land along with the deposition of the Buddha's relic, along with a number of 'identifier' persons (mainly women), whose relationship with her is stated by using specific words to mean 'daughter', 'mother', 'grandmother', 'brother' etc. The second text mentions Kshatrapa Shodasa, who along with some other men, makes a donation of a tract that was his camp, to a Buddhist teacher. Both inscriptions indicate a sectarian preference to the *Sarvāstivādin* school of Buddhism, over the *Mahāsānghika* school. Falk proposed that at least a decade must have lapsed between the two inscriptions and that the

second text is a rededication of the first one (Falk 2011: 134). One of the persons mentioned in both the inscriptions is ‘Kharahostes, the heir apparent’.

Much of the discussion about the lion-pillar capital (or ‘lion pillar capital reliquary casing’ as Falk calls it) depends upon the identity of who this person named Kharahostes was. Falk took this Kharahostes to be the same Kharahostes known from certain series of Gandharan coins, which mention him as the ‘son of Arta’ (Falk 2011: 124). In the inscription, Kharahostes is mentioned twice as a ‘Yuvaraja’ (heir apparent), so considering him to be Kharahostes the son of Arta raises many questions – the main being why would he be called as such when his father Arta was never known to have be the king. Considering possibilities that arise from a particular rendering of the inscription, Falk proposed that Kharahostes the heir apparent must have been the father of Yasi Kamui, the Queen of Rajuvula. As to why he might have been called as ‘heir apparent’, Falk suggested that he must have been nominated as such because Arta his father, while never being a ‘king’ or ‘Maharaja’ could well have been a ‘Mahakshatrapa’ just like Rajuvula, who is also never mentioned as a ‘king’. So the mention of Kharahostes as an ‘heir apparent’ reflects the fact that he was to succeed as a ‘Mahakshatrapa’ to his father, according to Falk. He also speculated as to what relationship Arta might have shared with the supreme Scythian king, Azes and contended that Arta could have been closely related to Azes or a younger brother. (Falk 2011: ibid.) One of the other contentions of Falk is to regard a person named ‘Nadadiaka’ mentioned among the various identifiers of Yasi Kamui, as her son (Falk 2011: 126) and therefore a male relative. However, in the inscription, there appears to be a female genitive case ending for this name (*Nadadiakasaya*, Falk 2011: 123, Baums 2012: 219). Falk in considering the name to be a masculine one, has apparently missed this ending.

Baums’ approach is more nuanced than Falk. Rather than judging who ‘Kharahostes the heir apparent’ was, he draws attention to the fact that there cannot be a single way to interpret the relationships the chief queen of Rajuvula appears to share with her various identifiers. At least three interpretations are possible (Baums 2012: 220-221):

1. The relic is established by Yasi Nadadiakasa, main wife of Rajuvula and mother of Kharaosta

2. It is established by Nadadiakasa, daughter of Yasi Kamui, who is the main wife of Rajuvula and the mother of Kharaosta

3. It is established by Rajuvula, his main wife Yasi, their daughter Kamui, the ‘young king’ Kharaosta, and his mother Nadadiakasa.

Noteworthy in Baums’ treatment is the fact that he acknowledges ‘Nadadiakasa’ as a female name. However, the received wisdom that Kharahostes was the son of Arta makes Baums to stray a bit further, suggesting more speculative interpretations (Baums 2012: 221) as to why he would have been described as an ‘heir apparent’ in the context of Rajuvula, his queen and his successor Shodasa.

A significant numismatic discovery, reported by Joe Cribb (2015) throws important light on all these conundrums. Here we have coins of a ruler called ‘Kharahostes’, which are ostensibly in the ‘Mathura’ type, just like those of Rajuvula and Shodasa. One of these was offered for sale at an Indian auction (Classical Numismatic Gallery, Auction 11, lot 9, 2.83 gm, FIG 26) On this coin, the name of the ruler can be clearly read as *Khata(pasa) Kharahoshtasa*. The discovery of this coin prompted Cribb to revisit another coin, in the collection of the Royal Asiatic Society, London (FIG 27), which also has the same inscription, although not as clear.

The discovery of these coins make it clear that one need not associate Kharahostes of the lion-pillar inscription with the homonymous king who was the son of Arta. Once the two are effectively dissociated, “the role of the ‘Kharahostes’ mentioned in the lion capital can be more easily explained if the inscription is interpreted as positioning the Mathuran Kharahostes as the son or grandson of Rajuvula, or the son of Shodasa”, as rightly observed by Cribb (Cribb 2015: 31). I would venture to suggest that the former relationship is more likely than the latter. The mention of Kharahostes as an ‘heir apparent’ in both the texts of the inscription, suggests that the inscription must have been carved when Rajuvula would have been a Mahakshatrapa, Shodasa the Kshatrapa and Kharahostes his younger brother, as ‘heir apparent’ in line for both these offices. This makes perfect sense with other inscriptional details. It is well-known that in the political system of the Scythians, a person holding the greater title of a ‘Mahakshatrapa’ would often appoint his first son as ‘Kshatrapa’, and the succession to this title usually passed between brothers. So one would presume the next son, or younger brother of the first, must have held some title to indicate his position as the next in the line of succession to the title of ‘Kshatrapa’. ‘Yuvaraja’ or ‘young king’ might just be this term. As coins and inscriptions indicate, Shodasa succeeded to Rajuvula as the ‘Mahakshatrapa’. At this time, Kharahostes his younger brother might have become the

'Kshatrapa'. As both Mahakshatrapa and Kshatrapa title-holders were allowed to the right of coinage in their names, Kharahostes must have struck coins in his name after his elevation to the title of 'Kshatrapa' from being an heir apparent.

I would also venture the suggestion that Kharahostes might have been named after his maternal grandfather, his mother Yasi being the daughter of Kharahostes the son of Arta. This relationship fits well in the evidence afforded by the Taxila silver scroll inscription, where Kharahostes the son of Arta finds mention alongside Kusula / Kusulaka Patika, the 'Kshaharata Kshatrapa of Chuksha'. The same Kusula is mentioned as a 'Mahakshatrapa' in the second text, and veneration in his name is sought, so it is possible that he was either very old or even deceased while the lion-pillar inscription was first engraved. Falk dates this to c. 40AD, soon after the arrival of Rajuvula at Mathura (Falk 2011: 134). According to Cribb, Kharahostes must have been one of the last Saka rulers at Mathura, with his tenure as a Kshatrapa having lasted till a date between c. 90 and 110AD, when Vima Takhto conquered the city (Cribb 2015: 31). The dissociation of Kharahostes the son of Arta, who strikes coins in Gandhara and Kharahostes, the son of Rajuvula who ruled at Mathura through the newly discovered coins, also annuls Falk's contention about the plausibility of rendering the Azes and the Maues eras to be the same (Falk 2011: 134-135) as there is no apparent need to reconcile the 'gap' between Kharaostes the Gandharan and Kharaostes the Mathuran.

Epilogue:

The discussion so far has tracked nearly three centuries of monetary history of Mathura and provided insights into how coins have helped in furthering our understanding of the interplay between cultural activities and political structures in the region. To briefly recap, we cannot yet be sure that the so-called 'Surasena Janapada' coins were actually a Mathuran coinage. However, it does indicate a degree of monetization in the region that could well have predisposed the flourish of art. Through the symbols on the post-Mauryan punch-marked silver coins of a local nature, we realise that the repertoire of iconic depictions that we see in the art of Mathura in later centuries, was understood, appreciated and in vogue among the population that was using these coins in late 2nd century BC. We also need to appreciate that arguments made on the basis giving primacy to 'style' as an analytical device need to be revisited in light of new evidence and interpretations. Lastly, through new numismatic evidence we can know better how political transitions happened and when the kingdom of

Mathura was finally lost to the Kushans. As has been demonstrated above, numismatic evidence is also useful to corroborate the general chronological developments in the art of Mathura and in some instances, has indeed helped to reattribute pieces (such as the pieces of coping stone from a railing in the Ashmolean and other museum/private collections) to their proper chronological placements.

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