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MULTAN: THE HOUSE OF GOLD

Author(s): R. B. Whitehead

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### III.

#### MULTAN: THE HOUSE OF GOLD.<sup>1</sup>

THIS contribution is concerned with a group of Indo-Sassanian coins stated by Sir Alexander Cunningham to have been struck by kings of Sind; they bear the effigy of a deity which Cunningham described as the sun-god of Multan. This attribution has held the field for forty years and has been widely accepted. I record some considerations which I submit show that the coins do not belong to Sind and that the deity is not the sun-god of Multan.

In the autumn of A.D. 711, the year of the Muhammadan conquest of Spain, the Arabs appeared before Dewal, a port of the Indus delta region, and by the year 713 the conquest of Sind was complete and Multan had fallen. The tide of invasion reached the extremities of the Islamic empire simultaneously, but while the contact of the Arabs with the culture of the west resulted in the brilliant kingdom of Cordova, the Arab administration of Sind with Multan as a northern outpost remained stagnant, and it was a subsequent impetus by another race three centuries later and from another direction which resulted in the Muslim conquest of India. The history of Sind called the Chachnāma terms Multan "a prop of the kingdom of Sind and Hind"; it was always the capital of the south-west Punjab. The Rai dynasty of Sind, which

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<sup>1</sup> A paper read at the International Numismatic Congress, London, 1936.

is said to have reigned 137 years, was subverted by the Brahman Chach whose accession is placed about the year 642. Chach left a deputy in the capital Alor and advanced with an army towards Multan. When the fort of Multan was taken, Chach went to an idol temple which stood in a retired and solitary place, prostrated himself before the idol, offered sacrifices and then proceeded on his expedition. At this time (about A.D. 644) the Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang came to the Mou-lo-san-pu-lu country. Amongst the temples of other religions was the magnificent fane of the Sun-deva; the image was of gold and the kings and nobles of all India made offerings to it. The name of the country has been restored as Mūlasthānapura and identified with Multan. Mr. Watters says that this is an impossible restoration.<sup>2</sup> The name literally means the city of the foundation place and signifies the city of the Supreme Spirit, usually Śiva. When Multan was captured by the Arabs, their leader Muhammad ibn Kāsim went to the temple where he found an idol made of gold with two eyes of red rubies in its head. The keeper of the idol said, "O just commander, this is only an idol which has been made by Jaswīn, the king of Multan, who has buried his treasure here". The treasure was contained in forty large copper jars; this great hoard together with jewels, pearls, and other plunder was sent off in boats to Dewal. The quantity of gold seems to vary with the translation. Major H. G. Raverty in his *Mīhrān of Sind* reckons that by the lowest computation the treasure amounted to the enormous weight of 26,400 lb. of gold. The

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<sup>2</sup> *On Yuan Chwang*, by T. Watters, 1904-1905, II, p. 254.

hoarding of temple treasure in a vault or receptacle underneath the idol was not peculiar to Multan, but the circumstances attending the discovery by Muhammad ibn Kāsim of this particular deposit and its immensity were such that Multan was called by the early Arab historians and geographers "the *Farkh-i-Bait-uz-Zahab*, the Temple of the House or Vault of Gold". The references are conveniently summarized by Major Raverty, *J.A.S.B.*, 1892, pp. 186 f. The best-known account is that of the celebrated al-Bīrūnī who, writing about A.D. 1028, records that there was a famous sun temple at Multan styled Āditya; in another place he gives some old names of Multan. As with most other assertions about ancient Multan, the exact significance of these names is disputed, but they are capable of interpretation as referring to the sun. It will be noted that of all these authorities only the Chinese pilgrim and al-Bīrūnī call the idol a sun-god.

The magnificent income of the House of Gold consisted of offerings made to a famous idol. A well-known group of coins bears on the reverse side a deity which is also found on an exceptional issue in gold and silver of the Sassanian king Khusru Parvez (Khusru II) who reigned from A.D. 590 to 628. The pieces have attracted the attention of the great experts in turn—James Prinsep, H. H. Wilson, Edward Thomas, Alexander Cunningham, Édouard Drouin. They have agreed to disagree about the legends; there are formidable difficulties. It is only in the last few years that real progress has been made in the decipherment of inscriptions in so-called corrupt Greek characters; this achievement is due to Professors Herzfeld and Junker.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, no. 38, *Kushano*

The essay entitled "Later Indo-Scythians, Ephthalites, or White Huns" (*Num. Chron.*, 1894) embodies the mature experience of Sir Alexander Cunningham. He states that the famous temple at Multan was a temple of the sun-god, that it was built by the Ephthalite or Hūṇa chief Toramāṇa, and that the image of this sun-god appears on a group of coins belonging to rulers whom Cunningham calls actual kings of Multan and identifies with members of the Rai dynasty of Sind. The relation of the coins with Khusru II brings them within the period of the Rai dynasty. One thing only is related about these kings in addition to their names. The king of Seistan invaded Sind and slew Rāi Sahirās. This statement provides a contact with the Sassanians and is used by Cunningham (*Cunn.*, p. 271). I think that the weight of evidence is in favour of the idol of Multan being a sun-god. The statement that the temple at Multan was built by Toramāṇa is pure surmise. Not only must the uncertain name Jaswīn or Jabwīn of the Chachnāma be Javula, the tribal designation of the Hūṇas, the Ephthalite invaders of India, but the particular Javula has to be Toramāṇa. There is no other evidence. It seems unlikely on the face of it that a vagabond horde erected this temple. Sun worship was rare in India, but did exist before the arrival of influence from Iran. A Hindu ruler of the Solar Race could have built a temple to the sun-god; probably this particular fane existed long before the arrival of the Ephthalites. The identification of local Sind

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*Sassanian Coins*, by Ernst Herzfeld, Calcutta, 1930; *Die Hephthalitischen Münzinschriften*, by Dr. Heinrich F. J. Junker, Berlin, 1930.

rulers belonging to the Rai dynasty with the great Hūṇa leaders Toramāṇa and Mihirakula is sheer fancy (*Cunn.*, p. 273). Cunningham was on firmer ground when he asserted that the Rai kings were White Huns (p. 275); not only were those rulers of Sind known by the title of Zambil, but the earlier years of the dynasty synchronized with the period of Hūṇa supremacy in North-west India. Yaḳ'ūbī, Ṭabarī, and Mas'ūdī repeatedly allude to "the celebrated Rutbil" who is variously designated as king of Kabul, of Sind, and of Sijistan (Seistan). Ibn Khallikān speaks of "a Turkish tribe in the territory of Sijistan governed by a king named Retbil. Yaḳūb bin Leis slew their king and three princes, all bearing the title of Retbil." There was the Zant-bel, Ran-pāl or Ratan-pāl dynasty of Kabul and Zabul, also the Kabul Shāh, Ran-pāl or Ratan-pāl, the Zantbil of the Arabs.<sup>4</sup> The title of Zambīl with its variants is applied like Shāhi and Tigīn to foreigners from the north-west who invaded India in the early centuries of the Christian Era. The word Zambil seems to be derived from Zabula (Indian form Javula), the ethnic designation of the Ephthalites in the Indian borderlands. Zabulistan or Zabul, the Ghazni highlands on the Upper Helmand, was an Ephthalite province; in it we read the tribal name of the Hūṇa invaders of India. The epithet Zambīl was also applied to the conquerors of the Ephthalites, the Turks.

Now we come to the coins themselves. Sir Alexander Cunningham "ventured to suggest the identification of the rayed bust with the sun-god of Multan because the same bust appears on the coins of Shāhi Tigīn,

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<sup>4</sup> The Arab script is peculiarly liable to be misread and blundered by copyists.

and Vasu Deva, the actual kings of Multan"—*Cunn.*, p. 291. Mr. F. D. J. Paruck carried the matter to its logical conclusion when he wrote of "the gold and silver coins of Khusru II struck at Multan". This view of the case, based on Cunningham, is further elaborated with useful references.<sup>5</sup> The coin of Shāhi Tigīn, preferably (as read by Drouin) Vāhi with the Turkish title Tigīn, is the celebrated trilingual piece illustrated at *Cunn.*, Pl. X, 9. There are fifty-five specimens in the British Museum. Cunningham read the Pahlavi reverse legend to right as *Takān Khorāsān Malka*, "the king of Takān and Khorāsān", and took it as the equivalent of "the king of India and Persia" of the Nāgarī marginal obverse inscription since Takān was the name of the Punjab. The bust on the reverse is described as a male head to front, with rayed flames ascending to a point, the sun-god of Multan [fig. 1].

The coin of Vasu Deva is *Cunn.*, Pl. X, 10; there are eight specimens in the British Museum. Cunningham read the obverse marginal legend in Pahlavi to left as *Wahman Multan Malka*, "king of Bahman and Multan"; Bahman was taken as referring to Bahmanabad, an old capital of Sind. The Pahlavi legends on the reverse were interpreted as *Takān Zawūlastan*, "Punjab, Zabulistan", and *Sapardalakhshan*, "Rajputana" [fig. 3].

A third coin is in the British Museum and appears to be still unique: it is *Cunn.*, Pl. X, 11. The portrait resembles that of Vāhi in style, but there is the curious little figure in the right field. To the left of the head is a Kushan Greek legend and to the right a Pahlavi

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<sup>5</sup> *Sasanian Coins*, by F. D. J. Paruck, Bombay, 1924, pp. 125, 269 f.  
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inscription. The reverse bears a long marginal Kushan Greek legend. On each side of the deity is a Pahlavi inscription. The word on the right is clearly the equivalent of Zabulistan; that to the left was read by Cunningham as *Saparlakshan*, "Rajputana" [fig. 2].



Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

The boundaries of the Rai kings of Sind are defined fairly accurately in the *Chachnāma*. Their dominion extended on the south to Dewal and the sea, on the west to Makrān, on the east to the boundary of Kashmir, and on the north to certain mountains. At this period the Kashmir power extended down to the Salt Range. The seats of the four governors are given: Bahmanabad (in Lower Sind), Siwistan (Sehwan), Iskandah (probably Uchh), and Multan. They show that the Sind of our period was much the same as modern Sind with

the addition of Multan. This local dynasty cannot be identified with kings of Zabulistan and Khorāsān. The vast extension of the Rai power to the west (*Cunn.*, p. 273) is incorrect. The word read as Kirmān should be Kuramān, the region of the Kurram Valley; this mistake has led to much misunderstanding.

Another work on Ephthalite coins claimed to have been struck at this period in Sind is Specht's *Du Déchiffrement des monnaies sindo-ephthalites* (*Journal Asiatique*, 1901, pp. 487 f.). Specht says that the alphabet is allied to those of Aramaic origin, calls the characters Sindo-Ephthalite, and reads from right to left the names and titles of pre-Muslim rulers given in the Chachnāma. The legends actually read from left to right in Kushan Greek characters, and the coins in question were struck by Zabuli kings of Balkh, Kabul, and Zabul. The matter is ably discussed by Junker (*op. cit.*, pp. 12 f.). But I had always distrusted the conclusions of Specht and Cunningham, because I was convinced from my own experience in India that the coins in question were not found in Multan and Sind, and had nothing to do with these parts.<sup>6</sup> The find spots

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<sup>6</sup> The numismatic remains of pre-Muslim Sind are very meagre. Henry Cousens in his excellent and comprehensive work on *The Antiquities of Sind* (Calcutta, 1929), writes "A few coins of earlier dates than the Arab invasion have been found in Sind." Six Indo-Sassanian gold coins were discovered in the Larkhana district about the year 1908 (illustrated on p. 6), but appear to be without legend. Coins of an Ephthalite type are not mentioned; there is no Indo-Sassanian piece in Cousens' plate of Sind coins. Edward Thomas had already remarked on the very limited number of Hindu (pre-Muslim) coins found on the site of Bahmanabad among the multitudes of medieval pieces; even the former "seem to be casual contributions from other provinces of no very marked uniformity or striking age".

are usually on the N.W. Frontier, and in Afghanistan; the nearest place to Multan is Manikyala.<sup>7</sup> Cunningham himself writes of the Vāhi coins: "Two specimens were obtained by Ventura in the Manikyala Stupa. Dr. Lord got forty to the north of the Caucasus. I have received some twenty or thirty from Kabul, and I am aware that a few have been found in Sindh and Kacch." Three out of Cunningham's four specimens of Vasu Deva came from the Masson Collection, and Masson got his coins in Afghanistan. To my mind the evidence of the find spots is conclusive. I agree with Edward Thomas that the triple legends point to a borderland where various languages met and interchanged methods of writing; Thomas suggested the locality of Bamiān, which seems likely.

A recent description of the Vāhi coin is that by Dr. Vincent Smith.<sup>8</sup> He cannot read the word Takān, but the title "king of Khorāsān" is certain. The reading and meaning of the Brāhmī (Nāgarī) legend still remain obscure because the characters are imperfectly formed and vary much in different specimens. This was precisely the verdict of Edward Thomas, who wrote: "The truth is the Sanskrit characters are so imperfectly formed and vary so materially in different specimens that this in itself creates a tendency to distrust any decipherment however carefully collated."<sup>9</sup> The die sinker was so poorly acquainted with the Indian alphabet that the legend has not been read with certainty after a century's efforts. On some Vasu Deva coins the Indian legend is written from right

<sup>7</sup> *Ariana Antiqua*, by H. H. Wilson, London, 1841, p. 400.

<sup>8</sup> *Indian Museum Coin Catalogue*, vol. i, p. 234.

<sup>9</sup> *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1850, p. 343.

to left. These facts point to an origin outside India proper.

Sir Alexander Cunningham described the deity on these coins as "male head to front, with rayed flames ascending to a point". The deity had to be male in order to be a sun-god. Edward Thomas noted that the face is unadorned by either beard or moustache, "but still in the majority of instances looks anything but feminine". The fact remains that the artist has carefully included moustache or beard in the king's portrait, and as deliberately omitted them from that of the deity. The contrast between the two busts is best studied on the piece of Vasu Deva. There is a significant difference in the arrangement of the embroidery. The features of the deity are not those of a beardless boy. One head is male and the other female; the deity is a goddess.

The only place-names which can be read with certainty on the three coins are Khorāsān and Zabulistan. The reading *mltan mlka* on the Vasu Deva piece is also certain. It is curious that of his four specimens Cunningham chose to illustrate that from which these all-important words had been obliterated.<sup>10</sup> If the meaning were "king of Multan", the words would be *multan malika*. I have the great authority of Professor Ernst Herzfeld for stating that *mltan* means first of all *mardān*; *mardān shāh* is a well-known name or title.<sup>11</sup> The deity is an Iranian goddess. Professor

<sup>10</sup> This was noticed by Professor Junker (*op. cit.*, p. 11).

<sup>11</sup> For the connexion in Iranian of *l* with *tr*, *rd*, &c., see E. Herzfeld's *Paikuli*, pp. 177 f. See also *Amliche Berichte aus den Königl. Kunstsammlungen*, Berlin, Dec. 1912, p. 46. I am much indebted to Professor Herzfeld for the kind permission to publish his communication.

Herzfeld's opinion is as follows. The subject of the investiture of the king by different deities is found on Sassanian sculptures. For example, Ardashīr II receives the crown from Hormizd and Mithra, Khusrū II from Hormizd and Anahit, and Bahrām III from Anahit alone. Flandin and Coste in the work, *Voyage en Perse*, have figured the four sides of the capital of a Sassanian column.<sup>12</sup> On faces B and D are geometrical and floral designs: on face A is a haloed goddess crowning a king on face C. The king is Khusrū II, and the goddess may well be that of our coins. This deity is connected with the east and Professor Herzfeld sees in her a possible analogue with Ardokhsho of the Kushan coins; Ardokhsho means "genius of the Oxus".

The piece of Vasu Deva is an imitation of the drachm of Khusrū II, Paruck, *op. cit.*, pl. XXI, 463: the gold coins of Khusrū II are figured at 455, 456, and 457. The issue is exceptional, and the pieces are extremely rare; unfortunately there is no mint monogram. Only four drachms of this type are known: one of year 26 (British Museum, Walker, *Num. Chron.*, 1935, pp. 242 f., Pl. XVIII. 3; two of year 36 (British Museum, *ibid.*, Pl. XVIII. 2, and American Numismatic Society); and one of year 37 (Vienna). For the bibliography of these coins see Walker, *ibid.*, note 3. The drachm of Vasu Deva has the same Pahlavi legend to left of the portrait as that of Khusrū, so should bear the name of the king to the right. The letters seem to be *sf vrsu tif*, probably the equivalent of Śrī Vāsu

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<sup>12</sup> Flandin & Coste, *Voyage en Perse*, Paris, 1851, volume of Plates, Pl. 27 bis.

Deva as suggested by Cunningham and others.<sup>13</sup> The representations of the kings on the remaining two coins are true portraits; belonging to the time of Khusrū II, they are probably Turks. The Ephthalites had been overthrown by a coalition of Khusrū I and the Turkish *khākān*; Chavannes shows that this victory took place between the years 563 and 567. The Western Turks for nearly a century succeeded to the Central Asian dominions of the Ephthalites, and for a time extended their supremacy to the Kabul valley. The limits of Khorāsān are discussed in *Paikuli*, vol. i, p. 37.<sup>14</sup> The term designates the eastern quarter of Iran, north of the Hindu Kush; in later Sassanian times there was an extension south towards Makrān. Vāhi must have reigned both north and south of the Hindu Kush; the other two kings at least had control of Zabulistan. Cunningham's *Sapardalakshan* is read by Professor Junker as Dāwar, Rusnan.<sup>15</sup> The unique coin differs from the other two because it does not bear an Indian legend; on the other hand, there is a long inscription in Kushan Greek characters. Professor Herzfeld has traced the use of this script continuously through the Kushano-Sassanian period to the time of Shāhpūr II. Professor Junker has read Balkh and other mint names in these characters on White Hun coins. The piece, *Cunn.*, Pl. X, 11, must be about the latest coin which

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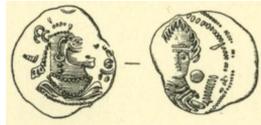
<sup>13</sup> For Professor Junker's interesting discussion of the legends, see *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 11. Professor Herzfeld has drawn attention to the significance of the position of the coin portrait on Parthian and Sassanian money.

<sup>14</sup> *Paikuli* by Ernst Herzfeld. Berlin, 1924.

<sup>15</sup> *Sapardalakshan* = Siwālik or Rajputana west of the Aravalli Mountains (*Ind. Ant.* 1932, p. 92).

bears legends in this script. The Kushan Greek inscription on the Vāhi coin is *Sri shaho*.

To conclude, these hybrid coins were struck by kings with Sassanian affinities, not in the Punjab and Sind, but in Zabulistan and other debatable lands



between Iran and India. The pieces exhibit an Iranian deity taken from certain issues of the Sassanian king Khusrū II; this is probably a token of suzerainty. Recently a new type has been found; nothing can be said about the inscriptions as the piece is in poor condition, and the obverse legend is off the flan. The metal is copper, size 0.55 inches, weight 7.2 grains. The coin belonged to the author, and is now in the British Museum.

R. B. WHITEHEAD.