Detail from above the entrance of Tehran’s fire temple, 1286/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad
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Part I

Articles
A note on the Alkhan coin type 39 and its legend

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In the classification of the Hunnic coinage issued by “Alkhan” authorities, Robert Göbl recognizes a type 39 that bears an obverse bust with a crown resembling that of Shapur II (Göbl 1967: 43-44). Klaus Vondrovec, in his update to Göbl’s work, considers the type 39 as part of the “Anonymous Clan Rulers” of the Alkhan series (Vondrovec 2014: 178) and stylistically links it to the type 43, “as well as by the obverse legends which are corrupted” (Vondrovec 2014: 170).

In their 2010 article, Michael Alram and Matthias Pfisterer summarized the previous attempts at reading the legends as: “Humbach (1966) thought it might be a corruption of Alxanno šauo, Göbl (1967) read xmoido boiono, while Davary (1982) offers no reading at all” (Alram & Pfisterer, 2010: 16). In his 2013 publication, Pfisterer states that “... die in meinen Augen immer noch überzeugendste Variante ist die von Göbl, der xmoido boiono liest” (Pfisterer, 2013: 33).

Neither Göbl, nor Pfisterer following him, offer any meaning for this reading, which seems by all measures bizarre. In fact, it might be most sensible to dismiss the legend, as in the related type 43, completely corrupted. The difficulty arises from the fact that unlike the type 43 legend where the individual letter shapes seem to have been corrupted, either incorrectly written or garbled by the die cutter, the Bactrian letters on the type 39 coin seem rather perfectly preserved, except that they make no particular sense.

Here, I propose to read the inscription, reading from 1h, r.o. as: χιδαρο βαιανο

I cannot quite see the μ as read by Göbl in the first part of the word (i.e. χμιοδο). Instead, it appears to me to be precisely χιδαρο. The second part I tend to largely agree with Göbl, modifying it to βαιανο, providing a reading for the whole legend as χιδαρο βαιανο. As parallel for the reading βαι- I like to bring attention to the gold denar type of Kidara, type 84 (Vondrovec 2014:184), where the reading Βοιο Κιδαρο has been proposed with the meaning “Lord Kidara.”

1Nicholas Sims-Williams, whose kind advice on this matter I would like to happily acknowledge here, suggests the reading as one word, thus χιδαροβαιανο (personal communication). I take full responsibility for my choice of treating the legend as two words and any possible ensuing mistakes.

2I cannot see how Vondrovec has read κιδαρο on the coin, a doubt shared also by Nicholas Sims-Williams (personal communica-
Bay meaning “god, lord” (MacKenzie 1971: 17) is of course a Middle Persian borrowing into Bactrian and thus by extension, the meaning of it as lord should be speculated to have also been fully borrowed from Middle Persian. In this sense, the plural form βαιανο from Middle Persian bayān should carry the same meaning of “lord” that has been used as a royal title (Panaino 2009: 209-256). In fact, as Mary Boyce has suggested, the plural form Bayān, when put in the postposition, comes to mean a royal title (Boyce 1981-1982: 64-66; Panaino 2003: 285). Considering this, I propose to translate the second part of the inscription as “King, Majesty” following the original Middle Persian version.

The first part, however, would be a problematic matter. Normally, the name of the Kidarite authority Kidara is written as Kedara on the Brahmi legends of his various issues (Vondrovec type 11, p. 60) and as κιδαριτο in the combination of “Huns known as Kidarites” in the fragmentary history of Priscus (fr. 33 Exc. De Leg. Rom., Blockley translation 1983: 337). In Bactrian, the name is attested as Kidro and Kēdīro (Grenet 2005; Sims-Williams 2010: 78, no. 213). In all these instances the name starts with a /k/ which leaves very little doubt about the pronunciation of the name. This would then cause problems with identifying the χιδαρο on our coin Type 39 as Kidara since the initial letter is quite clearly a χ (kh) and cannot be read as a κ.

However, in the Islamic sources referring to the Abbasid general Al-Afshin, a descendant of the traditional rulers of Ustrushana, his name is given as Khydhr (al-Tabari IX.11; Mas’udi 169) which was sometimes written wrongly as (Arabic) Ḥaydar (Dinawari 203; Baladhuri 211), but was specified as Ḥaydhar by later writers as well (Ibn Khallakhan, V.123) while at least one source has the form kydr (Qudama, Al-Kharaj, 380). The name Kydr seems to have indeed been a popular name among the people of Ustrushana, as several characters, including a certain Kydr b. Abdul-lah al-Ustrushani are mentioned in the Islamic sources (al-Tabari IX.259; Yaghubi II.495). I cannot at present suggest a precise connection between kydr and xydhr and will leave it to my better equipped philologist colleagues, but would like to propose that the χιδαρο mentioned on our coin is indeed referring to the same personality as Kidara, this coin possibly showing one of the earliest instances of kydr/χКyдр correspondence prior to its mention in the Islamic sources.

The numismatic complications for this can be manifold and beyond the concern of the present paper. Close association and correspondence between Ki-
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Associated with the “Kabul” mint, it is obvious that it was issued by the same mint and consequently, that the χιδαρο βαιανο authority was indeed in charge of this mint. If indeed the case, we might speculate that the tamgha S1 was in fact a sign of the mint of Kabul itself, passing from the Kidarites to the Alkhan when the latter took over the mint, and subsequently becoming canonical on the coinage of the Alkhan themselves, even when minting coins outside Kabul. This might also explain the presence of the tamgha on some later Nezak issues (Vondrovec 2014: type 219a) which are issued in Kabul (Vondrovec 2014: 389).

While issues of continuity in style and relations between stylistic types admittedly play a more crucial role in explaining the relationship between various coinage authorities, the decipherment of the legends of the coins can up to a point be useful for understanding their placement in the historical setting. By proposing a new reading of the coin type 39 of the Alkhan and suggesting a relationship between this coin and that of a Kidarite authority, I hope to have brought about the possibility of rethinking the pattern of coin issues in the earliest stages of the Kidarite and Alkhon issues and provided a way of redefining their history.

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