

TWO NOTES ON MALLA CURRENCIES

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Published sources on Nepalese history testify to the existence of a currency which went by the name *navadammaśivakā*, its first well-known appearance being the Pim Bāhāl inscription of N.S.477-479, i.e. A.D.1357-9. Departing from this date, the latest comprehensive survey of the field of Nepalese coinage (RHODES, GABRISCH and VALDETTARO 1989) ascribes its introduction to the king ruling at that time: this was Jayarājadeva, dated 1347-61. The term itself is explained with reference to the older *śivakā* currency known since the eleventh century: presumably in contradistinction to this, the name is interpreted to mean 'new *damma śivakās*'¹.

In the light of the public and private documents which have recently been collected under the auspices of the NEPAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME, we have to modify this account in two respects.

- (a) The currency itself is, in Newārī, styled *gun damma śivakā* (with a number of orthographical variants): the word *nava* in the Sanskrit name, then, is to be understood in the sense of 'nine' rather than 'new'. PETECH did consider this alternative², but thought is 'less likely'; the Newars of those days took it that way, and nobody will wish to question their reading.
- (b) The date of its introduction is earlier than RHODES, GABRISCH and VALDETTARO had supposed: There is a loan³ dated N.S. 420 *caitra śu ddhi* 12, i.e. from A.D. 1300, which, in lines 1-2, reads

(1) *gun = drama śivakā trayāṅka[tta]*⁴ *śivakā* 3.

This brings the *navadammaśivakā* up into the reign of the very king Anantamalla (N.S.394-427, i.e. A.D.1274-1307) whom the Gopālarāja-vaṃśāvali credits with the introduction of a new system of coinage using *dammās* (: *tena kṛta dammavyavahāreṇa prajā kaṣṭībhavati* ed. VAJRĀCĀRYA and MALLA, fol.26^a5)—a corroboration of PETECH's carefully worded hypothesis positing a relation between this king and the new currency (p.201). In passing, one notices the *Vaṃśāvali* proves reliable in what is not an inessential detail.

It is, then, a *śivakā* of nine *dammās* which the Newārī (and the Sanskrit) name of the currency attests to.⁵

This was a considerable departure from the former system where a *pala*, *pla* (i.e. a *śivakā*) consisted of four *karṣas*. The attempts to get a clear grasp of the position are further complicated by the fact that the old terms continued to be in use. N.S.519 jyeṣṭha kṛṣṇa 3, line 2, names a sum as

(2) [gu] damma śivakā ḥ m = eka-[pl]ā[nika]ta ḥ pla 1,

i.e. it testifies to an identity between *śivakā* and *pla*, just repeating what we already know from the Piṃ Bāhāl inscription⁶.

For the next lower unit, we have two names, *karṣa* and *damma*. As for *karṣas* continuing to be used even after *dammās* had been introduced, see, e.g., N.S.499 māgha śukla 6, lines 2-3:

(3) gun = damma śivakā dvaya kraṣāṅkata [ḥ] krarṣa 2, etc.

The materials available until now do not allow us to say whether in the *navadammaśivakā* currency a *karṣa* continued to keep its old value of a quarter *pala* = *śivakā*, or whether it is just a survival of the old term, being used as a synonym for the *damma*, i.e. one ninth of a *pala*. Until now, I know of only one piece of relevant evidence which, taken by itself, might point to the former solution. This is two loans separated by about 20 years, viz., the N.S.499 and N.S.519 documents just referred to. In 499, the sum borrowed is 2 *karṣas* and the yearly interest to be paid for this sum is 4 *paṃ* (i.e. *pāthū*) of paddy; the respective figures in 519 are 1 *pala* and 8 *paṃ*. On the hypothesis of the *karṣa* being a quarter *pala*, this leads to a neat proportion of 1 : 2: i.e. interest would be charged at the same rate. But basing a conclusion on this pair alone won't really do: from N.S. 500 or a bit later⁷, we have a loan which charges 2 (or 2.5⁸) *paṃ* for 10 *śivakās*; fluctuations of interest rates were considerable especially when paid in agricultural produce where dearth or abundance affects prices.

And one could plead against a persistence of the old *karṣa* valuation by pointing to the N.S.477 portion of the Piṃ Bāhāl inscription. Its lines 14-15 record a donation of *navadamma(śi)vakā dāma traya karṣāṅka karṣatrayaṃ*⁹, which *prima facie* does suggest an identity of *dāma* and *karṣa*¹⁰. But again, the text is not as clear as one would wish: if *dāma* was used in the generic meaning of 'coin', a possibility which cannot be positively ruled out, we would be left with *karṣas* equated with *karṣas*¹¹. Materials like the documents eventually ought to provide an answer.

An odd clause in a private document written during Yakṣamalla's reign raises a second problem of currency which is still far from a solution; since, however, it has not to my knowledge been hitherto recognized, I shall present it in outline.

It arose when dealing with a document from N.S.588, i.e. A.D.1468. This records a loan of a sum of 6 *dama*[*m*], taken by a Citrakār (*cetrakāra*). It is a bit unusual in that it covers quite a long span of time. The text itself consists of two parts: the earlier one, A, from N.S.588 jyeṣṭha śukla 15, is a re-writing of a loan taken at some previous date; the later one, B, dated N.S.606 phālguna kṛṣṇa 6, extends it, with no duration given, and expressly stating 'the interest of this figure (i.e. sum) has been entirely cleared, *thva añkasa klamtra sarvva sodhana dhumgva* (B1-2)'.
 It is in the former part that one meets with a phrase for which I cannot quote a parallel:

- (5) *kāyesa purāna dāma ḥ prate hñathya [gum] dāma pata ka [hñyāna]na udārāpa tayā ḥ* (line A3-A4), i.e. 'When taking, *purāna dāma* (are to be accepted) as settlement. The loan is being extended/continued¹², the former document (in) *gum dāma* being taken and invalidated'.

prate, pratye etc., i.e. Skt. *pratyaya-*, is the word commonly used in loans to mean the settlement of a debt, i.e. its repayment. This, the loans formula usually stipulates, is to be effected in the currency in which the loan was taken: the normal text runs *sāyesa ... taṃkā* [or designation of some other currency] *prate*, 'when being proffered, ... *taṃkā* coins (are to be accepted) as settlement'. I take the wording of (5) as a mere variant of this: in view of N.S.580, to be quoted presently, *kāyesa* for *sāyesa* may be nothing but a slip of the pen.

What is remarkable in the first place is the clause itself, in its normal form: it betrays some uncertainty as to currencies in public consciousness—an uncertainty which in the present state of our knowledge¹³ does not seem fully warranted: the changes that we know about are not all that frequent. Yet the sentence warns us to as it were be generally on the alert for innovations in this field. And the clause quoted as (5) seems to provide an instance.

It refers to a former loan in what the present document calls the *gun dāma* currency; the renewal stipulates the use of a different one which went under the name of *purāna dāma*. And from the same period there is a second scroll, less definite in wording, which points to the same direction. In N.S.580 *jyeṣṭha kr 4*, the *sāyesa* clause runs (lines 3 and 6)

- (6) *sāyesa dāma <thava desayā mālva> pratye*, i.e. 'the repayment is necessary (in the currency) of the (debtor's/creditor's) own region'¹⁴—

in other words, there was another currency afloat which in theory the debtor might have chosen. Surely it is not far-fetched to suppose this was the *purāna dāma* attested in the N.S.588 piece.

Till now, this coin seems to be unknown. The years 580 and 588 fell into the times of Yakṣamalla who, after a reign of more than half a century, died in the year N.S.602 (A.D. 1482). Among his many achievements, none of the chronicles etc. mentions a currency reform. And indeed the *gun=damma śivakā* was used during his reign: apart from the instance quoted as (5), there are others like N.S.572, line 2:

- (7) *gun=damma śivakā pañc[ā]dammāddhika ḥ
caturaśivakāṅka ḥ śivakā 4 damma 5—*

a wording which follows the style customary in *gun=damma śivakā* money¹⁵.

This text in one's ear, one notices what may be a significant departure in one of Yakṣamalla's famous documents, viz., the well-known inscription of N.S.573 concerning the building of the Bhaktapur wall and regulating its maintenance. Towards its end, it lays down fines for various trespasses that might do it damage. All of them are fixed in what is transcribed¹⁶ as *dāma* (line 26) or *damma* (lines 29, 34, 35), and the sums include one of 12 (line 26) and one of nine (line 34). To go by common sense and, indeed, by the style of (7), one would have expected them to be expressed by means of the larger unit if this had been the currency employed.

No doubt, these are three pieces of evidence decidedly minor; yet each

of them is not readily explained within the *gun damma śivakā* system. One wonders whether in the course of the manifold measures to re-organize his kingdom Yakṣamalla also introduced changes in coinage. The term itself of course reminds one of the *paṇa purāṇa* currency which was used until the twelfth century: was it a intentional revival of older times? Perhaps the phrase *thva desayā* of (6) is a clue: it would make sense if the confusion of Yakṣamalla and his co-regents had at some time found a territorial solution, with one of these parts striking coins of its own.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS referred to¹⁷:

Date	NGMPP Reel No.	
N.S.420 <i>caitra śu 12</i>	E 2032/23	(1)
N.S.499 <i>māgha śu 6</i>	A 856/27	(3)
N.S.*500 ¹⁸	A 856/21	(4)
N.S.519 <i>jyeṣṭha kr 3</i>	E 465/33	(2)
N.S.572 <i>vaiśākha śu 6</i>	E 2095/23	(7)
N.S.580 <i>jyeṣṭha kr 3</i>	E 2945/12	(6)
N.S.588 <i>jyeṣṭha śu 15</i>	A 855/29	(5)

Notes

¹ The Coinage of Nepal from the earliest times until 1911, p.52ff.

² History of Mediaeval Nepal, 1984², p.201.

³ Published by M. R. PANT: cf. his paper *Tādapatramā lekhiakā, ahilesamma prakāśmā naāekā, vikramako caudhaurṃ śatābdīkā 15 vaṭā likhatpatra*. In: *Pūrṇimā 77*, Kathmandu 2047 [V.S.], p.6: he reads *trayāṅkaka*.

⁴ Uncertain readings are enclosed in brackets [].

⁵ The interpretation of *nava* as 'nine' would seem to be confirmed by the amount of interest charged in this loan: *tasya varṣam = prati kalantara śivakā prati da 2* 'the interest of this is 2 *da* per *śivakā* per year': this works out at an annual rate of 22.22%, which is quite within the usual range. See also (7), below: a wording which makes sense only with the larger unit consisting of more than five pieces of the lower.

⁶REGMI, *Medieval Nepal* 3, pp.19ff., prints the relevant portions as *navadammaśivakā trayāṅkata pta 3 [...]* *navadammaśivakā pta 3 iti* (lines 21ff.): *pta* of course is *pla*.

⁷The document in question, (4)(NGMPP A856/21), is fragmentary, and no trace of its date preserved. The creditors, though, come from the same *bāhāl* as those of N.S.499, and the personal names of the *bāhāl* officials are in part identical.

⁸The figure 2 is followed by a double *daṇḍa*, and one cannot tell whether this is to be read as a punctuation mark or as ½.

⁹Quoted from Bh. PAUḌEL, Dh. VAJRĀCĀRYA, Jñ. NEPĀLA: *Mahāpātra-śrī-meghapālavarmanah śilālekhah*. In: *Saṃskṛta-sandēśah* 1 (10-12), Kathmandu 2010, pp.10-13.— REGMI (*Medieval Nepal* 3, p.20) and PETECH (*Mediaeval history*, p.201) read *dāma*.

¹⁰This is how PETECH translates it: *loc. cit.*, p.201.

¹¹The solution would not seem to lie in *dāmas* (if this is the correct reading: see Note 9) being distinguished from *dammas*: at least in N.S.588, to be quoted presently, they clearly are identical.

¹²lit.: the loan is kept being taken: *taye* used to mark the continuation.

¹³as codified in RHODES et al., *The coinage of Nepal*, p.55

¹⁴The words enclosed in < > are added underneath the completed text, the place of insertion marked by a *kākapada* in place of an effaced *akṣara*: the scribe apparently used this mistake to add the sign of insertion, though the codicil should have come after rather than before *pratyē*.

¹⁵It incidentally proves at least this *damma* was not identical with the *karṣa* four of which made up a *pala*.

¹⁶I am using the text printed in D.R. REGMI: *Medieval Nepal* 3, pp.73ff.

¹⁷Photographs of these documents can be found in NATIONAL ARCHIVES, Kathmandu, under the NGMPP Reel No.

¹⁸Date approximate: see above, note 7.

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