

Art and History

**Texts, Contexts and Visual Representations
in
Ancient and Early Medieval India**

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The Ābhīraka Coin: Search for a New Identity

Dev Kumar Jhanjh

A coin is basically a metallic medium of exchange of definite weight made of both precious and base metals. A particular significance of a coin is its connection with long-distance commerce. The intrinsic value of a coin plays a vital role in this context for which the issuer mentions his political profile that also symbolises his political sovereignty. However, the earliest coins of the Indian subcontinent date back to c. 600 BCE, which was found in hoards in Taxila, Bhirimound and Chaman-i-Hazuri without the name of the issuer. The earliest coins belong to different *janapadas* and had 1–4 symbols, followed by the imperial punch-marked coins with 5 symbols on one side and with *kārṣāpaṇa* weight standard (3.04 g) of the Magadha-Maurya series.¹ These uninscribed silver punch-marked coins inform about the absence of sovereignty in this phase. The Indo-Greek rulers (c. second century BCE to first century BCE) introduced the portrait with inscriptions on coins that actually worked as the marker of sovereignty.² The Śakas, the Kuṣāṇas, the Sātavāhanas and the Guptas also maintained this tradition. However, inscribed coins were also issued by the so-called ‘tribes’³, which are known as non-dynastic issues, unlike the mentioned monarchical issues. In the deep South, the coins of the Cōḷas, Cēras and the Pāṇṭiyas made of copper signal the transitional phase from chieftdom to kingdom.

The study of numismatics is ultimately connected with the transaction in burgeoning trade. The profusion of Roman coins found in the post-Mauryan phase establishes the vibrant trade with the Roman empire.⁴ A major historiographical debate on early medieval India for the establishment of feudalism theory has been stated by R.S. Sharma⁵ and K.M. Shrimali on the

basis of the absence of coins that pointed out the decline of trade. However, according to B.N. Mukherjee, B.D. Chattopadhyaya and others⁶, the absence of coins does not necessarily indicate a decline of trade, as other media of exchange may have been in use.

Though primarily they are the most valuable records for understanding monetary history, the coins also throw ample light on other historical aspects as well. The realm of cultural and religious history can be cited in this context. The depiction of various deities on the coins can be seen even before the emergence of iconographic texts⁷, and this also reveals the relation between religion and polity. For example, the deities chosen by the Indo-Greek kings for representation on coins tended to be those that could be used as symbols of power.⁸ Furthermore, the appearance of dates, names, dynastic affiliations, epithets used by the issuer along with certain symbols provides important information for political history. This highlights the difference between the sculptural and the numismatic art. The depictions on coins were done in official mints, possibly by the court artists, with a high degree of attention paid to details. Here, I am particularly looking at the Ābhīraka coin, which is named on the basis of the legend that appears on it. Attempts will be taken to re-examine the Ābhīraka coin with a purpose to offer an alternative identity that will be different from the prevailing ones. It will also throw light on the history of the non-monarchical Ābhīra polity, examining as both political and cultural symbols.

Prevailing scholarship attributes the Ābhīraka coin to the Satrap ruler Ābhīraka on the basis of the Kharoṣṭhī⁹ legend '*khaharatasa khatrapasa Abhirakasa jayatasa/jayatasa Abhirakasa*'¹⁰ (the legend is also found in Brāhmī as *Kṣaharatasa Kṣatrapasa Ā(ghu or bhe) dakasa Iyanasa*, earlier reading)¹¹, which appeared on one side of this coin. Moreover, the similarities of motifs with the coins of another Satrap ruler, Bhūmaka, led them to place this Ābhīraka at the top of the Kṣaharāta line from where the branch started, succeeded by Bhūmaka and Nahapāna subsequently. The exponents of this theory are Robert C. Senior, Amiteshwar Jha and others, who explained it based on numismatic evidence. I approach the Ābhīraka coin with a set of questions pertaining particularly to other contemporary

numismatic evidence. Other sources, especially epigraphic documents, will also be taken into consideration.

Image 2.1: Ābhīraka coin, c. first century CE



Credit: IIRNS, Nasik Photo Archives

The Ābhīraka coin shows a lion or horse (?) facing the front of a wheel (*cakra*?) on a pedestal along with a Kharoṣṭhī legend and sometimes with a Brāhmī legend on one side (see Image 2.1). The other side depicts a winged Nike standing to the right holding a palm and wreath and a circular Greek legend, which goes as CATAPATOY CATPAΠOY AYBIPAKOY, as interpreted by Senior¹² and Jha.¹³ The coins of Ābhīraka are of copper only, struck in several sizes, and have been found in Kutch in Gujarat, Afghanistan, and Mleiha in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).¹⁴

The Ābhīraka, according to previous readings, was deciphered as Aghudaka,¹⁵ Aubhiraka,¹⁶ Aghudaka Iyana,¹⁷ Arta¹⁸ and Ata¹⁹. Finally, it ended in Ābhīraka.²⁰ This Ābhīraka is considered to be the first Satrap ruler heading the Kṣaharāta branch and was succeeded by Bhūmaka (120 CE).²¹ Bhūmaka is believed to have imitated the coin device of Ābhīraka depicting lion and wheel, though he replaced the winged Nike device with arrow and thunderbolt. Moreover, unlike the Greek legend of Ābhīraka's coin, he introduced Brāhmī letters.²² The above-mentioned similarities connect

Ābhīraka and Bhūmaka. Certainly, they were linked in some ways, but that is not enough to place them in immediate succession.²³ Moreover, the appearance of the term '*khaharatasa khatrapasa*' cannot necessarily work as proof of them belonging to the same family of the Kṣaharāta branch of the Satraps. The term *Satrap* or *Mahāsatrap* denoted subordinate status and were used not only by the Kṣaharāta family, but also by other rulers.²⁴ Before going into the Ābhīraka controversy, we should discuss the legends and motifs appearing on this device in detail, and compare them with contemporary evidence. Attribution can then be attempted by situating them within the proper context.

The Ābhīraka coin presents a winged Nike holding wreath and palm. Furthermore, the Greek legend on it certainly indicates its Indo-Greek connection. Secondly, the Kharoṣṭhī legend (on the side showing lion or horse (?) facing a wheel on a pedestal) is proof of their north-western orientation, as it was a Kharoṣṭhī-speaking region since the third century BCE.²⁵ The same motif has also been found from Kutch in Gujarat with Brāhmī letters, which supplanted the Kharoṣṭhī legend.

There is no debate regarding the north-western or Indo-Greek connection of this issue, but identifying Ābhīraka as a Kṣaharāta ruler seems problematic. Let's have a look at the Kharoṣṭhī legend once again: '*khaharatasa khatrapasa Abhirakasa jayatasajayata Abhirakasa*'. On the basis of the term '*khaharatasa khatrapasa Abhirakasa*', these coins have been attributed to the ruler Ābhīraka of Kṣaharāta origin. This piece certainly belongs to Ābhīraka but that does not necessarily substantiate his Kṣaharāta origin. This Ābhīraka might have belonged to the Ābhīra community.

Now, the question arises who were the Ābhīras and how is Ābhīraka connected to them? Before throwing light on the Ābhīras, it is imperative to explain the term '*Ābhīrakasa*'. It can collectively represent the Ābhīra group²⁶ or can be used for the chief who, on behalf of the Ābhīras, represented the whole group. The title *khatrapasa*, as we have already discussed, can be used by any ruler who was in charge of a satrapy or province and symbolises subordinate status. In the case of Ābhīraka, it possibly indicates his/their subordinate status, but who continued the

erstwhile tradition of using Greek legend on their coins. Furthermore, a winged Nike with wreath and palm can be seen on the coins of the Indo-Greeks found in Kandahar, Taxila and so on. Interestingly, Nike has been personified as the goddess of victory²⁷ and the wreath and palm in her hand perhaps indicated the victory of the Ābhīraka over another polity. The appearance of the term ‘*jayatasa*’ is striking, and that literally denotes victory.

The next question that immediately comes to mind is, how do we explain this victory? Put differently, to whom can this reverse be dedicated? The answer lies within the remaining portion of the legend—‘*Kṣaharātasā*’. It symbolises the political clash between the Ābhīras and the Kṣaharātas and the victory of the former. This needs to be explained further. These coins with Greek-Kharoṣṭhī legend have been found extensively in Afghanistan and the UAE, and with Greek-Brāhmī legend in Kutch, wherefrom the coins of Bhūmaka have also been found.

To explain the Kṣaharata-Ābhīraka rivalry and to trace the movement of their coin device from Afghanistan to Gujarat, we have to look into the history of the Ābhīras. The Ābhīra occupation in Afghanistan is attested by the presence of people of the Ābhīra community. Major Rawlinson places them along the south of the Hindu Kush mountains, from the Bolan Pass to the Arabian Sea. He further argues that the Sacae, or Scythians, came down from Seistan and conquered them, extending their frontier to Pattalene or Sinde; hence, the Indo-Scythia of Ptolemy and Arrian.²⁸ D.C. Sircar found their earliest traces in Ābhīravan, an area between Herat and Kandahar.²⁹ The provenance of the Ābhīraka coin also supports this possibility of Ābhīra occupation in Afghanistan from the second/first century BCE to the first century CE.

Next, they shared space in the valleys of Punjab along with powers like the Indo-Greeks, the Śakas and the Kuṣāṇas during the first century BCE to the third century CE. Furthermore, their repeated mention of *mleccha* identity in the Epic-Puranic sources undoubtedly verifies their aboriginal identity.³⁰ The import of the term *mleccha* underwent radical changes through ages.³¹ Literary sources are replete with their references. The *Mahābhārata* calls the Ābhīras as *mlecchas* in several passages such as this:

‘Bahabo mleccharājānaḥ pṛthibāyam manudādhipa, mṛṣānuśāsinaḥ pāpāmṛṣābāda parayenāḥ, āndhrāḥ śakām pulindāśca yavanāśca narādhipāḥ, kāmbojā bāhlikāḥ sūrāstam ābhīrā narottama.’³² In the succeeding centuries, the different *Purāṇas* often mentioned them, along with other groups, and put them within the larger category of *mleccha*. Thus, in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (which mentions a list of future kings in the *Kali Yuga*), the Ābhīras along with other political powers like the Andhras, the Śakas, the Pulindas, etc. have been mentioned as *mlecchas* (‘*Kṣatrāḥ pārsāvāḥ sūdrās tathā’nye bahiścarāḥ andhrāḥ śakāḥ pulindāśca cūlikā yavanā saḥā, kaivarttābhīra śabarā ye cānye mlecchasāmbabāḥ*’).³³ Similarly, The *Vāyupurāṇa* also mentions a list of future kings (in the *Kali Yuga*) where the Ābhīras have been mentioned with other powers like the Andhras, the Śakas, the Pulindas etc. as *mlecchas* (‘*Andhraḥ śakaḥ pulindaca tulika yavanaiḥ saḥā, kaivartābhīra śabara ye cānye mlecchajātayah*’).³⁴ What is interesting in these four *ślokas* is they all mention the association of the Ābhīras with the Yavanas (Greek)³⁵ and the Śakas, and so on. A close examination of these powers clearly locates their habitation in the north-western and western parts of India. Pañcanada, the land of the five rivers, is described as the stronghold of the Ābhīras. When Arjuna, after the catastrophe at Dvārakā, is conducting wives, children and old men from there to Indraprastha, the Ābhīras attack him when he arrives in Pañcanada and robs most of the women (‘...*Abhīrāḥ mantrayāmāsuḥ sametyā śuvadarśanāḥ; ayamekorjjuno dhanvī vṛddhabālam hateśvaram; nayatyasmānatikramyayo dhāścheme hatoujaśaḥ*’).³⁶ All these references indicate the eastern part of the Punjab between the Sutlej and Yamuna as the stronghold of the Ābhīras.

Above Patalene, Ptolemy places Ābīriā or the land of the Ābhīras.³⁷ Patañjali locates them in the Sindhudeśa, which, according to W.W. Tarn, is ‘the country of the Indus’.³⁸ Sircar, on the basis of *Periplus*, states ‘that part of it (the kingdom of Nāmbārus) lying inland and adjoining Skythiā (Śakasthāna in the lower valley of the Indus) is called Ābīriā (Ābhīra country).’³⁹ It shows further that Ābīriā or the country of the Ābhīras spread up to the Indus Valley region. Debala Mitra states that the Ābhīras extended their territory from the deltaic region of the Sindhu river till Kathiawar.⁴⁰

That they were closely associated with the Śakas is corroborated by epigraphic documents. Their relation with the Śakas can be discerned from the Gundā stone inscription of the time of Rudrasimha I [Śaka] year 103 (181 CE), where we first come across an Ābhīra general (*senāpati*), Bāpaka, and his son, general Rudrabhūti, under the Śaka administration.⁴¹ It records the digging of a tank in the village of Rasopadra for the well-being of all men by Rudrabhūti, son of general Bāpaka or Bāhaka, during the reign of the Śaka king Rudrasimha. Another inscription of 258 CE from Nasik portrays Īsvarasena⁴², son of Ābhīra Śivadatta and Mādhāri, as a king (*rājan*). The inscription informs us that Viṣṇudatta (Śakanī), daughter of Agnivarman and mother of the Gaṇapaka Viśvavarmā, wife of the Gaṇapaka Rebhilā, made a perpetual endowment to provide medicines for the sick of the *saṃgha* dwelling in the monastery on Mount Triraśmi. For this endowment, an amount of *kārṣāpaṇas* were invested through the four guilds, evidently of Govardhana (Nashik). Though the exact Śaka-Ābhīra relationship cannot be determined from this record, it definitely indicates some connection between these two powers.

Moreover, two inscriptions from Kanheri and Thane district of Maharashtra present one Śakasena, who was *Mādhāriputra*⁴³ (son of *Mādhāri*).⁴⁴ This Śakasena has been identified with Śaka-Sātakarṇī, whose coins have been found from Andhra Pradesh, and is taken to be a Sātavāhana king and the successor of Yajñaśrī.⁴⁵ The view of K. Gopalachari⁴⁶ and H.S. Thosar,⁴⁷ however, places this Śakasena in the Ābhīra family, which seems to be more logical. In that case, Śakasena might have been a brother of Īsvarasena. What is interesting here is the name Śakasena, which again indicates the Śaka association with the Ābhīras. In another epigraph (283 CE) of *Rājan mahāsatrap* Bharṭṛdaman of Kārdamaka branch, we find the mention of an Ābhīra once more, namely Vāsudeva, who appears as the son of a certain Kadamba, the grandson of Harihivakamda and the daughter's son of a person whose name has been read as Gulaka.⁴⁸

Like the Indo-Greeks and the Śakas, the Ābhīras also came in close contact with the Śudras. Two passages from the *Mahābhārata* can be cited in this context, which clearly bear their association with the Śudras. The

Ābhīras lived in the north-west of India with the Śūdras and with those who lived on the bank of the Sarasvatī river, fishermen and mountaineers: ‘Śūdrābhīra gaṇāścaiva ye cāsṛitya sarasvatim; varttayanti ca ye matsyairye ca parvvtavāsinaḥ.’⁴⁹ In another passage, the epic states that the *tīrthavināśana*⁵⁰ lay in the country of the Ābhīras as the sacred river Sarasvatī disappeared because of the hatred of the Śūdras and the Ābhīras living there (‘*Tato vinaśanam rājana! jagāmātha halāyudhaḥ; śūdrābhīrān prati dveṣād yatra naṣṭā sarasvatī*’).⁵¹

Both the literary and inscriptional evidence tells us that in course of time, they migrated from one place to another, most probably in different branches. The movement of the Ābhīraka device with Brāhmī legend by replacing Kharoṣṭhī perhaps indicates the migration of a branch of the Ābhīras who, during the course of their movement, brought this tradition with them. Their adoption of the Brāhmī script might be explained in terms of their association with the place where it served as the medium of communication. Their migratory nature is also attested by later sources.⁵²

Attention may now turn to the coin device once again, which shows the wheel and the lion/ horse to understand its Ābhīra identity. The presence of the wheel connects them with the Indo-Greeks as we shall see later. Although the lion and wheel may signal their association with Buddhism, the wheel (*cakra*) can also demonstrate their affiliation to Vaiṣṇavism. A unique piece of the Indo-Greek king Agathocles (c. 180 BCE—170 BCE) found in the ancient Greek city of Ai Khanum in northern Afghanistan shows Balarāma-Saṁkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa holding a *cakra*,⁵³ the extension of each spoke of this wheel presents another dotted shape, which can also be seen in the wheel symbol of the Ābhīraka coin, thus linking them.⁵⁴ The question that immediately comes to our mind is why did the Ābhīras like Agathocles use this symbol on their coin? It appears, the Ābhīras, like Agathocles, were also connected to Vaiṣṇavism, which possibly led them to depict this symbol on their coins.⁵⁵ Their devotion towards Kṛṣṇa is well established and they have been often portrayed as a cowherd community.

Before going into details of the Vaiṣṇavite affiliation of the Ābhīras, I would like to cite another coin, which also presents the *cakra*. It belongs to

the Vṛṣṇis,⁵⁶ a group where the legendary Kṛṣṇa belonged.⁵⁷ The Vṛṣṇi coin portrays the *cakra* along with a circular Kharoṣṭhī legend on one side; another side depicts a joint figure of half-lion and half-elephant on a pedestal surrounded with Brāhmī legend. In the opinion of R.G. Bhandarkar,⁵⁸ the Ābhīras were a foreign nomadic tribe who came to India in the early centuries of the Christian era, and brought with them Christian legends of a pastoral god whose identification with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa led to the engrafting of Christian myths, such as the birth of Christ in a stable, the massacre of the innocents, etc., on the latter. The theory of the Christian origin of these stories has been rightly questioned by H.C. Raychaudhuri⁵⁹ and is now abandoned altogether on chronological grounds. According to him, the pastoral legends of Kṛṣṇa developed under the influence of groups like the Ābhīras. In the opinion of Suvira Jaiswal,⁶⁰ the connection of the Ābhīras with worshipping of Kṛṣṇa as a youthful boy-god is indisputable. She draws our attention to the *Padma Purāṇa*, where Viṣṇu is made to say that he would be born amongst the Ābhīras (*gopas*) in his eighth incarnation.⁶¹

The term ‘Ābhīra’ originally did not mean cowherd, but later on, as most of them followed the pursuit of tending cows, it became synonymous with the term *gopa*. From the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, we come to know that Kṛṣṇa mentions the nomadic nature of his clans. He states that they neither cultivate nor do they engage themselves in trade. They live in forests. Hence, to them, cows are their gods (‘*Na vayam kṛṣīkarttārovaṇījyajīvinona ca; gābohasmaddaivatam tātavayam vanacarāyataḥ*’).⁶² Another passage of the same *Purāṇa* elucidates that Vāsudeva, (Kṛṣṇa’s father), soon after his release from prison went near the ‘vehicle of Nanda’ and was very pleased to see the newborn baby. (‘*Vimukto vasudevohasya nandasya sakatam gataḥ; prahr̥ṣtam dr̥ṣṭavān nandam putrojātomamativai*’).⁶³ This indicates Nanda (Kṛṣṇa’s foster father) leaving the land in a vehicle. It is to be remembered that the Ābhīras were also nomadic people. Bhandarkar suggested that the foster parents of Kṛṣṇa belonged to the Ābhīras, who occupied the country from Madhuvana near Mathura to Anūpa and Ānarta—the regions around Dvārakā.⁶⁴ Here we may draw attention to a Deoghar relief, which depicts Nanda and Yaśodā, the foster parents of Kṛṣṇa,

wearing, in the words of J.N. Banerjea, ‘characteristically foreign’ garments with a slight touch of the late Gandhāra element in it, and further records that cowherds of Mathura and its environs belonged to the Ābhīra stock.⁶⁵ This may indicate that the Gupta artists considered the herdsmen associated with Kṛṣṇa’s childhood as foreigners and they may be the Ābhīras. Probably, the Ābhīras and the clans of Kṛṣṇa shared some common cultural complex, which led the Ābhīras to make Kṛṣṇa their god. Furthermore, the Nagarjunikonda inscription of Ābhīra Vasuṣeṇa, regnal year 30 (278 CE),⁶⁶ informs of an eight-armed image (*aṣṭabhujasvāmin*) of Viṣṇu made of wood at Setāgiri. The ruler’s attempt to re-establish this image, perhaps, again indicates the faith of the Ābhīras towards Vaiṣṇavism. Besides, the Mevasa inscription of Bharṭṛdaman (283 CE) mentions Ābhīra Vāsudeva, perhaps, indicating their association with Vaiṣṇavism.⁶⁷

From the foregoing discussion, it seems plausible that the identity of Ābhīraka should be credited to the Ābhīras, rather than attributing them to the Kṣaharāta house. The Ābhīraka coin, as we have discussed, perhaps signalled the victory of the Ābhīra group over the Kṣaharātas. Another possibility could be explained through the joint victory/alliance between the Ābhīras and Kṣaharātas. But it cannot be conclusively established until further evidence comes up.

Endnotes

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- 6 B.N. Mukherjee, ‘Commerce and Money in the Western and Central Sectors of Eastern India (c AD. 750–1200)’, *Indian Museum Bulletin* XVII (1982), 68–86; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Coins and Currency System in South India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977); Susmita Basu Majumdar, ‘Monetary History of Bengal: Issues and Non Issues,’ in *The Complex Heritage of Early India: Essays in Memory of R.S. Sharma*, ed. D.N. Jha (New Delhi: Manohar, 2014) 585–606.
- 7 J.N. Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956); B.N. Mukherjee, *Nana on Lion-A Study in Kushāṇa Numismatic Art* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1969). Also see B.N. Mukherjee, *Numismatic Art of India*, Vols I and II (New Delhi: Munshiram Monoharlal, 2007).

- 8 Ghosh, *From the Oxus to the Indus: A Political and Cultural Study*, 135.
- 9 Instead of conventional ‘Kharoṣṭhī’, the term ‘Kharoṣṭī’ is available in various Buddhist and Jaina texts, such as in *Lalitavistara*, *Mahāvastu* and so on. For details, see B.N. Mukherjee, ‘A Note on the Name Kharoshthī,’ *Journal of the Asiatic Society* 23 (1981), 13–15.
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- 11 Amiteshwar Jha and Dilip Rajgor, *Studies in the Coinage of the Western Kṣatrapas* (Nashik: IIRNS, 1994), 79.
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- 14 Senior, *Indo-Scythian Coins and History*, 193.
- 15 Jha and Rajgor, *Studies in the Coinage of the Western Kṣatrapas*, 79.
- 16 Bob Senior, ‘Kshaharata Questions,’ *The Oriental Numismatic Society* (July 1949): 1–4.
- 17 Michael Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage, Vol. 7–9* (Sanderstead: Hawkins Publications, 1976), 823. Also see, Ajay Mitra Shastri, *The Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas: A Historical Framework* (Nagpur: Dattsons, 1998), 144.
- 18 H.V. Trivedi, ‘Notes on Some Western Kshatrapa Coins’, *The Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* 17, no. 2 (1955): 89–90.
- 19 Ibid. See the Brāhmī legend *Atasa*.
- 20 Senior, *Indo-Scythian Coins and History*.
- 21 Jha, *Bharatiya Sikke*, 62.
- 22 Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage*, 823; Osmund Bopearachchi and Wilfried Pieper, *Ancient Indian Coins* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1998), 139.
- 23 Nahapāna continued the tradition of Bhūmaka on his coin by depicting thunderbolt and arrow, and replaced the lion and *cakra* motif with the bust of the ruler, possibly taken from the Indo-Greeks.

- 24 A copper coin from Taxila (first century CE) bears the Kharoṣṭhī legend *kshatrapa ... Rajuvala*, which indicates Rājuvala, the issuer of the coin, was a Satrap. See, B.N. Mukherjee, *An Agrippan Source: A Study in Indo-Parthian History* (Calcutta: Pilgrim Publishers, 1969), 169–170. Mukherjee thinks that Rājuvala might have been a subordinate ruler under Azilises or Azes II. But in Mathura Lion Capital inscription, he has been mentioned as *mahākṣatrapa*. See D.C. Sircar (ed.), *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization, Vol. 1* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1942), 112–117. Furthermore, the coin of his son Śoḍāsa presents him (Rājuvala) as the *mahākṣatrapa*. For details, see J. Allan, *A Catalogue of the Indian Coins in the British Museum: Coins of Ancient India* (Bihar: Eastern Book House, 1989), 185–191. Moreover, the Mathura votive tablet of the Year 72 (14–15 CE) presents Śoḍāsa also as *mahākṣatrapa*. See Sircar, *Select Inscriptions, Vol. 1*, 118–119. Also see B.N. Mukherjee, *Mathurā and its Society: The Śaka-Pahlava Phase* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1981), 1–11. *Kṣatra* denoting ‘realm’ was actually used by the Achaemenids, which was later changed to Satrap, Chhatrapa or Satrap. For detailed discussions, see Shastri, *The Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, 135.
- 25 B.N. Mukherjee, *Origin of Brāhmī and Kharoshṭī Scripts* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2005).
- 26 Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 145. We also find names ending with ‘Ka’ belonging to the Ābhīra clan, such as Bāpaka, Bāhaka, or Gulaka, in later sources.
- 27 This is taken from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/topic/Nike-Greek-goddess (accessed 8 November 2018).
- 28 Major Rawlinson, ‘Comparative Geography of Afghanistan,’ *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 12 (London, 1842): 112–114.
- 29 D.C. Sircar, ‘The Deccan after the Sātavāhanas,’ in *The Age of Imperial Unity* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Series, 1968), 221–223.

- 30 Haridas Siddhantabagish, ed., *Mahābhāratam* (in Bengali), *Bāṇaparvva*, Vol. 9, 159.34–35 (Calcutta: Visvabani Prakashani, 2nd edition, 1384 Bangabda), 1596–1597.
- 31 The antiquity of the term *mleccha* can be traced back to the Śatapatha *Brāhmaṇa*, where it has been referred to as a language that was unintelligible to the Vedic Aryans. See A. Weber, ed., Śatapatha *Brāhmaṇa*, 3.2.1 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1964), 23–24. Patañjali also mentions this in the sense of a language of the non-Aryans. See K.C. Chatterji, ed. and trans., *Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya* (Calcutta, 1957), 10. For a detailed discussion on *mleccha*, see Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India: A Study in Attitudes towards Outsiders Upto AD 600* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991). Romila Thapar believes in the cultural entity of the term rather than its linguistic aspect. It has been suggested that *mlecchas* may have been derived from Me-luh-ha, the Sumerian name for an eastern land with which the Sumerians had trading relations, possibly the people of the Indus civilisations. See Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003), 138. With the passage of time, the term was applied to demarcate the territorial land that reflects in the *Deśavibhāga* section of Manu, where except *Āryāvarta* (the pure land) all else was regarded as *mlecchadeśa* or where the *mlecchas* inhabit. See Panchanan Tarkaratna, ed., *Manusāṃhitā* (in Bengali), 2.17–23 (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1993), 22.
- 32 Siddhantabagish, *Mahābhāratam*, *Bāṇaparvva*, 1596–1597.
- 33 Panchanan Tarkaratna, ed., *Matsyapurāṇam* (in Bengali), 50.75–76 (Calcutta: Bangabasi Electronic Press, 1316 Bangabda), 181.
- 34 Panchanan Tarkaratna, ed., *Vāyupurāṇam* (in Bengali) (Calcutta: Bangabasi Electronic Press, 1317 Bangabda), 637.
- 35 Cited in the Evolution section of the term *Yavana* in Early India, in Ghosh, *From Oxus to Indus: A Political and Cultural Studies*, 104.
- 36 Haridas Siddhantabagish, ed., *Mahābhāratam*, *Mausalaparva* (in Bengali), Vol. 43, 7.46–49 (Calcutta: Visvabani Prakashani, 2nd

- edition, 1400 Bangabda), 54–55.
- 37 V.V. Mirashi, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. IV, Part I (Octacamund, 1955), xxxi.
- 38 Sudhakar Chattopadhyay, *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea & Ptolemy on Ancient Geography of India* (Calcutta: Prajna, 1980), 68.
- 39 Ibid., 75.
- 40 Details of their movements can be found in Debala Mitra, ‘The Ābhīras and their contribution to Indian culture,’ *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Jaipur, 1951), 91–92.
- 41 Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. 1, 176–177.
- 42 E. Senart, ‘Nāsik Inscriptions (No.15),’ *EI* 8, 198188–198189.
- 43 Using of metonymics can be seen as a shared tradition between the Ābhīras and the Sātavāhanas.
- 44 V.V. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions*, Inscription No. 52. Cited in H.K. Thosar, ‘The Abhiras in Indian History,’ *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 51st Session (Calcutta, 1990), 60.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Henry Beveridge, *Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. II (Calcutta, 1957), 3240.
- 47 Thosar, ‘The Abhiras in Indian History,’ 56–65.
- 48 P.R. Srinivasan, ‘Mevasa Inscription of Bharṭṛdaman, Year 205,’ *EI* 37, Part 1–8 (1968), 144–146.
- 49 Haridas Siddhantabagish, ed., *Mahābhāratam, Sabhāparva* (in Bengali), Vol. 5, 31.9 (Calcutta: Visvabani Prakashani, 2nd edition, 1384 Bangabda), 274.
- 50 The region of *Vināśana* may be identified with the present Hissar in Haryana. See, Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Some Early Dynasties of South India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), 82, 127.
- 51 Haridas Siddhantabagish, ed., *Mahābhāratam, Śalyaparva*, Vol. 29, 35.1 (Calcutta: Visvabani Prakashani, 2nd edition, 1395 Bangabda), 393.
- 52 The Ābhīras were spread across the whole country extending from the Punjab in the north to Maharashtra in the south and as far as Bengal in

the east and Gujarat to the west. The *Mārkāṇḍeyapurāṇa* in one passage locates the Ābhīras in the north-west, but in another passage, they were placed in the south together with the inhabitants of Mahārāṣṭra, Vidarbha, Asmaka, Kuntala and others. In a third passage, the *Mārkāṇḍeyapurāṇa* groups the Ābhīras with the people of Bhṛgukachchha, Koṅkaṇa, Mahārāṣṭra, Karnāṭa, the country on the banks of the Veni, Nāsikya and others. See F. Eden Pargiter, *The Mārkāṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1904), 312–314, 334, 362. The composition of the *Purāṇas* possibly indicates their later migration. For the date of composition of the *Purāṇas*, see R.C. Hazra, *Studies in The Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989).

- 53 While one side of the coin presents Balarāma-Saṅkarṣaṇa with Greek legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΓΑΘΟΚΛΕΟΥΣ, another side depicts Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa with Brāhmī legend *Rajane Agathukleyesa*. See R. Audouin and P. Bernard, ‘Trésor de monnaiesindiennes et indo-grecques d’Aï Khanoum (Afghanistan). [II. Les monnaiesindo-grecques]’, *Revue Numismatique*, (Année 1974), 16, 6–41. Also see Osmund Bopearachchi, ‘Emergence of Viṣṇu and Śiva Images in India: Numismatic and Sculptural Evidence,’ paper presented at From Alexander the Great to Kaniṣka: Numismatic Evidence in Constructing Early Central Asian and Indian History, Education Studios, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, 2016.
- 54 Similar ovoid shapes appearing around Nike’s wreath on most of Ābhīraka’s coins are found elsewhere only on the coins of Gondophares I, whom R.C. Senior regards as a contemporary of Ābhīraka and whose coins the latter imitated for his obverse. See http://www.orientalnumismaticociety.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/RC_Senior_Kshaharata_Questions_Jul_1999.27570724.pdf.
- 55 That the Indo-Greek rulers came into contact and showed their faith in Vaiṣṇavism is also attested by the Besnagar pillar inscription of Heliodorus, an Indo-Greek king. It was erected in the honour of Vāsudeva. For details, see Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. I, 90–91.

Also see the appendix of Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 265–267. Moreover, in the coin or medal we have a representation of the Hellenic deity Herakles, bearded and naked and shown as holding or turning a wheel and not his club. The general appearance of the wheel held by Herakles is favourably comparable with that held by Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva on Agathocles' coins. Thus, here we have a new deity Herakles-Kṛṣṇa, holding Kṛṣṇa's wheel, thereby alluding to a fusion of Hellenic and Brahmanical concepts. See B.N. Mukherjee, 'A note on a gold coin or medal found at Tillya Tepe (Afghanistan),' *Mudra* (1989), 37–39.

Thanks to Suchandra Ghosh for bringing my attention to this coin.

56 Alexander Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India: From the Earliest Times Down to the Seventh Century* (Piccadilly, London: B. Quaritch, 1891), 70. For elaborate discussions on *cakra* motifs on coins and its relation to Vaishnavism, see Wilfried Pieper, 'Earliest Garuḍa and Vaiṣṇava deities on ancient Indian coins,' in *Numismatics Digest* 38 (2014): 36–59.

57 'According to Brahmanic, Bauddha and Jain traditions Krishna-Vasudeva was the chief of a warrior tribe, the Yadavas (Vrishnis and Andhrakas) who were Brahmanist Kshatriyas and in the epic period represented the Rigvedic Yadus. But at Mathura and Dvaraka the Vrishnis and the Andhraks lived amidst the Abhiras and Saurashtras who were said to have been outside the Brahmanic pale (un-Vedic Pancharatra tradition). The un-Vedic or un-brahmanic Pancharatra evidently grew out of the primitive worship of Saṁkarṣaṇa, Vasudeva and other Vrishni chiefs such as Vasudeva's son Pradyumna and his grandson Aniruddha as hero gods by the barbarian Abhiras and Saurashtras.' Cited in Ramaprasad Chanda, 'Archaeology and Vaishnava Tradition,' in *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, no. 5 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998): 165–166. Thanks to Susmita Basu Majumdar for drawing my attention towards this issue.

- 58 R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1965), 37.
- 59 H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaishnava Sect* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1936), 149–151.
- 50 Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981), 83–85.
- 51 Panchanan Tarkaratna, ed., *Padmapurāṇam, Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍam* (in Bengali), 17.11–20 (Calcutta: Bangabasi Electronic Press, 1326 Bangabda), 189–191.
- 52 Panchanan Tarkaratna, ed., *Viṣṇupurāṇam* (in Bengali), 5.5.1 (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1390 Bangabda), 347.
- 53 Ibid., 5.10.26, 367.
- 54 Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, 37.
- 55 J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974), 422.
- 56 D.C. Sircar, ‘Nagarjunikoṇḍā Inscription of Ābhīra Vasuṣena,’ *EI* 34 (1987): 197–203.
- 57 Srinivasan, ‘Mevasa Inscription of Bhartrdaman, Year 205’.