XXV.

COINS AND SEALS COLLECTED IN SEISTAN, 1903-4.

By G. P. TATE.

THE sources whence have come all the coins and seals obtained in Seistan are the extensive ruins situated to the east of the Helmand, in Afghan Seistan, which it has not been possible to explore thoroughly.

The trade is in the hands of a small section of the people numbering about 150 families, who live on the edge of the deserted tract, on the eastern verge of the flood area of the Helmand. There they cultivate small holdings, raising wheat and barley and patches of water-melons; and their flocks of goats, sheep, and the few cattle they possess graze upon the fodder that springs up so luxuriantly wherever water touches the soil. When the Winter has set in, and after rain has fallen, and water stands in the hollows in the clay soil, these people set out for the deserted sites of towns or forts and ply their trade as treasure-seekers. They are known as 'Dagāl Gardis.' The word Dagār or Dagāl is Baluchi for 'land, soil, ground,' etc., and Gardi (as will be obvious) is in the same dialect 'the act of wandering about.' These persons are Baluchis, who for generations have eked out a livelihood by the pursuit of this calling,¹ until at last they have developed a preternatural keenness of vision. One of these persons, as he goes on at a rapid trot, will suddenly swoop down and pick up a tiny bead, or a minute turquoise, discoloured and covered with earth-stains to such an extent as to be unrecognisable by an ordinary individual.

Their ancestors wandered into Seistan when the prosperity of the country had already very considerably declined. Large

¹ They form regularly organised communities, dwelling under their *kad-khudās*, and pay revenue on their lands, flocks, and the value of their finds.

tracts had been abandoned by water and become desert, to all of which the newcomers entered into possession. The latter found extensive ruins, the names of which no one knew; and these localities were at once renamed (for convenience of reference) by names based on some local peculiarity of shape, design, or even the colour of the decaying materials. These names are handed about from one to another, and often in a corrupt form are preserved in travellers' narratives. Those few ancient places whose names are preserved in the writings of past generations of chroniclers are located by writers of the present day by means of these modern names, and often by some fancied resemblance between the two.

The district most thickly covered with these remains of a byegone condition of prosperity is called by the Baluch treasure-seekers 'Ghulghula,' because the ruins are as numerous as the stars in the sky, to which the same word also is applied.

The ruins are partially concealed by drifts of loose sand; and it is due to this that the traces of an ancient civilization are so well preserved from the action of the elements and the ravages of human beings. Every year under the impulse of the wind of 120 days these drifts continue their march towards the east; their ultimate destination being the *Wadis* that score the sun-baked under-features of the Dasht-i-Mārgo and break its terminal edge into deep re-entrants and bastions of gravel-capped clay. As these *Barkhans* move they hide portions of the ruins which have been exposed, and lay bare other parts which may have been hidden for years. In this way the area available for exploration continually changes.

It is not the larger ruins that yield the finds. The larger tumuli and masses of crumbling bricks could only be dealt with by means of systematic excavation. This the '*Dagāl Gardis*' cannot undertake. They search the patches of lighter debris of crumbling bricks and potsherds that mark the sites of individual homesteads. These are called *kacholi*, as this is the general term used for broken pottery and

fragments of brick. The alternate effect of the Summer and Winter temperatures breaks up these débris heaps into coarse dust, and when this has been washed away by heavy rain or melting snow all sorts of quaint and artistic things are picked up. Coins and seals, fragments of copper vessels, and strange shapes of birds and beasts, which were evidently fixed as handles to caskets or utensils; turquoises, very much discoloured by being buried in the earth; garnets, pale sapphires, and amethysts; agate and cornelian beads; occasionally tourmaline and rock crystals, shaped and cut or in the rough. These are not by any means plentiful. Many a time do these people return with nothing of the least value. Sometimes small hoards of coin and some really good seals are found. These are infrequent, and such occurrences are preserved and handed down in the traditions and tales with which these people occupy their leisure. In this way the reputed discovery of 700 gold pieces in the ruins of Kurdo, in the days of Ibrahim Khan, Sinjarāni of Chakānsur, is talked about, though probably sixty years and more have elapsed since then. Such finds rarely benefit the discoverers. News of it gets to others stronger than they, through some disappointed member of the party, and the weaker are compelled to disgorge more than they have actually found, as the value of the find increases at each repetition of the tale.

In addition to the articles already mentioned, fragments of fine porcelain and beads made out of composition are the most numerous. The former is a fine vitreous and white biscuit covered with a very pale olive-green glaze, the latter being sometimes $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch thick—a white porcelain, with the pattern in a blue colour not unlike what is made in China at the present day—Canton, say—after the pattern of the blue and white porcelain of the time of the Emperor Kang-hi. The porcelain found in Seistan has, however, only a floral pattern, the decoration being confined to sprays of foliage or to a mere scrolled decorative pattern; there is, however, a ‘fuzziness’ of outline that takes away from the effect of the design and good colour that is seen

in some of the fragments. Glazed earthenware strews the slope of every mound, and is not worthy of mention, as, though the pieces were well baked, the glaze is very thin.

None of the beads show any attempt to portray animal forms. A solitary exception was found in the case of an agate-bead, which was shaped like a squatting frog; a finely bored hole running through it lengthways showed exactly for what it was originally used. The representation was perfect, not a touch too much, and no over-elaboration of detail. Another fine piece of work is the head of a ram, in baked clay. It is hollow, and evidently formed the spout of an ewer or jug, the head being some $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The facial markings and the detail of the horns were most perfectly done with a few bold touches of some blunt tool when the paste was damp. The effect is lifelike, and shows that a very high standard of artistic skill must have been reached, to be employed in decorating what was probably an utensil in every-day use. The agate frog was discovered at an ancient site called Khana-i-Gaur, to the east of Chakānsur, at the point where the Khāsh Rud enters the plain of Seistan. The ram's head was found in one of the ruined sites of Ghulghula. Another representation of a frog was found in this district: it is cut out of a piece of that thick shell of which mention has been made; through the nose (it is a back view of a frog sitting up) a fine hole has been bored, and this bead or pendant was one of a number forming a necklace. Down the back, on either side of the spine, there are three cup-like markings of small circles enclosing dots which had been picked out with black colouring matter.

The seals are cut on cornelians, garnets, some on very pale amethysts, and milky translucent agates. Some are cut on dark green and grey stones, but the latter do not show the same skill or finish, and probably the stones are softer and do not lend themselves to very great elaboration of detail. The forms represented are for the most part those of animals; some few have representations of the human form, or of human heads, but these are rare. Cabalistic

diagrams or signs are very common. So are inscriptions of varying length and style, many of the more elaborate being marked by a star. I gave two seals to the British Commissioner which were brought in, one from Kadah and the other from Chihilburj, localities not very far from Chakānsur. One was a beautiful intaglio of a human head facing to the left. A chaplet of leaves bound the hair, which fell down the neck in three heavy curls. There was a collar or necklace, below which the representation did not go. The intaglio was about $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch along the greater axis of a regular ellipse; the head having been carved in this direction, the small vacant spaces containing two sentences in some ancient script. The intaglio was on the flat surface of the stone, the other being convex. The detail of the face, hair, and chaplet is very beautiful, and the inscription is also very distinct. The beauty of the workmanship can only be judged by examination through a magnifying-glass.

The other was of similar size and shape as to the stone. But the design, in this case a cabalistic sign, was cut on the curved side. It was enclosed on either side by an inscription in the same character as that on the seal previously described. This also I gave to the British Commissioner, who in the midst of a busy career finds recreation in a variety of pursuits. These seals have been sent by him to the Director of the Archæological Survey of India. There is also a third specimen in my possession. It is a head facing left, wearing a heavily crested helmet. It is also very beautifully cut and finished, but bears no inscription. It came from the Chihilburj ruins. The face is distinctly of an European type, whereas the former shows the features of an Eastern type of countenance. A class by itself is the more simple form of engraving, generally cut on a milky and translucent agate, the bird, fish, or other object being delineated by a few touches of the graver's tool. Some of the objects which it was intended to represent are not at all easy to make out, but I have a seal of this class with a very spirited representation of a man, with

a pigtail evidently, and other details of dress and figure very Chinese in their general effect. Some of the small intaglio seals are very beautiful, the detail of the horns and body of the animals being most carefully carried out. The animals are probably intended to represent the signs of the Zodiac.

The coins that are discovered bear the face and head of ancient monarchs, and the features and details of dress vary. These coins are now with the Society, and their exact significance can be clearly distinguished. Suffice it to say that the coins with effigies come from the ruins which extend from Sār-o-Tār, in the south, past Chakānsur and up to the ruins known as Post-i-Gau¹ and Chāpu, embracing the ancient sites at Kadah and Khana-i-Gaur, and Erindās, these localities being situated to the east of Chakānsur.

With these ancient mintages are found the coins of the Caliphs and the earlier Muhammadan coins. I have seen a very much defaced copper coin (apparently of Mahmud of Ghazni) which was found in the ruins of Sār-o-Tār itself. Copper coins, as a rule, are ruined by bad usage at the hands of the 'Dagāl Gardis' themselves. They place the coins they collect into a fire, and the oxydised crust is burnt off, leaving only a thin wad or ingot of metal behind. The latter comes out quite plain; the inscriptions, effigy, or whatever the coin had originally stamped on it are either altogether removed, in the case of a much corroded piece, or too far obliterated to be of any interest or value. Sometimes silver coins are also subjected to this treatment; but generally the greater value of the metal secures it better treatment.

As a rule, the more modern coins are found nearer the Helmand and across it inside Persian Seistan. But I have seen a coin of Kutb-ud-din, the Kaiani Malik of Seistan,² a contemporary of the celebrated Tamerlane, which was

¹ Both these are perhaps modern and Baluchi names. But this is not beyond doubt, as associated with them and close by is a ruin which still bears a name preserved in the writings of Istakhri, and the place so mentioned is probably the existing ruined site now visible.

² Taken prisoner by Timur in the month of Shawal, 785 A.H., and liberated after his death in 803 A.H.

brought in from Post-i-Gau. Coins of the Maliks of Seistan are not very numerous. Copper coins bearing the title of several princes of this family have been found, with the words "struck in Nimroz" or "the country of Nimroz." These are useful for verifying the names of those princes which appear in the *Shijrat-ul-Muluk*, a manuscript genealogy of the family, which, however, preserves little but a list of names of the ruling chiefs who have held authority in Seistan.

One very handsome gold piece bore on the obverse the legend "*Al Malik al A'zam 'Iz-ud-dunya wa ud-din Kai(āni).*" It formed part of an ornament belonging evidently to a lady of some position, whose husband was able to afford to buy gold coins for such a purpose. Another of these (on the same article) was a gold coin struck by the same, or another, Malik. This was a much more elaborate piece. The inscription was very full and cramped, and it could not be deciphered in the very short time the coin was in my hands. The word *Al Malik* stood at the head by itself, and in many of the copper coins the same arrangement is found to exist. So that, although the mint town is not named, there can be but little doubt that they were struck in Seistan, at the capital. Both coins were of the same weight. Each weighed equal to a rupee of Indian currency,¹ including the brass loop welded on so as to allow of their being strung on a necklace or other article of personal adornment.

The author of the *Rauzat-ul-Jannat fi Ausaf-i-Madinati-l-Herat*, Mulla Muin Zamji Isfirari, mentions a Malik, Muiz-ud-din Husen, who made himself very unpopular for many reasons, one of which was an alteration in the currency. Flying to the "island of the Zirreh" (Koh Khwaja) for refuge from the troops of Babar Mirza, Prince of Herat, he was put to death by the leading men of Seistan. This was in 859 A.H. Silver coins with the name "*Iz-ul-Haq*" and *wa ul-din* are fairly numerous, and on a copper coin are the words "*Iz-ul-Haq*" and "struck in Nimroz." So perhaps these coins may belong to the period of that Malik. In

¹ The rupee = 180 grs. troy.

the Shijrat ul Muluk he is called Malik Husen, is said to have had a glorious reign, and at last to have suffered from the caprices of fortune.

Some of the copper coins have very clear but abbreviated inscriptions. It was necessary to curtail these as the coins are very small, being mere wads of copper stamped on either face.

Copper was the metal universally used. Cattle brands are brought in, and seals of this metal are very common; a lamp was brought to me from Sār-o-Tār. Several fragments of censers or incense-burners, pitchers and ewers, ladles, mortars, and fragments that look like portions of body armour, or which may have been parts of copper caskets, are also very common. I have an arrow-head made of copper; and iron seems to have been either not used or kept solely for implements of agriculture and warlike weapons. It was probably difficult to get. The trade of a coppersmith must have been a lucrative one owing to the demand for his wares. And thus grew up the tale preserved in the Shijrat ul Muluk that Lais the coppersmith by his daily toil supplied his vagrant sons Yakub and Amru with the means of entertaining their fellows, who spent the father's daily earnings every night. And the sons of the coppersmith of Karyetein in Seistan spread the name and craft of their father throughout the world of Islam. The coins with effigies of an European type come from the tract of country about the embouchure of the Khāsh Rud and the ruins around the fort of Chihilburj.

To the west of the Helmand but few coins are found. During the year 1903-4 only some half-dozen coins were found in the ruins of Zāhidān. One of these had a loop attached to it, and was evidently used for decorative purposes long ago. It is an ancient coin, possibly struck during the Caliphate.

The name also of the town and country has altered, on coins of the Maliks, from the reigns of Malik Kutb-ud-din and his successors. Struck in Nimroz (or the town or country *فے بلاد نیمروز*) of Nimroz takes the place of Zaranj.

In order to induce the Dagāl Gardis to bring in their finds to the Mission Camp, it was necessary to offer them some inducement in the shape of higher prices than those they command in the vicinity of their abodes, especially as the journey included a swim across the Helmand in flood. There is a steady demand for ancient coins and seals, which find a ready market. For one thing, they are regarded with a certain amount of awe, as being endowed with certain properties that render them operative against ailments. The pendants cut out of the thick sea-shells are called 'Gwāti.' 'Gwāt' in Baluchi means wind; and the ornaments are believed to be a specific for pains and aches due to rheumatism or neuralgia, and they are worn in order to ward off these attacks. The old coins of the Caliphate or early Muhammadan mintage are distinctly held in reverence. In those days, before Islam was rent by the two great schisms, men say their ancestors' religious zeal burnt clear and steadily, and the profession of faith stamped on the ancient coins was more sincerely believed in than is the case in these degenerate days, and a greater potency is ascribed to it, which render these old coins objects of a sentimental regard. Then, again, coins and intaglios have a value as ornaments. They are bought largely by the richer classes of the people. Sardars and Kalāntars and wealthy traders generally have some.

The late Kalāntar, or Mir as he was called, of Iskil had a collection of seals and coins large enough to fill two or three small trunks. This collection is said to be very remarkable. I believe no European has ever been able, or allowed, to see the whole of it,¹ so it is not possible to form any idea of its extent or value. His sons have inherited the collection and property generally. The late Mir Abbas was in many ways a very remarkable man. His family and two others had the title of Mir handed down from their ancestors. The Mirs of Chakānsur, sometimes also called Mir-i-Arab, and the Mirs of Daulatabad have, however, fallen into evil days, and sunk in the social scale. The

¹ It is hoped the British Commissioner will be able to examine this collection before the work of the Mission closes.

late Kalāntar of Iskil displayed great enthusiasm in forming this collection; and, as he was always willing to give a fair return for what he took, and as his residence was on the high road to the city as soon as the river had been crossed, he commanded the supply of these articles. He took great pride in his collection, and used to occasionally present a few coins or seals to officers who visited him.

In the company of ancient coins, tokens of brass are often brought for sale as gold coins. Among these I have observed a brass imitation of the Venetian sequin, on which there was still legible a portion of the inscription, "Sit tibi, Christe, datus, quem Tu regis iste ducatus," and the well-known brass card-counters—(1) imitation of the spade-guinea of George III, with inscr. "In memory of the good old days"; (2) *obv.* head of Queen Victoria; *rev.* the Duke of Cumberland on horseback galloping, with inscr. "To Hanover."

Lastly, I have had brought to me the following gold coins (ducats) of the Netherlands: two of the province of Holland (eighteenth century), and one of King William I, 1837.

No detailed account of the ancient coins has been attempted, because they are in the hands of those more qualified to speak with authority on such a subject. And this note has been put together in the intervals of official work, from observations recorded at various times, in the hope that the matter may perhaps be not uninteresting.

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