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Section 3: Oriental and African Coinages

HUNS AND WESTERN TURKS IN CENTRAL ASIA AND NORTHWEST INDIA

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For the coinage of the “Iranian Huns” and their successors in Central Asia and north-western India, Göbl’s work published in 1967, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der iranischen Hunnen in Baktrien und Indien* (Wiesbaden) remains unrivalled. In recent decades – not least because of the political unrest in Afghanistan and Pakistan – an enormous amount of new material has emerged that has decisively changed the situation described by Göbl. Here we will mention only the vast quantity of new copper coins that have been found, allegedly in Kashmir and neighbouring regions of Pakistan (KHAN [21] has provided an initial survey) and the Bactrian documents published by SIMS-WILLIAMS (36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43) and found in northern Afghanistan. It was these new finds that in 2007 finally led a group of Viennese scholars under Michael ALRAM to launch a project supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) in Austria with the goal of completely reviewing the coinage of the so-called “Iranian Huns” and their successors from the end of the 4th to the 8th century AD. The project is planned to last six years and should be completed by 2012.

A summarised, although in part outdated, overall view of research into the coinage and history of the Iranian Huns has been provided by ALRAM (2, 3) and SCHOTTKY (35). A richly illustrated summary of the history of Hunnic coinage, which includes a survey of the coin finds so far known along with the associated archaeological and literary evidence, can be found in ERRINGTON AND SARKOSH CURTIS (11). New aspects on the history of the Kidarites, Alchon, Hephthalites and Nezak Shahs has been provided by GRENET (14), who also submitted for discussion an altered chronological scheme for the Hunnic period in Central Asia and Gandhara. Deserving of special mention is the work of LA VAISSIÈRE (23, 24), who has studied in particular the literary and archaeological sources on the migration of the Huns. In his last study LA VAISSIÈRE (25) attempts to demonstrate that the invasion of Bactria by the Huns probably did not take place in individual waves – as suggested by Göbl – but rather in a single massive migratory movement that took place between ca. 350 and 370 AD, a scenario that is very much in line with the coinage. Subsequently, the individual clans settled in Sogdiana, Tokharistan and Bactria as well as in Gandhara and north-western India, ruling in part next to one another. In this context, reference must be made to a Brahmi inscription recently described by MELZER (29). It probably comes from the area of Talaqan to the east of Qunduz in northern Afghanistan (Tokharistan) and is dated with the year 68 of an unnamed era. According to MELZER this was perhaps the Laukika era, which would result in a date of A. D. 492/493. The inscription, which was written on the occasion of the erection of a stupa, was made during the rule of a certain Mehama, and Talaqan was part of his territory at that time. He bears the title of a *mahāṣāhi* and the inscription clearly identifies him as a contemporary of Khingila, Javukha and Toramana, whom it also names. These were Hunnic princes known to us from their coins and members of the clan of the Alkhan Huns. We also know that they ruled side by side in part. We meet a “Meyam, the king of the people of Kadag, the governor of the famous (and) prosperous king of kings Peroz” again in the Bactrian documents from Rob described by SIMS-WILLIAMS (42) and dating from the years 239 (= 461/462 AD; Document ea) and 252 (= 474/475 AD; Document ed) of the Bactrian era. Sims-Williams assigns the beginning of the Bactrian era to 223/224 AD. If this Meyam should be the person called *mahāṣāhi* Mehama in the Brahmi inscription, this shows in any case that the Hunnic tribes were allowed to settle in Bactria by the Sasanids, that their leaders held administrative positions in the Sasanian government, and that they recognised the sovereignty of the Sasanid king at least until 474/475 AD.

The development of early Alkhan coinage in the area of Kabul and Gandhara starting in the second half of the 4th century has been subjected to new analysis by VONDROVEC (46). New types of Hephthalite coins have been presented by ALRAM (1, 6). The centre of Hephthalite drachm minting was in Balkh. Typologically they are in line with those of Peroz, beginning at the latest after the defeat of the Sasanid king in 484 AD. A special issue (Type 287A according to ALRAM [1]) bears on the obverse a waist-length portrait of a prince clad in a caftan and holding a drinking cup. The Bactrian legends have increasingly been subjected to the process of decay, but on the better specimens *ēbo* or *ēbo-dalo* (?) can be clearly read, identifying them as “Hephthalite”.

Up to now no coins have been found from the Turkish tribe of Khalaj, whom we encounter, for example, in the Bactrian documents studied by SIMS-WILLIAMS (36) (Document T). Recently, however, ALRAM AND LO MUZIO (5) have presented two copper coins bearing on the reverse the Bactrian legend *xalag/sano*, which according to N. Sims-Williams can be viewed as an adjectival derivative of the Bactrian *xalaso*, the name of the Khalaj. The Chinese, Arab and Persian sources on the Khalaj, who strengthened their rule south of the Hindu Kush starting in

the second half of the 7th century in the area of Kapisi / Kabul and Zabulistan, have been extensively examined by INABA (18).

A remarkable find of coins, of which LEE AND SIMS-WILLIAMS (26) have written, was made in Tang-i Safedak (Yakaolong district of Bamian Province, Afghanistan): together with a Bactrian inscription related to a Buddhist stupa, a stone box was discovered containing a golden ring, a gemstone as well as a book, allegedly with 17 coins between its pages. The coins were copper drachms of Type 243B (cf. VONDROVEC [47]), which bore the Bactrian inscription *sēro* on the obverse. This legend corresponds to the title *sērotorko* = “Ser of the Turks”, which is found on several Bactrian documents, one of them dating from the year 692/693 AD (SIMS-WILLIAMS [36], Document S). The inscription found in Tang-i Safedak is dated 492 in the Bactrian Era (= 714/715 AD), providing an important chronological indication for the coins.

An interesting ensemble, most likely part of a treasure trove, was discovered in Gharwal (Wardak Province, Afghanistan) and examined by VONDROVEC (47). From the total of eight coins in the find, five are of Type 242 (according to Göbl 1967) and bear on the obverse the Bactrian legend *sēro*. They were likely commissioned by the same ruler as the coins found in Tang-i Safedak. The Gharwal find also contained four gold bracteates, which in part derive directly from other coins in circulation but in part have other motifs, such as the *lupa Romana* known from Roman coinage, for example, and probably served as jewellery. Such bracteates are known to us from finds in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan as well as Uzbekistan, and they were sometimes used as burial objects in China.

Tamghas play a special role in the coinage of Central Asia. They have been interpreted as symbols of clans or sovereignty and are found repeatedly in the coins of the Hunnic tribes as well. ILYASOV (17) has devoted profound study to them. Also indispensable to an understanding of the iconography of Hunnic coinage is the iconography of Gandhara sculpture, which was compiled by FACCENNA AND FILIGENZI (12). Mutual influences are repeatedly found there between the two art genres. Traditionally there are close connections between the images on coins and seals. Reference should be made in this regard to the studies by ALRAM (7), CALLIERI (8), CAZZOLI AND CERETI (9), LERNER (27) and SIMS-WILLIAMS (37, 41). Deserving particular mention is the description of a Hunnic ruler's seal (RAHMAN, GRENET AND SIMS-WILLIAMS [33]) that probably belonged to a Kidarite prince living in Samarkand who on the Bactrian legend calls himself “...lord Ularg, the king of the Huns, the great Kushan-shah, the Samarkandian, of the African (?) family (?)”.

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