

## Two new types of Kushan forgeries

Pankaj Tandon<sup>1</sup>

As collectors and students of coins, we constantly have to be on the lookout for forgeries. People have been forging coins since ancient times, so this problem is not something new. However, the methods used to create forgeries are constantly evolving and it behooves us to be aware of this. In a recent article, I highlighted a method of forging that seems to be becoming more common: tooling or carving a genuine coin to create something that it wasn't to begin with, presumably something a lot more valuable than the original coin. In this paper, I record another type of phenomenon that I have seen twice recently with Kushan coins: using genuine coins to create new denominations.

The first coin is pictured in Figure 1. It purports to be a quarter dinar of Kanishka III (previously assigned to Kanishka II), the low denomination version of Göbl 635, which carries the Brāhmī letter *pri* in the right obverse field. The style looks perfectly correct and the weight, at 1.87 gm, seems quite appropriate for a worn quarter dinar. Initially, therefore, it seemed genuine, and an exciting new discovery, as no coin of this denomination is known for the type. Sadly, however, it turns out to be a dangerous new type of forgery.



**Figure 1: Purported quarter dinar of Kanishka III**

Weight = 1.87 gm, Diameter: 17.5-19 mm.

The first doubts arose in my mind as soon as I held the coin in hand. The surface had the rough, pitted look of a cast coin. Sometimes, however, a genuine coin that has

---

<sup>1</sup> Boston University. I wish to thank Joe Cribb and Lluís Mendieta for helpful email exchanges.

suffered corrosion from its long stay in an inhospitable environment can also display such a surface. So my next step was to examine the edge. This showed three features that would mark it as different from a genuine coin:

1. Overall, the edge was quite smooth, rather than having the pits and cracks that a genuine coin would typically display.
2. In places, it was possible to detect parallel grooves such as would be created by the action of a modern file. Although this is difficult to capture with the simple camera at my disposal, see panel (a) of Figure 2 to get some idea of the grooves.
3. In places, there was a subtle ridge around the center of the edge. When a coin is cast, molten metal is poured in between the two moulds which are held tightly together. Naturally, some of the metal seeps in between the edges of the two moulds and this forms a thin projecting ring around the edge of the coin. This ring must be filed away to give the coin its normal look, which is why a file has to be used along the edge. The ridge is the remnant of this ring ... parts that were not removed by the file. Again, this was very subtle, but Figure 2(b) attempts to capture it: the light catches the high point of the edge. On a genuine coin, there should be no high point in the center of the edge.



(a) File marks

(b) Ridge

**Figure 2: The coin's edge**

So a close examination of the coin suggested it was cast. Cast forgeries are nothing new, of course. I recently documented a cast forgery of a silver drachm of the Indo-Greek king Philoxenus and published it on a Facebook discussion group and also on the CoinIndia website.<sup>2</sup> The typical cast forgery uses a genuine coin to create the moulds from which the cast copies are made. But this coin was a cast of a previously unknown coin type. The style was so good, I knew a genuine coin must have been used to create the moulds. But, since no genuine coin of this type is known, I was left wondering how the moulds were made. Perhaps, I thought, a genuine coin had been found and the owner made a cast copy, keeping the genuine coin for his or her own collection. However, I finally realized this was not the case. Rather, the moulds had been made using a full dinar as the model!

The dimensions of the coin should have alerted me at once. The flan is somewhat ovoid, with a diameter of 17.5 mm from 9 o'clock to 3 o'clock, but a diameter of 19 mm from 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock. Quarter dinars of this series normally have a diameter of

<sup>2</sup> See the Philoxenus drachm discussed on the webpage: <http://coinindia.com/archive2.html>.

around 13 mm. By contrast, of the five examples of Göbl 635 I had available for direct examination, four had a diameter of 21 mm and one of 20 mm. Thus the “length” of the subject coin was closer to that of the dinar rather than a quarter dinar. Figure 3 shows a photograph of the coin laid next to the illustration from Göbl’s book of coin number 635.5,<sup>3</sup> along with an example of Göbl 636 from my collection. It can be seen that the size of the standing figure is much closer to the size of the figure in the dinar than the one in the quarter dinar. As Joe Cribb pointed out to me in an email exchange, there can be some shrinkage in the process of creating a mould from an original coin. If the process was carried out more than once, the shrinkage could be made more substantial. In addition, the feet of the king are off the flan of the forgery, accommodating the smaller flan. The reverse figure of Ardochsho similarly came close in size to the figure seen on examples of Göbl 635. It appears therefore that a genuine full dinar was used to make the moulds for the coin, which was then cast with a flan of approximately the 2 gm that would be expected for a quarter dinar.



**Figure 3: Size comparison of the coin with Göbl 635.5 and an example of Göbl 636**

The second coin I wish to discuss is pictured in Figure 4. This one purports to be a double unit (octadrachm) of Vima Kadphises. Again, this denomination is not known for Vima Kadphises; the common denomination is the single unit or tetradrachm of approximately 17 gm, and half and quarter units are also known. So a double unit, if genuine, would be a find indeed. The style of the coin looked perfectly normal and the weight, at 33.38 gm, seemed just right for a double unit. Sadly, this coin turned out not to be genuine either.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Göbl: *Münzprägung des Kušānreiches*, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984, plate 51.

Once I got the coin in hand, I was surprised that the diameter was only 28.5 mm, which is normal for single units. I had expected a coin that was larger in diameter than the tetradrachm. The extra weight was created by a significantly greater thickness, which was 6 mm for the coin, a good deal thicker than the single units. A look at the edge revealed the method of manufacture. The edge displays distinct layers, three in all, suggesting that at least two genuine coins had been fused together, with some filler added between them to accommodate the reliefs of the devices. Figure 5 shows two views of the edges of the coin. A look at the edge of course made it quite easy to identify this coin as a forgery. Lluís Mendieta, a professional chemist, informed me how easy it would be to create the “patina” seen on the edge, thus assuring the conclusion.



**Figure 4: Supposed double unit (octadrachm) of Vima Kadphises  
Weight = 33.38 gm, Diameter = 28.5 mm**



**Figure 5: Two views of the edge of the coin**

The innovativeness of the forgery workshops is something to be expected. As collectors, we need to be on constant watch for new techniques of fooling us. The more

we spot these techniques and make others aware of them, the safer we will be from these criminal elements working to exploit people's desire for rare and unique coins. Both these coins apparently originated in Pakistan, as did the tooled forgeries I documented in my earlier paper, so buyers of Kushan coins sourced in that country need to be extra careful.