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# An Investigation of the Early Phase Coin Series of Toramāṇa of Kashmir

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**Abstract:** *The present study has been prompted to examine the early series of Toramāṇa copper coins of Kashmir based on a recent discovery of base gold Toramāṇas attributed to Kashmir. Metallurgical analysis has been undertaken to determine the metal content of this early series to understand debasement over an extended period or whether they remain to be pure copper from the time of issue.*

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**Keywords:** Numismatics, Debasement, Toramāṇa, Rajatarangini, Metal Content, XRF Analysis, Kashmir

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## Introduction

The evidence of the Kashmir Toramāṇa, an eponymous individual, presents a complex picture as no local epigraphs have been found in his name nor is there any corroboration in inscriptions. The only available sources are numismatic records and a brief account in the Rajatarangini of Kalhana, written in 1148-9 CE. The Rajatarangini Kashmir king list mentions Toramāṇa as the vice king and co-reagent to Hiranya (no historical evidence available) and grandson of Pravarasena I who was imprisoned for the assumption of the royal privilege of striking coins in his name. He bore a son, Pravarasena II, in captivity, who later ascended the throne of Kashmir (Stein 1900:66).

The Huna king Toramāṇa, father of Mihirakula, whose reign can be dated to the period c. AD 490-520 is known through various inscriptions and has long been considered the same Toramāṇa who ruled Kashmir. One of the reasons to separate the two Toramāṇas is that the coins of the Hun king Toramāṇa are not found in Kashmir (Cribb 2017:5). The Rajatarangini links the coins of the Kashmir Toramāṇa in context to the reign of Harshavardhana whose rule is fairly established to c. AD 606-647 thereby dating Toramāṇa's reign to c. 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. CE (Cribb 2016: 98). With the new body of evidence of establishing chronologies of the Hunnic kingdoms in Kashmir and Gandhara, Kalhana's dating of the known Hun kings such as Kxingila, Meghamah, Toramāṇa, Mihirakula is erroneous and hundreds of years out of chronological context.

The Alchon Huns of the fifth century continued to carry the evidence of the Kidarites on their coins and this is evident on the early medieval Kashmir coins until Toramāṇa's coinage. An establishment of the Hun heritage draws interesting parallels on the early medieval Kashmir issues which copy the Kidara-Kushana style coin design with the presence of Kidara monogram; the adoption of the visual identity of the king holding the trident on the early coins of Toramāṇa indicate his ancestry of the Kidarite realm. This, therefore, suggests a continuity of the Hun rule in Kashmir and the reuse of earlier names in the seventh century (Cunningham 1894: 39; Lahiri 1984: 105; Cribb 2017:6, 2010:95, 137).

The principal coin currency of Kashmir was called '*Toramana*', *Dinara* or *Puntshu* which according to Cunningham was a gold coin struck by Toramāṇa (Cunningham 1844: 25; Deyell 1990: 62). Coins of Toramāṇa are plentiful and supposedly never seem to have gone out of circulation. Literary accounts indicate that the copper coins called, '*Toramāṇas*' were still in circulation as late as the fifteenth century thereby representing a fairly unique and self-contained coinage (Cunningham 1894: 34). According to Cunningham, the commencement of the original coinage of Kashmir was with the abundant Toramāṇa copper issues which were copied by Avantivarman until the ninth century.

### **Stylistic Analysis**

Toramāṇas can be grouped into two primary categories based on the stylistic evolution of its coin design. These coins can be obviously classified under various subcategories depending upon the wear, phase of issue, artistic renditions, fabrics, weight, flan, provenance, etc. However, for the scope of this study, only two broad categories will be considered since the emphasis is on degerming the metal content of the early style Toramāṇas to corroborate with the newly discovered base gold coins. Early phase for the purpose of this research can be labelled Type I and the later fabric which is cruder in execution would be Type II. Due to the inaccessibility of a large body of the specimen, there is a need for a vague and a broader classification.

The figures on the obverse and reverse of the earliest types are stylistically closest to its representation on Gupta coins with less wear and more elegantly engraved. The legends *Sri Toramāṇa* on the obverse and '*Kidara*' and *Jaya(ti)* written vertically and horizontally respectively on the reverse right and left field of the late Gupta, proto-Sarada style square calligraphy are tidily executed (Cribb 2016: 89,100). The quality of die engraving is superior. The earliest variety is therefore considered the original type (Stein 1899: 27, Cunningham 1894: 37).

The later copper issues of Toramāṇa share features with the subsequent Utpala dynasty coins and are cruder in execution. The king/god on the obverse and the goddess on the reverse are more simplified. The bare midriff of the goddess has pronounced vertical lines. The characters of the legend *Sri Toramāṇa* degenerated to *Sri Tora*. The monogram *Kidara* is visibly absent on the reverse, possibly hinting that

the Kidara legend was conservative retention of an earlier design feature that lost its political significance to be used on the later Toramāṇas (Deyell 2017: 206).

The extant copper issues in the name of Toramāṇa, therefore, should be studied as an independent phenomenon, separate from the historical sources since the attribution of Toramāṇa's later coins mentioned in the Rajatarangini before the issues of Avantivarman are somewhat unresolved.



Figure 1: Coin of Toramāṇa, National Museum, New Delhi



Figure 2: Early Series Coin of Toramāṇa, Private Collector, Kashmir

### Early Issue of Toramāṇa, Coin Design

**Obverse (Fig 1a, 2a, 3a):** Figure of a king (Kushana style)/man/god- Shiva (since the religion of the Kashmir kings was notably Shaivism) standing frontally, head turned three quarters, with his right hand extended to make an offering on a small altar and the left hand holds a trident/staff. The figure is shown wearing knee-length tunic with

leggings tied at the ankles. The legend on the top left corner is illegible but usually inscribed in Gupta style Brahmi as *Sri Toramāṇa*.

**Reverse (Fig 1b, 2b, 3b):** Flanked by a goddess seated frontally on a lion (unclear at times)/lotus occupies most of the flan. According to Cribb, the goddess could be a Shaivite version of Sri or Parvati as also observed by Cunningham (1844), depicting a syncretic element of Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Her left hand is resting on the lap while holding a long-stemmed lotus in the right hand and a water pot on the far-left field. The inscription on the earliest Toramāṇas has the *Kidara* monogram written vertically on the left corner in late Brahmi style and *Jaya(ti)* on the right field beneath the lotus.



Figure 3: Early series Coin of Toramāṇa, Private Collector, Kashmir



Figure 4: Late Series Coin of Toramana, Private Collector, Kashmir

## Later Issue of Toramāṇa, Coin Design

**Obverse (Fig 4a):** Figure of king (Kushan style)/man/god- Shiva standing at the altar, sacrificing. He is wearing a tight tunic belted in the middle with a decorative motif of a cross and a circular suspended ball motif. The background appears to have some kind of platform. Legend *Sri Tora* inscribed diagonally across the left field.

**Reverse (Fig 4b):** Goddess seated frontally with a visible halo and midriff bearing vertical lines and highly stylized hand holding a long-stemmed lotus. Inscribed legend *Jaya* on the right field.

## Research Inquiry

The Toramāṇa type is well known only in copper coin due to its appearance until a recently discovered hoard confirmed it in base gold. This hoard preserved debased gold coins of Kashmir kings-Pravarasena, Meghamah (Meghavahana-Indianised name), Tuysina, all recorded in the Rajatarangini. These coins yielded a favourable assay of gold, silver and copper proven by preliminary testing. The trimetallic composition of Toramāṇa's coins with a metallic assay of 5.56% gold, 17.44% silver, and 74.77% copper had not been recorded before (Cribb 2016: 96). With the discovery of base gold Toramāṇas, scholars are of the opinion that the earliest fabric Toramāṇas (Type 1) may actually contain some traces of gold and silver. No coins of these Toramāṇa progenitors have been tested for metal content thus far. They were categorized as copper coins based on their coppery appearance.

The present study is an attempt at understanding whether the early fabric Toramāṇas have a similar or a relative metal content to explain debasement over an extended period of time or whether they remain to be pure copper with an exception of a few inaugural issues. The general assumption is that the early trimetallic Toramāṇas morphed into later copper Toramāṇas of the seventh-eight century. For this study, the data consisting of random and limited samples of early fabric Toramāṇas that were tested using X-Ray Fluorescence. Metal content of the coins are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Metal content of coins from Private holding and the National Museum, Delhi

Sl. No.	Series	Weight	Diameter	Copper	Iron	Zinc	Lead	Nickel	Gallium
Coin 1	Early	7.03 g	2.0 cm	98.90%	0.50%	0.60%	-	-	-
Coin 2	Early	7.11 g	1.9 cm	99.36%	0.22%	0.42%	-	-	-
Coin 3	Early	6.98 g	2.0 cm	99.13%	0.31%	0.51%	-	0.05%	-
Coin 4	Late	6.90 g	2.1 cm	99.40%	0.12%	-	0.11%	0.19%	0.18%

## Process of Data Collection and Methodology

Coin 1. belongs to the Numismatics and Epigraphy Department of the National Museum and coins. 2, 3 and 4 were made available by a veteran Kashmiri collector

from his private collection. Through the assistance of the National Museum's conservation department, this study has been able to generate new metallographic analyses by using the X-Ray Fluorescence technique to discern the metal content for the above-mentioned coins. X-Ray Fluorescence is a non-destructive method of testing layers of the coins near its surface and is by far the only treatment that can be used to trace metal content of coins from institutions and private collections as opposed to wet/destructive analysis (Deyell 2017: 71). The readings of the above specimen have been taken from coins which are clean, free of corrosion and patination and show signs of wear.

XRF Tests on coin 1 were carried out on an X-MET3500 XRF machine (40 keV Si-PIN X-ray tube), undertaken by Mr. Mahesh Kumar. The X-Ray beam was directed on 3 randomly selected spots for an average analysis. Tests on coins 2,3 and 4 were carried out using an EXF 9500 XRF machine (Si-Pin145Kev±5) undertaken by the collector himself. The first four coins belong to the early fabric series type 1 and a single late Toramāṇa specimen is also tested for its metal content to understand the morphosis.

## Discussion

A metallographic testing of the early fabric Toramāṇas has not been attempted before. Since after the discovery of base gold Toramāṇas, the need for re-examining the earliest Toramāṇas which were thought to be copper, was more than ever. Toramāṇa specimen from the National Museum has yielded about 98.90% copper with trace elements of iron and zinc. We can safely assume it to be a copper coin with no trace of gold or silver content whatsoever. Coins 2 and 3 are also pure copper upon testing and yield no precious metal content. The early fabric tested above cannot pass as trimetallic issues. Presumably, the earliest Toramāṇa coins that represent an evolutionary continuation of the late Kidarite series in terms of metallography must have been fashioned from a naturally occurring electrum with a copper dilutant which needs further examination (Deyell 2017: 71). It is possible that the base gold Toramāṇas had a somewhat gold-like appearance when they were first issued but eventually disappeared in circulation, thereafter, degrading to copper.

Only a few debased gold Toramāṇas of the early series would have been minted during his brief rule in fewer quantities like the quantities of coins of Pravarasena, Meghmah, and Tuysina which are known to be scarce. The coins of these early Kashmir kings have been discovered in the same hoard along with the base gold Toramāṇas. The coins of Pravarasena can be placed stylistically alongside the early fabric Toramāṇas but cannot be sequenced based on their debased metal content (Cribb 2016: 98). The earliest category of Toramāṇas can be categorized on the basis of palaeographic factors like the presence of legends Sri Toramāṇa on the obverse and *Jayati Kidara* on the reverse. The above specimens could probably be classified as early issues and probably not the earliest phase of issue and hence they could be the intermediate series. We could therefore classify coins 1, 2, and 3 as examples of early 'intermediates' between the earliest base gold and the later copper issues.

If we corroborate the theory stated by Deyell for the enigmatic post Kidarite electrum coins from Punjab foothills that the evolution of the degenerating style of engraving and a progressive slow reduction of gold content are congruent (Deyell 2017: 83), then possibly only the finest engraved Toramanas can pass as base gold coins. It is also important to understand the provenance and context of where the early series of Toramanas were found. Coins 2 and 3 might have undergone oxidation and other chemical processes due to association with moist soil and lying buried, thereby, altering the inner structure of the coin over a long period of time before they were cleaned and restored. The later Toramāṇa issues (coin 4) which are 100% copper must have been struck by a series of local chiefs or later rulers continuing to represent his name as the Kidarite legend, 'Kidara' is absent on the obverse and an abbreviated version of Sri Toramāṇa (Sri Tora) was coined. The later coins of Toramāṇa are considered imitation series (Cribb 2016: 110) and pose further questions and problems.

The Toramāṇa copper coinage would have therefore been, in the general sense, 'money' or 'cash' considering the base gold Toramāṇas as a mere experiment to issue a commercially accepted coinage in base-gold to favour the balance of trade (Stein 1899:3). Scholars like S.C Ray claimed that though Kashmiris made an experiment with bimetallism in response to external trade activity, these cases failed and the currency lapsed to its original condition (Ray 1956: 71-75). A limited coinage in base gold Toramāṇas could be a model as the Pratapa electrum dinaras that continued to circulate as notional token value. (Deyell 2017: 214). The theory of debasement whoever is a more likely one where trimetallic Toramāṇa dinaras morphed over time into later copper issues.

## Limitations

This study is based on the metallic analysis of a limited body of specimen and is far from complete. This analysis has a tentative conclusion due to limitations of testing coins in a scientific facility along with the availability of large quantities earliest/early fabric Toramāṇas, separately and in hoards. This research is subject to refinement should further evidence become available. However, precedence is set in uncovering new data on the early Toramāṇas using scientific testing methods.

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