

A few Coins of Muslim Rulers Preserved in Tezpur District Museum

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Introduction

The District Museum at Tezpur in Sonitpur district of Assam has altogether 10 (ten) coins of Muslim rulers in its collections. Some of these coins were procured from local people, and some others reached the Museum because of the discovery of new hoard of coins. Once, an Assam Govt. Official of the Department of Tourism had purchased a few coins and donated them to the museum. The collected coins were issued by two royal houses—(1). The Mughal emperors and (11) The Bengal Sultanate. The coins of the Mughals may be sub-divided into two groups – (i) the coins of the early Mughal emperors and (ii) the coins of the later Mughal rulers. Of the early Mughal emperors there are only two coins. One coin was issued by Akbar and the other was left by Shah Jahan. The coins of the later Mughal rulers include (i) Three coins of Mohammad Shah; (ii) one coin of Ahmad Shah; and (iii) one coin of Shah Alam II. The rest three are the coins of the Bengal Sultanate left by the Ilias Shah dynasty (1339-1406 and again 1442-1481).¹ Of these three coins, one records the name Shamauddin Ilias Shah (1342-56) and the rest two bear the name Sikandar Ilias Shah (1357-89).

As hinted at the beginning, most of the coins were collected locally. The coin of Akbar was collected from one Sri Jogen Saikia of Lehugaon of Biswanath Charali in Sonitpur district of Assam. The coin of Shajahan reached the Museum through the courtesy of Sri Madhab Ch. Das of Tezpur town. Sri Das also offered the coins of Shah Alam II. The coins of Mohammad Shah and Ahmad Shah were collected from Md. Berajuddin Ahmed, the then Superintendent of Police, Lakhimpur district of Assam. Some time in the middle of the year 1992, a hoard of coins was discovered at Dhakuakhania village, about 7 kms. From the district headquarters of Lakhimpur, the police had rescued the hoard and offered the coins to the Museum. The coins of Shamsuddin Ilias Shah and Sikandar Ilias Shah were donated to the Museum by Sri Hem Saikia, the then Deputy Director

of Tourism, Sonitpur district of Assam. Reportedly, Sri Saikia had purchased the coins from one gentleman of Bhalukpung in West Kameng District in Arunachal Pradesh.

The coins were issued by the rulers of Islamic faith. These coins usually bear Arabic/Persian script.² The texts of the inscriptions normally contain the first Kalima of Islamic faith, the titles of the emperors recording the devotion to the religion, the declaration of the prosperity of the kingdom and finally the mint names and the date (mostly in Hijri era). The texts of the coins mostly bear certain terms and expressions according to a set patterns.

(1) Coin of Akbar

Silver, round shaped,

2.00 cms., 11.2000 gms.

Obv. Allah Akbar Jalle Jalalah

Rev. Azar Ilahi Zarb Ahmadabad

(2) Coin of Shah Jahan:

Silver, round shaped,

2.01 cms. ; 11.300 gms.

Obv. (Within square) – the first kalima of Islamic faith

(in the margin) – the names of the four great Caliphs

Rev. (Within square) – Shahabuddin Mohammad Saheb qiran

(in the margin) – Sani Zarb.

(3) Three Coins of Mohammad Shah³

Silver, round shaped,

200 cms. each; 10.500 gms., 11.000 gms. and 11.300 gms. respectively.

Obv. Mohammad Shah Badshah Gaji

Rev. Manus (associated) Maimanat (prosperity), Sanah (year) Julus (period), Zarb (mint).

(4) Coin of Ahmad Shah

Silver, round shaped,

2.00 cms., 10.720 gms.

Obv. Ahmad Shah Badshah Gaji

Rev. Manus – Maimanat – Sanah – Julus – Zarb.

(5) Coin of Badshah Shah Alam II⁴

Silver, round shaped,
2.01 cms., 5.700 gms.

Obv. Sikkah Zad Bar haft kishwar Sayah Fazl Allah
(Struck coin in the Seven climes,
the shadow of the Divine Favour)
Hami Din Mohammad Shah Alam

(The defender of the faith of Mohammad, the emperor Shah Alam)

Rev. Manu – Maimanat – Sanah 16 – Julus – Zarb Murshidabad
(The coin associated with prosperity was issued from Murshidabad in the 16th regnal year).

Bengal Sultanate

(6) Coin of Shamsuddin Ilias Shah⁵ (1342-56).

Silver, round shaped,
2.03 cms., 10.500 gms.

Obv. Al Sultan Al Adil
Shamsud – duniya waldin Abul Al
Mujafar Ilias Shah Sultan
(The generous Sultan Abul Al Mujafar Shah)

Rev. Sikandar Al Sani Yamin Al Khilafat
Amir Al Momenin
(The second Alexander, the right hand of the battle of Khilafat
the leader of the faithful).

(7) Coin of Sikandar Ilias Shah⁶ (1357 –89)

(i) Silver, round shaped,
2.05 cms., 11.000 gms.

Obv. Al Wasiq be taid Al Rahman Abu al Mujahid
Sikandar Shah Ibn Ilias Shah Sultan
(The truster in the support of the merciful, the warrior in the
path of Islam, the emperor Sikandar Shah Ibn Ilias Shah)⁷

Rev. Yamin Khalif Allah Nasir Amir al Momenin Gaus al Islam wa
al Muslemin Khaldath Khilafat
(Margin)-9

(The successor of the messenger of God, the leader of the faithful, helper of Islam and the Muslims and a supporter of Khilafat)

- (ii) Silver, round shaped,
2.05 cms., 11.500 gms.

Obv. Yamin – Khalif Allah Nasir Amir al Momenin

(The right hand of God's Messenger and the leader of the faithful)

(in the margin –mint name and date).⁸

Rev. Al Mujahid Fi Sabil Al Rahman

Shah Sikandar Ibn Ilias Shah Al Sultan

(The warrior on the path of the Merciful, Shah Sikandar Ibn Ilias Shah Sultan).

On the Legend of the Coins

Upto the first 29 years of his reign (i.e., upto A.D 1585) Akbar issued Kalima type coins i.e., on the obverse, the Kalima and the names of four great Kalifas and on the reverse, the name of the emperor with or without the titles.⁹ These coins followed the style of the Sharuki¹⁰ Coins of his predecessors Babar and Humayun respectively. But in the present coin of Akbar, the Kalima and the names of the Kalifas are abolished. The titles of the emperor were also ousted. Significantly, the name of the emperor is retained in expressions having pun – Allah Akbar (god is great and Akbar the great). The avoidance of Kalima and the names of the Khalifas seem to speak of Akbar's liberalism in religion. In the later part his reign, the emperor probably became more liberal in respect of religion. The coin of Shajahan referred to here, does not bring any new information. However, the Kalima type coin was issued by him during the first five years of his reign.¹¹ The inscriptions of the coins of Mohammad Shah and Ahmad Shah carry the conventional practice. One side of the coins bears the name of the emperor with the title Badshah Gaji, and the other side contains the expressions–Manus–Maqimanat–Sanah–Julus–Zarb. Both the rulers adopted the same formula introduced by their predecessor Aurengzeb.¹² The coin of Shah Alam II, on the obverse showing his devotion to religion, bears beautiful literary expression. This is coined on the basis of the ideas of the texts of the coins of Akbar, Jahangir and also the coins of Shahjahan issued from Shahjahanbad (the New Delhi that he built in 1048).¹³ The text on the reverse is mere imitation. The coins of the Bengal Sultanate

recorded in this paper are taken to be noteworthy. The inscriptions on the coins are rich both in ideas and expressions. The terms-Amir-al-Momenin, Yamin-al-Khilafat, Gaus-al-Islam state the deep respect of the Sultans for the religion both in mind and in action.

Concluding Observations

As to how and when the coins reached the find spots are precisely not known. The find spots of the coins as already stated were neither occupied by the Mughals nor subjugated by the Bengal Sultans. The coins were not used in the region of discovery. They probably reached the spots alongwith the coin collectors.

Notes and References

1. Vide P.L. Gupta, *Coins* (New Delhi, 1996), p. 121.
2. Sometimes there appear exceptions. Sultan Mahmud's coins issued from India are bilingual in nature. One side of the coins bear Arabic legend, and the other side contains Sanskrit language in Sarada script. See Danish Moin – *Coins of the Delhi Sultanates* (Nasik, 1999), p. 5.
3. Danish Moin and Md. Rehan Ahmad, research associates of the Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies at Nasik (Maharashtra) after the observations of the stampages of the coins opined that the Britishers issued the coins in the name of Mohammad Shah.
4. To Md. Rohan Ahmad, the British issued the coin in the name of Badshah Shah Alam II.
5. All the three coins of Bengal Sultanate referred to in the paper bear toghra style of writing. Toghra is the common script of the coins of the Sultans of Bengal. See Dilip Rajger *Standard Catalogue of Sultanate Coins of India*, (Bombay, n.d.), pp. 9-40.
6. The texts of the two coins of the ruler are different, and therefore, they are shown separately.
7. The idea is developed on the basis of the translation of P.L. Gupta. See *Coins*, pp. 122-123.
8. The text at the margin is not distinct. Dr. P.L. Gupta states twenty mints of the coins of the Bengal Sultanate See Idem, *Coins*, p. 124.
9. *Ibid.* pp. 146-51.

10. Sharuki coins were first introduced by Taimurid ruler Shah Rukh, and therefore, these types of coin are called Sharuki coins.
11. In the 4th year of his reign, certain changes appear in his copper coins, but not in the silver coins. See Gupta's *Coins*, p. 156.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 157. I had an opportunity to handle the silver coins of Aurangzeb during my stay at the Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies at Nasik in Maharashtra.
13. See Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-55.