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# Coins of Devotion: Ritual Economy and Sacred Landscapes in Medieval Mewar (9<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Century)

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the role of coins as instruments of devotion and ritual practice within the sacred landscapes of medieval Mewar between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. Moving beyond the conventional economic interpretation of coinage, the study explores how monetary objects functioned within temple economies, pilgrimage networks, and religious endowments, shaping both spiritual life and patterns of circulation. Drawing upon numismatic evidence, inscriptions, temple records, and contemporary historical accounts, the paper situates coins within a broader ritual economy where acts of donation, offering, and patronage connected political authority with sacred space. The circulation of coins across shrines, pilgrimage routes, and urban–rural religious centres contributed to the formation of a shared cultural and devotional geography in Mewar. By analysing the symbolic meanings attached to coins and their ritual deployment, the paper highlights the interaction between economy, belief, and landscape in medieval society. This study argues that coinage in Mewar cannot be understood solely as a medium of exchange, but must also be viewed as a material expression of devotion embedded within sacred and social practices.

**Keywords:** Ritual Economy, Sacred Landscapes, Numismatics, Temple Economy, Medieval Mewar, Devotional Practices

## I. Introduction

Coins have long been treated by historians primarily as economic instruments, valued for their role in facilitating exchange, taxation, and trade. In the context of medieval India, however, monetary objects often operated beyond the sphere of market transactions, acquiring social, religious, and symbolic meanings. In regions such as Mewar, where political authority, religious institutions, and sacred geography were closely intertwined, coins frequently functioned as instruments of devotion, ritual obligation, and religious patronage. Their circulation cannot be understood solely through the logic of commerce, but must also be examined within the cultural practices that shaped everyday religious life.

Medieval Mewar between the ninth and sixteenth centuries witnessed the emergence and consolidation of several important sacred centres, including Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Jain sites that attracted sustained patronage from rulers, elites, merchant groups, and local communities. Temples, monasteries, and pilgrimage centres functioned not only as religious spaces but also as economic nodes, receiving donations in the form of land grants, commodities, and coinage. Coins offered at shrines, deposited in temple treasuries, or distributed during ritual occasions entered distinctive circuits of circulation, linking devotional practice with broader patterns of economic activity. The concept of ritual economy provides a useful framework for analysing these processes. Rather than separating religious action from economic behaviour, ritual economy emphasises the ways in which material resources are mobilised to sustain sacred institutions and symbolic authority. In medieval Mewar, coins played a central role in this interaction, mediating relationships between rulers and temples, donors and deities, and sacred centres and surrounding settlements. Their ritual use reinforced

political legitimacy, expressed piety, and contributed to the maintenance of sacred landscapes.

This paper seeks to explore the role of coins within the ritual economy of medieval Mewar by situating numismatic evidence within its wider religious and spatial context. By examining coins alongside inscriptions, temple records, and historical narratives, the study aims to demonstrate how monetary circulation was shaped by devotional practices and sacred geography. Such an approach allows for a more integrated understanding of coinage as both an economic medium and a material expression of belief embedded in the lived religious landscape of medieval Mewar.

## II. Conceptual Framework: Ritual Economy and Sacred Landscapes

The concept of ritual economy offers a useful analytical lens for examining the intersection of material exchange and religious practice in pre-modern societies. Rather than treating economic activity and ritual behaviour as separate spheres, this framework emphasises their mutual dependence. Ritual actions such as offerings, donations, and endowments required material resources, while economic transactions often acquired symbolic and religious significance through ritual use. In medieval India, monetary objects frequently circulated within these intertwined domains, acquiring meanings that extended beyond their intrinsic or exchange value.

Closely related to this is the notion of sacred landscapes, which refers to the spatial organisation of religious meaning across regions. Sacred landscapes are constituted not only by temples, shrines, and pilgrimage centres, but also by the routes, settlements, and networks that connect them. These landscapes are produced and sustained through repeated ritual practices, patronage, and movement. Coins played an important role in this

process, as they accompanied devotees along pilgrimage routes, entered temple treasuries, and circulated among religious institutions, thereby linking sacred spaces through material exchange.

In the context of medieval Mewar, ritual economy and sacred landscapes were deeply embedded within structures of political authority and social hierarchy. Rulers and elites expressed legitimacy and piety through acts of donation, often mediated through coinage, while merchant groups and local communities participated in sustaining religious institutions through regular offerings. Coins thus functioned as mediators between devotion and authority, enabling the material support of sacred spaces while simultaneously reinforcing social and political relationships.

This framework allows for an interpretation of coinage that moves beyond typological classification or monetary valuation. By situating coins within ritual practices and spatial networks, it becomes possible to understand how monetary circulation contributed to the formation and maintenance of sacred geographies in Mewar. Coins were not passive objects moving through anonymous markets; they were actively embedded in devotional acts that shaped religious experience and collective memory. The present study adopts this conceptual approach to analyse numismatic evidence within its broader cultural and spatial context, providing a more integrated understanding of money, devotion, and landscape in medieval Mewar.

### III. Sources and Methodology

The present study is based on a qualitative and interpretative methodology that draws upon a range of primary and secondary sources to examine the ritual and cultural dimensions of coinage in medieval Mewar. Given the nature of the subject, the analysis does not rely on quantitative monetary data alone, but instead situates numismatic evidence within its broader historical, religious, and spatial contexts. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of coins as material objects embedded in social and devotional practices.

Numismatic evidence forms a central component of this study. Coins attributed to various ruling authorities of Mewar, along with circulating regional and inter-regional issues, are examined for their material features, inscriptions, symbols, and contexts of use. Rather than focusing solely on typology or metallurgical composition, the study considers how coins were employed in ritual settings, including temple donations, offerings, and endowments. Such uses are reconstructed through references in inscriptions and historical records, which provide valuable insights into the devotional deployment of monetary objects.

Epigraphic sources constitute another important body of evidence. Temple inscriptions, land grant records, and donation charters from the region offer direct references to monetary offerings made by rulers, merchants, and devotees. These inscriptions help establish the institutional role of temples as recipients and redistributors of wealth, and they shed light on the

social actors involved in sustaining sacred centres. Literary sources, including regional chronicles and religious texts, further supplement this evidence by describing ritual practices, pilgrimage activities, and the cultural meanings associated with acts of donation.

Secondary scholarship on medieval Indian history, numismatics, and religious institutions provides the interpretative framework for the analysis. Works by historians and numismatists are used to contextualise the primary material and to engage with existing debates on temple economy, ritual patronage, and monetary circulation. By combining these sources, the study adopts an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates economic history with cultural and religious analysis.

Methodologically, the paper employs a contextual reading of coins, treating them as historical artefacts whose meanings are shaped by their use, circulation, and symbolic associations. This approach enables an examination of how coins participated in the construction of sacred landscapes by moving across temples, pilgrimage routes, and settlements. Through this source base and methodological orientation, the study seeks to reconstruct the complex relationship between money, devotion, and space in medieval Mewar.

### IV. Coins and Temple Economy in Medieval Mewar

Temples in medieval Mewar functioned as important religious as well as economic institutions, sustained through continuous flows of patronage and donation. Coinage formed a crucial component of this temple economy, serving as a medium through which rulers, elites, merchants, and ordinary devotees expressed religious merit and social standing. Monetary offerings were not merely acts of private devotion; they were embedded within institutional frameworks that supported ritual performance, temple maintenance, and the broader religious life of the region.

Royal patronage played a significant role in shaping the monetary resources of major temples. Rulers and members of ruling lineages made donations in the form of coins, land grants, and revenue assignments, often commemorated through inscriptions. Coins offered during consecration ceremonies, festivals, or acts of piety reinforced the association between political authority and religious legitimacy. Such acts linked the ruling power to sacred institutions, presenting kingship as divinely sanctioned and morally grounded. The circulation of coins within temple treasuries thus reflected not only economic capacity but also ideological claims to authority.

Merchant communities and local elites also contributed actively to the temple economy. Guilds and trading groups, whose prosperity depended on regional and long-distance exchange networks, frequently donated coins to temples as acts of thanksgiving and protection. These offerings strengthened ties between commercial groups and religious centres, ensuring ritual support and social recognition. Coins deposited in temple treasuries could later be redistributed through ritual expenses,

payments to temple personnel, or the procurement of goods required for worship, thereby reintegrating devotional offerings into local economic circuits.

At the level of everyday religious practice, coins served as accessible and meaningful offerings for ordinary devotees. Small denominations offered at shrines, placed before images, or contributed during festivals accumulated into substantial resources over time. The repetitive nature of such offerings underscores the role of coinage in sustaining temples on a daily basis. Coins thus bridged individual acts of devotion with collective institutional needs, transforming personal piety into material support for sacred spaces.

The temple economy of medieval Mewar cannot therefore be reduced to static repositories of wealth. Temples operated as dynamic centres where monetary resources were gathered, stored, and circulated in ways that supported ritual life and local economies. Coins moved into temples through acts of devotion and patronage, and moved out through ritual expenditure and redistribution. This continuous circulation highlights the centrality of coinage in sustaining the religious and economic vitality of medieval Mewar, positioning temples as key nodes within both sacred and material networks.

#### **V. Ritual Circulation and Sacred Geography**

The circulation of coins within medieval Mewar was closely intertwined with the movement of people across sacred spaces. Pilgrimage, ritual travel, and seasonal festivals generated regular patterns of mobility that connected temples, shrines, settlements, and market centres. Coins accompanied devotees on these journeys, functioning as material carriers of religious intention as well as practical instruments of exchange. Through such movement, monetary circulation became embedded within a sacred geography shaped by ritual practice and devotional mobility.

Major religious centres in Mewar acted as focal points within these circulatory networks. Temples dedicated to Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Jain traditions attracted pilgrims from both local and distant regions, especially during festival occasions. Coins offered at these sites entered temple treasuries, while others were exchanged along pilgrimage routes for food, lodging, and ritual services. In this way, sacred centres were not isolated spaces but integral components of wider networks that linked religious devotion with economic activity.

Ritual circulation also connected urban and rural spaces. Urban centres served as hubs where coins were minted, exchanged, and accumulated, while rural shrines and temples provided destinations for devotional offerings. Coins moved between these spaces through pilgrimage, patronage, and ritual exchange, contributing to the integration of regional economies. This movement reinforced the spatial coherence of Mewar as a sacred landscape, where religious meaning was distributed across a network of interconnected sites rather than concentrated in a single centre.

The repetitive nature of ritual circulation played a key role in sustaining sacred geography over time. Annual festivals, calendrical rituals, and life-cycle ceremonies generated predictable flows of offerings, including coinage, which reaffirmed the sanctity of particular places. Through repeated acts of offering and movement, coins helped to anchor religious memory within the landscape, transforming physical spaces into enduring sites of devotion. Sacred geography was thus not static, but continually reproduced through the circulation of people and material objects.

By situating coins within these patterns of ritual movement, it becomes evident that monetary circulation in medieval Mewar cannot be understood purely in terms of market exchange. Coins participated in creating and maintaining networks of sacred connectivity that linked temples, routes, and communities. This ritual circulation endowed monetary objects with spatial significance, embedding them within the devotional map of the region. The sacred landscapes of medieval Mewar were therefore shaped not only by architecture and belief, but also by the continual movement of coins through ritual and pilgrimage.

#### **VI. Symbolism, Authority and Devotion**

Coins in medieval Mewar carried meanings that extended beyond their economic function, operating as symbolic objects within a shared cultural and political vocabulary. The imagery, inscriptions, and material presence of coins communicated ideas of authority, legitimacy, and devotion, making them effective instruments for expressing both power and piety. When such coins entered ritual contexts through offerings and donations, their symbolic value was further amplified.

Royal authority was frequently articulated through coinage. The issuance and circulation of coins bearing royal names, titles, or emblems served to assert sovereignty across both secular and sacred spaces. When rulers offered these coins to temples, the act transformed monetary authority into a visible expression of devotion. Such offerings signalled the ruler's submission to divine order while simultaneously reinforcing political legitimacy. The temple thus became a space where sovereignty was ritually affirmed and publicly displayed through material symbols.

Religious symbolism also shaped the devotional meaning of coins. Motifs associated with deities, auspicious signs, or cosmological ideas imbued monetary objects with sacred associations. Even when coins did not explicitly depict religious imagery, their use within ritual settings conferred symbolic significance. A coin placed before an image or deposited in a temple treasury was no longer a neutral medium of exchange, but a material embodiment of faith, intention, and moral obligation. Through such practices, monetary objects were integrated into the symbolic economy of religion.

The participation of non-royal actors further illustrates the layered meanings of coinage. Merchants, guild members, and local elites used coins as offerings to express both devotion and

social identity. Donations signalled economic capacity, moral standing, and communal affiliation, allowing individuals and groups to position themselves within the religious and social hierarchy. Coins thus mediated relationships not only between devotees and deities, but also among social actors competing for recognition and legitimacy.

Devotion, authority, and symbolism were therefore deeply intertwined in the use of coinage. Coins acted as tangible links between worldly power and sacred order, enabling the expression of political authority through religious patronage and the articulation of devotion through material means. By circulating across ritual and political domains, coins contributed to a shared symbolic framework that structured social relations and reinforced collective values in medieval Mewar.

## VII. Conclusion

This study has examined coinage in medieval Mewar not merely as an economic medium, but as a material object embedded within ritual practices, sacred spaces, and structures of authority. By situating coins within the framework of ritual economy and sacred landscapes, the paper has sought to move beyond conventional monetary interpretations and to highlight the cultural and devotional dimensions of monetary circulation between the ninth and sixteenth centuries.

The analysis demonstrates that coins played a significant role in sustaining temple economies, facilitating acts of patronage, and supporting the ritual life of religious institutions. Temples functioned as dynamic centres where devotional offerings in the form of coinage were accumulated, managed, and redistributed, linking religious practice with local and regional economic activity. Through repeated acts of offering and donation, coins became central to the maintenance of sacred institutions and the reproduction of religious life in Mewar.

At the same time, the movement of coins across pilgrimage routes, shrines, and settlements contributed to the formation of a coherent sacred geography. Ritual circulation connected urban and rural spaces, integrating diverse religious sites into a shared devotional landscape. Coins, carried by devotees and patrons, acted as material links between sacred centres, reinforcing the spatial dimensions of religious experience and embedding economic activity within patterns of ritual movement.

The symbolic dimensions of coinage further reveal how monetary objects mediated relationships between devotion and authority. Coins articulated political legitimacy when offered by rulers, expressed social identity when donated by merchants and elites, and embodied personal piety when used by ordinary devotees. In ritual contexts, coins acquired meanings that transcended their economic value, becoming instruments through which belief, power, and social order were negotiated.

By foregrounding these interconnections, the paper contributes to a more integrated understanding of medieval Mewar's monetary culture. It suggests that the study of coinage benefits from being placed within broader cultural and spatial

frameworks that account for ritual practice and sacred landscapes. Such an approach not only enriches numismatic history but also offers new perspectives on the relationship between economy, religion, and society in medieval India.

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