



PREPARATION OF A CATALOGUE OF COINS PRESERVED IN THE REGIONAL MUSEUMS OF SOUTH 24 PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract: *A regional museum is generally identified as an institution dedicated primarily to the preservation and exhibition of artifacts—specifically ancient and locally sourced items—rooted in local cultural heritage and history. These museums frequently showcase materials discovered through their own initiatives, focusing on specific local cultural elements such as antique art, handicrafts, manuscripts, and similar objects. The artifacts housed within these regional museums hold immense significance for understanding the socio-cultural fabric of the region. Coins, in particular, constitute a vital resource for reconstructing the history of ancient India; the numismatic collections preserved in these regional museums serve to enrich our historical narrative, providing researchers with invaluable source material for historical scholarship. Much like other districts of West Bengal, the district of South 24 Parganas has witnessed the establishment of numerous regional-level museums. Prominent among these are the Banglar Puratattva Gabeshana Kendra O Sangrahashala, Sundarban Anchalik Sangrahashala, Badabon Anchalik Pratnatattwik Sangrahashala, Sagardwip Sangrahashala etc. Currently, there exists no comprehensive inventory of the collections housed within these regional museums—nor is there a catalogue or chronological record of their numismatic holdings—the compilation of which is a matter of critical importance. Should this undertaking be successfully realized, it would not only enrich our understanding of ancient Indian history but also serve to disseminate regional history more widely among the general public.*

Keywords: Catalogue, Coin, Museums, Regional Museum, South 24 Parganas

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Introduction

The museums located in West Bengal are primarily established at the national, state, and regional levels. While the leading museums possess clear chronologies and comprehensive inventories, regional-level museums generally lack such documentation; the compilation of a definitive list for these institutions would significantly facilitate research and aid in the reconstruction of the history of ancient India. These regional museums—numbering over thirty—house a diverse array of artifacts, ranging from coins spanning various periods of ancient India and foreign trade goods to cowries (cowrie shell), which served as the lowest medium of exchange in commerce. A catalogue of coins preserved in the regional museums—*‘Banglar Puratattva Gabeshana Kendra o Sangrahashala’*, *‘Sundarabana pratinagabeshana kendra’*, *‘Badabon Anchalik Pratinatattwik Sangrahashala’*, ‘G - Plot Vivekananda Vidyamandir, Higher Secondary’—has been prepared. The aim of this research paper is to compile a comprehensive catalogue of the coins preserved in regional repositories. Its principal objective is to enrich the history of ancient India by providing researchers with a centralized resource where they can access detailed information regarding the coins housed across all these repositories. Furthermore, it seeks to enrich regional history and serve as a foundational step toward safeguarding these coins against loss or theft.

The primary issues observed to date in several regional museums across South 24 Parganas are as follows:

- There is a lack of proper maintenance within these museums; consequently, there is a risk that artifacts—including coins—may suffer damage or be stolen.
- The authorities demonstrate a noticeable lack of interest regarding the proper display of coins.

- There are no existing inventories detailing the weight, metallic composition, or provenance of the coins.
- There is a risk that a museum may cease to operate following the demise of its founder; for instance, the *‘Gangaridai Gabeshana Kendra o Museum’* currently faces imminent closure following the passing of its founder, Narottam Halder.
- Many museums that once existed have now vanished entirely—such as the *‘Mansadwip Ramakrishna Mission Ashram Museum’*.
- Many of the coins are indistinct or illegible; therefore, their chronological dating is a matter of urgent necessity.
- Museum organizers and collectors frequently charge exorbitant fees for access and inspection—a practice that creates significant impediments to academic research.
- Object has no unique accession number.

Initially, to conceptualize the research problems outlined in the proposal, relevant data has been gathered from various sources—comprising both primary Source (ancient Indian coins housed in this Regional museum collections) and secondary sources (reports on explorations and excavations conducted at sites such as Chandraketugarh [1956–57 & 1966–67], Tamruk [1954–55 & 1973–74], Moghalmari [2002–03, 2006–07, 2012–13, & 2015–16], Harinarayanpur & Deulpota [1963–64], Boral, Tilpi-Dhosa [2006], Kankandighi [2012], Atghara [1989], etc.). Subsequently, to address the aforementioned problems and inquiries, the following methods have been employed for the observation and tabulation of data and statistics:

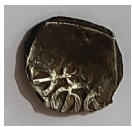
- Surveying the coins through visits to museums and personal consultations with the relevant authorities.

- Documenting the provenance or find-spots of the coins.
- Recording the metallic composition and weight of the coins.
- Identifying and cataloging the coins.
- Accessioning (Formal Inclusion in Collection)
 - (a) Object is given a unique accession number.
 - (b) Entry is made in the Accession Register.
 - (c) Documentation includes: Method of acquisition (donation, purchase, excavation, transfer), Provenance and ownership history, Date of accession, Object description and classification.
 - (d) Accessioning establishes the legal ownership and responsibility of the museum. Upon the collection of all

available information and data pertinent to the proposed research problem, the coin inventories of the regional museums will be subjected to analysis from a historical perspective.

Regional Museum of South 24 Parganas

A) *Banglar Puratattva Gabeshana Kendra O Sangrahashala* established in the year 2008 and founded by Mr. Rajiv Barua is located in 117, Khan Mahammed Road, South Behala, Sarsuna, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India, latitude 22.47895 N 22°28'44.20992", Longitude: 88.30404 E 88°18'14.526". With reference to the collections housed in the museum, it includes stone tools, beads, stone plaques depicting deities (Vishnu and Goddesses), bricks, and—predominantly—coins from various periods and regions of India. The details of the collections has been discussed below in tabular format:

Identification	Image		Metal	Provenance	Description of Obverse	Description of Reverse
	Obverse	Reverse				
Magadha Coinage Weight – 3.3 grams			Silver	Rajghat, Uttar Pradesh	Five symbols engraved: Sun, Ujjain symbol, three-arched hill, tree, and Bull/Elephant imprint	Blank
Coin of the Gandhara Janapada Weight: 12.0 grams			Silver	Punjab	A circle flanked by dot marks on both sides, featuring six arms and four smaller symbols subsequently stamped onto it. Due to its manufacture as a long, bar-like coin created via stamping, it is narrower in the center and slightly bent.	Blank
Coin of the Gandhara Janapada Weight: 1.4 grams			Silver	Punjab	Circular symbol with a central dot and six radiating arms	Blank

Coin of the Kashi Janapada Weight – 3.2 grams			Silver	Kaushambi	Two pairs of distinct symbols—one type resembling a whirlpool, and the other pair depicting lotuses—along with three additional pairs of minute symbols.	Blank
Coin of the Surasena Weight: 1.3 grams			Silver	Mathura	Struck	Indistinct Impression
Chandraketugarh Coin Weight: 1.5 grams			Copper alloy	Chandraketugarh, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal	Hexagonal symbol on the left; boat on the right; symbol at the top is indistinct (wheel=?)	Symbol is indistinct, features a large dot.
Coin of the Avanti Janapada Weight – 1.5 grams			Silver	Ujjain	Eight large dots surrounding a relatively larger central dot.	Blank
Coins of the Magadha Empire— Weight: 2.1 grams Weight: 3.2 grams Weight: 3.2 grams Weight: 1.7 grams			Silver	Kaushambi	Five engraved symbols: Sun, Ujjain symbol, three-arched hill, tree, and bull.	Flower (with peacock-?) imprint.
			Silver	Purnia	Depictions of three human figures (female); additionally marked with imprints of a hill (?) and a peacock.	Peacock
			Silver	Vidisha	Five symbols: Sun, lotus flower, wavy pattern; the remaining two imprints could not be identified.	Three small imprints.
			Silver	Ujjain	Indistinct imprint	Uneven surface

Shunga Period Coin Weight: 1.5 grams			Copper	Kaushambi	Three-arched hill surmounted by a crescent moon; Elephant	Elephant
Wright – 3.0 grams			Copper	Kaushambi	Elephant, Staff (Indra-dhvaja), Lotus flower (Swastika motif?), Dotted inverted crescent moon; below: two dotted lines.	Fig tree with three leaves (Indra-dhvaja?), Moon above, Hill below, '+' symbol below.
Kushan Coinage Ruler: Kanishka Weight: 15.1 grams			Copper	Rajasthan	The King, clad in an overcoat, offers oblations into the sacrificial fire with his right hand; his left arm is bent and held behind his back, and a halo encircles his head. The rim is adorned with a pattern of dots. Legend.	The King (or Deity?) is depicted wearing an overcoat, extending his right hand forward while holding his left arm bent upwards. [Includes Legend]
Shashanka's Coinage Weight: 8.8 grams			Gold	Murshidabad, West Bengal	The King is depicted seated upon a bull, accompanied by a crescent moon. [Includes Legend]	Goddess Lakshmi is depicted seated with her knees bent, holding her arms extended outwards to either side. [Includes Legend]

Courtesy:- Banglar Puratattva Gabeshana Kendra O Sangrahashala

B. *Sundarabana pratnagabeṣaṇa kendra* established in the year 1985 is located in Kashinagar, Mathurapur, Raidighi. Its founder is Debishankar Midya. With reference to the collections in the museum, it consists of Beads and seals [Period: 3rd Century CE], Spindles [Period: 5th Century CE]; Site of Discovery: Kankandighi], Grey-colored steatite seals bearing Brahmi inscriptions [Period: 1st Century

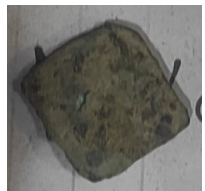
BCE], Site of Discovery: Kankandighi]; Proto-Bengali script [Grey-colored terracotta; Site of Discovery: Paschim Jata]; Weights [Period: Circa 3rd Century CE; Kankandighi]; Additionally, various divine figurines and diverse archaeological artifacts recovered from numerous locations across South 24 Parganas has been preserved in the museum. The details are discussed below in tabular format.

Identification	Image		Metal	Provenance	Description of Obverse	Description of Reverse
	Obverse	Reverse				
Kushan King Vima Kadphises (The weight of the coin was not recorded)			Copper	Paschim Jata, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.	The King, clad in an overcoat, offers oblations into the sacrificial fire with his right hand; his left arm is bent and held behind his back.	(Indistinct) Deity figure seated upon a mount.
Magadha Janapada Coin (The weight of the coin was not recorded)			Bronze	Kankandighi, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.	Punch-marked bronze coin; a wheel-like imprint is discernible (possibly representing the Vishnu Chakra, Kala Chakra, or Buddha Chakra).	
Cowrie Period: Circa 9th Century				Paschim Jata, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.		

Courtesy: Sundarabana pratnagabeṣaṇa kendra

C. *Badabana ancalka pratnatattbika sangrahasala*, was formerly known as the ‘Matala ancalka sangrahasala’. The museum’s founder, Kshitish Bishal, donated his entire collection to the Jaygopalpur Gram Bikash Kendra. The museum is

located in Basanti, Sundarban, South 24 Parganas. The collections in the museum in addition to five coins from the ancient period, also consists of coins from the British era, along with sculptures, beads, manuscripts, and other artifacts.

Identification	Image	Metal	Provenance	Description
Cowrie Shells		Cast Copper Coin	Sundarban	Five distinct denominations of cowrie shells are preserved; the value of each category varies. One class of cowries is cut through the middle; they vary progressively in weight and thickness—factors that served as indicators of their differing monetary values.
Regional coin imitating the coinage of the Magadha Janapada [possibly a counterfeit coin]		Cast Copper Coin	Kankandighi, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.	coin is worn and corroded, making it indistinct; the reverse side is not shown.

Regional coin imitating the coinage of the Magadha Janapada [possibly a counterfeit coin]		Cast Copper Coin	Kankandighi, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.	coin is worn and corroded, making it indistinct; the reverse side is not shown.
Regional coin imitating the coinage of the Magadha Janapada [possibly a counterfeit coin]		Cast Copper Coin	Kankandighi, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.	coin is worn and corroded, making it indistinct; the reverse side is not shown.
Kushan Era Coin		Cast Copper Coin	Boral, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.	Indistinct; as it depicts a standing king wearing an overcoat with his left hand resting on his waist. The reverse side is not shown.

Courtesy: Badabana ancilika pratnatattbika sangrahasala

D. 'G' Plot Vivekananda Vidyamandir, Higher Secondary located in Unar Surendranj, P.O.- Daspur, P.S.- Pathar pratima, Dist.- South 24 Parganas, has collections of four distinct varieties of coins from the Gauda King Shashanka, along with fossils, various terracotta artifacts, beads, and other archaeological objects (Fig.7)

Description: Gauda King Shashanka's coin.

Type 1-

Silver coin, Weight – 9 Gram 080 Milligram, Diameter – 2 cm.

Obverse: The king is seated in the Padmasana posture.

Reverse: Not depicted.

Findspot: Uttar Surendranj, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

Type 2-

Gold coin, Weight – 5 Gram 565 Milligram, Diameter - 2.2 cm.

Obverse: The king stands holding a weapon in the *Tri-vikrama* posture.

Reverse: Not depicted.

The coin is ringed, possibly used as a pendant worn around the neck.

Findspot: Uttar Surendranj, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

Type 3-

Gold coin, Weight – 5 Gram 760 milligram, Diameter – 2 cm.

Obverse: The king is standing upon a bull.
Reverse: Not depicted.

Findspot: Uttar Surendranj, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

Type 4-

Bronze coin, weight – 8 Gram 350 milligram, Diameter – 2 cm.

Obverse: The king is standing upon a bull.

Reverse: Not depicted.

Findspot: Uttar Surendranj, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

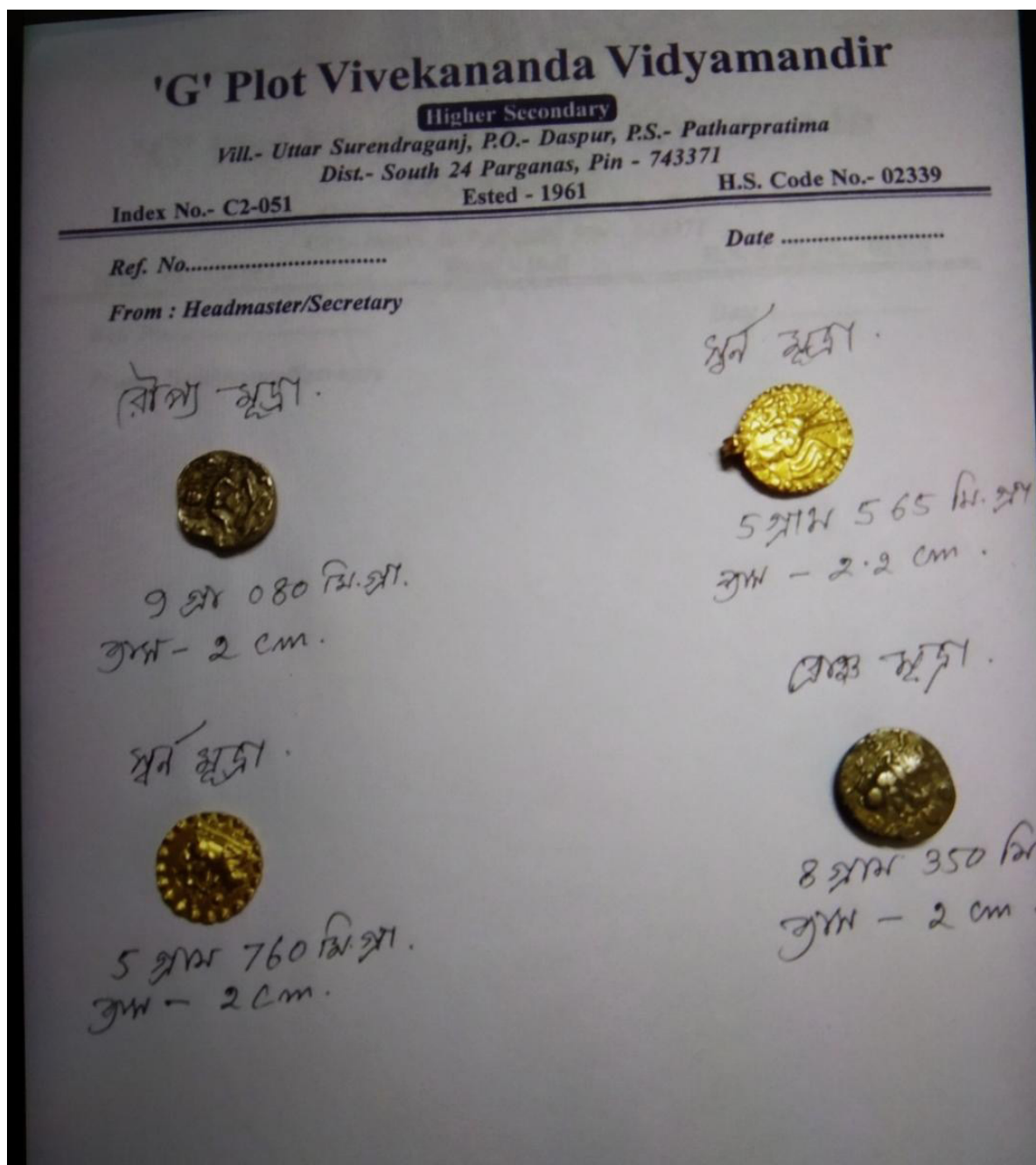


Figure 7: Four coins of King Shashanka of Gauda. Courtesy – ‘G’ Plot Vivekananda Vidyamandir, Higher Secondary

Conclusion

Museums are an essential component of a civilized society and a vital source of knowledge. While throwing light on multiple perspectives of historical change, regional museums represent an underexplored yet significant field of research. A systematic history of these institutions forms an important chapter in understanding the intellectual and historical development of a region.

The artefacts preserved in regional museums reflect not only the cultural identity of local populations but also provide evidence of commercial activities through objects such as stones, beads, and coins. Coins discovered in marginal or coastal (Sundarbans region) areas are historically significant. They serve as indicators of imperial trade and economy, while also acting as silent witnesses to dynastic histories.

For this reason, it is crucial to prepare and publish a clear and systematic catalogue of the coins preserved in regional museums. If curators or collectors pass away, their collections risk being lost or stolen. Proper documentation is therefore a rational and necessary step to safeguard these materials.

If such cataloguing is undertaken across all regional museums in West Bengal, it will enhance both the scope and value of historical research. Unpublished coins will come to light, enriching historical scholarship and ensuring the preservation of ancient artefacts.

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