

Coins of Arab Sind and Multan

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Abstract

The period from Muhammad Qasim's siege of Deybul (AD 711) to the conquest of Mahmud of Ghazni (before AD 1030) is the first time that Muslim rulers exercised more than temporary authority over a part of the subcontinent. The coinage of this period is particularly important to its reconstruction but the principle catalogues (Goron & Goenka; Album 2011) are sparsely illustrated which can make the identification of coins difficult. The Fitzwilliam museum in Cambridge has its collection online but the holdings are modest and not broadly representative. The museums of Rajasthan have digitised more than 7000 coins but the database while a powerful research tool is not user friendly. The British Museum has recently made its collection available online and this article is a brief introduction to that resource. Previous curators, Nicholas Lowick and Joe Cribb, made considerable advances in the study of these coins but much of this material has not previously been published. The digitisation was only possible as Joe Cribb kindly providing his unpublished research on the coins of Multan and Sind.

In AD 711 an Arab army led by Muhammad Qasim arrived in the kingdom of Sind and laid siege to the port of Deybul at the mouth of the Indus River. The reasons for this attack and its objectives are unclear. The Arab historian al-Baladhuri tells us that pirates operating out of Deybul had captured ships with Muslim passengers and that appeals to the king of Sind, Dahar, by al-Hajjaj, governor of Iraq, had been met with a claim the pirates were beyond his control. Al-Hajjaj ordered a punitive raid and after the first two were unsuccessful he sent a third commanded by Muhammad Qasim. This account has often been taken at face value but some caution is in order. Al-Baladhuri also describes many previous raids on Sind, reaching back to the time of the prophet, and there are suggestions that Sind had supported both the ailing Sasanian state and the kingdom of Makran in their wars with the Arabs. The piracy of Deybul may have been a pretext rather than the reason for the invasion.

Muhammad Qasim was spectacularly successful but the results ephemeral. Having seized Deybul he met Dahar's army and defeated him. Marching up the Indus he went on to capture Brahmanabad, capital of Sind, and then pushed further capturing the city of Multan, a kingdom distinct from Sind. However, in AD 715 a new Caliph replaced the governor of Iraq and Muhammad Qasim was recalled, and imprisoned. Hullishah, the son of Dahar, retook the kingdom of Sind and the Arab conquests were reduced to the port of Deybul and the lower part of the Indus. The Caliph 'Umar accepted Hullishah's conversion to Islam and recognised his kingdom. However the new governor soon organised a subsequent invasion and conquered Sind completely.

From the 720s until the early eleventh century the region of Sind would remain under Arab rule. At first it was ruled by governors, usually answering to the governor of Iraq. However, these governors frequently rebelled against

central authority and the position of Sind at the edge of the Arab world made it a desirable place for dissidents. For example, the Arab writer al-Tabari gives us an ambiguous picture of the governor Umar b. Hafs (AH 142 to AH 151). When the brothers Muhammad and Ibrahim fled to Sind fearing Abbassid persecution he recounts they were forced to leave because they were denounced to Umar. However, later he tells us that Muhammad dispatched his son Abdallah to Sind and that Umar protected him, and was in fact removed from his governorship for this reason (Vol. 28, p. 94; Vol. 29, pp. 51-56).

The difference between these accounts, one suggesting the governor was loyal to the Abbassids the other that he sheltered their enemies, probably reflects the internal politics of the Abbassid court at this period. Al-Tabari's source for the flight of Muhammad and Ibrahim, and thus the suggestion of loyalty, seems to derive from Umar's brother while the lengthy narrative of his aiding Abdallah comes from an Abbassid source – presumably trying to blacken the name of the governor.

Intrigues like this combined with the obvious advantages of Sind to dissidents would have made any governor too well established automatically suspect to the central authorities. Umar was in fact, at eight years (AD 760-8), the second longest serving governor in the province and this is probably why his copper coinage is relatively common (Fig. 1).

In the ninth century both Sind and Multan became independent kingdoms ruled by Muslim Amirs. Mansurah's last and successful act of rebellion occurred in AD 854 and the amirate of Multan probably became independent earlier. Arab chronicles contain less information about the region after it broke

away from central control. However, the Arab geographer's of the tenth century do record information about the two kingdoms. Masudi, a very well-travelled geographer visited the region AH 300/912-3 when Munnabih was ruling at Multan (Fig. 2), and Umar, son of Abd Allah, was ruling at Mansurah in Sind (Fig. 3). The coinage of Multan probably began first and shows the greatest accommodation to local traditions. One side of the coin has two Brahmi characters *ta* and *pa* either side of three dots representing the flames of an Iranian fire altar. This derives from a local coinage which was influenced by Sasanian designs. Beneath the design are Kufic characters with the name of the amir. On the reverse a Brahmi inscription names a god, usually *Sri Adivaraha*. Varaha was the boar incarnation of Vishnu and an important political symbol for Indian kings. The legend of him rescuing the Earth from the primordial ocean was equated with the king's duty to re-establish peace and prosperity in dark times.

The rule of the Amirs of Sind, descendants of Habbâr b. al-Aswad after whom they are often known as the Habbarids, lasted until the early eleventh century. The rulers of Multan were deposed by an Ismaili or Qarmatian sect in the middle to late part of the tenth century. Where the rulers of Multan had accommodated the Hindu population and adopted habits of Indian kings, issuing coins with the names of Hindu gods and preserving the famous Sun temple in the city, the new rulers issued more traditionally Islamic coins naming the Fatimid Caliph (Fig. 4) and Jalam Ibn Shaibân destroyed the temple. The independence of Multan was brought to an end in AD 1005 when Mahmud of Ghazni's armies sacked the city. Mahmud's chroniclers are silent on the fate of the amir of Sind.

There is less evidence of religious innovation in Sind than at Multan. Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries survived the invasion – though some were either damaged or destroyed as evidenced by a linga at the port of Deybul symbolically incorporated into a mosque. Buddhism, principally represented by the Sammatiya sect before the Arab invasion had disappeared by the eleventh century, for reasons which are still unclear (for a discussion see MacClean, 1989). The coinage of Sind though it shared the same weight standard as that at Multan was more traditional in its design, with an Arabic inscription on both sides. It is possible that Sind avoided direct conquest by Mahmud's forces though the replacement of the Amirs of Sind coins by a similar type of Ghaznavid coin, known as a Qanhari dirham (Fig. 5) sometime before AD 1030, suggests they may have lost their independence. However, there is some contrary evidence. The coins of Ahmad continue to be issued with additional inscriptions added, initially just the title 'izz but Album (2011) also reports the inscription *al-qa'im bi-amr Allah* on some (Fig. 6) suggesting they were issued during the caliphate of Al-Qa'im (AH 422-67).

The British Museum Collection

The British Museum has an ongoing process of digitising its collection for public access. The collection is accessible at www.britishmuseum.org/research.aspx?ref=header. Material relating to this period is accessible by using the 'Advanced Search' function and entering 'Arab Sind' under 'Cultures/period/dynasties'. Coins can also be searched by the name of the issuer and by the reference number as given in Goron & Goenka (2001).

The collection has 363 objects. Twenty of these coins are issues of the Amirs of Multan, and twelve are coins of Multan issued in the name of the Fatimid Caliphs following the Ismaili/Qarmatian seizure of power, previously published by Nicholas Lowick (1983). Two coins acquired with coins of Sind and Multan are Qanhari dirhams of the period of Farrukh-zād (AD 1053-59) or Ibrāhim (AD 1059-99), while seven are copper coins of the governor 'Umar ibn Hafṣ. In addition the museum has a range of Qanhari dirhams otherwise acquired, about 45 in total. They can be found amongst the coins of the other Ghaznavids by searching for the period/culture 'Ghaznavid dynasty'. The vast majority of other coins are issues of the Amirs of Sind, mostly silver but some copper. Of these, 74 are from the India Office Loan Collection (these have a registration number beginning 'IOLC'). The IOLC is a permanent loan from the British Library of coins that had been received in the nineteenth century and were probably collected by Charles Masson at the site of Begram in the early nineteenth century.

The first coin, a copper of the governor 'Abū Ja'far 'Umar b. Ḥafṣ was received in 1847. It was purchased by an agent of the museum, John Doubleday, amongst other Islamic coins. The first coin which has some provenance, a coin of the amir Ahmad, was received in 1860 as part of the collection of William Hay who had fought in the first Afghan war and collected coins from the site of Bamiyan. The museum continued to receive coins as parts of other collections. This included 18 coins of the Amirs of Sind received from James Burgess the Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India. Burgess had collected a variety of coins in his tour of Kathiawad and Kachh in 1874-5 which were discussed in the second volume of his second volume of the

Archaeological Survey of Western India by Edward Thomas, these eighteen almost certainly were collected then. Other notable sources include two coins from the Government of the Central Provinces (covering parts of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, and Maharashtra) said to come from finds in 1906-7, and some received in 1912 as part of the collection of Arthur Henry McMahon who served in Baluchistan. There was then a substantial gap before various acquisitions in the 1970s to early 2000s including a group of nine coins which had probably formed part of a parcel in trade. A parcel of qanhari dirhams including one Mahmud 13 Mas'ud and one Khwarazm Shah coin, was acquired in this period and is numbered '1974,1111'. The coins of the Amirs of Multan were largely unknown until the late twentieth century. The British Museum had two examples, from the collections L. White-King and Alexander Cunningham, both unattributed. In 1997 it acquired 49 coins in trade whose provenance was unknown but included three crude examples of Ahmad. The bulk of coins either lack any information about how they were acquired or came as a group from the India Office which had received them from the India Museum.

All of the coins in the British Museum collection have been photographed and where possible a reading of the inscription is provided. Photographs have been taken with the coins lit from above which tends to produce the best results but for many of the amirs of Sind coins a second photograph is provided with raking light which may aid in the reading of the inscription.

It is notable that there is no evidence of any of the British Museum coins actually coming

from Sind or Multan. Likely most of them came from Baluchistan, Afghanistan, and northwestern India (Gujurat being strongly implicated), and therefore represent not the sort of coins which circulated in the territories themselves but those which were exported. This seems to be true of all the public collections so far used in studies and probably of most coins in trade. The result is a significant distortion of the numismatic evidence which is significantly more complete for the Amirs of Sind who ruled between AH 280 and Mahmud of Ghazni's conquests. The copper coinage, probably very substantial of the governors and the amirs is quite rare precisely because copper coins did not travel far. The silver coinage of Multan and the early silver of Sind are comparatively rare though there is no reason to think they were originally issued in small numbers.

Some useful searches for the BM collection

'Ghaznavid dynasty' in the advanced search period culture field will return all Ghaznavid coins in the database including qanhari dirhams issued in or similar to those of Sind.

'Arab Sind' in the period culture field will return issues of Amirs of Sind, Amirs of Multan, Fatimid rulers of Multan

The first part of an acquisition code entered into the search box which consists of a year and a four digit code separated by a comma will return all of the coins acquired together. Some useful examples of searches like this are:

'1980,0917' the Fatimid rulers of Multan published by Nicholas Lowick.

'1997,0705' the bulk of the museums Amirs of Multan coins acquired in 1997.

'1889,0505' coins received from James Burgess, probably from Gujrat.

'1996,0609' a parcel received in trade of Amirs of Sind.

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Fig. 1. A Copper Coin of the Governor 'Umar Ibn Hafis (OR.1654)

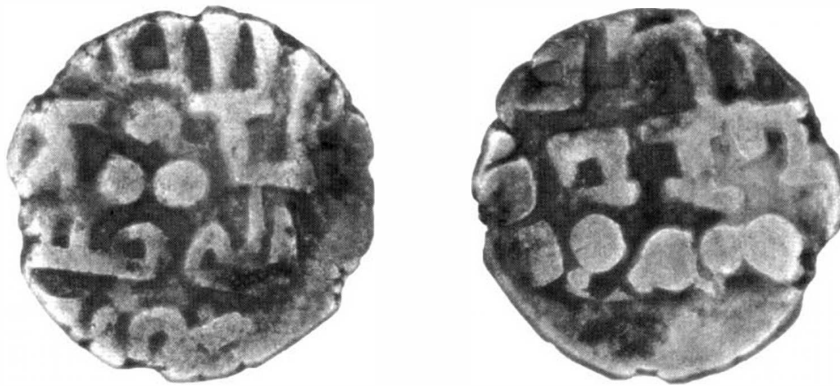


Fig. 2. Silver coin of Munnabih, Amir of Multan (1997,0705.64)

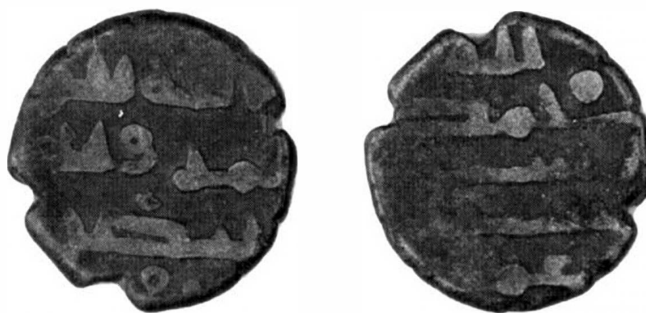


Fig. 3. Silver coin of Umar, Amir of Sind (OR.1644)



Fig. 4. Silver coin in the name of the Caliph al-Mu'izz from Multan (1980,0717.2)



Fig. 5. Qanhari Dirham of Mahmud (IOC.1413)



Fig. 6. Coin of Ahmad with additional inscription (1997,0705.97)