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DIRHAM MEDALLION OF MANSUR IBN NUH

The numismatic collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (Great Britain) contains a silver dirham (diameter 33 mm, weight 11.04 g), issued in 358/968-69 in Bukhara by the Samanid amir Mansur I ibn Nuh (reigned 350 – 365/961 – 976). Its obverse (Av) shows a portrait of the ruler facing right with two Pahlavi inscriptions on the sides. The right inscription reads *MLK'n MLK'*, which means “King of Kings,” i.e. Shahanshah, and the left one reads *GDH 'pzw*t, which means “Victory, increase in territory.” On the reverse side (Rv) in the field there is an Arabic inscription in 6 rows in the shape of a square, imitating a square. In it, after the usual Sunni creed, the name of the caliph is given, and then the name of Mansur ibn Nuh with the royal title of al-Malik. The circular legend provides the release data: “This dirham was struck in Bukhara in the year three hundred and fifty-eight” (Fig. 1).

It is assumed that the dirham of Mansur ibn Nuh depicts a portrait of one of the pre-Islamic ancestors of the Samanids. There is a hole on the edge of the coin, indicating that the owner of this coin wore it on his chest as a medallion in memory of his ancestors.

Of particular interest is the portrait of the ruler, which reveals similarities not with the Iranian, but with the Turkic tradition of portrait art. The anthropological type of his face is a mixture of Caucasian and Mongoloid features with a predominance of the latter. There is a protruding bone in the upper part of the face, which is typical for Mongoloid Qipchaqs. The eye is large, elongated, almond-shaped with a very swollen eyelid. The nose is straight and convex in the upper part, characteristic of the Western Turks, in particular the Oghuz Turks of Khorasan. On the head is a specific headdress, vaguely reminiscent of a complex crown.

But the main feature of the portrait is his specific hairstyle – a coarsely braided braid hangs from under the crown and falls behind his back. This hairstyle was characteristic of the Turkic nobility of the era of the Turkic Qaghanate, but is not found in the iconography of either the Sassanid or the Hephthalite coins. Another feature of the portrait of the ruler depicted on the coin of Mansur ibn Nuh is that he does not have a beard and his face is clean-shaven. In the early Middle Ages, the absence of a beard and a clean-shaven face was considered one of the advantages of Turkic rulers and nobility. At the same time, all portraits of the Sasanian Shahanshahs are characterized by the presence of a specific rounded beard. Sogdians are also always depicted with thick beards in surviving monuments of material culture.

The iconography of the portrait has a close resemblance to the portraits of the Turkic rulers of Tokharistan, Kabul and Gadhara of the 7th – 8th centuries, who are depicted on the coins they issued in imitation of the drachmas of the Sasanian Shahanshah Hurmazd IV Turkzada (reigned 579 – 590). (Fig. 6, 7)

But almost complete similarities with it are revealed by two commemorative

medallions issued by the Turkic Qaghans in the first quarter of the 7th century in honor of the victory over the Sassanids and Hephthalites. One of them was released by a Turkic Qaghan named Zik or Zhik (reigned 710 – 718) after the victory over the Sassanids in 616 – 617, when his army invaded deep into Iranian territory and reached Ray and Isfahan (Fig. 3). On the obverse side (Av) of the medallion there is a portrait of the ruler to the right, to the right and left of which there are Pahlavi inscriptions. The left inscription reads GDH ‘pzwn zyk – “Victory, increase, Zik”, and the right one reads MLK’n MLK’ – “King of Kings”. On the reverse side (Rv) of the medallion there is an altar with fire, and to the right and left of it two priests making sacrifices to the fire.

The same Qaghan issued the seal for the administration of the conquered territory, which, like the medallion, is stored in the Forughi collection in Great Britain. It contains Middle Persian and runic legends. The Middle Persian inscription reads as zyk hhn GDH – “Zik Qaghan, victory”, and the runic inscription - b(a)q(e)šeb qiy(ū)g(o)ŋkū – “Take care of your companions, home, village, find a good name for yourself.”

The second medallion was issued around 625 in Qunduz by Tardu-Shad, who was the son of the supreme Turkic ruler Tun Yabghu Qaghan and the founder of the Turkic Yabghu dynasty of Tokharistan and Gandhara, on the occasion of the final victory over the Hephthalites and the annexation of their possessions to the Turkic Qaghanate (Fig. 2). The iconography of the medallion, as well as some coins of the Turkic Yabghus of Tokharistan, reveals, on the one hand, imitation of the drachmas of Shahanshah Hurmazd IV, and on the other, the Indian religious tradition. On the front side of this medallion there is also a portrait of the ruler to the right, to the right and left of which there are Pahlavi inscriptions jeb MLK’n MLK’, i.e. “yeb[gu] King of Kings,” and GDH ‘pzwt – “Victory, increase in territory.” It is assumed that this medallion depicts Tun Yabghu Qaghan. On the reverse side of the medallion of Tun Yabghu Qaghan, an altar and two priests are depicted, as well as the god Shiva with hair in the form of a flame.

The similarity of the portrait depicted on the coin of Mansur ibn Nuh with the portrait on the medallion of Tun Yabghu Qaghan is expressed in almost all details – the same thick braid falling behind his back, the same costume. No beard. The winged crown with bull horns, a month and a dot, as well as the necklace of precious stones worn on the neck of Tun Yabghu Qaghan, are depicted in a stylized form. A comparison of the three portraits allows us to conclude that the portrait on the medallion of Zik Qaghan (616) served as a model for the portrait on the medallion of Tun Yabghu Qaghan (625), and the latter, in turn, served as a model for the portrait on the coin of Mansur ibn Nuh (358/968-69).

The rulers depicted in front on the above-mentioned silver-plated copper medallion, issued in 351/962-63 in the city of al-Muhammadiyya by the Buwayhid ruler Rukn al-Dawla al-Hasan ibn Buwaih (Fig. 4) and a gold medallion issued in 359/969-70 in Baghdad by another Buwayhid ruler ‘Adud al-Dawla Fana-Khusraw (Fig. 5), have a completely different appearance. They have a pronounced

anthropological type of the Mediterranean group of the Caucasian race: a round face, a straight nose, small round eyes, they have a thick mustache and beard, a winged crown on their head, and a costume of a completely different cut than the costumes of the rulers depicted on the coin of Mansur ibn Nuh and medallions of the Supreme Turkic Qaghans. At the same time, the general appearance of the Av and Rv coins of Mansur ibn Nuh and Rukn al-Dawla are almost identical. On the Av coin of Rukn al-Dawla, there are two Pahlavi inscriptions on both sides of the ruler, the same as on the coin of Mansur ibn Nuh. On Rv is the same Arabic legend of 6 lines, in which, after the usual Sunni creed, the name of the caliph is given, and then the title and name of Rukn al-Dawla Abu ‘Ali Buwaih. The circular legend provides the release data. Thus, although the general shape of these two medallions is the same, their contents are completely different. These data indicate that the medallion of Mansur ibn Nuh was issued as a response to the release of the medallion of Rukn al-Dawla, which allows us to determine the true origin of the Samanids.

In the light of these data, it seems to me that the pre-Islamic ancestors of the Samanids, including their ancestor Saman-Khudat, belonged to the dynasty of the Turkic Yabghu of Tokharistan, the founder of which was Tardu-Shad, the son of the supreme Turkic ruler Tun Yabghu-Qaghan. The image of a portrait of one of the supreme Turkic Qaghans on the coin of Mansur ibn Nuh indicates that the Samanids revered him as the highest ancestor of their clan.

The issue in 358/968-69 by Mansur ibn Nuh of a coin depicting a portrait of one of the Samanid ancestors with the title of Shahanshah could have been caused by the actions of the Buwayhids, who, having accepted the title of Shahanshah, declared themselves descendants of the Sassanids. The reason for this was the release in 351/962 in the city of al-Muhammadiyah by the Buwayhid ruler Rukn al-Dawla al-Hasan ibn Buwaih of the above-mentioned medallion.

Chinese sources give the names of the Turkic Yabghus of Tokharistan, who ruled from 618 to 750 with residence first in Qunduz and then in Balkh. Their dynasty continued to exist after the Arab conquest, moving to Badakhshan. The first ruler of Tokharistan from this dynasty was the son of Tun Yabghu Qaghan Tardu-Shad (618 – 630). The Samanid ancestor Saman-Khudat was the son of one of the last representatives of this dynasty of Turkic Yabghus of Tokharistan.

Illustrations



Fig. 1. The Samanids, Mansur ibn Nuh, Bukhara, 358/968-69, dirham, silver.



Fig. 2. Western Turkic Qaghanate, Tun Yabghu-Qaghan, Qunduz, ca. 625, medallion, silver.



Fig. 3. Western Turkic Qaghanate, Zik-Qaghan, Rey or Spahan, 616 – 617, medallion, silver.



Fig. 4. The Buwayhids, Rukn al-Dawla, al-Muhammadiyya, 351/962-63, dirham, silver plated copper.



Fig. 5. The Buwayhids, 'Adud al-Dawla Fana-Khusraw, Baghdad, 359/969-70, medallion, gold.



Fig. 6. Western Turks, Yabghu of Tokharistan, end of 7th – early 8th centuries, ½ of drahma, copper.



Fig. 7. Western Turks, Yabghu of Tokharistan, ca. 700 – 720, drahma, silver.