

1. Vijayanagara Era Gold Coins – History

Punch-marked gold coins dating back to Vijayanagara-era unearthed in Tiruvannamalai. Over 100 circular gold coins from the Vijayanagara era, some bearing the dynastic 'Varaha' (boar) emblem, were discovered during restoration at a Later Chola-era temple in Tamil Nadu. These coins reflect the Vijayanagara Empire's economic strength (issuing gold, silver, and copper) and religious devotion, with rulers like Krishnadevaraya using motifs like Balakrishna and Achyuta Raya using the Ganda Berunda.

Discovery of Vijayanagara Era Gold Coins

What – Over 100 gold coins have been discovered.

Era – The coins date back to the Vijayanagara era (14th–16th century CE).

Location – The discovery was made at a Later Chola-era Shiva temple in Kovilur hamlet.

Place – The site is located in the Tiruvannamalai district, Tamil Nadu.

Circumstance – The coins were found during restoration work being carried out at the temple.

Details of the Discovery

Characteristics of the Discovered Coins

Average Size – Approximately 5 millimetres in diameter.

Shape – The coins are circular, which distinguishes them from the square-shaped coins of the Sangam Age.

Symbolism – Some of the coins bear the emblem of a pig.

Pig Emblem Significance – This was a royal symbol of the Vijayanagara Empire, representing Varaha, the boar incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Estimated Age and Purpose

Age – The coins are believed to be from the Vijayanagara period (14th–16th century CE).

Historical Context – This aligns with the reign of Krishnadevaraya and his successors, who were known for reviving temple architecture and endowing temples with gold and other valuables.

Purpose of Deposition (According to Archaeologists)

Religious Offering – Gold coins were intentionally buried beneath the temple sanctums as offerings to the deities. This was a ritual practice done to invoke prosperity and divine protection for the entire region.

General Economic Usage – Separately, metal coins (especially copper and silver) were the standard for economic transactions due to their durability and resistance to melting.

About the Vijayanagara Empire

Foundation and Origin

Date – Founded in 1336 CE.

Founders – Harihara I and Bukka Raya I.

Location – Established on the banks of the Tungabhadra River (in modern Hampi, Karnataka).

Guidance – The founders were operating under the spiritual guidance of Saint Vidyaranya.

Capital City

Name – Vijayanagara, meaning "City of Victory".

Status – It grew to become one of the most prosperous and well-fortified cities of medieval India.

Ruling Dynasties

Sangama Dynasty (1336–1485 CE) – Founded by Harihara & Bukka.

Saluva Dynasty (1485–1505 CE) – A period of transition.

Tuluva Dynasty (1505–1570 CE) – The empire's peak, notably under Krishnadevaraya.

Aravidu Dynasty (1570–1646 CE) – The last phase of the empire until its decline.

Key Features of Coins of the Vijayanagara Empire

Metal Composition

Metals Used – The empire issued coins in gold, silver, and copper.

Significance – This diversity showcased the empire's economic strength and vast trade network.

Denominations

Gold Pagoda (Varaha) – This was the highest denomination coin.

Gold Fanams, Silver Taras, Copper Kasu – These were used for smaller and everyday transactions.

Regional Coinage

Early Issues – The first coins were often region-specific, such as the Barkur Gadyanas and Bhatkal Gadyanas.

Standardization – Harihara I and Bukka introduced the gold fanams and silver taras, which set the standard for later issues.

Religious and Cultural Symbols

Theme – Coins prominently featured Hindu deities and sacred motifs.

Significance – This reflected the empire's deep religious devotion and cultural ethos.

Ruler-Specific Motifs –

Harihara II – Introduced depictions of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva on gold Pagodas.

Krishnadevaraya – His coins famously displayed the Balakrishna (infant Krishna) motif.

Achyuta Raya – Used the Ganda Berunda (a mythical double-headed eagle), which symbolized royal power.

Tirumala Raya (Aravidu dynasty) – Depicted Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita, highlighting the growing Vaishnava influence.

Legends and Language

Inscriptions – The coins bore the names and titles of the rulers.

Languages/Scripts Used – A variety of scripts were used, including Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Nagari.

Significance – This reflected the vast linguistic diversity of the empire.

Example – Some coins were inscribed with "Sri Krishnadevaraya" in both Nagari and Kannada scripts.

Symbolism

Dynastic Emblem – The Boar (Varaha), an incarnation of Vishnu, served as the dynastic emblem (as seen on the newly discovered coins).

Other Symbols – Deities, animals (like the elephant and horse), and other mythological symbols were common.

Purpose – This imagery reinforced the concepts of Dharma (righteousness) and divine kingship.

Ganda Berunda – This double-headed eagle was a powerful symbol of strength, protection, and imperial sovereignty.

Economic Role

Trade – Gold Pagodas and silver Taras were stable currencies that circulated widely across South India and along the Indian Ocean trade routes, especially with Southeast Asia.

Standardization – The empire maintained standardized denominations and weights, which ensured commercial reliability and trust in the currency.

Local Economy – Copper coins served the needs of local markets and facilitated daily transactions for common people.

Administrative Significance – The coinage system reflects the monetary uniformity and administrative efficiency of the Vijayanagara state.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/punch-marked-gold-coins-dating-back-to-vijayanagara-era-uneearthed-in-tiruvannamalai/article70240206.ece>