

3 Numismatics of ‘the other’

Investigating coinage and ‘Greekness’ at Taxila

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Prologue

Taxila, located in the Punjab province of present-day Pakistan has been a focus of visualizing the ‘Greek’ in Indian history for a long time. Its beginnings lie in the Alexander narrative, reconstructed from Classical texts like Arrian’s *Anabasis*, which refer to an Indian ruler named ‘Taxiles’ who became Alexander’s ally. Coins enter the narrative at this juncture too – Taxiles is said to have paid Alexander a tribute of ‘thousand talents of coined silver’ (Plutarch, *Alexander*, 59 – “So, after receiving many gifts and giving many more, at last he lavished upon him a thousand talents in coined money. This conduct greatly vexed Alexander’s friends, but it made many of the Barbarians look upon him more kindly.”).¹ Taxiles also owed allegiance to Alexander in his campaign farther east of the Punjab, against his enemy Porus, and it famously culminated in the battle of the Hydaspes. The credit of identifying the city of Taxila goes to Alexander Cunningham, who, working from the survey of archaeological remains and mapping them on various textual accounts in Greek and Chinese, commented that ‘extensive ruins near Shah Dheri’ were the ‘the famous Taxila of the Greeks’ and indeed, ‘the ancient capital of the Panjab’.²

In the formative years of the study of Indian numismatics, the origin of coinage in India was a highly debated aspect. Many Western numismatists saw a familiarity with Greek coinage as a precondition to have triggered the development of indigenous coins in India, and thus dated the advent of coinage in India commensurate with the Indian campaigns of Alexander. But the mention of Classical writers like Plutarch of Taxiles paying ‘coined silver’ to Alexander meant the Indians knew of coined money even before Alexander, so it ended this debate. Alexander Cunningham declared, “The Hindus were in actual possession of a real coinage at the time of Alexander’s expedition”.³ The

numismatic analysis of Cunningham set the tone for most future investigations and interpretations, as we shall see further in this chapter.

Taxila and its constituent sites, such as the 'Bhir Mound', Sirkap, Sirsukh, Jandiyal, and Mohra Moradu, became the subject of extensive archaeological exploration and excavation under the directorship of Sir John Marshall over nearly three decades. The reports of the excavations further cemented the 'Greek' element in the narrative of Taxila.⁴ Central to the narrative was not only the 'similarity' of artistic archetypes, such as pillar capitals, or motifs such as the 'double-headed eagles', but also an urban plan which was thought to be essentially Greek. Marshall described it as a "typically Greek chess-board pattern, with streets cutting one another at right angles and regularly aligned blocks of buildings".⁵ The excavations yielded an enormous amount of numismatic data, a lot of which still remain to be properly studied and published. Coins helped Marshall put his narrative of a 'Greek' Taxila in further perspective as can be seen in his assessment of the data. Although he seemingly acknowledged "there is nothing typically Greek about buildings, nor are there any remains of temples, altars, public monuments or statues such as we are accustomed to associate with the Greeks" in spite of the city being laid on a Greek grid plan, he posited the numismatic evidence into the narrative to be "where Greek Art manifests itself most prominently . . . the stylistic history of which is singularly lucid and coherent".⁶

The narrative constructed by Marshall had a lasting impact on the history of Taxila in particular, and the history of the Greeks in India, or the narratives of 'Hellenism', in general. Taxila occupied the position of a node where cultures mixed and produced hybrids. The roots of such interpretations lay in Classical Studies, with nineteenth-century Romantic revivalist historians like Johann Gustav Droysen, the father of the term 'Hellenismus'. In the post-colonial discourse, however, the term 'Greek' was problematized, particularly in the aftermath of Edward Saïd's 'Orientalism'. It attracted criticism from several quarters, posited between the Droysenian idea of *mischkultur* and hybridity and Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture*. It also attracted attention from a more incisive post-colonial inquiry into the concept of 'identity' in the ancient world and what its connections were with ethnicity.⁷

My chapter attempts to unpack the role coins played in the narrative, particularly from the viewpoint of numismatic analysis and interpretation which in turn led to the archaeological inferences which the like of Marshall drew from the data. I will also present new numismatic data to argue for a different interpretation, which in turn casts a

doubt on earlier inferences, specifically the archaeological chronology of various sites under the umbrage of Taxila. I hope the analysis and data I present here will help further deconstruct the notion of what exactly ‘Greek’ means in the context of Taxila and feed it further into the debate about essentialism in ancient history and archaeology.

The numismatic chronology of Taxila

Alexander Cunningham was responsible for creating a numismatic category titled ‘coins of Taxila’ in his book *Coins of Ancient India*, published in 1891.⁸ By this time, the knowledge that the silver ‘punch-marked coins’ were the earliest of Indian coins had been well established. Cunningham described two such coins and remarked on a peculiar mark they carry on the reverse (for a similar coin, see Figure 3.1), conjecturing that it could be “the mark or sign of Taxila”. One of the reasons for this conjecture is that it also occurred on a gold coin he reportedly obtained at Taxila, now in the British Museum collection. Cunningham then described a range of “square copper pieces of single dies, and of the standard peculiar to India” (for example, see Figure 3.2) and commented on the symbols they carry. Evident in the commentary is the fact that Cunningham sees many of these symbols as Buddhist or Hindu – the chaitya and ‘Bodhi Tree’, ‘plan of a monastery with its cells’, ‘a building which may be a temple’, and so on. He then moves to ‘double-die pieces’, the salient of which are ‘Elephant and Lion types’ (Figure 3.3). He also described a number of other types in this category – most of them uninscribed, but a few carrying inscriptions indicating they were struck by ‘*Nigamas*’, or guilds.



Figure 3.1 Punch-marked coin with ‘Taxila’ mark on reverse

Source: All images have been taken from Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, UK. Used with permission.



Figure 3.2 Uniface die-struck copper coin attributed to Taxila



Figure 3.3 An 'elephant and lion' coin of Taxila

The internal chronology of these 'local' coins is suggested by Cunningham on the basis of a "small parcel of 143 square copper coins", which was found in 1884 at Shah-Dheri. He was able to examine 135 of these and managed to acquire 127 for his own collection. The breakup of the 135 was as follows:

- Eighty-four Indian coins of one face only – average weight 140.8 grain
- Twenty-seven Indian coins of two faces – average weight 183.3 grains

- Twenty-four Greek (nine Pantaleon and fifteen Agathocles) – average weight 180.5 grains

Cunningham identified the single-face coins to be struck on the ‘Indian standard of 80 *ratis*, or 144 grains’, whereas the two-face coins, ‘both Indian and Greek’, were struck to the heavier standard of 100 *ratis*, or 180 grains. He then remarks,

As all these coins were found together, they must have been current at the same time. But as the greater number are of the Indian standard, I infer that they must belong to the indigenous coinage prior to the Greek occupation. I infer also that the deposit must have been at an early period of the Greek rule, as shown by the presence of the two early Greek kings, Pantaleon and Agathokles. The Greek coins preserve the Indian type of the Lion, as well as the square shape.⁹

Cunningham’s analysis ends here, but it sets the tone for all future assessments of coins found at Taxila. He obviously regards some of the coins to be ‘Indian’ and others to be ‘Greek’. The reason why they are ‘Indian’ is conceivably because they have ‘Indian’ (Buddhist/Hindu) symbols, a different shape – rectangular rather than round – and a weight corresponding to the ‘Indian standard’. The coins of Pantaleon and Agathokles do have inscriptions, which are in Greek and Brahmi, whereas the Indian coins do not. As such, and because they are more numerous in the parcel, Cunningham contended that they must antedate the ‘Greek’ coins. This is a very clear example of an antiquarian method of taxonomic categorization, with ‘Essentialism’ about the inherent characters of the objects being classified as a guiding principle. The ‘Indian’ coins, depending on their physical features, are thus ‘Othered’ from being ‘Greek’, thereby creating ‘Greek’ and ‘Indian’ as numismatic categories. This numismatic categorization is based on a purely Essentialist premise: ‘Greek’ is manifest when coins are inscribed, round, neatly executed with animate motifs, and struck with dies, whereas they are regarded as ‘Indian’ when they are uninscribed, square, mainly symbolic in terms of motifs, and struck with either one or two dies. This ‘taxonomic Othering’, as I call it, later emerged as a fulcrum for classifying these coins which had a huge impact on how other kinds of data, particularly the archaeological data emerging out of Marshall’s digs, was analyzed and interpreted.

I would like to emphasize here that the ‘taxonomic othering’ I have referred to is, in a sense, an analytical rather than a ‘physical’

categorization. If we see coins for what they are physically, of course, Cunningham was right: these coins bear the traits he recognized as such in terms of shape, size, weights, motifs, and so on. However, the way he treats them analytically and puts them in these pigeonholes of 'Greek' and 'Indian' is where the 'othering' comes about. In doing so, Cunningham ostensibly does not take into account aspects beyond these physical attributes – like the circulatory context of the coins or how such aspects as shape could have been dictated by far more mundane considerations such as how the coin-manufacturing technology worked, and in response to what sort of circulatory demands the coinage were subjected to, rather than whether they were 'Greek' or 'Indian' in any way. The important consideration that a 'coinage tradition', which emerges out of a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and political factors, could well have been behind these physical aspects is also largely overlooked by Cunningham.

The major fallout of the scheme of classification and the placement of the so-called 'Indian' coins immediately before the advent of the Greeks was the creation of a Taxila as an 'independent state' between the Mauryan and the 'Greek' periods in the historical narrative about Taxila. Thus, Taxila was taken to be a 'state' under its ruler Taxiles, the adversary of Porus and ally of Alexander. Then came the Mauryan interlude which was briefly followed once again by a 'Taxilan' state; this state then was taken over by the Greeks during the rule of Pantaleon and Agathokles, who made it a Greek outpost. Once the Greeks took over, in Marshall's words, "for six long centuries . . . Taxila was never again to be free from the yoke of Western conquerors".

It is worthwhile to note that the key framework within which the numismatic evidence was analyzed and interpreted was provided by texts. These were often taken ad lib and ad hoc – for example, while discussing the Mauryan presence at Taxila beyond the rule of Asoka Marshall took the mention of a Stupa dedicated to his son Kunala by the Chinese traveller Xuanzang as a chronological marker, even after acknowledging that the mention was clearly 'apocryphal'¹⁰ and notwithstanding the fact that Xuanzang was writing nearly half a millennium later. This helped to bridge the gap between Mauryan Taxila and the advent of the Greeks in the late second century BCE under Pantaleon/Agathokles as Cunningham had propounded.

This numismatic chronology for Taxila came to be generally accepted – barring minor discord with respect to some details – by Classical historians and numismatists. As ancient Indian numismatics grew as a subject, the Taxilan coins came to occupy a categorical 'time and space' locus. In Marshall's excavation reports, three numismatists,

namely E.H.C. Walsh, John Allan, and R. B. Whitehead, wrote separate reports on the coin data that were recovered. Marshall himself consolidated his views upon their writings, sometimes offering his own views. Exactly why Marshall enrolled three different authors to treat numismatic evidence is not known, but it appears to be the result of some of them having specialized knowledge about or interest in certain series of coins (for instance, Walsh dealt only with punch-marked coins). The contribution of these three, and of Marshall himself, with specific reference to the coin data excavated at Taxila will be discussed in more detail later. But before that, it will be worthwhile to see how other numismatists have treated what was regarded as the 'Indian' coinage of Taxila.

Taxila before the Greeks: numismatic assessments

The most significant numismatic treatment of the Taxila coinage came at the hands of John Allan, who published the catalogue of coins of Ancient India in the British Museum in 1936.¹¹ Allan clearly stated that "it is on the authority of Cunningham that most of these coins in the (British) Museum collection are attributed to Taxila". He then produced a classification much like Cunningham had done, splitting the bulk into 'inscribed' and 'uninscribed'. In the latter category, he identified the 'three-arched hill with crescent' as a symbol 'characteristic of Taxila' which accompanies disparate symbols on the uninscribed die-struck coins, including 'a plan of the courtyard of a monastery with cells around and a Stupa in the centre'. On the basis of the symbolic configuration, he assigned them eight varieties: Var. a through Var. e, and Vars. h through j. Chronologically, Allan assigned all these coins to the first quarter of the **second** century BCE because certain varieties were 'found in one pot amid ruins of Taxila. . . (with) coins of Pantaleon and Agathocles of Taxila fabric'. This is ostensibly a reference to the find Cunningham made which we have already discussed. Implicit in this statement is Allan's recognition that the coins of the Greek rulers were in a 'non-Greek' fabric, thereby emphasizing the 'Othering' of the physical attributes.

Allan then proceeded to describe another large group of uninscribed die-struck coins 'of similar fabric', attributing them to 'Taxila' on the basis of the repertoire of symbols they share with other such coins.¹² One of them is the 'three-arched hill with crescent' which he had adjudged to be 'characteristic of Taxila' while describing the previous group. These coins bear the motifs of an elephant and a lion, both of which are depicted in association with the so-called 'Taxila' symbols

and classified into Vars. a through e. On certain varieties, however, the symbol is replaced with a 'plant', as Allan recognizes it, and the lion replaced by a 'galloping horse with a star' above. These constitute Vars. e and g. The horse, according to Allan, is 'familiar on the coins of Euthydemus and some other Greek kings' and 'the type of galloping horse is not an Indian one, nor is the star'. Allan also considers that 'the idea of a main type with subsidiary symbol is Greek, and not Indian' and 'on purely Indian coins, all the symbols are the same size'. He then concludes that Vars. a through d of this group of coins 'should be attributed to Greek kings in Taxila'. The fact that they were also represented in the pot found by Cunningham is taken as corroborative evidence. Because coins of Vars. e and g were not in the pot, they 'may therefore be a little later in date than the former'.

Allan's analysis exemplifies the Essentialist approach – he clearly makes his mind up on what is 'Greek' and what is 'Indian' when it comes to classificatory characteristics of the coins. The corroboration he seeks also follows the same logic – some of the motifs on the coins are 'Greek' in his view: the lion is Pantaleon's 'favourite type', the monogram on one of the coins which looks like 'Ā' is the 'initial of Agathocles', and 'the star and the plant (as Allan identifies it) link these coins with those bearing the name of Agathocles'. These characteristics prompt Allan to remark that these coins might be Greek issues, even though the fabric of the coins is clearly 'Indian' as the Essentialist definition goes – they are rectangular, differently manufactured than the Greek coins, and carry no inscriptions.

William Tarn, who wrote the narrative *The Greeks in Bactria and India*,¹³ imagined a different reality. He was convinced that the conquest of Taxila by the Greeks happened not close to Pantaleon or Agathocles, but their predecessor, Demetrios.¹⁴ Described famously as the 'Conqueror of the Indians' by Justin, the remarkable portrait of Demetrios on his silver coins wearing a headgear fashioned as an elephant scalp, as well the motif of an elephant wearing a bell in its neck, were both taken as numismatic substantiations of this event by Tarn. He also contended that Demetrios laid the foundations of a new 'Greek' city at Sirkap¹⁵ and entrusted his agenda of a southward conquest to his kinsman General Apollodotos.¹⁶ Tarn does not attribute the 'Indian'-style coins of Agathocles to Taxila; Agathocles in his view ruled in a 'sub-kingdom that lay primarily in Iran'.¹⁷ Instead, he explains the similarity between the bilingual coins of Agathocles to the 'Indian'-style unscripted coin by suggesting that Agathocles might have struck his coins because he was 'putting into circulation under his own name more coins known and acceptable to the merchants of

Taxila'. So in effect, Tarn agrees that 'Taxila' possessed a coinage of its own prior to, or parallel with, its purported Greek conquest, but he does not take the similarity of the inscribed Greek coins of Agathocles and Pantaleon with the so-called 'Taxila' coins to suggest that they manifest a political interface at Taxila.

With regard to the other types of 'Taxila' coins, Tarn has precious little to say. He does contend that the coinage continued after Demetrios's conquest of the city, referring to Allan's remark of some of the varieties being 'a little late' than those contained in Cunningham's pot, which was deposited concurrently to the reigns of Agathocles/Pantaleon. Tarn's quest to substantiate the Greek rule in Taxila takes him in the direction of finding a 'Greek' type associated with that city, which he contends 'ought to be discoverable on Taxila's own coinage'.¹⁸ He identifies this to be the 'elephant' type which is 'infinitely commonest' among the various types of Taxila coins. Tarn is conceivably referring here to the uninscribed 'lion × elephant' coins which he takes to be a part of the Taxila coinage. Conveniently for Tarn, the coins of Apollodotos are of 'elephant × bull' type as well, so it substantiates not only his identification of the elephant as a 'Greek' type associated with Taxila, it also fits neatly with the dynastic order (Demetrios the conqueror appoints Apollodotos the governor) he suggests in his narrative reconstruction.

Tarn's view that the Agathocles/Pantaleon issues were not struck in Taxila effectively dissociated the identity of these coins as markers of a political interface between the 'independent state of Taxila' and 'Taxila under the Greeks'. This interface, according to Tarn, antedated the two rulers. However, Tarn regarded the 'lion × elephant' type coins to be of a 'Taxila type' which was struck almost concomitantly with the Agathocles/Pantaleon issues but under Apollodotos, who Tarn considered to be the Greek ruler of Taxila under Demetrios. Tarn's views regarding the Greek succession are no longer tenable, but his dissociation of the Agathocles/Pantaleon coins with Taxila, in direct contradiction to Cunningham and Allan, is worthy of note. But it did not find favour with numismatists. They were guided by the apparent similarity between the fabric and the motifs of the two series – both were struck in an 'Indian' fabric in being rectangular and followed an 'Indian' standard, and the lion on the Agathocles/Pantaleon coins was evidently similar to the lion of the 'lion × elephant'-type coins.

Michael Mitchiner, while accepting the narrative of an 'independent Taxila state' in the immediate aftermath of the Mauryans, suggests a somewhat different treatment.¹⁹ According to him, what was clubbed together into a single category as the local/ 'Indian' coinage of Taxila

falls under two categories: coins with 'thick compact' fabric and coins with 'thin broad' fabric. Each of these comprises many series, but the "influence of Greek art" is evident on only one of them, according to Mitchiner. He agrees that the coinage in both fabrics ends with the Greek king Agathocles striking what could be the terminal types in both fabrics.

Mitchiner further suggests that each of these fabrics must be linked to the two premier cities of Gandhara: Taxila and Pushkalavati. The 'thick compact' coins are attributed to Pushkalavati, and the 'thin broad' coins to Taxila. He bases his surmise on numismatic typology and the 'amount of Greek influence' shown by the coins in each series (as if it were a quantifiable prospect!). The 'influence' logic is nothing but 'taxonomic Othering' in a slightly different garb – coins such as those of the 'lion × elephant' were adjudged to have 'more Greek influence', manifested in the fact that they were 'struck on both sides' and constitute a 'single device' appearing on each side, which are in a 'style' that in evolutionary terms 'is suggestive of Greek influence'. The basis of this interpretation is that the motifs such as lion, elephant, and horse are similar in execution to the 'succeeding Indo-Greek coins of Apollodotos I and their portrayal is "distinctly Greek". On the other hand, the coins of an earlier sort within the same fabric/series have a lower weight, have a multitude of symbols, and are primarily struck on one side. This makes them an 'essentially an Indian coin type'. This is then adopted or continued by the Greek rulers when they make an appearance in Gandhara.

The latest numismatic assessment of the 'Taxila' coinage is by Wilfried Pieper²⁰ who ascribes its chronological placement to the 'independent' period between the Mauryas and the Greeks approximately between 232 BCE when Asoka died and c.190–180 BCE when Agathocles 'made Taxila a province of his realm'. This is in turn based on Osmund Bopearachchi's dating of Agathocles.²¹ The Taxila coins thus 'served as prototypes for Hellenized copies struck by Agathocles and Pantaleon'. He also suggests that 'the series is so extensive and the varieties so numerous that the continued striking of these coins seems to have been tolerated by the Indo-Greek kings of Taxila for use in local trade'. However, he does not say for how long. He also doubts Bopearachchi's contention (following Tarn) that the square elephant/lion and elephant/horse coins could be issues of Demetrios I because if the Greeks had 'invented' the square copper types at Taxila, 'the absence of any legend on them would be unusual and against the rule of their coinage'. To Pieper, the technique of producing a uniface coin is 'obviously simpler' than to strike a coin between two engraved dies,

which is 'more advanced', and therefore he chooses to suggest that the uniface coins of Taxila might be earlier than the biface types. Pieper compares the symbolic programme of the Taxila coins with 'Mauryan'-cast copper coins known from northern India and sees them as the prototypes for the animal types from Taxila.

There is an 'Indian side' to this story as well. Babu Durga Prasad, an Indian numismatist, propounded a view that a common symbol evident on a wide range of Indian coins, identified by numismatists as 'Three-arched Hill surmounted by a Crescent', was in fact a 'Mauryan royal symbol', or *Rajapata*.²¹ Noted Indological scholar Dr K. P. Jayaswal was also of the same opinion – in fact it is difficult to ascertain who asserted it first between Prasad and Jayaswal. Jayaswal appears to have made the assertion in 1933 while delivering the presidential address of the Oriental Conference at Baroda, but Prasad contends that

[t]he symbol was first mentioned by me to be connected with the Mauryas, as I found it on the remains of half a dozen remains of definitely known Mauryan monuments, as well as cast copper coins dug out from the Mauryan levels at different ancient sites.²²

Prasad adduced evidence to this effect from so-called 'Mauryan' texts like the *Arthashastra*, which indicated that a practice of marking various objects with such a royal mark was indeed prevalent during Mauryan times. Although the text themselves do not give any idea as to what the mark actually looked like, the identification of the symbol as such was inferred by one of its prominent constituents, the 'crescent', which is *Chandra* in Sanskrit, and therefore conveniently linked to Chandragupta, the first Mauryan ruler. Needless to say, this is all purely conjectural; however, it gained wide acceptance and contributed subsequently to the identification of punch-marked silver coins as 'Mauryan' currency.

Because the three-arched hill symbol predominates on a lot of the Indian-style coins of Taxila, Prasad contended that these were in fact Mauryan issues. Most noteworthy is the inclusion of the 'lion × elephant' types – regarded as the immediate precursors of the Pantaleon/Agathocles coins by other numismatists – into this very broad category of Mauryan coins, because they, too, carry the arched hill symbol.

By Durga Prasad's contention, a period of independence for Taxila before the supposed Greek advent under Pantaleon/Agathocles would not appear to exist. The succession to the Greeks from the Mauryans would be direct. However, this view did not find takers in the

historical narrative about Taxila, probably because the overwhelming analysis provided in the Taxila excavation reports seemingly goes against it. However, in the numismatic section John Allan wrote for the Taxila excavation report, he deployed the logic of interpreting the arched hill symbol as Mauryan to emphasize the Mauryan character of some of the 'Indian' coins.

If we recap these varied numismatic perspectives, certain distinct analytical tropes emerge. First, the chronological placement of the Taxila coinage is taken by most numismatists to be a post-Mauryan phenomenon. Archaeological substantiation was sought for this (see later in this chapter), by the fact that Taxila had an independent coinage soon after the Mauryans had been a part of the discourse even before this substantiation was published. The inference that the coinage of Taxila was post-Mauryan and pre-Greek is primarily based on a typological construct, in which the discussion has mainly been to identify and assign coins to 'Greek' and 'non-Greek' types. The characteristics of these types are physical as well ideological – if the coins are square, 'rough', uninscribed, and symbolic in appearance, they are adjudged to be 'non-Greek'; if they are round, neat, inscribed, and carry animate motifs, they are inferred to be of 'Greek' type. The next step is to identify, in individual instances, which of these have been influenced by the other and then relate such a connection to a type-based chronology. This is then mapped with the known historical wisdom to suggest where exactly the political interface lay. To most numismatists, this interface appears to lie about the time of Agathocles/Pantaleon, which then makes them deduce that this was the time Taxila 'lost' its independence and became a 'Greek' city. The historical reconstruction is thus a direct outcome of the selective 'Othering' of certain types of coins with respect to the bulk of coins associated with Taxila in both excavated and non-excavated contexts.

Taxila's local coinage – archaeology and numismatics

John Marshall excavated various sites comprising the ancient city of Taxila for a long time. Excavations began in 1914 and continued until the late 1930s. A consolidated report was published in 1951.²³ This report curiously has four analytical sections on coins written by four authors: Marshall himself, John Allan of the British Museum, R. B. Whitehead, and E.H.C. Walsh. Each presents his own analysis about the coin finds. Marshall and Allan write more from a 'top-down', summary perspective; Whitehead's take is that of an antiquarian/numismatist (focusing on "significant coins", separating out those which

he found more interesting), and Walsh writes mainly about the two hoard finds unearthed at the site of Bhir mound. A ‘*Myrical*’ appears at the beginning of the report in which the general chronology and periodization of the site are outlined. A cursory glance at this section suffices to suggest that the general structure follows the norm we have seen in the preceding section of this chapter – in the decades following Alexander’s retreat from the Punjab, Taxila first exists as a ‘Mauryan’ province, then becomes independent for a while, and then is occupied by the Bactrian Greeks. The interpretation of coins is largely based on the stratigraphic sequencing and identifying certain layers of Bhir and Sirkap as ‘Mauryan’, which inter alia has been essentially a numismatic exercise, based mainly on the analysis of the Bhir Mound coin hoards as forwarded by Walsh. To an extent therefore, the archaeological and numismatic narratives given in the Taxila volumes feed off each other in a circular way. The four writers also present different views, particularly with respect to the local Taxila coins, which draw upon and/or differ from each other’s analysis, as well as in ways they use their forbearers’ views and conclusions. At the same time, each of them arrives at what appears to be a curious mix of interpretations, sometimes completely ignoring important factual details others have noted.

Marshall devotes a number of pages to the ‘Local Copper Coinage of Taxila’.²⁴ In the opening paragraphs of this section, he noted that the archaeology of the finds of these coins makes it certain that although they were largely issued from c. third century BCE (“it would be unsafe to infer that any of these coins were struck before the third century BCE”), the coinage was not ‘short-lived’ and did not end with the ‘Greek conquest before the middle of the second century BCE’ as Allan had postulated. Marshall’s inference is based on the numbers of these coins recovered from different levels – he found 179 coins from the so-called Mauryan and ‘autonomous’ periods of the Bhir mound settlements, but from the Sirkap cities, he recovered 502 coins, with 432 coming from the top two strata. A type-wise distribution was also telling – whereas 25 types and varieties were recovered from Sirkap, only 11 were common in the assemblage uncovered at Bhir, and none of the “noteworthy types such as the ‘Tree-in-railing’” were found there. According to Marshall, the Sirkap cities “did not come into existence until well after the Greek conquest”, so finding such a large number of these so-called ‘Indian’ coins at Sirkap came as a bit of a surprise. Although Marshall agrees on the ‘residuality’ of coins from an earlier period in circulation (“ancient Indian coins often remain in circulation for several generations after they had ceased to be

minted”), he found the sheer number of these coins rather daunting to admit that their issue had been stopped after the Greek conquest. He therefore contended, “On the whole, it seems more likely that these local coins continued to be struck for some time after the Greeks, and possibly after the Saka conquest also”.

This contention could have killed the narrative about the existence of an ‘independent’ Taxila based on placing these coins into the Maurya–Greek interlude as ‘Indian’ issues preceding the Greek conquest in an interpretative sense. But it did not **happen**, primarily because even though archaeology was clearly guiding Marshall in suggesting that the issue of these could have been carried on well after the Greek conquest, the art historian in him appears to have ignored these warnings, as evident from the successive paragraphs of his analysis. In his estimation of what the symbols of these uninscribed coins might mean, he seems to be guided by a preconceived notion that they are ‘Buddhist’. Marshall takes the ‘three-arched hill surmounted by a crescent’ symbol to stand for a Buddhist stupa. Types which have various ancillary symbols constituting a programme around this so-called ‘stupa’ – a ‘pillar’, a tree in railing, an ‘undulating river’, a female figure holding a flower, etc. – are also alluded to have a ‘Buddhist’ connotation. He even sees the “plan of a *sangharama* with two rows of monastic cells and a small flame-shaped object in the middle” on one coin type. In a feat of interpretative certitude, Marshall declares with regard to the meaning of these symbols, there “can hardly be much room for doubt” – the chaitya or stupa is evidently the great Dharmarajika Stupa built by Asoka; the stream is the Tamra Nala, which flowed at the foot of the stupa; the pillar is an Asokan pillar; the two rows of cells and the *sangharama* are parts of the monastery with the central flame-shaped object being a diminutive description of the stupa; and the tree-in-railing must be the Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya which Asoka had transplanted at Taxila. As for the female holding the flower, Marshall chooses to identify her as Maya, the Buddha’s mother, even though other numismatists like Allan had opined earlier that she could well be Lakshmi.

Marshall’s essentialist arguments are quite surprising because he gives no specific evidence to his interpretations. It is interesting to see that much like the numismatists ‘Other’ the coins in an Essentialist manner, he ‘Others’ Buddhism from Hinduism and regards the symbols on the uninscribed coins as exclusively Buddhist. In this, he is probably guided by his work on the Buddhist monuments of Sanchi co-authored with Alfred Foucher, who famously created the category of ‘l’Art Greco-Bouddhique’ in Gandhara. However, as work by Julia

Shaw on Sanchi,²⁵ the very site Marshall and Foucher wrote about, has shown, the identities of what constituted ‘Buddhism’ and ‘Hinduism’ were not so determinedly set up in clear-cut terms in the Early Historic period. Both religious systems borrowed freely from each other in terms of visual culture and vied for already established cults.

Another interesting aspect about Marshall’s views is that he almost wants to see everything he excavates at Taxila firmly rooted and confirmed by the coin depictions, thereby creating a specific ‘time and space’ context for the local coins. He even alludes, agreeing with Tarn,²⁶ that the elephant on some local coins must have been an ancestor of the beast named ‘Ajax’, mentioned by the classical writer Philostratus (first century CE), as resident in the temple of the sun at Taxila and worshipped or greeted by visitors to the temple! In doing so, he ignores the fact that some of these coins – particularly the ‘elephant x lion’ types – had already been found at places far away from Taxila, like Begram or Yusufzai province. In his attempt to contextualize the coins so firmly with Buddhism, Marshall also posits them chronologically into the Mauryan to post-Mauryan epoch, when according to him, “Buddhism had become the established religion at Taxila”. This interpretation is based largely on how he thinks the symbols to be ‘Buddhist’, bolstered by the occurrence of these coins in the ‘Mauryan’ layers of Bhir, but ignoring the vast numbers he found at so-called ‘Greek’ cities of Sirkap.

Lastly, it might be said that Marshall’s attribution of the local coins of Taxila is itself not free from over-simplification. From the stratum- and site-wise distribution charts of coins identified as such that Marshall presents and exemplified by the entries of such coins which he adds to the compendium of “Rare and Unique Coins found at Taxila between 1912 and 1934” (Chapter 39 in the report), it is quite evident that he includes a good number of types which are found across northern India at different sites into the broad label of ‘local coins’ of Taxila. Examples of such are ‘early uninscribed cast copper coins’ or EUCCCs (no. REF in the plate) of two distinct types: round coins with an elephant on the obverse and an arched hill with crescent on the reverse, and rectangular coins with four symbols on both sides. Attributional mix-ups like these limit the utility of Marshall’s data when it comes to analyzing his data in a quantified manner.

The identification of ‘Mauryan’ strata at Bhir is largely on the basis of the coin hoards discovered there, namely Bhir-I which comprised 166 coins, discovered in 1913, and Bhir II, which contained 1,167 coins and was found in 1924. In Marshall’s 1951 report on Taxila, E.H.C. Walsh presents a descriptive account of the hoards as in

Chapter 40. But earlier on, he published the two hoards separately as a memoir of the Archaeological Survey of India²⁷ where much of the analysis regarding the coins can be found. Bhir II contained chronologically earlier coins, such as Gandharan bent bars and a single Achaemenian siglos, mixed with five punch-marked silvers of the "larger and thinner" sort which Walsh contends to be "older". The Bhir I hoard, in contrast, exclusively contained five punchmarked silvers of the "smaller and thicker" sort, which Walsh thinks to be "later" issues.

Due to their anepigraphic nature, punch-marked coins can only be dated by other contexts. To accomplish the task of dating the deposition of these hoards, Walsh placed a considerable emphasis on the few 'dateable' coins contained in the hoards; in Bhir II they are the coins of Alexander the Great and his short-lived successor Philip Arrhidaeus, whereas Bhir I contained a single gold coin in the name of Diodotos, issued by one of the two homonymous Greek kings in Bactria who declared independence from the Seleucids. Walsh also places considerable importance on the condition of these dateable coins; in both the hoards, these Greek and Bactrian coins are said to have been in "mint condition" as compared to the punch-marked coins, so Walsh adjudges them to be the "current coinage at the time of their deposit". Given the fact that Phillip Arrhidaeus died in 317 BCE, Walsh uses this date to suggest that "it is possible to determine within narrow limits the date of the deposit and, from it, to arrive at the date of the latest punch-marked coins in the hoard, and to estimate that of the older coins as well". Because Bhir I contained the coin of Diodotos, Walsh deploys a similar argument to date its deposition to 248 BCE, when such coins were in circulation. The most noteworthy aspect of the Bhir-I hoard is that 161 coins of the total of 166 bear a unique mark known as the 'Taxila mark' on the reverse, "though in many cases it is in such a debased form as to be scarcely recognized as such". Noting the fact that "the two hoards were found on the same site and in distinct strata, which are respectively dated from other considerations, apart from the dates of Phillip Aridaeus (*sic.*) and of Diodotos", Walsh concludes that "the later coins were first struck sometime between the close of fourth century and the reign of Diodotos".²⁸

Quite conveniently this is the 'Mauryan' epoch. Based on these dates, Walsh creates a 'Mauryan' identity for the site where these hoards were found. Bhir I also contained some jewellery alongside the coins. According to Walsh, it was of a "distinctly Mauryan" character. This contention of Walsh becomes a benchmark for assessing the archaeological chronology of Taxila. The Bhir mound henceforth

emerges as the 'Mauryan' or 'Indian' city, with its chaotic organization, whereas Sirkap, with its grid plan and other civilizing architecture is recognized as the 'Greek' city. Much like the treatment meted out to the local Taxila coinage, this is another example of 'Othering', and Walsh's analysis of the punch-marked coins underpins it by identifying Bhir as the 'Mauryan' city.

However, Walsh's assessment can be criticized from several angles. Most unreliable is his emphasis on the condition of the dateable coins of the hoards. Gold coins almost invariably were used more as a store of wealth due to their very high intrinsic value than a medium of circulation to effect everyday transactions. It is therefore not surprising that the gold coin of Diodotos was left in an exceptional state of preservation. The date of Diodotos, 248 BCE, therefore cannot be posited as the 'date of current coinage' to date the deposition of the Bhir I; it could well have been preserved in pristine condition even at a later date. The same applies to the coins of Alexander and Phillip Arrhidaeus – their physical condition, too, can only be taken as a qualitative indicator in assessing how long they could have remained in circulation and not an absolute one. In a circulatory realm dominated by anepigraphic and largely symbolic coins, exotic foreign coins with realistic portraiture have every chance of being saved from circulation and deposited in a hoard in fresh condition. Moreover, Hellenistic and Graeco-Bactrian coins are often struck with deeply engraved dies and thus bear impressions in high relief. As such, they often show very little sign of wear even after a reasonable degree of circulation. In recent years, a large hoard of these coins was found in Bihar.²⁹ The sample data collected for their die analysis by Zeng³⁰ show a very high proportion of coins in a very good state of preservation that could be regarded comparable with the specimen found in Bhir I. The date of Phillip therefore has little connection with estimating the date of deposition of the hoard. All one could say is that the coins were already struck when they were deposited alongside the punch-marked coins – but how later than their date of issue could the deposit have been made is an open-ended chronological bracket.

The preponderance of coins with the so-called 'Taxila mark' in Bhir I is also worth a revisit in the discussion about the date of deposition of the hoard. Studies by Elizabeth Errington³¹ and Robert Tye³² have indicated quite clearly that some of the so-called 'Mauryan' types of imperial punch-marked coins are in fact later issues and subject of a particular numismatic phenomenon involving salient punch-marked coin types (often referred to by numismatists by the Gupta-Hardaker classificatory system and identified by a 'GH' number).³³

The characteristic features of this phenomenon constitute a gradual (but often steep) debasement of precious metal contents and placement of the symbols on the flan of the coin in a 'rigid' manner, with their orientation vis-à-vis each other being 'fixed', unlike the predecessor issues where it is almost invariably random. The coins on reverse also sport a bold single mark. The phenomenon is regionally oriented – it is observed with respect to coins in Malwa, in the Ganga Plain, and in Vidarbha and Gandhara. In some regions, these act as precursors to even later punch-marked coin types, each with further distinguishing features which are also regionally oriented, such as incorporation of unique obverse and/or reverse marks. The coins in Bhir I are typical of such a 'regionally fossilized' series from Gandhara, originating from a variety of imperial coins identified as GH-575 of the Gupta-Hardaker classificatory system. It is now a well-established numismatic observation that such coins, although copying prototypes which were first struck in the Mauryan or late Mauryan period, are issued considerably later than that epoch.

This critique of Walsh's assessment of the chronology of the Bhir hoards demonstrates that their 'Mauryan' date of deposition is far from being certain. Walsh's statements which he adds to support this conclusion are conceivably without adducing any evidence. The "other considerations" he mentions to date the layers in which the Bhir hoards were found as 'Mauryan' are presumably the pre-Mauryan or Achaemenid levels discussed by Marshall,³⁴ but the veracity of Marshall's claim of discovering Achaemenian levels at Taxila have been questioned.³⁵ Working within the context of the finds, Walsh remarks that the jewellery found along with Bhir I was of a "Mauryan character" – this, too, is a vague description which lacks substance because he does not specify in which ways such a 'character' is assessed and attributed. Notwithstanding these facts, Walsh's analysis of the Bhir hoards was convenient in creating the chronological narrative about Taxila because it bolstered the recognition of a 'Mauryan' Taxila, which in turn provided a substantial basis to Marshall's own Essentializing arguments about how Buddhism came to be the 'official religion' in the region and how the local coinage (which succeeds these so-called 'Mauryan' coins) employed symbols which were firmly rooted in the spatio-temporal milieu of material culture known to exist at Taxila, including stupas, monasteries and pillars. This effectively facilitated their 'othering' from the Greek coins which chronologically followed them in the scheme of the narrative Marshall and others established for Taxila through their writings.

R. B. Whitehead presented a ‘commentary’ on the “Rare and Unique” coins found at Taxila³⁶ which Marshall listed as his Chapter 39. His remarks on the local coins of Taxila reiterate the established wisdom, if only underlining the ‘othering’ even more. He regards the local coins as predecessors to the Greek presence at Taxila. He criticises W. W. Tarn for his remarks on finding a ‘Greek type’ at Taxila (“the Greek type at Taxila ought to be discovered in Taxila’s own coinage”, *vide supra*) and contends against Tarn’s suggestion that the missing type of Taxila on Greek coins was the elephant, mainly because in Taxila’s local coins, the elephant is not so preponderant. But he does make an essentialist comment – that the Greeks “did derive from the Taxila was the square shape”. Here again we see the impact of ‘othering’, originally devised by Cunningham, whereby the square/rectangular shape of coins was adjudged as something uniquely ‘Indian’ and therefore not ‘Greek’. The ‘othering’ is further emphasized in Whitehead’s remark on the *Hiranasame* coinage of Agathocles, which he regards to be a “small change of local character”, thus not being ‘Greek’ enough in its type characteristics. He also takes *Hiranasame* or ‘Golden Hermitage’ to be synonymous with Taxila and therefore contends Tarn’s argument that Agathocles did not rule at Taxila to be untrue. In this, he is guided by Marshall’s identification of the motif on these coins as that of a ‘lotus tree’, with a specific local Taxilan Buddhist context, which we have already seen to be just another example of how ‘othering’ works when it comes to categorizing these coins.

But apart from this one analytical remark, Whitehead does little else than link up the attributive category of ‘Taxila coins’ to their provenance (“The accepted identification of the indigenous Taxila money has been amply confirmed by actual discovery on the spot”) so far as any analytical critique goes. He refers the reader to Cunningham’s *Coins of Ancient India* and the “full and up-to-date treatment” by Allan in the British Museum catalogue for further information on these coins. Curiously, he does not remark on or correct the wrong inclusion of some of the EUCCCs in the list as ‘local Taxila coins’ by Marshall even though he must have been well aware of their attribution as such.

John Allan added his own “notes” to punch-marked, local, and Greek coins found in Taxila in Chapter 41 of the report.³⁷ Marshall leaves Walsh’s and Whitehead’s contributions without adding any remarks of his own, but he annotates Allan’s section with a series of footnotes bearing his initials, offering views which are different from that of Allan’s and/or giving additional information. Allan agrees with Walsh’s estimation that the date of deposition of Bhir I took

place in the 'Mauryan' period and firmly places the local Taxila coins "between the decline of the Mauryan Empire and the Greek occupation". According to him the contents of the Bhir I and II hoards are so decidedly 'Mauryan' that "too much stress need not be laid on the three Greek coins [from Bhir II], which were certainly not current in Taxila but had drifted down there from the North-West, just as they still do to Rawalpindi at the present day". He muses over the possibility of a later date of deposition, perhaps in response to the "threat from Bactrian Greeks", and suggests that the Bhir II hoard could even have been buried as late as 170 BCE, just before the destruction of the Bhir mound settlements. Marshall adds a cautionary footnote that "our knowledge of the history of this period is next to nil". This is interesting because if the coins were withdrawn from circulating specie as Walsh had suggested, such a late date of burial, particularly for Bhir I (which, according to Walsh, contained coins struck later and not represented in Bhir II), would mean the coins had been in circulation well after the 'Mauryan' period. This might have meant a different approach in the ways the chronology of the hoard finds and, inter alia, the stratigraphy of sites at which they were found. However, this does not seem to have happened, probably because regarding the Bhir coins as 'Mauryan' neatly suited the narrative about Taxila that had been in vogue and to which Allan largely subscribed.

Regarding the local coins of Taxila, Allan reiterates his agreement with Cunningham about their attribution as such, although he notes that "a number of types said by Cunningham only to be found at Taxila are conspicuous by their absence". He also re-emphasizes his position, voiced in the British Museum catalogue where he first classified these coins, that they form a "well define[d] series and must cover the period of autonomy between the decline of the Maurya empire and the Greek occupation". Marshall once again adds a cautionary footnote: "The local coinage undoubtedly covers this period of autonomy, but it seems to have started well back in the third century, under Maurya rule". In this comment, Marshall is probably guided by the '*Rajanka*' theory of Durga Prasad et al, who regarded the 'arched hill with crescent' seen on many of these coins as a 'Mauryan' royal emblem. Allan regards symbols such as the swastika, a hollow cross, a plant, and a chaitya as "characteristic of Taxila".

Unlike the other commentators in the report Allan also attempts to suggest an internal chronology for these coins, but in his views he is clearly guided by certain assumptions which he already had subscribed to while writing the British Museum catalogue. Thus, he is firmly of the opinion that the coins of the rectangular fabric of the 'elephant ×

lion' type, but where the lion is replaced by a horse, are the "probably the earliest types issued under Greek influence", and although they are not rare, "they were found very sparingly" at Taxila.³⁸ According to Allan, "the horse is a Greek rather than an Indian type". Curiously enough, he comments that "the lion is also a Greek type, but not one particularly favoured by the Greeks in India" and in any case, because it is associated with symbols such as the swastika or the 'arched hill' on these coins, "there is no reason to think it is not the local Indian type in this case". This is yet another instance of 'typological Othering', but it works very well in supporting the chronology Allan attempts to arrive at.

Allan's contention is to regard the type similarities between these coins and those bearing the name of Agatocles and Pantaleon to suggest that the political watershed at Taxila manifests itself at the time of Agathocles/Pantaleon. Much like Whitehead, his intention appears to be to debunk the narrative of Tarn, who did not agree with this proposition. Allan posits the hoard findings by Cunningham once again into the debate and comments, "Dr Tarn says that there is no reason to suppose that Agathocles ever ruled at Taxila. If there is one fact that the coins tell us, it is that Agathocles did rule at Taxila".³⁹

Allan further adduces typological clues to suggest that the local coinage at Taxila came as the immediate predecessor of Greek coins, introduced after the Greek 'conquest'. According to him the horse which substitutes the lion on what he regards as the 'earliest coins with Greek influence' has direct resemblance with the horse on the copper coins of the Graeco-Bactrian king Euthydemus. He also takes the monogram 'Ā' occurring on some of these coins to mean either 'Agathocles' or 'Ta' for 'Taxila'. He also draws attention to the similarity of the star symbol placed above the horse with a similar star placed above the arched hill motif on Agathocles' *Hirama* coinage, which he views as issues of Taxila.

Recapturing the numismatic analysis in Marshall's 'Taxila' volumes, a few salient interpretative themes become evident. As the fundament of their analysis, all four contributors take Cunningham's contentions as a given without really questioning it. As we have seen, Cunningham basically devised his scheme on 'typological Othering'. The subsequent commentators work pretty much within the same frame. Marshall's approach is more cautious as is evident from the comments he adds in footnotes to Allan's comments. But he is still led by the logic of finding 'Greek' elements in Taxila's local coins, and 'Othering' forms a basis of his argument too – he extends numismatic 'Othering' further to create a distinctly 'Buddhist' identity for the local coins of Taxila,

essentially suggesting the symbols on them are 'Buddhist' rather than 'Hindu'. Whitehead and Allan both try to find the 'Greek' type of Taxila and although they take on board Tarn's statement that such type ought to be found in Taxila's own local types, they attack Tarn for suggesting Agathocles did not rule at Taxila. Allan contends that the political interface between 'independent' and 'Greek' Taxila is manifested by the oblong, rectangular coins of Agathocles and Pantaleon, which act as typological successors of the 'elephant × lion' types, with the unscribed coins on which the lion is replaced by a horse, also attributed to Agathocles, coming slightly earlier in the sequence. In this way, Allan firmly rejects Tarn's contention and reinstates Agathocles at Taxila as its earliest Greek ruler.

Reassessing the 'Greekness' at Taxila – archaeological and numismatic realities

Astonishingly, these assertions are not backed by excavated numismatic material at Taxila. The 'elephant × lion' type coins, supposedly the predecessors of Greek issues, are found in greater numbers at Sirkap (eighteen coins) than at Bhir (five coins). With regard to the *Hiranasame* coins, the number is woefully small – one coin with only *Hiranasame* legend was recovered from the surface, whereas four coins with the name of Agathocles alongside the *Hiranasame* legend were found at Sirkap. The issues of Agathocles and Pantaleon regarded to be the earliest 'Greek' issues of Taxila are actually absent from the archaeological record! The logic Allan applies to explain the lack of several Taxila types described by Cunningham in excavated context ("that evidences their rarity rather than casts doubt on their attribution") may not be applied in case of the Agathocles/Pantaleon issues, because they are not rare coins. Their absence from the archaeological record is therefore a significant omission in justifying Allan's claim that they were the earliest 'Greek' coins at Taxila, preceded by the local coins and copying designs from them. We have already seen that far more local Taxila coins are found at Sirkap, presumably Marshall's 'Greek' city, than at the Bhir sites, deemed to be 'pre-Greek' or 'Indian/Mauryan' in their character. A chart of stratigraphic retrieval of these coins provided by Marshall makes it even more clear; even though Marshall contends that 134 local coins were found in the supposedly 'Mauryan' stratum, the identity of such a stratum is based in consequence of Walsh's analysis of the Bhir coin hoards. There appears to be a curious case of Walsh and Marshall entering into a circular agreement of each other's stratigraphic wisdom – Marshall alludes to

certain layers as ‘Mauryan’ because Walsh discovered ‘Mauryan’ coins in them, whereas Walsh confirms the ‘Mauryan’ nature of the layers in which the punch-marked coins came from based on ‘other considerations’, probably alluding to Marshall, but does not give any idea as to what these considerations are.

A type-wise break-up provided with stratigraphy on p. 757 of the report reveals some interesting facts. The most conspicuous of the local coins at Bhir mound are those which have an arched hill with crescent, or a taurine, with the Brahmi letter ‘Go’ besides it on both obverse and reverse (Figure 3.4). The weight, fabric, and manufacturing technique of coins of this type and the way in which the letter is executed leaves little doubt that it is a later type. However, a great number of these coins (67) are found in the supposedly ‘Mauryan’ layer (layer II) at Bhir. Another seemingly later type – lion to left with taurine and swastika (Figure 3.5) with a blank reverse – is also found in significant number (33), only second to the type mentioned earlier. Together, these two types constitute more than half of the total number of local coins Taxila recovered from Bhir, and from a numismatic perspective, they are decidedly struck later than the chunky, oblong, rectangular pieces of Allan’s ‘Class I’ of the British Museum catalogue. The ‘elephant × lion’ type and varieties thereof are found in sparing numbers (only six) and out of these four come from the ‘Mauryan’ layer II.

On the other hand, a greater concentration of these supposedly earlier types of the local coins is encountered not at the pre-Greek Bhir mound, but at the ‘Greek’ Sirkap. Here a total of 36 of the ‘elephant × lion’ types are found, with the number of those found in the ‘Greek’ layers (VI and V) and the ‘late Saka and Parthian’ layers (II to III) being the same: 15 each. Coins of the types preponderant at Bhir are



Figure 3.4 ‘Taxila’ coin with arched hill flanked by Brahmi letter ‘Go’



Figure 3.5 'Taxila' coin with lion and swastika; the reverse is blank

found at Sirkap in much greater numbers – those with the letter 'Go' and variants thereof number 201 – and here they are concentrated in maximum numbers in the 'late Saka and Parthian' levels, with 132 out of the total belonging to this type alone. The other preponderant type at Bhir is also encountered in a large number at Sirkap (125), and out of these 80 come from the 'late Saka and Parthian' layer.

With such a remarkable variance in distribution, it is difficult to agree that these coins could be Essentialized as 'Mauryan' issues. At best, one can assume their issue must have begun in the Mauryan times, but stratigraphy shows that they certainly constituted the bulk of currency at Taxila in periods much later than the 'Mauryan'. It is significant that their numbers appear to swell in the period after the Greek levels and, in general, these are the levels which have yielded masses of Indo-Scythian coins, so their occurrence in numbers greater than that at Bhir cannot be justified as representing an exigent 'residual' circulation in later times in response to a general lack of circulatory coinage.

In a nutshell, therefore, the numismatic chronology of Taxila appears to be a sequence qualified by a number of essentializing contentions resulting from 'Othering', and the narrative emerging from it is a reflection of the segmented approach taken by numismatists who worked on the data to make the coins fit in the established framework.

In view of the critique presented earlier, it is evident that there is an urgent need to set all the essentialist categorization aside and look afresh at the coins labelled as 'local Taxila' coins. We must investigate what they themselves reveal to us through their characteristics. With regard to their internal chronology, so far the attempts have been

based on rather feeble grounds – ‘Othering’ has facilitated their identification as ‘Indian’ coins as opposed to ‘Greek’, and this has been the basic guiding principle in deciding which of these types are earlier. Typological features such as similarity with other Greek coins, the search for ‘Greek’ types at Taxila, and deployment of aspects such as monograms have been used as further tools in the framework largely set up through this ‘Othering’.

By far one of the most significant numismatic tools used to determine chronology of coins is counterstriking – wherein coins struck by one issuing authority are used as templates for manufacturing coins by another authority. This affords numismatists undeniable evidence to suggest the chronology of the coins involved in the phenomenon – if coin of ‘A’ is counterstruck by ‘B’, that would mean ‘B’ can exist only as a contemporary of ‘A’ or his successor but never as his predecessor. Some ‘local’ coins of Taxila presented hereunder throw a significant light on when they might have been struck. Two of these are from the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford collection (Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7) and one has been listed on www.zeno.ru, the online database of Oriental coins, as Zeno# 23875 (Figure 3.8).

The two coins from the Ashmolean collection are of the ‘square incuse’ type of local Taxila fabric belonging to Cunningham’s category of “square copper pieces of single dies, and of the standard peculiar to India”. But evident very clearly is the fact that they are struck over copper coins of the Indo-Greek ruler Apollodotos I (c. 175–165 BCE). The undertype is BN Series 6A as per Boppearachchi’s classification.⁴⁰



Figure 3.6 Indo-Greek copper coins of Apollodotos I counterstruck by ‘Taxila’-type devices



Figure 3.7 Indo-Greek copper coins of Apollodotos I counterstruck by 'Taxila'-type devices



Figure 3.8 'Lion x elephant' type coin, counterstruck on Apollodotos I

The overtype, however, is of the sort Marshall et al. would attribute to the period when Taxila was 'independent' following the decline of the Maurya Empire. It comprises a tree in railing, a swastika, an arched hill with crescent, and a small taurine. It is listed in Allan's British Museum catalogue⁴¹ as 'var. c', p. 220, Pl. XXXII, no. 4. The fact that a coin of this sort is counterstruck on an Indo-Greek coin of the mid-second century BCE throws open the fact the issue of coins of this

type must have continued well beyond the fall of the Mauryan empire and during the early heyday of the Indo-Greeks, just before the reign of Menander. There is no reason therefore to believe in the Essentialist premise that all such coins were pre-Greek because of their 'Indian' character.

The coin listed on the Zeno database is even more interesting – it is of the 'elephant × lion' type, but like the Ashmolean coins, it, too, is counterstruck on a coin of Apollodotos I. The remnants of the base of Apollo's tripod, the reverse device of Apollodotos I's copper coins, is clearly evident around the top left corner on the side bearing the incused 'lion' punch and so are the remnants of the Kharoshthi legend that surrounds the tripod. This clearly indicates that the issue of these coins was taking place around 175–165 BCE. As such the chronological narrative that fixes these coins as 'Indian' prototypes for the coins of Agathocles and Pantaleon, and thereby their issue to the 'pre-Greek' epoch of independent Taxila, becomes rather tenacious.

Judging by the archaeological findings at Taxila, however, these counterstruck coins come as no surprise. Marshall had already hinted at their circulation being continued at a later date, and Allan also had suggested that the dates of deposition of the Bhir mound coin hoards could have been as late as 170 BCE. The stratigraphic placement of these coins in the Taxila excavation also suggests their preponderance at sites dated later than the so-called 'Mauryan' settlements of Bhir.

Apart from the evidence of counterstruck coins, there exist other typological aspects of the coinage which suggest that the various series which comprise it were inter-related or connected to each other irrespective of the tenets – such as single/double die striking, 'incused' appearance, inscribed or uninscribed – upon which Cunningham, and following him Allan, classified them. One such feature is the symbol of a standard, variously regarded by Allan and others as a 'lotus plant'. On the thin and rectangular uninscribed series of coins (of which the inscribed *Hirañsames* coins are a part of), it is seen on the reverse in its most detailed form (Figure 3.9). It has a long staff in the centre, surmounted by a lotus bloom, which is flanked by two ribbons or penants of a serpent-like nature. In its simplified form, it is evident on the round, uninscribed coin series as well (Figure 3.10). Most importantly, the same symbol appears on the oblong, rectangular coins with an incused 'horse' motif, which Allan regards as the 'earliest Greek' coin type of Taxila (Figure 3.11). None of the four writers which contribute to Marshall's Taxila report take an account of such nuances – instead, they appear to be far more concerned with proving how the 'Indian'



Figure 3.9 'Taxila' coin with elaborate lotus standard



Figure 3.10 'Taxila' coin with symbolic configurations on both sides; the stylized 'lotus standard' symbol is seen besides the arched hill on the obverse

coin types get Hellenized into 'Greek' coin types, treating the bulk of the local coins summarily as a pre-Greek phenomenon. The evidence of counterstruck coins and the stratigraphy of coin finds suggest that the so-called 'Indian' coin types certainly continued to be issued after the Indo-Greek coins were being struck and as such formed a part of the same circulatory horizon. This important fact was sidelined in more abstract questions like finding a 'Greek' type of Taxila, primarily because these coins were 'Othered' as 'Indian' and the narrative of



Figure 3.11 ‘Elephant and horse’ coin with stylized lotus standard in front of the elephant

Taxila needed to be seamlessly joined between the indigenous ‘Mauryan’ and the foreign, more civilizing ‘Greek’ period.

If one overlooks the typological ‘Othering’ of these coins and accommodates the fact that the ‘Indian’ and ‘Greek’ coins were being issued alongside each other, it sounds far more likely that the typological features were being drawn from the same cultural collective comprising a wide repertoire of symbols. With this in mind, Essentialist questions like whether ‘Indian’ coin types were being ‘Hellenized’ or ‘Greek’ coin types were being ‘Indianized’ really have no meaning. Lastly, the Orientalist overtones in Marshall are evident in his foreword to the ‘Taxila’ volumes. Rather romantically, he has visions of Greece in the river plains of the Punjab. He writes in the preface to the ‘Taxila’ volumes of 1951 –

I still remember the thrill I got from the sight . . . I was a young man . . . filled with enthusiasm for anything Greek . . . in that far off corner of the Panjab . . . it seemed as if I had lighted on a bit of Greece itself . . . Doubtless the illusion was prompted . . . by Taxila’s historic association with Greece . . . I felt then there was something appealingly Greek in the countryside.

It is no wonder that a person so vividly wishing to find a piece of Greece in the East would go on cementing the narrative created by his forerunner Alexander Cunningham. ‘Othering’ therefore predominates in his intellectual approach, but it is hardly represented in material that he excavates. One would therefore wonder whether there is really any need for Essentialism as a narrative tool in visualizing the ‘Greek’ in Gandhara.

Epilogue

So to sum up the argument made in this chapter:

- 1 The numismatic chronology of Taxila is a direct outcome of 'taxonomic Othering' of coins into Essentialist categories of 'Indian' and 'Greek' – each coming with its features which reflect an 'Orientalist' and antiquarian method of judging what these two labels mean. In effect, 'Greek' means aspects which are orderly, literate, standardized, and familiar, whereas 'Indian' connotes with the exotic, cryptic, and symbolic. These two categorizations are then deployed to suggest an intercultural hybrid, which is created by Greek kings who 'Hellenize' the 'Indian' coins by adopting salient features such as shape from them, while introducing ostensibly 'Greek' elements such as type to them.
- 2 The chronology effectively feeds into an established narrative about Taxila – that it was a Mauryan province to begin with but seceded as an independent state when the Maurya Empire fragmented. The Greeks then arrive at Taxila and build a Greek city at Sirkap. The 'Indian' coins of a local nature fit well into the independent phase at Taxila and give credence to the civilizing Greek phase at Taxila. The basic framework of this historic narrative is derived from textual sources.
- 3 This Essentializing classification of coins therefore helped in a major way to create a narrative of 'Greek' Taxila. Other parallel narratives – of how the Bhir mound hoards are 'Mauryan', for example – cemented the story of 'Greek'-ness in Taxila.
- 4 However, archaeology as well as numismatic evidence indicate that there is nothing that justifies this positing of the coins to create the fundament to secure the narrative of 'Greek'-ness at Taxila. Counterstruck coins published confirm the issue of the so-called 'Indian' coins well into the Greek period. In effect, they are quite clearly a part of the currency picture which is also inhabited by the Greek coins. Their 'Othering' strips them of their circulatory context, and they are almost never recognized as counterparts of the Greek coins.
- 5 Lastly, the so-called 'local coinage' of Taxila is a category that requires much further research in terms of establishing the internal chronology of various constituent types. It is evident, both from the numismatic analysis and archaeological record, that localized coinages in greater Gandhara in general appear to have been struck and issued for a considerable length of time during the late

Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian periods. They obviously circulated alongside various ‘royal’ coinages. We have very little evidence on hand to explain what precise circulatory role they played, or even the reason for their continued issue even when ‘royal’ coins were being issued simultaneously. There are instances scattered in the long history of Indian coins where coins have often been produced as commodities and/or for specific purposes, like rituals. The local coins of Taxila need to be contextualized more firmly into the realm of monetary history before they are treated as objects which reflect Essentialist ‘ethnocentrism’. Simplistic classification, like separating them into ‘square/round’, ‘inscribed/uninscribed’, or ‘uniface/double-faced’ and so on, might provide a numismatic categorization for their study, but it tells us little about how they circulated, what their monetary role was vis-à-vis other currencies in the region of greater Gandhara, and in particular, how they related to the coins of the Indo-Greeks alongside which they circulated. To regard them summarily as ‘Indian’ and not ‘Greek’, and therefore ‘Othering’ them from their contemporary circulatory context, does not prove helpful.

Notes

- 1 Plutarch, *Alexander*, 59 – “So, after receiving many gifts and giving many more, at last he lavished upon him a thousand talents in coined money. This conduct greatly vexed Alexander’s friends, but it made many of the Barbarians look upon him more kindly.”
- 2 Alexander Cunningham, Taxila, or Takshasila, *Archaeological Survey of India: Four Reports Made During the Years 1862–63–64–65*, Government Central Press, Simla, 1871: 111–135.
- 3 Alexander Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India, from the Earliest Times down to the Seventh Century AD*, 1891, second AES reprint, New Delhi, 2000: 52.
- 4 Sir John Marshall, *Taxila: An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations carried out at Taxila Under the Orders of the Government of India Between the Years 1913 and 1934*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1951.
- 5 Sir John Marshall, *A Guide to Taxila*, 4th edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1960: 5.
- 6 Sir John Marshall, *A Guide to Taxila*, 3rd edition, Government Press, Calcutta, 1936: 28–9.
- 7 Rachel Mairs, The ‘Greek Grid-Plan’ at Sirkap (Taxila) and the Question of Greek Influence in the North West, in Michael Willis edited, *Migration, Trade and Peoples: European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, Proceedings of the Eighteenth Congress, London, 2005*, The British Association for South Asian Studies; The British Academy, London, 2009: 135–147.

- 8 Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India*, 1891: 60–66.
- 9 Cunninham, *Coins of Ancient India*, 1891: 65–66.
- 10 Marshall, *Taxila*, 1951: 25–26.
- 11 John Allan, *A Catalogue of the Indian Coins in the British Museum: Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*, British Museum, London, 1936: CXXV–CXXXIX, 214–238.
- 12 Allan, *A Catalogue of the Indian Coins*, 1936: CXXXVI.
- 13 W.W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1951 (reprint 1966).
- 14 Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria*, 1966: 135.
- 15 Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria*, 1966: 137.
- 16 Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria*, 1966: 143.
- 17 Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria*, 1966: 161.
- 18 Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria*, 1966: 163.
- 19 Michael Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage*, Vol. 4, Hawkins Publications, London, 1975.
- 20 Wilfried Pieper, *Ancient Indian Coins Revisited*, Classical Numismatic Group, USA, 2013.
- 21 Osmund Bopearachchi, *Monnaies gréco-bactriennes et indo-grecques, Catalogue raisonné*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 1991.
- 22 D. Prasad, Observations on Different Types of Silver Punch-marked Coins, Their Periods and Locale, *JASB-Numismatic Supplement*, 1937–1938 XLVII: 61–62.
- 23 Marshall, *Taxila*, 1951.
- 24 Marshall, *Taxila*, 1951: 757–763.
- 25 Julia Shaw, *Buddhist Landscapes in Central India: Sanchi Hill and Archaeologies of Religious and Social Change, c. 3rd century BC to 5th century AD*, BASAS, The British Academy, London, 2007.
- 26 Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria*, 1966: 164.
- 27 E.H.C. Walsh, *Punch-marked Coins from Taxila*, Memoir no. 59, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1939.
- 28 Marshall, *Taxila*, 1951: 850–851.
- 29 Osmund Bopearachchi and K. Grigo, Thundering Zeus Revisited, *ONS Newsletter*, 169, 2001: 22–24.
- 30 C.D. Zeng, Some Notable Die-links among Bactrian Gold Staters, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 2013: 73–78.
- 31 Elizabeth Errington, A Survey of Late Hoards of Indian Punch-marked Coins, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 2003: 69–121.
- 32 Robert Tye, Late Indian Punch-marked Coins in the Mir Zakah II Hoard, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 2006: 167–171.
- 33 P.L. Gupta and T. Hardaker, *Ancient Indian Silver Punch-marked Coins of the Magadha-Maurya Karshapana Series*, IIRNS, Nasik, 1985.
- 34 Marshall, *Taxila*, 1951: 14–15
- 35 Pierfrancesco Callieri, *India iii: Relations: Achaemenid Period*, in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 2004. Digital Edition, accessed at www.iranicaonline.org/articles/india-iii-relations-achaemenid-period on 12–1–2016.
- 36 Marshall, *Taxila*, 1951: 830–842.
- 37 Marshall, *Taxila*, 1951: 853ff.
- 38 Alan, *A Catalogue of the Indian Coins*, 1936: Pl. XXXII, 17–22.
- 39 Marshall, *Taxila*, 1951: 857.

40 Boppearachchi, *Monnaies gréco-bactriennes*, 1991.

41 Allan, *A Catalogue of the Indian Coins*, 1936.

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