

The Audumbaras, known also as the Udumbaras or Odumbaras, were one of the six sections of the Shalvas mentioned in the *Shatapatha Brahmana* (X.4.1, 10) as very eminent and prosperous people (Dasgupta 1961, 44–47; Handa 2007, 25-27). The other sections were the Tilakhalas, Madrakaras, Yugandharas, Bhulingas and Sharadandas as known from later Vedic and historical literature (Bharadwaj 1986). The Madrakaras have been mentioned in the *Aitareya Brahmana* (VII.14, 3) and king Yaugandhari is referred to in the *Apastambiya Mantrapatha* (II.11, 12) by Shalvi women playing on the spinning wheel near the river Yamuna. The antiquity of the Audumbaras thus goes back to very early times and they are still known as one of the oldest tribes of ancient India. Panini in his *Ganapatha* (circa fifth century BCE) placed the Audumbaras under the Rajanya class of people and mentioned them with some other people (IV.2, 53; IV.1, 99). They have also been referred to in the *Mahabhashya* by Patanjali (II.4, 58) as well as in the Great Epic (Sabhaparvan 52.13) too. Various Puranas like the *Harivamsha* (XXVII.1466), *Vayu* (91.98), *Brahmanda* (III.66, 70), *Markandeya* (58.10), *Vishnu*, etc. also refer to them (*Purana*, VII, no. 1, 186-90). Pliny (V.17) mentioned the 'Odombeores' who lived on the mouth of the Indus. Cunningham ([1891] 1963, 66) located them in the Kachchha region while Jayaswal (1955, 161) identified them with the modern community of Gujarati Brahmins of the Audumbara caste and regarded them as the descendants of the Audumbaras who, like many other communities, may have migrated to Gujarat at some point in history. Some of the Sanchi inscriptions also mention donors of the Audumbara tribe (Marshall Foucher and Majumdar 1982, 318-19, 321, 365, nos. 191, 194, 216, 650 and 652), indicating clearly that branches of the tribe had migrated to different areas of the subcontinent. Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita* (V.40; XIV.4; XVI.3), a work of the sixth century CE, also refers to 'Udumbara country' and its people, the Audumbaras, in Madhyadesha. The *Vinayapitaka* (II.299) (Przyluski 1962, 10)¹ and the *Mahamayuri* (Levi 1915) refer to a place called Udumbara which seems to have been named after the tribe (ibid., Cunningham n.d.).² The *Chandrayakarana* (II.4, 103 and III.1, 62) of Chandragomin (circa CE 470 or sixth century CE), *Kashika*, and various medieval works -*Sarasvatikanthabharana* (IV.1, 76 & IV.2, 62) of king Bhoja, the *Ganaratnamahodadhi* (IV.266), the *Samkshiptasāra*, etc. - also contain references to the Audumbaras (Dasgupta 1961; Handa 2007).

Alexander Cunningham was the first archaeologist to discover and publish Audumbara coins (Cunningham n.d.; *CAI*, 67). He found six Audumbara coins (one circular silver piece of Dharaghosha and five square copper pieces) at Pathankot in district Gurdaspur in Punjab in 1872–73 along with the coins of Zoilus, Gondophares, Kanishka and Huvishka. One circular silver coin of Dharaghosha was found in a field near Jwala Mukhi and is now preserved in the Lahore Museum (*CAI*, 67; Whitehead 1914, 167, no. 136, Pl. XVI). In 1913, a big hoard of 363 copper coins was discovered at Irippal near Hamirpur in the Kangra district of erstwhile Punjab (now in Himachal Pradesh) and was published by R.D. Banerji. Of these, 103 coins were attributed to Shivadasa, Rudradasa and Dharaghosha. The rest did not bear clear legends and could not be definitively

assigned to any king (Banerji n.d.).³ Two copper coins exist in the collection of the Indian Museum (Mukherjee 1983, 20-21, Pl.III.6-7) and a silver coin of Dharaghosha - from a hoard of Kuninda, Vemaka and Mahadeva type coins, probably found from Palampur and smuggled to London - is now in Jan Lingen's collection (Handa 1997, 41-42, Pl.V.2). Many stray copper pieces have been obtained by private collectors in trade. Some coins of apsidal shape and a hoard of more than 450 square copper coins with new types and varieties and different styles of disposition of the legends are noteworthy finds in recent years (Handa 2015, 30-40; Handa 2022, 2-5). Silver coins may be put in Class I while the copper specie form Class II.

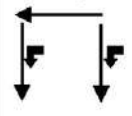
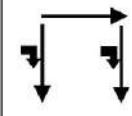
Class I, consisting of three round silver coins of Dharaghosha, depicts the following on the obverse: on the left a filleted trident with a kettle-drum below the prongs and a battle-axe attached to the shaft further below on the right; a tree in an enclosure on the right; a Brahmi legend around *Mah[a]d[e]vasa rano Dharaghoshasa* from 9 to 5 o'clock and *Odu(m)barisa* below from 8 to 6 o'clock. On the reverse is bearded Vishvamitra standing facing with right hand raised and holding a (lion?) skin on the *katyavalambita* (akimbo) left hand; the Kharoshthi legend *Vishpa* on his left (viewer's right) and *mitra* on his right; *Mahadevasarana Dharaghoshasa* around from 3 to 8 o'clock and *Odu(m)barisa* below from 4 to 7 o'clock, Pl. I.9-10.

Class II consists of square and apsidal copper coins, one anonymous, Pl. I.1, and others carrying the names of Shivadasa, Pl. I.2-3, Rudradasa, Pl. I.4-6, Dharaghosh, Pl. I.7, and Shivadatta, Pl. I.8. They show the following on the obverse: a temple with trident-battleaxe on right or left with the Brahmi legend *Mahadevasa Rana* (or *Rana Mahadevasa*) *Shivadasasa/Rudradasasa/Dharaghoshasa/Shivadatas* *Odumbarisa* above and on two sides. The reverse shows the forepart of an elephant to the left (very rarely right also) facing a tree-in-railing in the centre with a Kharoshthi legend above and on two sides. Some coins have preserved an undulating line below the central devices on the obverse or reverse, or even on both sides, while most others have lost this through wear and tear or partial accommodation of the die impression.

The coins bear identical bi-scriptual legends in Brahmi and Kharoshthi. The inscriptions are generally very fragmentary, and it is only through cumulative evidence that their legends have been reconstructed as follows:

- (i) *Mahadevasa Rana Shivadasasa Odubarisa*
- (ii) *Mahadevasa Rana Rudradasasa Odubarisa*
- (iii) *Mahadevasa Rana Dharaghoshasa Odubarisa*
- (iv) *Mahadevasa Rana Shivadatas Odubarisa*

The legends in Brahmi and Kharoshthi, with some exceptions, are generally disposed as illustrated below:

Serial No.	Legend Details	Kharoshthi	Brahmi
(a) Title	(Mahadevasa raña)	Above	Above
(b)	Name of issuer	On left	On right
(c)	Name of the tribe	On right	On left
			

Association with Udumbara

Cunningham thought that 'the name of Odumbara, or Audumbara, is derived from the Udumbara fig tree (*Ficus glomerata*)' (CAI, 66). Referring to Panini's aphorism, which laid down that any country abounding in Udumbara trees may be called Audumbara, Cunningham found this applicable to Nurpur district (between Pathankot and Kangra). He says that the old Hindu name of Nurpur was Darmeri or Dharmeri, which is not an improbable abbreviation of Audumbara. The old name was changed to Nurpur by Jahangir in honour of his wife Nurjahan (CASR V, 155; CASR XIV, 115-16; Dey 1927, 13).⁴ Rapson (1900, 533ff.), however, was doubtful of this identification of the name Udumbara with Cunningham's Damari or Dahmari, which he sought to connect with the Damara mentioned in the *Brihatsamhita* (XIV.30).

D.C. Sircar suggested that 'the Udumbara tree had some sort of totemic value with the Audumbaras as the Kadamba tree had with the Kadambas' (Sircar 1960, 161-62, fn4).⁵ We have referred above to the silver coins of Dharaghosha bearing a male figure on the obverse with the label inscription reading Vishpamitra, i.e. Vishvamitra, and a tree in an enclosure on the reverse. Allan held that 'Vishvamitra's connection with the Audumbaras is otherwise unknown' (Allan 1975, lxxxiv). The relation of the Audumbaras with the Udumbara tree and Vishvamitra has, however, been established firmly by Dasgupta (Dasgupta 1961, 15-19; Dasgupta 1974, 43-44; Dasgupta 1965, 6-7). He refers to the story of the birth of Vishvamitra, traceable from the *Mahabharata* (MbhIII.115; XII.49; and XIII.14) and narrated in the *Kalikapurana* (Chapter 82; Chapter 85; Hazra 1963, 243ff.).⁶ The story says that in order to have a child, the mother of Vishvamitra hugged an Udumbara tree. Dasgupta observed that:

The association of the tribe with the fig tree on the one hand and Vishvamitra on the other is supported by other sources as well. For instance, the tribe has been described as belonging to the family of Vishvamitra in the *Harivamsha*. The tradition regarding the common origin of Vishvamitra and the Audumbaras is known from the combined testimony of the *Rigveda* and the Puranas, for while in the third book of the *Rigveda*, which is attributed to Vishvamitra, the sage calls himself the son of Kushika (III.33, 5), the *Vayu* and the *Brahmanda Puranas* assign the Audumbaras to the Kushika or Kaushika *gotra*. Thus it appears to be certain that the name of the tribe was derived from *udumbara* or fig tree and Vishvamitra was their 'national sage' (Dasgupta 1965, 44).

Dasgupta's view is widely accepted now.

While there is no doubt that Vishvamitra may have been the 'national sage' of the Audumbaras and that they believed his birth resulted from an embrace of the fig tree by his mother, to regard the depiction of the tree-in-railing on their coins as the fig tree seems to be rooted in the same belief of their origin from Vishvamitra or, as Cunningham suggests, in the Udumbara tree being the *sthala-vriksha* (tree of the land). We have already noted above that Cunningham's suggestion of deriving Darmeri/Dharmeri, a former name of Nurpur, from Audumbara, was not regarded as beyond doubt by Rapson. Fig trees thrive in the lower, coastal, and southern tropical heat and not in hilly regions. As such, fig trees are mostly confined to the western parts of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and some parts of Uttar Pradesh like Lucknow and Saharanpur, where winter temperatures do not fall below 15° Fahrenheit. Also, the fig is not the *sthala-vriksha* of the Pathankot-Kangra region. Fig trees have large leaves growing singly. But if we see the depiction of the tree-in-railing on Audumbara coins, it becomes clear that the tree has branches with trefoil leaves

and abundant round fruits as , resembling the Bael/Bilva tree (*Aegle marmelos*, stone apple), also called *Shivadruma* (Shiva's tree), which is an important medicinal plant used to treat diabetes, diarrhea, dysentery, inflammation and respiratory system. Its fruits are also rich in bioactive constituents and is used for beverages. It is believed that the Bael emerged from the sweat droplets of goddess Parvati and is imbued with her essence. When, during the churning of the ocean, a deadly poison named *Halahala* emerged, and Shiva consumed it to protect the world, Bael leaves were offered to soothe the intense heat and pain caused by the poison. Since then, Bael has been an essential item in Shiva worship. The Bilva tree is also believed to be the residence of goddess Lakshmi, the deity of wealth and prosperity. Its leaves are also offered to Shiva in worship as described in the *Bilvashtakam: Tridalamtrigunakaramtrinetrām cha trayayudham/ Trijanmapapasamharamekabilvam Shivarpanam//* [(the leaves of the *bilva* tree) have three petals, they are an expression of the three qualities of life (*sattva, rajas* and *tamas*), three eyes (*trinetra* is an epithet of Shiva also), three weapons of Shiva and an offering of a single *bilva* leaf to Shiva destroys the sins of three lifetimes]. Another verse reads: *Darshanambilva-vrikshasyasparshanampapanashanam/ Aghorapapasamharam eka-bilvam Shivarpanam//* [Seeing or touching a *bilva* tree destroys the most horrible sins; therefore offer a single *bilva* leaf to Shiva]. The tree-in-railing on Audumbara coins thus looks more like a Bael or Bilva tree having trefoil leaves and branches laden with fruits, Pl. II. Dharaghosha's silver coins show a trident-battleaxe -representing Shiva or a Shaiva temple - and the tree-in-railing as the main devices on the obverse and the figure of Vishvamitra as the exclusive main device on the reverse. The tree-in-railing on all other Audumbara coins is depicted on the reverse, but on these specific silver coins it has been brought to the obverse with trident-battleaxe to show its association with Shiva and not with Vishvamitra. It is notable that the tree-in-railing on the anonymous coin, Pl. I.1, does not seem to be the Bilva tree and differs in form (); its obverse shows a temple flanked by a *svastika-dhvaja* on the left and *chakra-dhvaja* on right , indicating the Vaishnavite leaning of the issuer. The tree-in-railing on this coin may have been a Tulsi plant (Holy Basil), considered holy by Hindus and related to the worship of Lord Vishnu. Had the Audumbaras derived their lineage from Vishvamitra or the fig tree, the issuer of this coin, too, would have put a similar tree with trefoil branches and leaves on the coin. The depiction of the tree-in-railing on the anonymous coin also negates its possibility of being the *sthala-vriksha*, as it is not found on other Audumbara coins. Describing the features of Audumbara coins, Allan had rightly observed that 'The obverse type is a tall tree in an enclosure; this type is so common on early Indian coins that it is doubtful if we need identify it, as Cunningham does, with the *udumbara* fig-tree . . .' (Allan 1963, lxxxiii). Our belief that the tree-in-railing on Audumbara coins is a Bael tree is strengthened as we find the names of all the other rulers of this tribe bearing Shaivite names. This belief is further corroborated by the depiction of a Shaiva temple with trident-battleaxe on the coins.⁷ Some Puranas like the *Shiva* and *Skanda* also refer to the sanctity and religious merit of Shiva's worship with *Belapatra* (Bael leaves) and the importance thereof.⁸ Thus, the tree-in-railing on the Audumbara coins, except the anonymous one, should be regarded as the Bael or Bilva tree and not the fig tree as held by all scholars till now.

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Plate I
Depiction of tree-in-railing
on Audumbara coins

Plate II
Bael tree leaves and fruits



Notes

1. Przulski refers to *U-du-ma* of the *Dulva*, the Tibetan version of the *Vinaya*, and equates it with Udumbara of the Sanskrit *Vinaya*.
2. Cunningham had also observed that 'The name Odumbara must be that of the town or district in which they (i.e. coins) are discovered'.
3. Ten coins of this hoard without decipherable names are preserved in the Asiatic Society of Bombay. I have read the name of Rudradasa on them.
4. Dey also located the country of the Udumbaras in 'the district of Nurpur (or rather Gurudaspur)'.
5. Some connection is also suggested between the Adamvira or Admera section of the Johiya Rajputs and the ancient Audumbaras.
6. *Kalika Purana* dates this Purana between seventh and tenth centuries CE. The Pauranic version differs in minor details from the *Mbh.*, though the kernel is the same.
7. The silver coins of Dharaghosha show on the obverse trident-battleaxe with tree in railing on right. The trident-battleaxe on these coins represents the Shaiva temple and the Bilva tree near it.
8. The coins illustrated belong to the British Museum, Sarvashri Jan Lingen, Amit Udeshi, Rajnarain Maurya, Jeevandeep Singh, Sanjeev Chagti, and Classical Numismatic Gallery and are not to scale. Plate II is collated from Wikipedia with thanks.

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