



# Ikshvaku Period Coins Found in Telangana

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## Why in News?

Recently, Telangana's **Department of Heritage** discovered a hoard of 3,730 **lead coins** in an earthen pot at **Phanigiri**, a renowned **Buddhist heritage site** located 110 km away from Hyderabad.

## What are the Findings of the Excavation?

### ▪ Recent Excavation:

- A **globular pot** measuring 16.7 cm in diameter and 15 cm in height was **unearthed** at a depth of 40 cm from the ground level in the **Southernmost monastic cell**.
- The pot's mouth was covered with a shallow pot on the outside and a broken bowl base on the inside and contained 3730 coins weighing an average of 2.3 grams each.
- Archaeologists conclude that all coins, similar in appearance and made of lead, featuring an **elephant symbol** on the **obverse** and **Ujjain symbol** on the reverse, belong to the **Ikshvaku period** (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century CE) based on **strata graphical** and **typological studies**.
- **Other Artefacts Found:**
  - Many other valuable cultural antiquities and structural remains, including **beads of stone and glass**, shell bangle fragments, **stucco motifs**, **broken limestone sculptures**, **toy cartwheels**, iron nails, and **pottery**, were also unearthed during the excavation.

### ▪ Earlier Excavation:

- Excavations at Phanigiri have been conducted on seven separate occasions in the past.
  - These excavations at **Phanigiri** brought to light a **Mahastupa**, apsidal **Chaitya Grihas**, Votive stupas, pillared congregation halls, **Viharas**, platforms with staircases at various levels, octagonal stupa chaitya.
  - A **24-pillared mandapa**, a circular chaitya, and cultural materials including **terracotta beads**, semi-precious beads, iron objects, shell bangle pieces, **coins**, stucco figures, **Brahmi label inscriptions**, and a **holy relic casket** were also found.

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#### ▪ Significance of Phanigiri Village:

- **Phanigiri village** lies on the left bank of the **Bikkeru Rivulet**, a tributary of the **river Musi** in Hyderabad.
- It is one of the **important Buddhist monasteries** strategically located on the hilltop, on the **ancient trade route (Dakshinapatha)** connecting north to south.
- Etymologically, the village Phanigiri has derived its name from the shape of a hillock located on the northern side of the village, which is like a **snake hood**.
  - In Sanskrit, Phani means snake and Giri means hillock.
- This village was occupied by pre/proto-historic, early historic, early medieval, and **Asaf Jahi period (1724-1948)** inhabitants.
- This village had a vibrant life from 1000 BCE to late 18th century CE.
- This evolved Buddhist monastery **surpasses** the monasteries at **Amaravathi** and **Vijayapuri (Nagarjunakonda)** in Andhra Pradesh.
- The early historic site at Phanigiri was **first discovered** and protected during the **period of Nizam** and was excavated from 1941 to 1944 by **Sri Khaja Mahamad Ahmad**.

#### ▪ Other Buddhist Sites in the Region:

- There are several Buddhist sites near Phanigiri, such as Vardhamanukota, Gajula Banda, Tirumalagiri, Nagaram, Singaram, Aravapalli, Ayyavaripalli, Arlagaddagudem and Yeleswaram.

## Stratigraphical and Typological Studies of Coins

These are methods used in numismatics (the study of coins) to understand the chronological and cultural context of coins.

### ▪ Stratigraphical Studies:

- This method involves studying the **layer or strata** in which **coins are found** during archaeological excavations.
- By analysing the stratigraphy, researchers can determine the **relative age of coins** compared to other artefacts found in the same layer.
- This helps **establish a chronological sequence** of coinage and understand the history of a site.

### ▪ Typological Studies:

- Typology is the **classification of coins** based on their **physical characteristics**, such as design, metal composition, size, and inscriptions.
- By comparing these features, numismatists can group coins into **types and subtypes**.
- Typological studies help in **identifying the origin**, minting authority, and period of circulation of coins.

## What are the Key Facts About the Ikshvaku Period?

### ▪ About:

- The **Ikshvakus** emerged in the **Krishna-Guntur region** following the decline of **Satavahana power** in the **eastern part** of the peninsula.
  - The **Ikshvaku dynasty (300 CE- 400 CE)**, is named after the legendary **King Ikshvaku**.
- Knowledge of the Ikshvakus comes primarily from **inscriptions, coinage, and archaeological excavations**.
- Evidence suggests that the dynasty emerged in the **Vijayapuri region** (modern Bellary district, Karnataka) around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.
  - The Ikshvakus were succeeded by **Pallavas**.

### ▪ Expansion and Consolidation:

- The Ikshvakus rose to prominence under **King Kanha**, who significantly expanded their territory.
- Kanha's conquests encompassed parts of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Maharashtra, establishing a **formidable regional power**.

### ▪ Cultural and Economic Contributions:

- The dynasty actively **patronised Buddhism**, leading to the construction of magnificent **stupas** and **monasteries**, like those at **Kanaganahalli and Sankaram**.
- **Ikshvaku coins**, featuring Buddhist symbols and regional deities, were **widely circulated** during this era.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

### Prelims:

**Q. With reference to the history of India, the terms “kulyavapa” and “dronavapa” denote (2020)**

**(a) measurement of land**

(b) coins of different monetary value

(c) classification of urban land

(d) religious rituals

**Ans: (a)**

**Q. In medieval India, the term “Fanam” referred to:**

(a) Clothing

(b) Coins

(c) Ornaments

(d) Weapons

**Ans: (b)**

**Mains:**

**Q. How do you justify the view that the level of excellence of the Gupta numismatic art is not at all noticeable in later times? (2017)**

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