

II. *Observations on the Coins found by Colonel CALDWELL in the Tumuli described in the preceding Letter from Sir ANTHONY CARLISLE, Knt. By RICHARD PAYNE KNIGHT, Esq. V. P.*

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Read 18th April 1822.

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THE three irregularly square pieces of silver which accompany this Letter, weighing from forty-three to thirty-five grains each, in a dimension of about a quarter of a square inch, are not properly Coins, having no impressions in relief stricken from dies, but merely incuse marks, irregularly imprinted by small and very neat stamps worked by hand: nor do these marks appear to imitate or represent any thing, but to be mere arbitrary signs; though their being found with the relicks of the dead, in sepulchral urns, proves them to have had some sacred or symbolical meaning. The pieces themselves appear, from the irregular bulging in the edges, to have been beaten flat and stamped, after being divided into monetary portions; and they are worn and polished in a manner which proves them to have been long in use as a circulating medium. Both the circumstances of their discovery, and the simplicity of their fashion are such, that we may, perhaps, safely pronounce them to be the most ancient and primitive specimens of money extant; though it is in vain to offer any conjectures concerning their date, or to seek for any accounts of the nation by which they were fabricated and employed, all the native histories and traditions of India terminating in allegorical fable at a much later period. Even the coarse gold coins, found in the great peninsula, with an androgynous figure sitting on a lotus on one side, and a robust male figure standing with a bow in his hand on the other, though evidently imitated from those in silver of

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the Syrian and Parthian kings, and therefore little, if at all, anterior to the Christian era, are nevertheless beyond the reach of all historical or antiquarian knowledge possessed by its present inhabitants. The dies of these, as well as of others of impure gold, with different devices, which appear to be of the Boodists, are of rude work : but still they are dies, as deeply sunk as those of the Parthians, and equally leaving impressions on both sides ; whereas the pieces of silver in question are only stamped, as they might have been by individuals through whose hands they passed ; and as pieces cut out of rolled or beaten plates of the precious metals now are by the Chinese bankers. The tools nevertheless, employed in stamping them must have been very sharp and neat, and such as required much more skill in hardening and fashioning the operative metals, than the rude and massive structures in which they were found, warrant us to suppose in the people who raised them. Yet nothing at all resembling them has been found any where else ; and the symbolical devices, which caused them to be buried with the dead, must have belonged to the religion of the country ; for the fable of money being required to pay for their passage into another world was never, I believe, considered otherwise than as a poetical fable any where, nor ever known as such, to any but the Greek poets and their Imitators. The most entire and intelligible of these devices, and the only one repeated, is a radiated circle or disc, probably signifying the sun, the primary object of all primitive worship, not guided by Revelation : but in both instances the stamp has been so applied as to extend over the edge of the piece, and leave the circle imperfect. All the other marks are so arbitrary, unconnected, or effaced, that it is in vain to attempt any explanation or interpretation of them.

Money appears to have been unknown to the Greeks in the Homeric times ; the general scale of comparative value being graduated by particular numbers of horned cattle, and not by any definite portions of the precious metals ; the application of which to such purposes originated, according to Herodotus, with the Lydians ; whose country abounding in gold, might naturally have suggested the notion of making it the

universal medium of traffick ; and impressing upon definite masses of it the stamp of public authority, assuring both its weight and quality, and thus affording a portable and universally intelligible measure of relative value for every thing else. In this metal, great numbers are extant, all of the most primitive fabrick, and with every characteristick of original invention ; some of which may be of the early Lydian kings, though most of them have the known devices of different Greek cities <sup>a</sup>. None, however, have the smallest resemblance to these Indian pieces of silver, being all thick rudely shaped lumps, seeming to have taken their form from being dropped melted into water, and then rammed into the dies with one or more square, round, or oblong stamps, very deeply impressed, to shew that the metal was the same within as without, and obviate fraudulent plating, which seems to have commenced almost immediately after the first coinage of silver in the Grecian states ; though the less operose fraud of mixing and debasing the metals does not appear to have been known till after the Macedonian conquest. Neither does the refining of them appear to have been practised for the purpose of coinage in its early stages, all the examples extant being of different degrees of impurity, as they came from the mines ; and Herodotus expressly stating, that Darius, the son of Hystaspes, first struck money of the purest gold ; which practice both the Macedonian kings and Roman Emperors seem to have continued to the last, as far as their imperfect chemistry would allow, though both the Romans and Parthians, in the decline of their wealth and power, adulterated their silver so as to leave a very small proportion of the nominal metal. The gold, also, of the Indian coins of the Boodists above mentioned, is much adulterated, whilst the silver of the pieces in question appears to be very pure : which may afford another argument in favour of their high antiquity.

That an invention, however, so universally and individually beneficial as that of a general medium of barter and traffick between wants and

<sup>a</sup> See Mus. Hunter. Tab. 66, fig. 1. et Sestini Stateri antichi.

superfluities, should have once existed, and been then abandoned, is most extraordinary ; and only to be accounted for by one of those exterminating revolutions, in which religious proscription consummated the devastation of military violence. That such revolutions have happened in the peninsula of India, there can be no doubt ; the traditions concerning the extermination of the Jairs, a nation of Boodists, by the Bramins, at a period beyond the reach of prophane history, being confirmed by the few remains of their sculpture, of which a specimen, a figure of Boodra, sitting cross-legged on his lotus throne, the whole only an inch high, was given by the late Sir John Macpherson to the Hon. Charles Greville ; and since by the Duke of Hamilton to Mr. Payne Knight ; most exquisitely wrought out of extremely thin plates of brass, imperceptibly joined, and having the features, limbs, and extremities finished with a degree of neatness, truth, and delicacy, worthy of the best ages of Grecian art, and far surpassing, not only what Indians, but even what Europeans of the present times can do. Like the Egyptian, indeed, the talents of these ancient Indian artists being confined to given subjects of unnatural form, could only display themselves in the details of particular parts, in which both have left specimens of high excellence ; while the liberty of the Greeks left all nature open to their choice ; and the sublime imagery of their early poets so exalted and expanded all around them, and presented it to their heated imaginations so augmented and embellished, that imitation learned to surpass reality. The Phenicians appear to have been equally free from all religious or political restraint ; but still having no Iliad nor Odyssey, nor probably a language capable of such compositions, their art, as far as we can judge by their coins, the only certain monuments of it, was confined to mere close and correct imitation. The intercourse of the Egyptians with both these nations was very early, and sufficiently intimate to have taught them the conveniencies and advantages of money ; yet none seems to have been ever coined by them under any of the dynasties of their native kings ; nor is it probable that the shekel of silver of the Jews was a coin, but merely a weight, like the talent of

gold in the Homeric poems ; no Jewish coins having appeared anterior to those of the Maccabees. Some religious prejudice may have been the obstruction with both ; hierarchies being naturally hostile to all innovation, and often extending their jealousy and aversion of it to matters the most unconnected with those of their proper and immediate care.

Some such religious prejudice may perhaps account for the seeming inconsistency between the rudeness of structure in the Indian tombs above described, and the perfection of the earthen vases, and neatness of the stamped money found in them. The Israelites were ordered to *construct their altars of stone, of unhewn masses only ; as the application of a tool of metal would pollute them.*<sup>b</sup> Similar notions seem to have prevailed among other neighbouring nations,<sup>c</sup> and perhaps influenced the ancient inhabitants of the peninsula of India, to whom these monuments belonged. It is much to be regretted, that none of the earthen vases have accompanied the pieces of money ; as both the drawings and description of them imply a skilful use of the potter's wheel in the fabric ; and that is an instrument, of which the formation and employment, as well as the stamps used on the pieces of silver, must have been preceded by a degree of practical knowledge of mechanic art, which could not fail to produce both masonry and carpentry, the first means of administering to the social wants and comforts of man. The use, too, alone, of a portable and universal medium of exchange, such as money, supposes, independently of its fabrick, a stage of civilization sufficiently advanced to have produced a division or classing of productive occupations, so extended as to afford that variety of respective superfluities which would call for the intervention of such a medium, to supersede the difficulties and simplify the perplexities of reciprocal transfer in kind. That such a people should have been so operose and costly in the construction of their sepulchres, and yet have left no other

<sup>b</sup> Exodus xx. 25. Joshua vii. 31.

<sup>c</sup> Spences. de Leg. rit. vet. Hebræor. l. 11. c. vi. s. 11.

traces or memorials of their having existed, and that too in a climate so well adapted to preserve such memorials, is scarcely to be accounted for, even with every allowance that can be made for the exterminating zeal and unwearied industry of religious devastation ; and it is probable that, if more extensive researches are made in a country so imperfectly explored, many other objects of sufficient interest to repay the labour of investigation, may be discovered. The peninsula of India seems to have been the earliest seat of civilization and science unenlightened by Revelation ; and though its inhabitants never made any progress at all comparable to that of the more favoured nations on the borders of the Mediterranean, their priority and originality must always render their antiquities interesting both to the philosopher and the historian.

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