EARLY INDIAN MINTS *)

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I. THE AGE OF SYMBOLS

Unlike the mediaeval period, we have no names of mints on ancient coins, nor do we know much about the problems regarding the ancient Indian mint and currency. We have no elaborate literature on the subject and the acute paucity of materials makes it difficult to describe accurately the mint-places or towns where the ancient money was minted either on behalf of the guilds or private citizens or by royal order for general circulation. A number of facts known about the mint and money of seventeenth or eighteenth century India have a great bearing also on the study of early Indian numismatics 1). In fact, the various meaningful symbols inscribed on ancient coins and also the recent finds of coin-moulds at different places help determine the places where they actually were minted. These symbols speak of the history of the evolution of coinage, for the different marks carry a definite message and represent the various phases of their evolution. On close examination of the important hoards of the punch-marked

*) Abbreviations:

JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain.
ASI Rep Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Reports.
JBBRAS Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.
BMC A.I. British Museum Catalogue: Ancient India.
JNSI Journal of the Numismatic Society of India, Varanasi.
INC Indian Numismatic Chronicle, Patna.
ANS American Numismatic Society.
JUPHS Journal of the U.P. Historical Society, Lucknow.
ABORI Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona.
EI Epigraphia Indica.

coins from all over the country which bore a constant group of marks—four or five different symbols—Walsh suggested that "one mark may represent the State, one the reigning king, one the place where the coin was struck, and perhaps one a religious mark recognising the religious deity; also the master of the mint may have had his mark which would affix his responsibility for the coin..." 1). It is also suggested that the five symbols on the Kārṣāpāṇa series represent State, king, mint, religion and mint-master 2), but no suggestion has so far been made about a particular symbol representing a particular place or institution with the solitary exception of the "three-arched hill with crescent" which has been identified as the rājānka symbol of the Mauryas 3). Thus, it is not easy to suggest if all the imperial coins were issued from one central mint or there were several mints in various provincial headquarters of the empire. The analysis of various hoards of the imperial punch-marked coins seems to indicate that in the time of Aśoka, if not earlier, there were more than one mint functioning in the empire. Apart from a central mint at Pātaliputra, there were at least three other mints: one in Central India, not unlikely at Ujjayini; the other in the region of Tākṣasālā and the third somewhere in Kāliṅga or Andhra 4).

A passage in the Visuddhimagga says that every place which issued coinage had its own distinguishing mark or marks stamped on it by observing which the Shroff (berāṇīka) could at once tell from which place a particular coin came. After looking at the coins, and "examining them in various ways such as hearing the sound they make when struck, smelling and licking them and taking them in his hand, he would

1) E. H. C. Walsh, Cent. Suppl. to J.R.A.S., 1924, p. 184, 177. For other views, see Smith, CCIM, p. 133; Rapson, Ancient India, p. 151; Spooner, ASI, 1905-06, p. 153; Bhandarkar, Ancient Indian Numismatics, p. 98. For an elaborate interpretation of these symbols see Durga Prasad, J.A.S.B. (NS), 1934, No. XLV, pp. 1-59; 1937 (NS), No. XLVII, pp. 51-52.

