



## Three Hunnic Bullae from Northwest India

M I C H A E L   A L R A M

This paper deals with three bullae which were found in Pakistan in 2004 and are now in a private collection. All three are of fired clay. One was probably attached to a string used to tie a document (no. 1, fig. 1) as can be seen from the little channel on the edge below the bust. The two others are irregular pyramid-shaped tokens (no. 2, fig. 2; no. 3, fig. 3), with clearly visible fingerprints underneath, and were probably used to confirm the legitimate identity of the bearer.<sup>1</sup>

Two of our bullae show the typical male bust representing a Hunnic nobleman, while the third depicts a sun wheel (*cakra*) and can therefore also be seen in a non-Hunnic context. The inscriptions are in Indian Brahmi and tell us the names of the owners of the seals. I am specially grateful to Professor Harry Falk, Institut für indische Philologie und Kunstgeschichte, Freie Universität Berlin, for the deciphering and philological interpretation of the legends. He also kindly provided the facsimiles.

1. Seal impression (bulla) with the bust of a man (fig. 1)

Find spot: Buner, Swat (Pakistan)

Dimensions: 49 × 38, th. 20 mm; impression (upright oval): 25 × 18 mm. On the edge, below the bust, a small channel where the bulla was attached to a string

Material: fired clay

Date: 5th/early 6th century A.D.

*Image*: bust of a man facing right; plain hairstyle, combed outwards from the crown with an encircling braid of hair; moustache; recognisable remains of earring; round, raised tunic neckline. Below the bust the remains of an ornamental spray of leaves or pair of wings.

*Legend*: Brahmi (9 o'clock, outer right) *śri bha – gumḍiḥ* ("Lord Bhagundi").

The name appears in the nominative together with the customary title of *śrī*. However, according to Harry Falk the name is of non-Sanskrit origin; its linguistic background is unknown.

According to Pierfrancesco Callieri's iconographical classification—his book on "Seals and Sealings from the North-West of the Indian Subcontinent and Afghanistan" (Callieri 1997) is the leading publication on this topic—this type of portrait belongs to his Class II (Cat 7.27–35 and pp. 32–33) and Class III (Cat U 7.32).<sup>2</sup> These pieces all belong to an early Hunnic group which can be localised to the area around Kapiśa/Kabul and Gandhara and has been dated by Callieri towards the end of the 4th and beginning of the 5th century (Class II)<sup>3</sup> as well as the 5th century (Class III).<sup>4</sup>

One of the earliest seals with the ornamental spray of leaves or pair of wings—according to the typology established by Callieri 1997—is that showing a frontally depicted princely couple, dated by Callieri to the end of the 4th/beginning of the 5th century.<sup>5</sup> In its style and iconography it still shows a strong Kushano-Sasanian or "Kidarite" influence and can probably be assigned to rulers who preceded the Hunas in the Kapiśa/Kabul and Gandhara area—the "Kidarites" or a Kushano-Sasanian splinter group.<sup>6</sup>

Later the ornamental spray of leaves or pair of wings is also repeatedly found on Huna seals, for example on the magnificent seal of Princess Siurazado ("of noble lineage") last published by Judith Lerner (1999) and Nicholas Sims-Williams (2005), now in the Rosen Collection.<sup>7</sup> Other examples include the seal of Mozdako from the Masson Collection in the British Museum<sup>8</sup> as well as a further piece with a male bust which



Fig. 1. Seal impression (bulla) no. 1 (obverse, reverse, facsimile).

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Fig. 2. Seal impression (bulla) no. 2 (obverse, reverse, facsimile).

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Fig. 3. Seal impression (bulla) no. 3 (obverse, reverse, facsimile).

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bears the title *asbarobido* ("Master of the Cavalry," marshal).<sup>9</sup> Behind the head we see a characteristic symbol (depicted upside down), which is the tamga of the Indian Hunas, or Alchon Huns, as Robert Göbl called them, and which is frequently attested on the Alchon coinage.<sup>10</sup>

The ornamental spray of leaves or pair of wings beneath the bust is also a typical decorative element in the coinage of the so-called Alchon Huns. Even in the earliest phase of their own minting, which copies the type of the Sasanian King of Kings Shapur II (309–379),<sup>11</sup> it is deployed below the bust as an ornamental border (fig. 5). The reverse type of these early Alchon coins follows the model of Wahram IV (388–399), which also provides the *terminus post quem* for their dating. I have thus roughly dated these issues to between A.D. 400 and 420.<sup>12</sup> In Sasanian coinage, which as a rule served the Huns as a model, a comparable decorative floral element is first found as the lower border of the bust during the reign of Wahram IV,<sup>13</sup> later becoming standard during the reign of Yazdgerd I (399–420).<sup>14</sup>

However, these floral ornaments and/or wings supporting a bust are already attested on Sasanian silver bowls from the 3rd and 4th centuries, i.e., much earlier than in the coinage. Prominent examples are the silver-gilt plate from Mtskheta (Georgia) with the bust of the Sasanian viceroy (*bitaxš*) Papak holding a flower in his right hand, or the cup from Sargveshi (Georgia) with busts of Wahram II (276–293), his wife, and two princes.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, this motive is especially prominent in Sasanian glyptic art, for example on the seals of the Zoroastrian priesthood.<sup>16</sup> However, the significance of this motif in Sasanian art remains enigmatic.<sup>17</sup>

Let us return, however, to the Huna coinage in India which forms as it were the leitmotif for the typological development of the sealings, as well as for their chronological setting: Alchon minting began in the area around Kapiśa/Kabul, where a Sasanian mint had fallen into their hands after A.D. 384.<sup>18</sup> Their first issues are still minted with the original Sasanid dies of Shapur II and Shapur III (383–388) from the "Kabul" mint, on which the Bactrian legend *alxanno* is re-engraved (fig. 4).<sup>19</sup> Subsequently the Hunnic centre of power shifted eastwards from Kapiśa/Kabul to Gandhara and the Punjab, where from around A.D. 440—the dates must be regarded as approximate—Khingila (ca. 440–490?) emerges fully from anonymity,

putting his portrait as well as his name on coins (fig. 6).<sup>20</sup> What is typical here—and this should be regarded as the main element in how Huna identity is expressed in a mainly Iranian/Sasanian and Indian context—is the artificial skull deformation (steeple head) which, however, is not always visible. The king is wearing a diadem with floating ribbons which are mistakenly attached to the necklace. Later Khingila takes a crown, at first only in the form of a simple crescent on the forehead; this is then later joined by other decorative elements such as a trident, wings, and horns. The legends are in Bactrian, Indian (Brahmi), or in both languages and mention various titles as well as occasionally the name of the king (Brahmi *khigi*, *khigila* or *khingila*). In this context it is interesting to note that the Huns never used Pahlavi (Sasanian Middle Persian), either on their coins or on seals. On the coins we find also a plethora of control marks and symbols which mainly belong to the Indian religious domain—such as the shell of Vishnu (*śankha*) with the sun disk (*cakra*) above, while the Sasanian fire-altar remains on the reverse, albeit occasionally appearing as an obverse symbol as well (fig. 8).<sup>21</sup>

A recently published seal of Khingila's—or another ruler of the same name—by Pierfrancesco Callieri and Nicholas Sims-Williams has a Bactrian legend which gives his name in the form Eshkingil, the filiation (or clan name which is, however, incomplete) as well as the title *xoadēo* ("lord, king").<sup>22</sup> In this context a seal from the Rosen Collection last published by Judith Lerner (1999) should be mentioned:<sup>23</sup> this shows a diademed bust of a Huna prince above the ornamental spray of leaves or pair of wings and bears the Bactrian legend *alxono*. According to Callieri's classification this type is to be assigned to Class IV and dated to the 5th/6th century.<sup>24</sup> On a coin issue associated by Göbl with Khingila the Bactrian *alxonno* is combined with the title *šauo* ("king") (fig. 9).<sup>25</sup>

The well-known silver bowl that was allegedly found in the Swat Valley and is now preserved in the British Museum should be placed in the same Huna context. Its exterior surface is decorated with hunting scenes while the bottom of the bowl displays a medallion representing a left-facing male bust above the typical wing-like ornament.<sup>26</sup> On another bowl found in Tshilek near Samarkand<sup>27</sup> we find a similar motive: here



Fig. 4. Alchon (ca. 385–ca. 400). Original dies of Shapur II with re-engraved Bactrian legend *alxanno* (*obv.*). Drachm, Kabul (?). Göbl 1967, Emission 36/3 (= 36A) (BM).



Fig. 5. Alchon (ca. 400–ca. 420). *Obv.* Imitation of Shapur II's type with Bactrian legend *alxanno*. *Rev.* Imitation of Wahram IV's type. Drachm, Kabul (?). Göbl 1967, Emission 33 (Jean-Pierre Righetti collection).



Fig. 6. Khingila (ca. 440–ca. 490?). *Obv.* Bact. *alxannano* – Brähm. *khigi-la*. Drachm, Gandhara. Göbl 1967, Emission 44 (BnF).



Fig. 7. Khingila. *Obv.* Bact. *alxano* – Brähm. *khigi*. Drachm, Gandhara. Göbl 1967, Emission 66 (BnF).



Fig. 8. Khingila. *Obv.* Bact. *alxano* – Brähm. *khigi*. Drachm, Gandhara. Unpublished (private collection).



Fig. 9. Khingila. *Obv.* Bact. *šauo* – *alxonno*. Drachm, Gandhara. Göbl 1967, Emission 60 (BM).



Fig. 10. Khingila. *Obv.* Brähm. *šāhi jāukha*. Drachm, Gandhara. Göbl 1967, Emission 51 (Berlin).



Fig. 11. Toramana (ca. 490–ca. 515). *Rev.* Brähm. *tora*. AE, Punjab. Göbl 1967, Emission 120/14 (BM).



Fig. 12. Mihirakula (ca. 515–ca. 540). *Obv.* Brāhm. *jayatu mi hirakula*. Drachm, Gandhara. Göbl 1967, Emission 135/2 (BM).



Fig. 13. Narana-Narendra (ca. 540–ca. 580). *Obv.* Brāhm. *śrī [jayatu narendra?]*. AE (Drachm?), Gandhara (?). Göbl 1967, Emission 171/4 (BM).



Fig. 14. Nēzak, Group I (ca. 460–ca. 560?). *Obv.* Pehl. *nycky MLKA* (mostly corrupt). Drachm, Ghazni (?). Göbl 1967, Emission 217 (BnF).

a Huna king is depicted—clearly identifiable according to the diadem with floating ribbons, which are attached to the necklace—holding a flower in his right hand. A similar type is attested in the Huna coinage from the time of Khingila.<sup>28</sup>

The ornamental spray of leaves or pair of wings remains a characteristic component of Hunnic coin typology in northwest India and was also used by Toramana (ca. 490–ca. 515) (fig. 11)<sup>29</sup> and Mihirakula (ca. 515–ca. 540) (fig. 12).<sup>30</sup> However, it is not limited to Alchon issues, as it was taken over by the so-called Nēzak kings in the area around Ghazni (group I: ca. 460–560) and Kabul (group II: ca. 515–650) (fig. 14).<sup>31</sup> The prominent characteristic of the Nēzak coinage, which partly runs parallel to the Alchon issues, is the bull's head crown of the kings, which is unmistakably encountered on all Nēzak coinages. This is joined by the Middle Persian legend *nycky MLKA* (albeit mostly written in a corrupt form) which Janos Harmatta was the first to read correctly.<sup>32</sup>

2. Seal impression (bulla) with the bust of a man (fig. 2)

Find spot: Shahpur, Sargodha (Pakistan)

Dimensions: 24 × 18, th. 21 mm ; impression (almost circular): 18 mm. Irregular pyramid-shaped token with fingerprints underneath  
Material: fired clay

Date: middle of the 5th/first half of the 6th century A.D.

*Image:* bust of a man facing right; plain, short hairstyle combed outwards from the crown; moustache; earrings. Tunic with low, circular neckline, draped in linear folds. On right-hand side of pictorial field, in front of the head, a staff, its lower end swelling to a sphere; above this two symmetrically arranged ribbons pointing diagonally downwards (horizontally ribbed?); at the upper end two discs (?) lying one above the other, with symmetrically distributed horizontal bars above these.

*Legend:* Brahmi (8 o'clock, outer right) *śrī sudāsa* ("Lord Sudāsa")

The name appears in the nominative. It is Sanskrit and well attested in the literature. A further example of this type is "Devadāsa," a person whose socle inscription was recently found near Peshawar in conjunction with

two others bearing names of neither Indian or Iranian origin.<sup>33</sup>

The type of portrait belongs to Callieri's Class IV.<sup>34</sup> The staff in front of the man's head is found in similar form on coins and is there described as a club. This object is first attested on drachmas with the Brahmi legend *ṣāhi javūkha/jaūkha*, which Göbl dates to the time of Khingila (fig. 10).<sup>35</sup> The emissions 50, 51, 56, 73, and 86 also bear the club symbol. Other issues from this period include the trident, standards, sceptre, sun wheels, shells, altars, vases, and small images of gods among many others. Most of these symbols are doubtless borrowed from the world of religious imagery; some can probably also be interpreted as symbols of rulership.

### 3. Seal impression with sun wheel (fig. 3)

Find spot: Taxila (Pakistan)

Dimensions: 21 × 23, th. 16 mm; impression (recumbent oval): 16 × 13 mm. Irregular pyramid-shaped token with fingerprints underneath

Material: fired clay

Date: end of the 5th/6th century A.D.

Image: Sun wheel (*cakra*) with eleven curving spokes, surrounded by 15 spheres; the pictorial field is set within a raised circular border

Legend: Brahmi *jinaḥ*, "Jina"

The name appears in the nominative and is Sanskrit. The customary prefatory *śrī* is missing, making it doubtful as to whether a human being is referred to here. A parallel *śrīr jīnasya* is known from a gold seal ring from the cultic cave of Kashmir Smast in the Peshawar Valley.<sup>36</sup> Harry Falk points out that the reading *jitaḥ* remains to be considered, since during this time the forms for *ta* and *na* are indistinguishable in many manuscripts. *Jita* ("vanquished," "obtained by vanquishing") on its own as a name would be quite unusual; a possible solution might be the abbreviation for the formula *jitaṃ bhagavatā* known from seals.<sup>37</sup> All in all, however, the reading *jinaḥ* would seem to be most likely.

The sun wheel (*cakra*) is first attested on the obverse as a pictorial symbol on drachmas of Khingila (fig. 7).<sup>38</sup> As the main image on the coin it is found prominently and in almost identical form on copper coins of Toramana (fig. 11), whose

mint has been localised in the Punjab.<sup>39</sup> This coin type displays the sun wheel in the upper field of the reverse, with the abbreviated name of its issuer (*tora*) in the lower field. Narana-Narendra (ca. 540–ca. 580), one of the last Huna kings in India, also used the *cakra* on the reverse of his copper coinage (fig. 13).<sup>40</sup>

## Notes

1. On the function of the sealings cf. Callieri 1997, 245–47.

2. Cf. also Lerner 1999, fig. 8, and Göbl 1967, G36, as well as the summarizing description by Callieri 1999 (Classes A–C). In a personal communication Pierfrancesco Callieri argues that our portrait may probably belong to Class IV (cf. Callieri 1997, Cat 7.39–40 and Cat U 7.34–39); because of the poor state of preservation of the impression, however, a clear decision is not possible.

3. Now amended by Callieri 2002, 130, from the 1st half to the middle of the 5th century.

4. Class IV is dated to the 5th–6th century.

5. Göbl 1967, G 20 = Callieri 1997, pl. 65, Cat U 7.43 (Class II/V) = Callieri 1999, 281, and 289 (Class B).

6. For the "Kidarites" compare the discussions in Grenet 2002 and Alram 2004 as well as in ur Rahman, Grenet, and Sims-Williams 2006.

7. Göbl 1967, G 26 = Lerner 1999, 276, no. 10 = Sims-Williams 2005, 335, no. 1; cf. also Humbach 1966, Sig 26, and Davary 1982, 232, who read the name as Miurozado.

8. Göbl 1967, G30 = Callieri 1997, pl. 24, Cat 7.40 = Callieri 1999, 290, Cat 7.39.

9. Göbl 1967, G22; reading according to Humbach 1966, Sig 22; cf. also Davary 1982, 163–64.

10. For an overview of the Alchon coinage cf. Alram 1996 and Alram 2004.

11. Göbl 1967, Emission 33 = Alram 1996, no. 3. On the early clan chiefs of the Alchon cf. also Vondrovec 2005.

12. Alram 1996. According to Vondrovec 2005, this period should now be shortened to around A.D. 420.

13. Schindel 2004, I, 285–86, obverse type Id; cf. also his remarks on pp. 73–74.

14. Schindel 2004, I, 318, types Ib1, Ib2, and IIa.

15. Harper 1974, figs. 1 and 2; Harper 1981, pls. 1 and 2. Cf. also remarks by Lerner 1999, 268–69 with nn. 22–27.

16. Cf. Gyselen 1995, 135, types III and IV.

17. Harper 1981, 28.

18. On the dating see Schindel 2004, I, 273 and 280–84.

19. Göbl 1967, Emission 36, and Göbl 1987, Emission 36A; Alram 1996, nos. 1–2; Alram 1999/2000,

nos. 91–92A (Emission 36B) also Vondrovec 2005. The name “Alchon” is derived primarily from the Bactrian coin legends read by Davary 1982 in their optimal form as *alxanno* or *alxannano*. These might be reflected in the Indian legend *raja lakhana* (i.e., *raja alakhana*), which occurs in conjunction with the Bactrian *alxano* on a coin issue from the time of Khingila (Göbl 1967, Emission 80). We also know a king of Gurjarā in the Punjab, mentioned in the Sanskrit text *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* by name *alakhana*; cf. Humbach 1966, 30, and Harmatta 1969, 431.

20. Grenet 2002, 221 does not place Khingila before A.D. ca. 460–490; see also the important new inscription published by Melzer 2006.

21. Göbl 1967, Emission 71.

22. Callieri 2002, who dates the seal to between A.D. 400 and 450. On the Bactrian legend (eškigilo [ ](r)ōkano xoēo) see Sims-Williams 2002.

23. Lerner 1999, 276, fig. 9.

24. Following Lerner 1999, 268–69, I would limit the timeframe to the middle or the second half of the 5th century.

25. Göbl 1967, Emission 60; see also note 20.

26. Göbl 1967, pls. 93–95; cf. for example also catalogue *Weihrauch und Seide*, no. 133.

27. Marschak 1986, figs. 11–13.

28. Göbl 1967, Emission 62; here the king holds a diadem (?).

29. Göbl 1967, Emission 120 = Alram 1996, no. 20; cf. also Melzer 2006.

30. Göbl 1967, Emission 135 = Alram 1996, no. 23.

31. Göbl 1967, Emission 217 = Alram 1996, nos. 64–65 (Ghazni); Göbl 1967, Emission 198 = Alram 1996, nos. 69–71 (Kabul).

32. Harmatta 1969, 406–9; cf. also Frye 1974, 115–18.

33. H. Falk, “Six Early Brāhmī inscriptions from Gandhāra,” § 5, *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, vol. 64 (2004), 139–55.

34. Callieri 1997, 229–31; cf. also Callieri 1999, Class D.

35. Göbl 1967, Emissions 49–51; according to the new copper scroll inscription Jarūkha is not a title but a person’s name, cf. Melzer 2006.

36. Falk 2003, 9, fig. 11.

37. Falk 2003, 12, fig. 13.

38. Göbl 1967, Emission 66 = Alram 1996, no. 9, and Göbl 1967, Emission 81 = Alram 1996, no. 13.

39. Göbl 1967, Emissions 120ff. = Alram 1996, no. 20; Göbl presumably took Sagala to be the mint.

40. Göbl 1967, Emissions 171–73.

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|               |   | BnF                                       | Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris   |
|               |   | BM  | The British Museum, Department of Coins and Medals, London   |