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## 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: 129).<sup>1</sup> *Kaspapuros* is also mentioned on Indo-Scythian coins and inscriptions (Cunningham 1875: 129). The local name of Multan is mentioned as *Kashyapa-pura* after Maharishi Kashyap, one of the seven *saptarishis* of the Rigveda, who is considered the city's founder (Cunningham 1871: 232). The name Multan is derived from the Sanskrit name *Mula-sthana*, where *Mula* is an appellation of the Sun god Surya/ Aditya/ Mithra (Cunningham 1871: 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 homage 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 Muhammad bin Qasim's Indian campaign that began in 712 CE. According to contemporary Arabic historical sources, such as *Istakhri* and *Masudi*, the amount of treasure that fell into Muslim hands compelled them to name Multan as *Farj Bait al-Zahab* ('the frontier house of gold') (Elliot 1879: 14). Impressed by the riches of Multan, Masudi (erroneously) reports that the name Multan means '*meadows of gold*' (Elliot 1879: 36).

Under the influence of the Caliphate, Multan retained its status as one of the main urban centres of the Caliphate ('frontier-') province of Sind. In the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, a locally-settled family of Quraishi descent wrested control of Multan from the official Caliphate governor and asserted its independence (Rose 1997: see Qureshi, 260-261). This dynasty, known as the Amirs of Multan, claimed descent from the progeny of Ghalib, one of the ancestors of Prophet Muhammad. The dynastic origins have been traced to Sama bin Lu'ay bin Ghalib (Mubarakpuri 1967: 169-171), whose name gave the name Samid to the dynasty. Later, the dynasty was also known by the name of one of its more prominent rulers, Banu Munabbih (Asimov et al. 1992: 302-303).

### Coinage of the Amirs of Multan

The Amirs of Multan issued silver coins struck to the local standard of *damma* or Qanhari *dirham*, as opposed to the standard Caliphate *dirham*. Initially, their coin legends were in Arabic, but, starting sometime in the middle of the ninth century, they began to issue a series of bilingual *dammās*, with Sanskrit (or Prakrit) legends inscribed in the regional script on the obverse and Arabic legends inscribed in Kufic script on the reverse. Whereas a number of experts identify the regional script as Sharada, the time period of these issues pre-dates the formation of the actual Sharada script (or

Sharada proper (Bühler 1959: 76-77)), which is dated to have developed from the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the early part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE (Deambi 1982: 24-28). The regional Indic script on these coins can be labeled as proto-Sharada or the *Sidhamatrika* of Al-Beruni (Bühler 1959: 68). The bilingual Multani *dammās* constitute the earliest known 'Islamic' bilingual (Arabic-Sanskrit/Prakrit) coinage in medieval India.<sup>2</sup>

The obverse legend on the bilingual coins carries the local (Indic) royal title adopted by the issuing Amir in proto-Sharada. Some of these titles are constructed by Sanskrit-ising the Arabic name of the Amir, such as *Madhumati* for Muhammad<sup>3</sup> or *Ahamadi* for Ahmed. However, other titles used on the Multani coins are either rooted in local religious mythology or adopted from the royal titles of famous Indian monarchs. For example, the royal title of Mihira Bhoja I of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, *Shrimad Adi Varaha*, was adopted by two of the Multani Amirs: *Shrimad Varaha* by Amir Asad and *Sri Adi Varaha* by his son Amir Munabbih I (Fishman & Todd 2018: 275). The adoption of royal titles based on the man-boar avatar of Lord Vishnu by the Amirs of Multan is a unique example of inter-religious acceptance and syncretism. The reverse design has a three-dot motif in the center surrounded by the phrase *Sri Tapa* in Sharada letters, which was a carryover from the previous indigenous coinage of the region. The name of the issuing Amir is inscribed below the three-dot motif in Kufic script, prefixed with *Lillah* ('for Allah'). The short Arabic inscription conveys the message of the issuing authority being subservient to the supreme ruler, i.e., Allah with whom rests all power (*Quran*: 65(12)) and who has the ownership of all that is between the heavens and earth (*Quran*: 4(126)), including the coins struck by the Amir.

The use of local political and religious elements on these *dammās* can also be seen as a device employed by the issuing amirs to impart legitimacy and a local character to their coinage. This may have led to a general acceptance of the coinage among their majority non-Muslim subjects 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 rule, 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 Habbarid amirs of Mansurah and the Ma'dani amirs of Makran,<sup>4</sup> which also issued *dammās*, 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 *dammās*. 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.



Fig. 1. Silver damma of Amir Sulayman, 0.50 g, 9.2-9.9 mm (PC)



Fig. 2. Silver damma of Amir Sulayman, 0.47 g, 9.1-9.6 mm (PC)

Obverse: Proto-Sharada legend *Sri Bharatha*

Reverse: Three dot motif in centre, with Brahmi legend *Sri* (above) *Ta* (left) and *pa* (right); Arabic legend in Kufic script below *لله سليمان* (*Lillah Sulayman*, 'for Allah (issued by) Sulayman')

The above two *dammās* 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 Baijnath 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 *kutīla* 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.



Fig. 3. Bronze stater of Abhimanyu Gupta, Obverse: Goddess Lakshmi surrounded by Sharada legend, 'A' on the left and 'bhima(nyu)' to the right (KS)



Fig. 4. Bronze stater of Tribhuvana Gupta, Obverse: Goddess Lakshmi surrounded by Sharada legend, 'Tri' on the left and 'bhuvana' to the right (KS)



Fig. 5. Bronze stater of Bhima Gupta, Obverse: Goddess Lakshmi surrounded by Sharada legend, 'Bhi' on the left and 'ma Gu' to the right (KS)

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).



(a)



Fig. 6. Silver dammas of the Amirs of Multan that have the akshara 'ha/hi': (a) Asad, (b) Hassan II, (c) Ahmed II, (d) Munabbih I, and (e) Munabbih II (PC)

### 3. Ra (ॠ)

The construction of *ra* is similar to other coins in the series, and can be compared to the inscriptions on the coins of Asad, Munabbih, and Fahad. The mature Sharada script (including the modern Sharada alphabet) does not have this lower tail of *ra*; nevertheless, this construction is seen in the contemporary northwestern inscriptions that use proto-Sharada and the 'acute angled' scripts (Khaw 2015: 116-121).

### 4. Tha (थ)

In the entire bilingual series of Multani dammas, only the *biruda* of Sulayman contains *tha*. Once again, the identity of this *akshara* can be established by looking at contemporary inscriptions and manuscripts. Both the Baijnath temple inscriptions (c. 804 CE, Bühler 1959: pl. V) and the Bakhshali manuscript (c. 800 CE, Sarasvati 1979: 7) have similar styles for *tha*. However, the epigraphic style on Sulayman's coins is closer to the Bodhgaya inscription of Mahanaman (c. 588/589 CE, Bühler 1959: pl. IV) and the Lakhmandal temple inscriptions (c. 600 C.E., Bühler 1959: pl. IV).

Harry Falk, in a private email, suggested that this letter might represent the number 20. However, in the context of the coin legend, this is unlikely. No other Samid coin contains a number (presumably representing a date) on it.

### The meaning of Bharatha

In order to find the meaning of the *biruda*, we have two possible avenues to initiate our search: a) historically prominent figures who had adopted the same title, and b) a possible connection between *Bharatha* and the solar deity Aditya whose famous temple was in Multan. The adoption of *Bharatha* as a royal title is quite unprecedented in Indian history; Amir Sulayman may be the only

Indian ruler to have adopted this title. Unfortunately, there are no official records or surviving textual sources that can explain its usage. *Bharatha* 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup> 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 *Kaspapuros* 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 Chinchani 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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