

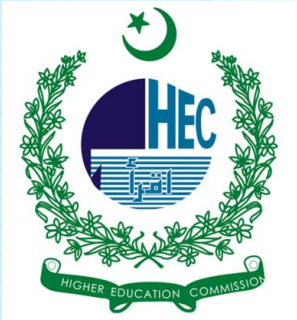
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**New Varieties in the 'Bent- Bar' Coins of Tahir Suleman's
Collection, Taxila, Pakistan**



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Abstract

Tahir Suleman is a businessman and private coins collector. He has a good number of punch- marked coins ranging from bent bars to the local Taxila coinage housed at Taxila. Most of the coins in this collection are in fine state of preservation. Among his collection, copper coins having different new symbols were found. These particular symbols suggest an important link to the regional historical context, showing that these coins were struck at Taxila, while also reflecting artistic and cultural influences of the Achaemenid Empire. The archer symbol on the ‘bent bar’ coins exhibits how local workmanship and more general imperial aesthetics interacted for mutual benefit. In addition to highlighting Taxila's historical significance as a centre of trade and culture, this blending of styles shows how the Achaemenids influenced regional coinage. By studying these coins, we may learn a great deal about the socio-political dynamics of the time and how local identities were influenced by outside forces while retaining their own regional identity.

Key words: ‘Bent bar’, Gandhāra, stylized archer, sigloi, Taxila, Thair Suleman’s collection, J. Allan, A. Cunningham, and Janapada.

Introduction

The study of ancient coins and currency gives very thoughtful understandings into the economic, cultural and historical contexts of ancient civilizations. Among them the most noteworthy examples of early coinage are the ‘bent- bars’, silver and copper punch-marked coins of Gandhara, particularly the fresh collection of Tahir Suleman, housed at Taxila. These coins are known for their unique symbols and diverse designs, representing a pivotal era in the development of monetary systems across the whole of Gandhāra in particular and in the Indo-Pak subcontinent. Their unique features not only reflect the workmanship of the artists of that time but also stand as a witness to the socio-political background that influenced their production and circulation in the market.

Taxila, the second capital city of Gandhāra that remained a hub of trade, business, education and culture offers a rich context. Because of the geographical position, numerous cultures were blended and consequently created new economic

and artistic arena for the artists of different fields (Samad 2011:18). This convergence is best shown by the punch-marked coins in Tahir Suleman's collection, which show how various cultures influenced their design and application. Through systematic investigations of these coins, one can study the intricate networks of political appellation, trading routes, and social structures that shaped the area while they were in circulation.

Furthermore, this collection provides a strong link to the past and is a valuable source for both numismatists and historians. Every coin has a story to tell, whether it is from its material, the symbols punched on them, or how they facilitated the traders and business community. So this article deals with the technical details and also highlights production methods, typological variants, and historical relevance of these bent bar coins.

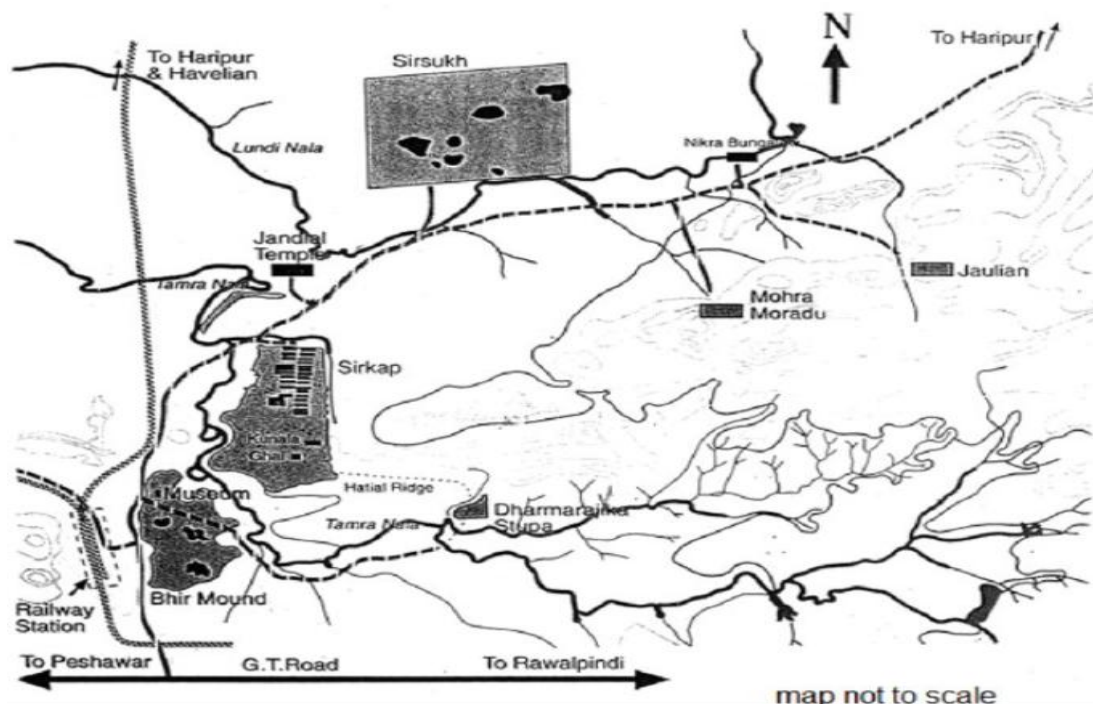


Fig.1 Taxila Map

(After Somuncu, M., & Khan, A. A. (2010))

'Bent-bar' Coins

The 'bent bar' coins, an early type of coinage from ancient Gandhāra, are mostly struck at the Taxila mint. The sun or wheel is among the symbols punched on the thick, slightly twisted silver bars. The smaller denominations usually have a single stamp, whereas the bigger coins have two stamps. Despite having a similar design,

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these coins differ in whether or not they have an end bar or pellet. This form of coin is probably connected to the six-armed emblem that is frequently found on a variety of differently designed, punch-marked coins. Different scholars have proposed that the weight of these bars was determined by using the Persian "double *sigloi*" standard and its fractions, half and quarter *siglois* (Bopearachchi 1995;55; Cunningham 1891: 34).

Silver 'bent bar' coins are among the earliest forms of coinage from ancient northwest India. These coins are thick, slightly curved silver bars stamped with symbols resembling wheel or sun like design. However, the larger coins have double designs, while, smaller ones have a single stamp. Although they share a universal style, some coins include an end bar or pellet. These coins are likely linked to the six-armed symbol often seen on silver punch-marked coins. Allan believed that these bars were weighed on Persian standard "double *sigoli*," half or quarter *sigolos* (Allan1936: xv-xvi).

The coins from the Gandhara *Janapada* (district) are among the earliest, if not the very first, coins in India. It's hard to identify the exact *Janapada*, dynasty, or king that issued the first coins, as much of this ancient history is unclear. These coins, discovered in Gandhāra, particularly from Taxila as its capital, are also known as bent bars. These coins have a very unique solar symbol at each end, containing six-arms and a small circle and dot in its centre and Taxila symbols. Because the die used to punch the symbol was larger than the coin *planchet*, so the impression on these coins is often incomplete. Its means that the coins were struck while the metal was still soft, causing them to bend at the ends, which is how they got the name bent bars (Singh 2018:1-4).

Table no. 1, A list of these six coins with their size, weight and symbols

Coin No.	Size (mm)	Weight (g)	Obverse	Reverse
1	903.5 x 876.53 x 88.20	11	Six-armed symbol, Taxila symbol and stylized running archer	Blank
2	905.53 x 891.53 x 88.10	12	Six-armed symbol, Taxila symbol	Prominent counter marks
3	905.37 x 891.57	11	Six-armed symbol, Taxila	Blank

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	x 88.16		symbol and small stylized running archer	
4	905.45 x 892.12 x 88.20	11	Six-armed symbol, Taxila symbol and defaced stylized running archer	Blank
5	903.04 x 893.10 x 88.10	12	Six-armed symbol, Taxila symbol and small stylized running archer	Blank
6	900.45 x 891.00 x 88.20	12	Six-armed symbol, Taxila symbol	Blank

Coins condition

The bent bar coins of the Tahir Suleman's collection are six in number and all of them are in good state of preservation. These coins of this group can be divided into two varieties on the basis of their symbols found on obverse and reverse. These varieties are as under:

Group: 1, Six-armed and Taxila symbol, stylized running archer symbol and counter marks

This group consists of only six coins from 1 to 6 (Nos 1-6), with the weight ranging from 11 to 12 grams. The size of these coins ranges from 900.45x891x88.2 to 905.53x891.53x88.10 mm. These are in rectangular concave shape, having a six-

armed , the Taxila symbol , and a new symbol looking like a stylized archer  on the obverse, while the reverse is mostly blank. These coins are divided into two varieties on the basis of the symbol having stylized running archer on the obverse and prominent counter marks on the reverse.

J . Allan (1936:xv-xvi) has also discussed similar coins. He mentions them under the heading Early Single Type Silver Coins and observes that these are thick slightly bent bars of silver stamped with wheel or sun like designs double on the larger denominations and single on the other. He further adds that this sun like design is probably associated with six-armed symbol found on the rest of the punch marked

coins.

Var:1.1. Six armed, Taxila symbol, stylized running archer with or without counter marks

This variety consists of five coins from (Nos, 1,3,-5). The size of these coins varies from 903.04x893.10x88.1 to 905.37x891.57x88.16 mm.

The weight ranges from 11 to 11.5 grams. These are rectangular concave in shape. The six-armed and Taxila symbol and a tiny symbol possibly representing stylized archer are punched on the obverse, the reverse is blank.

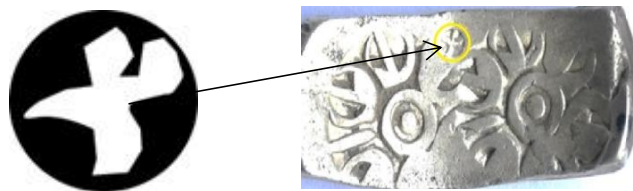



Fig 2. a) New Symbol on Bent Bar coins

Var: 1.2. Six-armed and Taxila Symbol with Counter Marks

The size of coins (Nos,2 and 6) of this variety ranging from to 900.45x891.00x88.2 to 905.53x891.53x88.10 mm, and weigh 12 grams. These are rectangular concave in shape, having six-armed Taxila symbol punched on the obverse and three prominent counter marks  on the reverse.

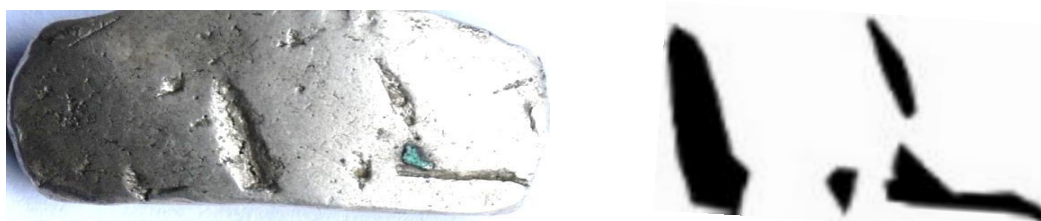


Fig.3, b) Prominent counter marks

Discussion and Conclusion

The theory related to the Persian weight standard “double *siglois*”, and notably a new symbol resembling a possible stylized archer punched on the bent bar coins as reported by the present author from the fresh collection of coins housed at Taxila, provides critical insights into the assessment and classification of currency during that period. The Persian weight standard is known for its precise and extensive use across numerous regions of their state that established a base for understanding the weight

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and value of coins. The introduction of the archer symbol on bent bar coins of ancient Gandhara suggests that these coins were somehow linked with the double *siglois* concept.

Through these local bent bars coins the power of purchasing of Gandharan business communities was enhanced, to facilitate trade and business engagements across their most important province. The double *siglois* concept having the stylized running archer symbol may suggest a transitional phase in coinage in ancient Taxila, indicating a blend of various cultural impacts in the region. Taxila remained a key centre of education, trade and commerce and cultural exchange and would have been considered the right place for such an innovation in coinage. Moreover, the association of the archer symbol and Persian weight standard measurement suggests that these coins were not merely local variants but part of a broader economic system influenced by Persian practices. This development highlights the complexity of ancient trade networks and the evolution of currency systems as they adapted to the demands of commerce.

Acknowledgment

Tahir Suleman, a business man and coins collector, alleges to have collected these coins from Taxila. Majority of the coins in this collection are in fine condition. The author obliged to him for granting permission to study and examine his collection thoroughly. Many thanks go to Dr. Muhammad Zahoor who helped me in the photography and documentation of these coins. I am grateful to Mr. Danish Gul for retrieving symbols from the coins. Many thanks goes to Dr. Junaid Ahmad for helping author to make the Taxila map. The author is also very thankful to Mr. Iftikhar Ahmad for his hospitality.

Variety no 1 Of Bent-Bar coins from Taxila

Coin:1

<p>Metal:AR Variety 1: Reg. No. 1 Weight: 11g. Size: 903.5x876.53x88.20 mm Obv: Six-armed symbol, Taxila symbol and small stylized running archer.</p>	 The obverse of the coin shows a central six-armed symbol with a circular center, flanked by two Taxila symbols (a seated figure) and a small stylized running archer.
<p>Rev: Blank</p>	 The reverse of the coin is blank, showing a dark, textured surface with some green patina.

Coin:3

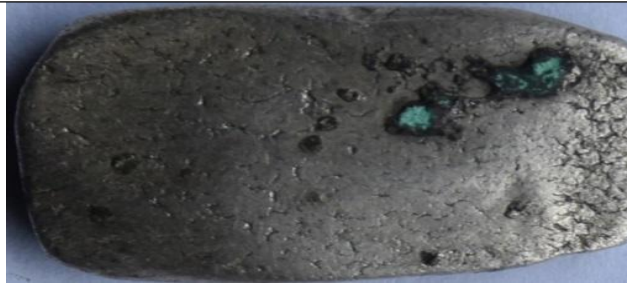
<p>Metal:AR Variety 1: Reg. No. 3 Weight: 11g. Size:905.37x891.57x88.16mm Obv: Six-armed Taxila, symbol and small stylized running archer.</p>	 The obverse of the coin shows a central six-armed symbol with a circular center, flanked by two Taxila symbols (a seated figure) and a small stylized running archer.
<p>Rev: Blank</p>	 The reverse of the coin is blank, showing a dark, textured surface with some green patina.

Coin:4

Metal:AR
Variety 1:
Reg. No. 4
Weight: 11g.
Size:905.45x892.12x88.2mm
Obv: Six-armed symbol, Taxila
symbol and defaced stylized
running archer



Rev: Blank



Coin:5

Metal:AR
Variety 1:
Reg. No. 5
Weight: 12 g.
Size:903.04x893.10x88.10mm
Obv: Six-armed symbol, Taxila
symbol and small stylized running
archer



Rev: Blank



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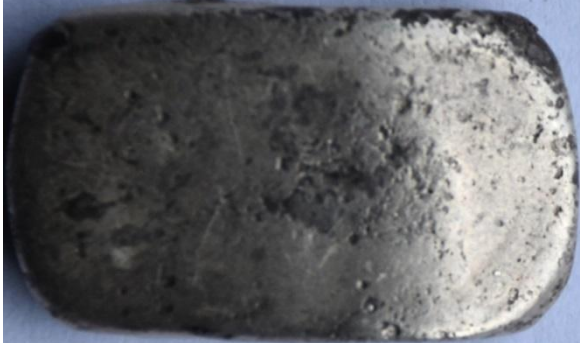
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Variety no 2 Bent- Bar coins from Taxila

Coin:2

<p>Metal:AR Variety 1: Reg. No. 2 Weight: 12g. Size:905.53x891.53x88.10 mm Obv: Six-armed symbol and Taxila symbol</p>	
<p>Rev: Counter marks</p>	

Coin:6

<p>Metal:AR Variety 1: Reg. No. 6 Weight:12g. Size: 900.45x891.00x88.2mm Obv: Six-armed symbol and Taxila Symbol</p>	
<p>Rev: Blank</p>	

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