

The art of deception: perspectives on the problem of fakery in Gandhāran numismatics

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Prologue

Studies in Gandhāran (Graeco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek, and Kushan) coinages, particularly as a subset of the wider discourse on Gandhāran art, have remained largely preoccupied with the tropes of style, iconography, and chronology, much as the contributions on numismatics in the previous ‘Gandhāra Connections’ volumes show. However, coins are not mere objects; they are ‘things’. Antique coins have long lost their primary function as medium of exchange or store of value. They have ‘moved’ away from their common function and thus qualify to be ‘things’ taking Heidegger’s conceptualization of ‘things’ as a basis of human-object interactions and cultures of object consumptions (Heidegger 1971). As such, they can be studied from the critical viewpoint of ‘Thing Theory’, which has been articulated and developed by Bill Brown (Brown 2003; 2004).

Coins possess inherent material properties that contribute to their ‘thingness’, and the preoccupation of historians, art historians and numismatists to focus on themes outlined above tends to obliterate how coins can be fully understood as ‘things’. As Knappett has shown in his work on the role of ‘meaning’ in material culture (Knappett 2005), objects cannot be understood exclusively by representation and by a ‘mentalist’ understanding. Their meaning needs to be comprehended by treating them as ‘things’. Appadurai’s seminal contribution on the social life of ‘things’ (Appadurai 1986) presents an outlay of how issues like commoditization are closely related to the materiality of objects. Coins, in particular ancient coins, could well be included within its remit. Coins are no exception to these critical views; as ‘things’, the physical properties of the coins, the processes by which they were produced and the interactions they did and continue to have, all contribute to understanding of their ‘meaning’.

One crucial aspect that connects the materiality of the coins with their meaning is their ‘genuineness’. Coins are collectible and desirable primarily because as historic objects, their occurrence and supply is limited. Conceivably, this serves as an impetus to make unauthorized or fraudulent copies of them; collectors would recognize such copies as ‘fakes’ or ‘forgeries’, although the latter word is often used to suggest a fraudulently manufactured coin that is currently in circulation, much like ‘counterfeit’. Coin collectors often use words like ‘fantasy’ to suggest a fraudulently produced coin of a type that never existed. The enticing lure of finding a previously unknown and unpublished ‘new’ coin that collectors often fall for is by far the most likely *raison d’être* behind ‘fantasies’. However, within the broad remit of fraudulently produced coins are also included those that were made to dupe users while the coins were actually in circulation. These are regarded as ‘contemporary forgeries’ and come with a different historicity from ‘modern forgeries’. There are also numismatic entities labelled as ‘imitations’ which imitate an existing coin-type for circulatory reasons. In addition, it needs to be noted that not all fake coins might be produced with an explicit intention of duping collectors. Older collecting practices included knowingly adding reproductions of coins into a formed collection or ‘cabinet’ as space-holders, either because the collector could not have afforded to acquire such coins or because of some unique and individual reason. Such coins existed only in institutional or museum collections, not available to be acquired privately. Such copies were often made legitimately and collectors kept them in their collection with the full knowledge that they were copies. These copies are usually known by the less pernicious term ‘replica’. Institutional owners like museums often made such replicas from originals in their collection and supplied them to collectors on order. Most commonly, such replicas are known

as ‘electrotypes’ and they are made by a process involving electrolysis of metallic solutions. They are usually made of a core of an inferior metal and then coated with a gold, silver or copper wash, and they are faithful to the originals inasmuch as they replicate the strike perfectly and give a most realistic impression of the original coin. However, the process produces separate replicates of the obverse and reverse which have to be soldered together, resulting in a tell-tale seam or fracture on the edge of such a replica. Additionally, suppliers sometimes took care to identify them as replicas often by putting a small hallmark-like sign, mostly on the edge. The focus of discussion of this paper is neither ‘contemporary forgeries’, nor ‘imitations’, nor legitimate replicas. We will be looking at fakes, forgeries, or fantasies of coins, made with an intent of deceiving their consumers, and collectively labelled as ‘fakes’.

Unfortunately, since fakes are deemed as unauthentic, they seldom get any scholarly attention and there is no typology available to classify them. Fakes are pervasive; all collectors acquire at least some fakes as they build collections or ‘cabinets’ of coins. Fakes frequently end up in institutional collections as many times museums acquire individual private collections. Often, in such cases they are segregated into separate storage as a matter of curatorial practice and then mostly forgotten. The collection in the Heberden Coin Room of the University of Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum is no exception – here one can find a cabinet of ‘Greek replicas and duplicates’. Many of the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins contained here do not have basic curatorial identifiers such as an acquisition number or source. As objects that are not genuine, or authentic, they have been consigned to a curatorial oblivion because authenticity takes centre stage in an object-based discipline like numismatics.

The simplest way to classify fakes would be by their prototypes; however, this is not particularly apt for ‘fantasies’ for which there are no prototypes. Fakes could well be classified by the method of their manufacture, by their intent, or their circulation. They come in several ‘grades’ of purported genuineness, which has a bearing on the purpose for which they were made. For example, a fake of a rarity made exclusively with a view to dupe rich collectors may tend to be extremely difficult to identify but, on the other hand, fakes made on the scale of a small cottage industry to be sold as souvenirs to tourists visiting ancient sites could be easily recognizable. Two examples are shown here (Figures 1 and 2).¹ First is a well-made die-struck forgery of a tetradrachm of Demetrios, which because of its depiction of a Greek ruler in an unusual ‘elephant scalp’ headdress, is deemed desirable by collectors. The second is a poor, cast replica of another rare type – a tetradrachm of Eukratides depicting Heliokles and Laodike. It bears several imperfections: it is made in a sub-standard alloy, has casting flaws, and a pitted surface. Generally, the quality of a fake is decided by the method of manufacture – high quality fakes tend to be made by processes such as striking with dies, which are as close as possible to those that were used in making real coins, whereas poorer fakes are made usually by cheap, low labour, and non-cost-intensive processes such as casting in moulds. Thus, fake coins follow their market: high quality fakes are made for a different segment of market from low quality fakes. Likewise, their intent also has a wide spectrum, from being high-value objects of deliberate deception to serving as low-value aids of souveniring.

One more aspect of fakery associated with coins, about which we shall see more below, is the intentional tampering of an otherwise genuine coin. Ancient coins were made by hand, which means they show a great variance in their post-production quality. It is not always possible that desirable features like the name of the issuing king, or features which aid in developing a taxonomy such as monograms on Indo-Greek coins, are clearly discernible and/or visible on every coin. Evidently, coins where such features are visible tend to be deemed more collectible by collectors. Coins are subject to natural decay that ancient metallic objects usually suffer – they can corrode, they develop accretions or patination, they can wear in circulation etc. Since collectors value condition in their collecting practice – coins have long been graded into condition registers such as ‘fine’, ‘very fine’, or ‘extremely fine’ – all such aspects directly

¹ Except where otherwise stated, photographs are courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 1. A die-struck fake tetradrachm of Demetrios I (ex-Hugh Shortt collection, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



Figure 2. A cast fake tetradrachm of Eukratides, 'Heliokles and Laodike' type (Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).

affect a coin's collectability. It therefore pays to enhance some such features in an artificial manner. It is only a small step in such endeavours from general enhancement to intentionally modifying, or even adding, features to something more desirable. Such tampering adds a different, but unusual and significant, dimension to the problem of fakery of coins.

A historiography of fake Gandhāran coins

Interestingly, the reports and occurrence of fake Gandhāran coins antedate even the inception of Gandhāran studies. As Stanley Abe has shown (Abe 1995: 70), nineteenth century British colonial administrators in India became interested in investigating particular ancient sites in India as an outcome of 'romantic Philhellenism' which was a major part of the general milieu of neo-classical revival in Europe. Around the same time, the disciplines of classical art history and archaeology also came to be formalized as methods of scientific investigation of the past. This was also the period of increasing colonial domination and consolidation in the Indian subcontinent and the idea of European 'classics' became a tool of fostering and projecting authority within the colonial project. However, scientific and systematic archaeology was still in its infancy in India; at best, we have examples of a few early antiquarians undertaking 'excavations' at some sites like the Buddhist *stūpas* which dotted the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province countryside. In such a climate, coins – inherently because of their wide occurrence and portability – became the chief antique drivers of positing, justifying, and legitimizing a 'Greek' past in the subcontinent. This is evident in a series of publications by James Tod, James Prinsep, and Alexander Cunningham, all of which focus on 'coins with Greek inscriptions' (Tod 1827; Prinsep 1833; Cunningham 1854). A noteworthy name among the antecedents and/or contemporaries of Tod and Prinsep is that of the Orientalist scholar William Marsden, who alongside Prinsep formed one of the earliest systematic collections of Indian coins, and published a monograph entitled *Numismata Orientalia Illustrata* describing it (Marsden 1823/1825). Marsden's coin collection now rests in the British Museum.

It is in this monograph that we find reference to a 'facsimile' of a Kushan gold coin, that Marsden attributes to Sir John Anstruther, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court at Calcutta and the President of the Asiatic Society, who had brought the facsimile to London upon his return from India in 1806. Anstruther had in turn obtained it from a collector named Peter Speke. Similar facsimiles are known from other collections as well and Cribb and Jongeward, in an addendum to the catalogue of Kushan and related coins in the American Numismatic Society's collection (Cribb and Jongeward 2015: 307), describe one such facsimile. It copies a gold coin of the Kushan king Vasudeva I, although when Marsden described it he was not aware of its attribution. Ostensibly, Marsden also made mistakes in identifying the motifs: he identified the figure of Shiva reclining against Nandi the bull as the 'goddess Shivani'.

Figure 3. A cast fake in white metal of a late Kushan dinar, similar to the 'Speke replica' illustrated by Marsden (Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



This is by far the earliest reference to a copy of a Gandhāran coin; however, Speke evidently had not made these facsimiles to dupe anyone. He appears to have given them away as mementos ('a curious specimen of Hindu Art', as described by Marsden) and indeed, they are encountered in more than one metal/alloy. The Heberden Coin Room also possesses examples of these 'Speke facsimiles', made of a whitish alloy (Figure 3). Although the facsimiles were recognized as such by their possessors (Marsden remarks – 'This coin is avowedly of a modern fabrication', Marsden 1823/1825: 730), they did play an important role in the formative period of studies in Indian Numismatics. Marsden adjudged that the model for the facsimile was an Indian coin and was able to establish the relationship of its type to other coins in his collection. He was also able to suggest that the prototype for the facsimile must have antedated these other coins, which were recognizably struck by the Gupta rulers, as seen from the inscriptions they carried (Cribb 2007: 181). The story of how the facsimiles were made and distributed sheds an important light on building of early colonial networks of knowledge. Both Speke and Anstruther were East India Company officials who ostensibly engaged in collecting ancient objects in the first decade of nineteenth century.

Although Speke made replicas for innocuous reasons of curiosity and souveniring, the increased attention that early antiquarians paid to collecting coins soon led to deliberate fakery. In the 1820s, Ranjit Singh, the Sikh Maharaja of Punjab, expanded his realms towards the West, pushing back Afghans from tribal territories around Peshawar and securing control over the Khyber Pass. Peshawar was formally annexed to the kingdom of Punjab in 1834. Instrumental in this Sikh expansion were European generals in Ranjit Singh's service, namely Jean-Francois Allard, Jean-Baptiste Ventura, and Claude Auguste Court. They were all interested in archaeology and conducted some of the earliest explorations and excavations of Gandhāran sites, particularly *stūpas* like Manikyala and Mera-ka-Dheri (Lafont 1994: 9-68). They also built extensive collections of coins; the most substantial one being that amassed by General Court (Errington 1995: 410). By the end of the 1830s, their collections and contributions were already being recognized by western learned societies like the Royal Numismatic Society (RNS). The presidential address of the RNS for the year 1836-1837 lauds the contribution they have made to the '... Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Bactrian coins, which now enrich the museums of France and England'.² That the generals were very aggressive in their collecting spree is noted by Charles Masson, who was also engaged in a similar enterprise and therefore had the fortune of competing with them. He notes that the generals had 'all the advantage that affluence confers' to conduct their operations 'on a magnificent scale' and that they were 'purchasing coins at very extraordinary prices'. They apparently 'cleared the Peshawar Bazaar for copper medals at the rate of four or two to a rupee' (Errington 1995: 412). One can only imagine that with such a bonanza in the offing, an incentive to manufacture some unusual and novel varieties, which the unsuspecting European collectors might readily buy, would soon prevail. No doubt, therefore, fakes of Indo-Greek coins started infiltrating in the market.

Alexander Cunningham noted these as early as 1840 and published a 'notice on some counterfeit Bactrian coins' (Cunningham 1840a), followed by an appendix (Cunningham 1840b). He subsequently published 'a second notice of some forged coins of the Bactrians and Indo-Scythians' (Cunningham 1840c). These notices brought forth a good number of fake Bactrian, Indo-Greek, and Indo-Scythian

² *Proceedings of the Royal Numismatic Society 1836/1837-1838/1839*: 71.

(including Kushan, as they were labelled ‘Indo-Scythian’ at this time) coins, many of which had been obtained in the bazaars of Peshawar, Kabul, Bajaur and other towns near ancient sites. Their provenance includes collections of Europeans, such as General Allard or others, ‘whose commendable zeal leads them to give higher prices for these coins than prudence warrants’ (Cunningham 1840b: 543-544). The methods that Cunningham deployed in analysing these coins to infer that they were fakes are interesting indeed. They include a careful study of the materiality of the coins: how they had been manufactured, using what sort of tools and implements, and how they were dispersed. Thus, he noted certain features of the coins, such as a tapering flaw at the end of a coin’s flan, or the crudeness and mistakes generated in the execution of inscriptions on them; or flaws induced by methods of spurious manufacture, such as casting in moulds. European collectors keen to acquire the coins undoubtedly provided the main incentive for the appearance of these fakes. However, the forgers evidently possessed an acute knowledge of what they really went for. Many coins Cunningham discussed were ‘fantasies’ in typology – they were made by copying types, which were usually known for one metal into another. Most were copies of bronze types into silver but salient examples of silver and bronze types made into gold were also noted. In some cases, genuine precursors were used to make mould impressions from which fake specimens were cast using unusual metals. The collectors of these coins came from various layers of colonial gentry and officialdom. They included European soldiers and civilians associated with the British Army, and the army of the Kingdom of Punjab, and even an occasional aristocratic woman like the Lady Sale.

Cunningham commented in his analysis that the ‘the best test for distinguishing a genuine coin is its excellence as a work of art’. In fact, he outlined two basic tenets for spotting a fake coin: ‘whether its workmanship is worthy of Grecian art’ and ‘whether the double legends are perfect’ (Cunningham 1840c: 1228-1229). His analysis showed that many of these fakes were being made by local forgers who did not understand the scripts, nor the tenets of ‘Grecian art’, and therefore evidently made mistakes. He noted certain executional features, such as a ‘full eye in a side view of the face’, to suggest that the coins with such a feature were a ‘work of a native of India’, because the Indian artists employed a stylization that employed ‘a full eye, even in a side face’ (Cunningham 1840b: 1222). However, by far the most striking aspect of Cunningham’s analysis is that it lays bare a nexus between the antiquarian academia of the day and the forgers. Some of the coins, which the forgers were making, were evidently copied not from the actual extant specimens, but from illustrations that appeared in plates accompanying contributions by James Prinsep to the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* (Prinsep 1835). This made Cunningham infer that the fakery operation was in all likelihood being run by a ‘white gentleman’, who was in possession of these plates and was masterminding ‘native assistants the particular coins he wished to be forged’. In a detective fashion, he proclaimed that before long, he ‘shall be able to expose the white gentleman, who superintends the forging of these coins to the merited contempt of the public’ (Cunningham 1840c: 1226). However, subsequent publications do not indicate that Cunningham ever accomplished such a task.

Some examples of the fake coins Cunningham discussed appear to have found their way into museum collections. Two examples from the Ashmolean’s collection (Figures 4 and 5) are a case in point. They are crude copies of bronze types of Menander, with an owl and a shield on the reverse, respectively, but made in a white metal. Cunningham described this metal as silver but it is evidently just a white alloy. Errington noted examples of both amongst the rubbings of coin that once belonged to General Court (Errington 1995: figs. 2B and 3F). A rather astonishing case of a coin copied from the plates accompanying Prinsep’s 1835 article is a copy of a gold dinar of Vima Kadphises, now in the British Museum collection. Prinsep’s engraving, the original gold coin and the copy are all illustrated by Errington in her research on the coin collection of General Court (Errington 1995: figs. 1H, 3G, H, I).

Figure 4. A cast fake of Menander, 'owl' type, similar to the piece in General Court's collection, illustrated in Errington 1995 as fig. 2B (Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



Figure 5. A cast fake of Menander, similar to the piece in General Court's collection, illustrated in Errington 1995 as fig. 3F (Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



The subject of fake Gandhāran coins is forgotten after these early investigative reports. In the bibliography published by Glenn we find mention of very few academic contributions which deal with the subject of fake coins (Glenn 2016: 11). Two exceptions stand out – one is a contribution by Hugh de S. Shortt on 'Utmanzai Forgeries' (discussed below) and the other, a notice of Bactrian forgeries by Jenkins (Jenkins 1965). More recently, Bracey, Gawlik, and Tandon have contributed papers on fake Bactrian, Indo-Greek and Kushan coins (Bracey 2008; Tandon 2010; 2014; 2018; Gawlik 2016). The methodology adopted by Jenkins, Bracey, and Tandon underlines the importance of the materiality of coins as a diagnostic tool for detecting forgeries. They all follow the trailblazing method of Cunningham, focussing on the dies from which the coins are struck, commenting on the inaccuracies in execution of letters and/or motifs. Jenkins took Cunningham's methods a step further – he diagnosed forgeries by demonstrating die links between dubious coins. Bracey emphasized the occurrence of a fake patination on the group of Bactrian coins he examined.

However, going by the fact that fake Gandhāran coins have been known for nearly two centuries, these contributions can at best be regarded as skimming the surface of the subject. One more way to observe the circulation of fake coins among the collector community is museum acquisition details. They bear testament to the fact that forgeries were an integral part of the coin-collecting spectrum in North India in its earliest days. Indeed, Cunningham mentioned forgeries of other, non-Gandhāran coins circulating as early as 1840 in his notice (Cunningham 1840b: 544). The provenances of coins discussed by Jenkins amply support this observation, but further evidence is found in acquisition details of coins in institutional collections. In the Ashmolean's holdings, for example, mid-nineteenth century acquisitions like the collection of J.W. Elliott, acquired in 1853, have fake Kushan and Indo-Greek coins.

Some astonishingly well-made forgeries could not even be detected until subsequent acquisitions revealed their exact mould replicates, diagnosing them to be fakes. Illustrative of this are two examples – one a relatively common drachm of Apollodotos II (Figure 6) and the other, a more unusual bronze 'octuple unit' of the 'shield of Athena/ trident of Poseidon'-type of Demetrios I (Figure 7). Both were acquired from the collection of Sir Charles Oman in 1947. Of these, the copper coin of Demetrios was listed in the significant compendia of Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins such as the *Catalogue Raisonné* by Bopearachchi (Bopearachchi 1991: 167, série 6A) and by Mitchiner (Mitchiner 1975/1976: Type 107b, illustrated). However, it was not until the Ashmolean acquired the collection of Adrian Hollis in 2010 that exact replicates of both these coins came to light (Figures 8 and 9), adjudging them instantly to be well-made forgeries.



Figure 6. A fake drachm of Apollodotos II (ex- Sir Charles Oman collection, acquired in 1947, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



Figure 7. A fake bronze 'octuple unit' of Demetrios (ex- Sir Charles Oman collection, acquired in 1947, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



Figure 8. Exact replicate of drachm in Figure 6 (ex- Adrian Hollis collection, acquired in 2010, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



Figure 9. Exact replicate of the bronze octuple unit in Fig 7 (ex- Adrian Hollis collection, acquired in 2010, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).

The 'Utmanzai forgeries'

In the 1963 volume of the *Numismatic Chronicle*, noted coin collector Hugh de Sausmarez Shortt published an article titled 'Utmanzai Coins' (Shortt 1963). This is perhaps the most thorough and detailed treatment of fake coins and therefore warrants a special mention. Hugh Shortt's collection was bequeathed to the Ashmolean on a 'first refusal' basis upon his death in 1975 (Kraay and Sutherland 2001: 10). Before the Ashmolean acquired the Senior Collection of Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian coins, and the Hollis Collection of Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins, the coins from the Shortt bequest constituted the best of the Ashmolean's coin holdings in the Gandhāran series. A number of coins, which Shortt published in the 1963 paper are now in the Ashmolean collection and a few are illustrated here (Figures 10 to 13).

Shortt's intention to study a group of coins – which he labelled as 'Utmanzai coins' upon the fact that many of them were originally acquired by another noted collector of Gandhāran coins, Major-General Henry Lawrence Haughton, from the 'villagers in the neighbourhood of Utmanzai in the North West Frontier Province' in the 1940s – was to allay suspicions about their genuineness. G.K. Jenkins, the curator of coins at the British Museum, was the main instigator of these suspicions. The coins were evidently made by striking with dies, not cast in moulds as many of the previous fakes had been. They did not betray any of Cunningham's tenets: their execution was of a high artistic quality and the bilingual



Figure 10. Fake silver tetradrachm of Menander, 'Utmanzai group' (ex- Hugh Shortt collection, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



Figure 11. Fake silver tetradrachm of Hermaios and Calliope, 'jugate bust' type, 'Utmanzai group' (ex- Hugh Shortt collection, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



Figure 12. Fake silver tetradrachm of Hermaios, 'cavalier' type, 'Utmanzai' group (ex- Hugh Shortt collection, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).



Figure 13. Fake silver tetradrachm of Strato I, 'Utmanzai' group (ex- Hugh Shortt collection, Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum).

inscriptions on them did not carry any signs of mistakes or omissions. Indeed, some of them had been published earlier and some had been acquired by institutions like the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Whitehead 1947).

The investigative methods and pathways Shortt adopted made this study a path-breaking one. Shortt assembled a sizeable database of coins, from both institutional and private sources, which shared the same provenance and had appeared on the market alongside the group under investigation. He did extensive provenance research – he went through Haughton's archives to build a picture of how and when these coins had appeared and where they were dispersed. Above all, he subjected coins he had on hand to scientific analysis using XRF spectroscopy, an analytical tool that was considered cutting-edge in the 1950s and 60s. Some coins from his sample database were adjudged forgeries based on the XRF analysis because they were found to contain a significantly high percentage of Zinc. With his thorough analysis, he came up with a list of 'criticisms' which in effect put the rest of the coins, including the 'Utmanzai' group, under an investigative lens. He then discussed these points in a systematic way to answer them. Ultimately, the 'Utmanzai' group were diagnosed to be fakes based on an undeniable fact – in spite of sharing die-identical details with genuine museum specimens, they were all about 2 mm smaller in diameter. This peculiar feature was because the dies that were made to produce the 'Utmanzai' coins were made 'by taking casts from the originals, a process which involves a slight shrinkage in the diameter' (Shortt 1963: 18).

Shortt's openness, thoroughness and investigative approach makes his attempt at analysing the 'Utmanzai' group a unique one, particularly so because it shows a journey from conviction to admission and resolution, via scepticism, faced by an enlightened coin collector. However, apart from the methods, approaches and arguments involved, the investigation also sheds light on an important aspect – that of the role of networks of collectors, dealers, and museum professionals in determining the status of coins. Some of these are indeed a continuation of colonial networks, which earlier scholar collectors like Cunningham were a part of – Haughton was an officer in the British Army and stationed at Kohat in the North-West Frontier Province as regional commandant. Shortt operated in a milieu that straddled colonialism and its aftermath. Even when Pakistan (and India) had become independent in 1947, Shortt continued to collect coins through the pre-independence networks he had been familiar with. A major player in this collecting story is a Punjabi dealer named Sri Chand, based at Rawalpindi. Notes made by Shortt on his identifier tickets that accompany the coins, which are now in the Ashmolean, suggest that many coins from his collection were purchased from Sri Chand, including the Utmanzai fakes. Sri Chand was also instrumental in supplying coins of Gandhāran and other sorts, to institutions, such as the American Numismatic Society and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Most importantly, Sri Chand was also responsible for suggesting a provenance for his wares – names like Lal Dheri, Spinwarai or Safed Dheri and Swabi appear in the records of Whitehead, Haughton, and Shortt as places where coins had been found, only on the subjective authority of Sri Chand. Coin dealers in London were on a more benevolent side of the story – the firm A.H. Baldwin allowed Shortt access to Haughton's coins as well as papers and were instrumental in tracking the dispersal of the coins. G.K. Jenkins, the curator at the British Museum, proved very helpful to Shortt to build a corpus of all coins that were essential in his analysis.

Another important point that Shortt's study highlights is how fakes are made in 'iterations' or 'editions', sometimes improving or touching upon existing apparatus or toolkit. The fact that many of the 'Utmanzai' coins are struck from dies that were altered from those that produced earlier versions, as evident not only from tell-tale signs of touched up aspects but also from progressive shrinkage in diameter, shows they are merely a small 'packet' in a long chain of fakery enterprise that was going on for decades. Shortt astutely concluded that the enterprise was that of wilful deception: 'more than one man was involved – a mastermind as well as a skilled technician, and middlemen... It would appear that the coins were judiciously planted for the benefit of General Haughton and others' (Shortt 1963: 22).

Gandhāran fakes: recent developments

The subject of fakery and dubiousness continues to play a part in the discourse of Gandhāran numismatics. Glenn's recent study of Bactrian coins includes an appendix which lists a number of dubious coins and a dubious bronze die claimed to be of ancient origins (Glenn 2020: 373-377). Two categories stand out – the first being that of 'fantasies' and the other of 'tampered' coins. Fantasies, or coins that 'never existed' have been an old and consistent theme – the 'silver' copies of bronze coins that Cunningham discussed, are a case in point. As types usually met with in bronze these should have never existed in other metals. However, the fact that this is precisely what the collectors want, for their penchant for novelty, might have prompted the forgers to create such pieces. The same lure of novelty continues to be an impetus for making fake coins. By far the most controversial in recent times is a gold 'double daric' attributed to Alexander once touted to be a component of 'une découverte pour l'humanité' and 'the only authentic life-time portrait of Alexander the Great' (Bopearachchi and Flandrin 2005). This piece immediately provoked a long debate between numismatists and classical scholars regarding its genuineness. The first to cast doubt was Hurter (Hurter 2006) and subsequently many others have voiced their doubts (Bracey 2011; de Callatay 2013; Habicht, Chugg et al. 2018-2019). The piece would qualify as a classic example of the state of affairs in which a 'fantasy' Gandhāran coin would find itself in – of dubious provenance, with several inadequacies and hitherto unique, purporting to overturn scholarly viewpoints about

Alexander's iconography and therefore, having a fittingly 'magnetic' lure for keen collectors for the series. However, a cursory glance through auction houses and their catalogues would be enough to see that the so-called 'double daric' is not alone in its appeal. A number of other examples of such unique and academically interesting coins have turned up on the market. A unique gold coin of the Bactrian king/satrap named Sophytes (Roma Numismatics Ltd, Auction 2, lot 366, 2nd October 2011),³ a gold coin of a 'new king' named Heliodotos (Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XV, lot 1362, 3rd January 2012),⁴ and an anepigraphic gold stater attributed to Strato (Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XVI, lot 649, 8th January 2013) could be cited as examples. Some of these coins have been published in numismatic literature (for example the Heliodotos coin in Bopearachchi 2011) and suggested to complement new discoveries, which in turn can be problematic, having been reported through a market that thrives on illegal digging and spoliation of ancient Gandhāran sites. The Heliodotos coin was linked to a newly discovered Greek inscription, reportedly found at Kuliab in Tajikistan, but this provenance is based only on hearsay ('Un renseignement que nous avons obtenu récemment d'une autre source qui s'est toujours révélée fiable situe effectivement la découverte de la pierre inscrite à Kuliab' – Bernard et al. 2004: 338).

Perhaps more pernicious is the trait of tampering with the materiality of coins by adding features like fake patination and re-engraving details to make them more 'apparent' and discernible. Collectors are invariably keen on certain aspects of the coin design that make the coin more explicable, classifiable and attributable. In case of Gandhāran coins, these usually include the inscriptions, taxonomic features like monograms, and certain iconographic details, all of which can be lost through natural wear and corrosion that any coin as a metallic object from antiquity would endure. As an example, a specimen offered by Classical Numismatic Group is shown here (Figure 14; Electronic Auction 330, lot 150, 9th July 2014).⁵ This coin is of Telephos, an ephemeral Indo-Greek ruler whose coins are rare and therefore collectible. The description of the coin clearly indicates that it has been 'repatinated with artificially applied earthen deposits, smoothed and details lightly enhanced'. The picture, however, shows that 'lightly enhanced' is at best an understatement – the details, particularly the Greek and Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions show clear signs of having been considerably tooled, probably with not so sophisticated



330, Lot: 150. Estimate \$100.
Sold for \$240. This amount does not include the buyer's fee.

BAKTRIA, Indo-Greek Kingdom. Telephos Euergetes. Circa 80-70 BC. AE (23mm, 7.72 g, 12h). Zeus enthroned slightly left, extending hand / Man seated right on low rocky surface, warming hands over small fire, cradling branch in left arm; container at feet, monogram to left. Bopearachchi 3A; SNG ANS –; HGC 12, 411. VF, repatinated with artificially applied earthen deposits, smoothed and details lightly enhanced. Rare and interesting.

Figure 14. A retouched bronze unit of Telephos offered at a Classical Numismatic Gallery auction.
(Photo: <<https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=263986>>.)

3 <<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=515337|920|366|b2f42a9e1c50ada185db91b837df8f35>> (last consulted 18th February 2022).

4 <<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=453249|823|1362|77dc8eafdf0c3df42da0d9a30c24cc7d>> (last consulted 18th February 2022).

5 <<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=691462|1282|150|1d551bab3f79b412aa8d21fe9c9ec4f0>> (last consulted 18th February 2022).



Figure 15. A tooled Kushan bronze with re-engraved figure of standing Buddha on reverse. (Photo: courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.)



Figure 16. A tooled Kushan bronze with re-engraved figure of seated Buddha on reverse. (Photo courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.)

tools like the ones used in dentistry which are designed to work on small surfaces to etch and buff them. In the recent past, the market for Gandhāran coins has been replete with such doctored or tooled coins, which make them more saleable.

The doctoring of coins is not limited to only enhancing the features – even more problematic is the practice where doctoring and re-engraving is used effectively to modify existing features to more ‘interesting’ ones or even to add non-existent ones. Such modifications are also presumably done to increase the saleability of the coins. Tandon has discussed Kushan coins with re-engraved and modified features in detail (Tandon 2010: 19-20). By far the most common fakes of this kind are Kushan coins where the deity on the reverse is re-engraved to resemble the Buddha. It is common knowledge to coin collectors that Kaniṣka’s coins with the Buddha (of both the historic as well as the ‘future’ varieties) are rare and desirable. Fakers therefore take common Kushan coins and re-engrave the reverse to resemble the Buddha, often adding features such as Bactrian inscriptions and the Kushan *tamghas*. Although the ‘Buddha’ type coins were issued only by Kaniṣka, this does not deter the enterprising fakers from taking a coin of any Kushan ruler – such as Wima Kadphises or Vāsudeva – and tool the ‘standing Shiva’ or the ‘seated Ardokhsho’ on reverse into a standing or seated figure of Buddha. Two such examples are shown here (Figures 15 and 16).

These developments are worrying for the future of Gandhāran numismatics indeed. Many times, some such doctored coins are published in literature for their seeming novel and interesting features. A case in point is a Kushan copper coin of Huvishka, with the four-armed god Oesho on reverse that was published as depicting an image of ‘Shiva cursing Apasmārapuruṣa’ or ‘the demon of ignorance’ (Figure 17; Bopearachchi and Pieper 2009). The analysis presented suggests the depiction is of a high iconographic and socio-religious importance (Bopearachchi and Pieper 2009: 36):

It should be emphasized that we are confronted here with a syncretic deity, prior to the polarisation and codification of symbols of later Hindu iconography where each god is equipped with stereotypical attributes. This is one of the main features of the earliest iconography of Brahmanical deities in India during the Kushān period before the phase of polarisation or codification. The engraver has not attempted to create an image of the Śiva punishing Apasmārapuruṣa based on passages in the sacred texts. This unorthodox iconography, as compared to other images, which do conform to the letter descriptions formulated in the holy texts, is more freely engraved. The engraver seems to have enjoyed some independence in a growing cosmopolitan atmosphere created by the politics of the Kushāns.

Figure 17. A tooled Kushan bronze with 'Shiva cursing Apasmārapuruṣa' on reverse. (Photo: courtesy of Wilfried Pieper.)



Thus, the depiction was adjudged the earliest numismatic depiction of its kind and indicative of major religious and iconographic flux. However, the size of the 'demon of ignorance' as compared to the depiction of Shiva, his strange posture and the fact that he had been engraved cutting across the dotted die margin, created some doubts as to the authenticity. Moreover, no such depiction was found on coins that were nearly die-identical with the published coin in other aspects (Tandon 2010: 20). In Tandon's view, it is plausible that the reverse die developed a flaw, a corrosion pit to be precise, which would be a perfectly normal consequence for a metallic tool. This resulted in a 'shapeless blob' on the surface of the coin once the die was struck on the coin blank. A clever forger then reshaped or tooled it into a kneeling human figure. Fraudulent doctoring had thus been the basis of an iconographic novelty.

Why (should) fakes matter?

To sum up, we should look at why studying fake Gandhāran coins should matter. Primarily, it matters because fake (including fraudulently doctored) Gandhāran coins carry the potential of contaminating the discourse of Gandhāran studies. As the foregoing discussion has shown, fakery has been an inseparable aspect of Gandhāran numismatics. Whether easily detectable or highly accomplished, fake coins have been on the scene ever since the inception of Gandhāran numismatic studies; some perhaps even predate them. In spite of this, they have never been studied systematically. Curatorial practice and treatment are mainly responsible for this attitude – once an object is deemed not genuine, it diminishes its antiquarian value, and it is consigned to a curatorial oblivion. However, as outlined in the prologue of this paper, fake coins are not merely 'objects' but 'things'. They bring with them their own narratives and interpretations, which are deeply rooted in their materiality. Studying fakes can therefore be an illuminating exercise to ascertain how they feed into the contexts of human activities such as collecting. With the changing museum and curatorial climate, some of these contexts have also changed and evolved. It is now impossible for museums to study and/or acquire unprovenanced objects and consequently a closely-knit co-operation between trade professionals, private collectors, and museum curators, like the one evidenced in Hugh Shortt's analysis of the 'Utmanzai' group of fakes, has become a thing of the past. The deep knowledge curators once harboured about market networks is now diminished as the curatorial world moves away from trade in antiquities, particularly when it is fraught with issues regarding ethics of collecting. Studying fakes, particularly from old, legitimately provenanced collections is therefore our only way to develop a material understanding of these objects and how they were produced, disseminated, and circulated.

A very significant insight that the study of fakes feeds into is with regard to the 'networks of Knowledge formation' that were built among coin collectors. These networks can be seen in the context of the concept of 'information order', which the historian Sir Chris Bayly outlined to historicize knowledge-gathering and social communication in colonial India (Bayly 1999: 3-6). As Bayly points out, 'in pre-modern societies the information order was decentralized, consisting of many overlapping groups of knowledge-rich communities'. So far as Gandhāran numismatics goes, the 'overlapping groups of knowledge-rich communities' consisted on the one hand of the British/European collectors, mainly

comprising the ‘colonial elite’, and on the other hand various local and indigenous ‘colonized’ participants in the enterprise of coin collecting. The ways in which British/European collectors interacted with each other, how they exchanged information and objects with each other and how they made disciplinary contributions in the discourse about Gandhāran numismatics can be reconstructed through sources like published and unpublished archival materials. The tickets accompanying coins and acquisition notes made by the collectors also prove helpful. However, the narratives from the viewpoint of the colonized people are yet to be told. The exploitation of the ‘colonized’ component of ‘knowledge-rich communities’ constituting the information order towards the working and articulation of the colonial project became a hallmark of British colonialism in India. Knowledge about India’s past was generated not only through exploiting her archaeological sites and ancient texts; it was also dependant on tapping into the knowledge base of indigenous communities. In the case of collecting coins, these comprised traditional caste and kinship-based groups like goldsmiths, coppersmiths, and metal scavengers. Their help was sometimes sought in ascertaining genuineness of the coins. Cunningham notes – ‘when I showed them [i.e. the cast fake coins] in the midst of several genuine silver coins to a native goldsmith, and asked him if he could make me some casts from them, he replied, that the figures and letters of the casts would not be so clear and distinct as on the original coins; and then added, as he picked up one of the gold pieces, “This was made in a mould”’ (Cunningham 1840c: 1221).

In some instances, however, generating information using shared wisdom was not so straightforward. Many western coin collectors viewed the indigenous people who sold coins with a great degree of suspicion. Sometimes, racial prejudices prevailed. In 1835, Charles Masson wrote in response to the collecting spree unleashed by the French generals Allard and Court in the bazaars of Peshawar – ‘I could have sold them some 2000 coins at that time in my possession at these rates, but I was not a native of Peshawar without a conscience, but a European with one, and would scarcely have reconciled myself to selling even to Frenchmen, 2 coins for a rupee, which I had purchased for 2 pice’ (Errington 1995: 412). These remarks presuppose the fact that this spree also gave an incentive to some of the earliest fakes of Gandhāran coins we now know, made explicitly with a view to deceive the European collectors. This racialized view is also found in Cunningham’s hunch, realized to his horror, that the person involved in faking coins by copying them from Prinsep’s plates was in all probability a ‘white man’ who in a nexus has pointed out to ‘his native assistants the particulars of coins he wished to be forged’ (Cunningham 1840b: 1226).

The dynamic of suspicion and doubt between ‘native informants’ and bazaar dealers continues well into the twentieth century, as is evident from remarks made by later collectors/scholars like Whitehead and Shortt. Whitehead was not just a private collector; he was also the Honorary Numismatist to the Punjab Government and his contributions (Whitehead 1923; 1940; 1947) outline several conduits through which coins were being collected by him and his illustrious forerunners in the field of collecting Gandhāran coins, namely L. White King, G.B. Bleazby, and J. P. Rawlins. Whitehead’s 1923 contribution is significant as it lays out a ‘collecting landscape’, noting in some detail coins of which types or rulers were found in which areas, based on ‘local knowledge’ (Whitehead 1940: 91). Conceivably, his source of information must have been local coin dealers in the region, particularly those based in cities like Rawalpindi, rather than those in mofussil towns. Of this group of dealers, Whitehead remarks – ‘The Rawalpindi dealers probably began as collectors for Cunningham and others; their services have been indispensable, although they cannot resist the temptation to make easy money by forging. During my fifteen years’ dealings with them, they were usually vague, perhaps purposely so, about the provenance of their coins, though it was obvious that most came from west of the Indus’ (Whitehead 1947: 41). While describing coins from Gen. Haughton’s collection that were said to have been found in the Sheikhan Dheri and Lal Dheri hoards – many of which were condemned by Hugh Shortt as ‘Utmanzai forgeries’ almost twenty years later – Whitehead says, ‘The dealers are gradually bringing them out and unhappily have

already placed casts on the market' (Whitehead 1947: 42). However, even though it was common for these dealers to offer fakes amongst their wares, they always maintained that the 'forgeries come from over the border', i.e. from Afghanistan. Whitehead deploys a quote from an army journal written in 1846 to insinuate, 'There are Jews in Cabul who are very clever in counterfeiting ancient Greek and Bactrian coins'. He further adds that reported in the 1872 issue of the *Numismatic Chronicle* was a didrachm of Telephos from a 'Kabul Jew' that was ostensibly a 'fantasy' (Whitehead 1923: 310, n.18). These oblique and much older references to Jews being the culprits behind faking Gandhāran coins add another racial dimension to the tinge of suspicion harboured by early twentieth-century collectors. In a way, these insights contribute to the 'decolonizing' of Gandhāran numismatics. This is by far the most significant contribution the study of fakery can bring to the discourse on reception of Gandhāran studies.

While commenting on the so-called 'Alexander medallion', Andrew Stewart wrote – 'fakers are seldom intellectually adventurous, still less brilliantly intuitive' (Stewart 2011: 76). Such a position is naive and dangerous, in addition to being 'hubristic' as noted by Bracey (Bracey 2011: 491). It presumes academics know better than fakers. What we know from the history of fakery in Gandhāran numismatics is exactly opposite. It is seen repeatedly from the earliest years of the formation of the discipline that forgers produce highly innovative fakes and have an acute understanding of the collectors' psyche. Combined with skillsets at hand and the right kind of steer, such as access to academic wisdom and debates, forgers can come up with the most 'interesting' coins, which pose and/or solve interesting quandaries and are thus more desirable and collectable from a collector's standpoint. The ways fakers operate are difficult to comprehend; indeed, in spite of having access to apparently 'reliable' bazaar information Whitehead or Shortt could never ascertain the precise locations of ateliers or artists of the forgeries they discussed. The extent to which forgers can go to hawk their wares in the right direction of business can be seen in the case of the so-called 'Pipal Mandi' hoard of Kushan gold coins, found in Peshawar in early 2006 (Bopearachchi 2007; 2008). This hoard supposedly contained four highly unusual gold coins, which identified the issuer, the Kushan king Wima Kadphises as the 'son of Wima Takto'. This inscription, occurring on the reverse, was said to have been prompted by an anxiety on part of Wima Kadphises 'to proclaim that he was the rightful heir to the Kushan throne' (Bopearachchi 2008: 25). This anxiety in turn was attributed to a 'usurper' – identified to be the issuer of coins with the title 'Soter Megas' – who had tried to bid for power at the very beginning of Wima Kadphises' reign and had been defeated by the latter. The coins therefore were posited as early issues of Kadphises (Bopearachchi 2007: 49) where he 'used his coin portrait as a medium of propaganda' to let his subjects know that the usurper had been defeated and that he was now the sole inheritor of his father's empire. This interpretation is at variance with the earlier position that Wima Takto and 'Soter Megas' were in fact the same ruler (Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996; Cribb 1999). However, in his most recent reappraisal of the 'Soter Megas' coinage, Cribb has effectively and assiduously countered the claims to the find and the nature of the coins in the hoard and their interpretation (Cribb 2015). What stands out in Cribb's analysis is the fact that only one coin of the hoard, a gold stater (Bopearachchi 2008: 9, coin no. 4), which is in a much poorer state of preservation than all other coins, is most likely genuine. The legends on this coin are not in a good condition to be read fully. The other coins are modern fakes made using this genuine piece as prototype. Cribb's analysis rests on incontrovertible arguments, based on a thorough die analysis of all Wima Kadphises coinage by Bracey (Bracey 2009) and also a cogent explanation of how the legends on the fake coins have been reconfigured imaginatively from the worn coin. The most striking piece of evidence Cribb adds is that fact that the genuine coin had in fact been known two years prior to the publication of the Pipal Mandi hoard (Cribb 2015: 91). This suggests a manipulation of the hoard's contents, where the genuine coin was placed into the find along with the three fake gold coins that it inspired in order to provide contextual legitimacy to the fakes.

The problem of fakery has unfortunately become endemic to the discipline of Gandhāran numismatics. With the advent of newer technologies, such as digital coin databases from the numismatic trade

(<www.coinarchives.com> and <www.coinarchivespro.com>) and ‘linked open data’ digital typologies, it has now become possible to ‘test and track’ how dubious coins are dispersed. Social media platforms have also greatly added to the speed with which information is processed and dispersed. It is now much easier to alert collectors to potentially dubious wares. However, technological advances have meant that faking coins has become an even more ‘scientific’ and technologically superior enterprise than it has ever been. It is still not possible to track down the perpetrators of fakes and find out exactly where and how the fakes are manufactured; however, this has been a problem faced by the discipline ever since its inception in early nineteenth century. The dynamic between fakers and collectors/scholars continues to evolve in a ‘cat and mouse’ fashion.

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