BILINGUAL COINS OF SULAYMAN: A SAMID AMIR OF MEDIEVAL MULTAN
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This paper presents the first confirmed coins of Amir Sulayman, a medieval ruler of Multan, and provides details of his hitherto unreported biruda: the local (Indic) royal title taken by the Muslim Amirs of Multan and inscribed on their bilingual coinage in the local regional script.

The city of Multan is identified with the ancient city of Kaspapuros mentioned by early Hellenic sources, such as Hecateus, Herodotus and Ptolemy (Cunningham 1875: 232). The name Multan is derived from the Sanskrit name Mula-sthana, where Mula is an appellation of the Sun god Surya/ Aditya/ Mitra (Cunningham 1875: 234). The reference to the solar deity is based on Multan's famous ancient temple of Aditya, which brought devotees from all over India and enjoyed the patronage of numerous ruling dynasties during the medieval period. After the Muslim takeover of Multan in the 8th century CE, the temple continued to be a center of pilgrimage and devotion (Cunningham 1875: see Multan).

Historically, Multan is portrayed as a rich and prosperous city. Xuanzang, the Chinese Buddhist missionary who visited India in 641 CE, describes Multan as a city that houses the famous Sun temple to which the kings and noble families of all of India pay hommage and make offerings of gems and precious stones (Beal 1911: 152). That was one of the reasons that the temple housed a huge amount of gold and treasure accumulated over time. These resources fell into Muslim hands once Multan came under Muslim rule as a result of Muslim-Arabic conquest. The amount of treasure that the Amirs of Multan were actively engaged in creating a novel and hybrid political and cultural identity for their rulers, they may have had a good reason to adopt the royal title of a local Muslim subject and could have helped establish trust within the regional trade networks, of which Multan formed an important hub. Whatever the case maybe, these coins paint a picture of a multicultural and religiously diverse Multan. By adopting local titles rooted in Indian religious mythology and history, the Amirs of Multan were actively engaged in creating a novel and hybrid political and cultural identity for their rulers, which is a unique example of religious and cultural syncretism in the medieval Indian encounter of Islam with the Indic religions (Flood 2009).

The openness of the Samid Amirs of Multan to adopt Indic titles and then subsequently have them inscribed in the local language (and script) on their official coinage also supports the hypothesis that the Amirs of Multan were autonomous, i.e. they did not have a strong allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate. This point is further borne out by the coinage of other contemporary Indian Muslim emirates, such as the Hababak amirs of Mansurah and the Ma'dani amirs of Makran, 4 which also issued dammas, but whose coins do not carry local symbols or textual legends.

Coinage of Amir Sulayman

Coins issued by Amir Sulayman are listed by Album (2011: 162), though the listing does not provide any details about the coins' legends. Fishman and Todd rule out the existence of any coins of Sulayman, and attribute the previously reported coins as being based on an erroneous reading of the stylised Sharada word Sri as Sulayman (Fishman and Todd, 2018: 313). The two specimens we report in this paper clearly show the name of the issuing Amir as Sulayman, written in Kufic script on the reverse (see Figs. 1-2). The coins are part of a private personal collection and belong to a hoard that contained approximately 800 to 1,000 dammas. Unfortunately, the exact find-spot and the hoard composition cannot be determined. However, to the best of our knowledge, the find-spot is in northern Baluchistan, Pakistan.
The above two dammas of Amir Sulayman adhere to the general layout of the bilingual series. The obverse has the local title or biruda of Amir Sulayman; composed of only four letters or aksharas – Sri Bha ra tha – it is shorter than most other coins in the series. The epigraphic details of each akshara are presented below:

1. **Sri (श्री)**
   
The first akshara can be clearly identified as Sri (श्री), a common honorific that was widely used on coins and is still used for addressing famous and prominent personalities. It has a broad spectrum of meanings, ranging from being of noble descent to denoting wealth and prosperity or auspiciousness. On Sulayman’s coins, Sri is inscribed in a form similar to other coins in the bilingual series, such as the coins of Hassan II, Ahmed II (for comparison see Fig. 6c) and on certain issues of Munabbih I and Asad (Fishman and Todd 2018: 274-328).

2. **Bha (भ)**
   
The coins of Sulayman are the only ones to use the akshara Bha in the entire Multan series, which makes it difficult to correlate its construction with coins of other rulers. There is a possibility of reading this letter as Ha. However, based on epigraphic evidence from inscriptions in Sharada and proto-Sharada, a similar style of constructing Bha, with the right arm forming a downward flourish, is found in a number of inscriptions, such as the Bajnath temple inscription (c. 804 CE, Bühler 1959: pl. V) and the Bakhshali manuscript (c. 800 CE, Sarasvati 1979: 7). The construction of Bha is similar to the so-called ‘acute angled’ script that was in use in northwestern India, including Kashmir, and Madhyadesha (Bühler 1959: 68; Deambi 1982: 33). The ‘acute angled’ script, also known as the kutila or sidhamatrika script, can be seen as a precursor to Sharada; it matured later around the tenth century and came to be the de-facto script used in Kashmir. Furthermore, the identification of the second akshara with Bha is also supported by the roughly contemporary coinage of the Utpala rulers of Kashmir. Figs. 3-5 show coins of Abhimanyu Gupta (ruled 958-972 CE), Tirbhuvana Gupta (ruled 973-974), and Bhima Gupta (ruled 974-79 CE). In each case, the Bha closely matches the second letter on Sulayman’s coins.

With the downward looped flourish on its right, the second akshara could be confused with the letter Ha. In the early western Brahmi and proto-Sharada scripts, Ha is also constructed with a downward loop on the right. Fortunately, a number of Multani Amirs adopted birudas that contain the letter Ha. For example, this letter is seen on the issues of Asad, Munabbih I and Hassan II, who adopted titles based on the man-boar avatar of Lord Vishnu, Varaha. The akshara Ha is also found on the coins of Amir Ahmed II (biruda: Sri Ahamadi) and Amir Munabbih II (biruda: Sri Mihira Deva). These coins are shown in Fig. 6, and the construction of Ha can be compared with that of the second akshara on the coins of Sulayman. As can be observed, the overall construction of Ha in Samid coinage is more angular than that of the second akshara on the coins of Sulayman. Furthermore, there is no continuing stroke or a tail on the left of the main stem of Ha, while Bha clearly has a distinct stroke to the left of the main stem. The left tail is similarly more pronounced in the Bha seen on the coins of Kashmiri rulers (see Figs. 3-5).
Indian ruler to have adopted this title. Unfortunately, there are no official records or surviving textual sources that can explain its usage. Bharata at first can be seen as a reference to the legendary emperor Bharata from the epic *Mahabharata*. However, the name on the coins is clearly Bharatha, as opposed to Bharata. It is unlikely that this is a transcription error. According to Harry Falk, such an error could be expected in the southern languages, such as Telugu or Tamil, but cannot be expected in northern inscriptions. However, if we look at the meanings of this word, we find that Bharatha is a masculine noun that means king, world-protector and also Agni (fire) (Monier-Williams 1899: 747), and that Bharata is also a name of Agni (Monier-Williams 1899: 747). Thus, we cannot rule out the possibility that the epithet Bharatha did indeed refer to the king Bharata. Further, relating to the Aditya temple of Multan, it is worth noting the close relationship between Agni and Surya (Aditya). In the Agnihotri ritual, for example, practised twice each day, the morning ritual offering is to Surya and the evening ritual offering is to Agni (Bodewitz 1976). Thus, both avenues of our inquiry seem to have some validity.

**Chronological placement**

In the absence of hoard data, it is difficult to assess the exact time period of the issues of Sulayman. There are no historical sources that list the order of succession of the Samid Amirs of Multan, the only exception being the rule of Munabbih I, which is dated to around AH 300 (912-13 CE), when the Arab historian and geographer *Masudi* visited India (Flood 2009: 19). However, the issues of Sulayman can be dated using the overall design of his coins, inscription styles and weight, following the trends identified by Fishman and Todd (2018).

As far as the overall fabric of the coin is concerned, the coins of Sulayman are markedly similar to the coins of Hassan II (Fig. 6b) and Ahmed II (Fig. 6c). Both these rulers are the immediate successors (in that order) of Asad whose reforms lowered the weight and size of the bilingual *dammas* (Fishman and Todd 2018: 293-299). Based on the weight trends of the bilingual series (Fishman and Todd 2018: 323, fig. 8.44), the coins of Sulayman, with an average weight of 0.49 g, can be grouped with the post-reform issues of Hassan II and Ahmed II. Furthermore, based on the average weight alone, the coins of Sulayman can be placed before the coins of Hassan II, making Sulayman the immediate successor of Asad.

The placement of Sulayman’s coins, based on their average weight, is further supported by the style in which the *akshara* ‘Sri’ is inscribed. Fishman and Todd note that the style of *Sri* changed from the old style (Fig. 6a), having two bottom horizontal lines, to the new style (Fig. 6c) during the late coinage of Asad (2018: chapter 8.7). The style continued unchanged through the issues of Hassan II, Ahmed II, and the early coins of Munabbih I. Since the inscription style of *Sri* is identical to the coins of Hassan II and Ahmed II, the order of succession of Sulayman can be safely placed after Asad and before Munabbih I. Since we have a date for Munabbih I of 912-913 CE, the date for Sulayman would then be in the late 9th century.

**Conclusion**

This paper reports the coins of Amir Sulayman that were issued as part of the bilingual coinage of the medieval Amirs of Multan. A reading of the new Amir’s *biruda* provides new insights about the influence of local languages and culture on the coins of Multan and the efforts made by the Arab Amirs of Multan to assimilate within the cultural, political, and religious landscape of medieval India. Based on the overall fabric of the new coins, their epigraphic details, and average weight, the reign of Sulayman can be placed immediately after the reign of Asad. The chronological placement should be regarded as tentative and requires more specimens in order to attain statistical significance.
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Sources of images

PC Private collection
KS Karan Singh collection

References

1. Some historians identify the city of Kasrāpuros with the region of Kashmir (Cunningham 1871: 232).
2. With the exception of the single bilingual gubernatorial issue of Unayna bin Musa al-Tamimi (758–760 CE) (Fishman and Todd 2018: 102-103).
3. This Sanskrit-isation of Muhammad as Madhumati is supported by the Chinchanı Rashtrakuta inscription of Saka 848 (926 CE) (Flood 2009: 21-22).
4. Dammas bearing the name of Amir Eesa are attributed to Eesa Bin Ma’dan of Makran (Fishman and Todd 2018: 129).
5. Personal communication of Pankaj Tandon with Harry Falk.

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