



A SILVER DIRHAM OF THE LAST SHAYBANID RULER, ‘ABD AL-MU’MIN IBN ABDULLAH KHAN, STRUCK AT BALKH: A NUMISMATIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an in-depth numismatic and historical analysis of a silver dirham struck in the name of ‘Abd al-Mu'min ibn Abdullah Khan II — the last ruler of the Shaybanid (Abu'l-Khayrid) dynasty — at the Balkh mint in 1007 AH (1598-1599 CE). The study first traces the development of the tanga-i Shahrukhi monetary system established under Shahrukh Mirza and Muhammad Shaybani Khan, and then examines the substance of the monetary reform carried out by Abdullah Khan II from 1583 onward. It further considers Abd al-Mu'min's fifteen-year governorship of Balkh, his brief and turbulent six-month reign following his father's death, his violent end, and the dynasty's consequent departure from the historical stage in favor of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty. On the basis of the Arabic-Persian legends on the coin's obverse and reverse, their iconographic features, and its weight and diameter, the article situates this monument within the monetary history of Transoxiana and, more broadly, within the political history of Central Asia at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The research draws on foreign and local numismatic scholarship, encyclopedic sources, UNESCO's academic history of the civilizations of Central Asia, and international coin catalogues.

The history of Transoxiana and Khorasan in the sixteenth century is characterized by the gradual rise of the Shaybanid (Abu'l-Khayrid) dynasty, its unification of four major political centers — Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and Balkh — into a single state, and, almost immediately after this centralization was completed, its rapid collapse under the weight of internal strife [5][6][15]. The dynasty's founder, Muhammad Shaybani Khan, wrested most of Transoxiana and Khorasan from the Timurids between 1500 and 1510 and founded the state that bears his name [13]. Over the following century, power was divided among various Shaybanid princes until it was reunified in the second half of the sixteenth century under Abdullah Khan II [5][15].

The monetary circulation of this period rested on the tanga-i Shahrukhi system, introduced by the Timurid ruler Shahrukh Mirza in the early fifteenth century, which subsequently became the basic model for silver coinage across Transoxiana and neighboring regions [5]. During his monetary reform of 907/1501-1507, Muhammad Shaybani Khan brought this weight standard — approximately one mithqal, or 4.8 grams — into uniform use throughout the state, laying the groundwork for silver coins of a single standard weight minted in Bukhara and Samarkand [4][11][14]. Later, however, particularly during the nominal reign of Iskandar Khan (1560-1583), the minting of silver coins again became decentralized, with coins issued in parallel at Bukhara, Samarkand, Balkh, Tashkent, Andijan, and Yasi (Turkestan) [14][14].

After Abdullah Khan II ascended the throne, he carried out a multi-stage monetary reform beginning in 1583: first, in order to address the shortage of silver, high-quality gold coinage had already been organized in Bukhara under his father's reign, after which the silver coinage was adjusted in line with rising silver prices [14][14]. The most significant stage of the reform was a sharp reduction in the number of mints licensed to strike silver coin, with production concentrated primarily in the capital, Bukhara; in addition, copper coins were introduced for everyday urban trade [14][14]. Researchers note that coins minted under Abdullah Khan II were of 960-carat, that is, high-fineness silver [14]. Viewed in this light, the fact that the present dirham was struck at Balkh — outside the centralized Bukhara mint — lends it a particular significance, since it is plausible that Balkh, despite formally standing outside the centralized system, retained the right to strike coin by virtue of its autonomous political status.

The title inscribed on the coin, “Abd al-Amin Bahadur Khan,” is in fact none other than the name of Abd al-Mu'min ibn Abdullah Khan II, rendered variously in Latin- and Russian-language scholarship (‘Abd al-Mu’min, Abdulmo'min). He was born on 16 Rajab 975/1568, was circumcised at the age of ten, and took part personally in his father's 1582 campaign to Ulughtagh [1]. His father, Abdullah Khan II, had entrusted him with the governorship of Balkh as early as 1583 — even before Abdullah himself was formally proclaimed khan — and Abd al-Mu'min administered that city and its surrounding region independently for more than fifteen years, until his father's death in 1006/1598 [1]. During his years at Balkh he first brought the neighboring province of Badakhshan under his control, and subsequently launched several major military campaigns toward Khorasan against Safavid Iran, temporarily occupying major cities such as Mashhad and Nishapur during the wars of 1587-1598 [1][7][16]. Modern historians describe him as a capable but ruthless and impetuous commander [16].

Over time, relations between father and son grew increasingly strained; particularly during 1596-1598 there were several serious disputes, and even a brief rebellion by Abd al-Mu'min against his father is recorded, although it was suppressed without bloodshed [1][16]. In the view of some modern historians, this conflict between the aging and power-conscious Abdullah Khan II and his impetuous, impatient son ultimately became one of the principal factors that laid the groundwork for the dynasty's collapse [16].

In Rajab 1006/February 1598, following a long and severe illness, Abdullah Khan II — by then past sixty — died; some sources attribute his death to natural causes, others to poisoning [16]. After his father's death, Abd al-Mu'min came to Samarkand and formally assumed supreme authority, the title of khan, and upon taking power immediately launched a ruthless purge of his father's former officials [1][16]. His reign lasted only six months and was marked

throughout by internal political violence: the claim to the throne of his rival kinsman Hazara Sultan in Tashkent was mercilessly crushed, and his father's closest and most influential amir, Qulbaba Kukältash, was executed — actions that heightened fear among the remaining amirs that Abd al-Mu'min might purge the entire circle of his father's courtiers [1].

As a result, the amirs of the court conspired against him. While preparing a new campaign against Khorasan and returning from Tashkent to Samarkand, Abd al-Mu'min was ambushed and killed by conspirators in a village near Uratapa (present-day Istaravshan) — an event that falls around Dhu'l-Hijjah 1006/1007, that is, July 1598 [1]. Since his only heir, an infant son, was merely two years old at the time, a fierce struggle for the throne broke out: Abdullah Khan II's cousin Pir Muhammad Khan II was first proclaimed the new khan, but his claim was contested by Kazakh sultans, other rival princes, and finally by Baqi Muhammad Bahadur, a nephew of Abdullah Khan II through his sister [6][12]. Having triumphed in battle, Baqi Muhammad Bahadur defeated and killed Pir Muhammad Khan II, and thus the nearly century-old Shaybanid dynasty departed the historical stage entirely, its place on the Bukharan throne taken by the new Ashtarkhanid, or Janid, dynasty [6][12].

Viewed against this broad historical and political backdrop, the present dirham, dated 1007 AH and struck at the Balkh mint, assumes particular significance. This date may correspond to the very last months of Abd al-Mu'min's reign, or to the very brief interval immediately following it — before the authority of the new dynasty had fully reached Balkh — since Balkh was precisely the provincial center he had personally governed and relied upon politically and militarily for more than fifteen years [1]. In other words, this coin is a direct material trace of the final weeks or months during which the Shaybanid dynasty was departing the historical stage.

Turning to the coin's iconographic features, the obverse bears, within an ornamental cartouche, the title and name “Abd al-Amin Bahadur Khan” rendered in Arabic-Persian script — a style traditional to Shaybanid coinage, in which the ruler's name, epithet, and military-political title such as “Bahadur Khan” are rendered in a complex, often intertwined calligraphic composition [8][9]. The reverse, within a similar cartouche, bears the core profession of the Islamic faith, the kalima (“There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God”), which since the seventh-eighth centuries has remained an invariant traditional element of silver coinage across nearly all Islamic states, serving to affirm the state's religious-political legitimacy regardless of the ruler's identity [4][4]. The coin weighs 3.9 grams and measures 25 millimeters in diameter; although these figures fall somewhat below the original 4.8-gram mithqal standard introduced under Shaybani Khan, they fully accord with the broader tendency toward the gradual decline in coin weight amid the prolonged wars and financial crises of the late sixteenth century [3][11][14].

In conclusion, this coin embodies several layers of historical information at once: first, it is material evidence of the late, crisis-ridden stage of a monetary system based on the tanga-i Shahrukhi standard that had governed the Shaybanid realm for over a century; second, it is a direct witness to the complex political processes of dynastic succession from father to son, ruthless internal struggles, and, finally, the tragic collapse of one of Transoxiana's most powerful dynasties; and third, it is a unique numismatic monument reflecting the distinctive status of Balkh as an autonomous political center operating outside the centralized Bukhara mint. For these reasons, coins of this kind serve as an exceptionally valuable primary source

not only for numismatics but also for the study of the political and economic history of Central Asia at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries..

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