

## RECENT DISCOVERIES OF GOLD AND COPPER COINS OF KANISHKA I FROM MULTIPLE SITES IN DISTRICT KHYBER, PAKISTAN

Bilal Khan Afridi<sup>\*1</sup>, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Naeem Qazi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>Ph.D Scholar, Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar

<sup>\*1</sup>[bilalafриди1@gmail.com](mailto:bilalafриди1@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[drnaeemqazi@uop.edu.pk](mailto:drnaeemqazi@uop.edu.pk)

Corresponding Author: \*

Bilal Khan Afridi

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### ABSTRACT

Gold and copper coins of Kanishka I are rarely documented from secure contexts, yet when such finds emerge, they provide significant value for numismatic and historical studies. Recorded during ongoing doctoral field research, this is the first systematically documented assemblage of Kanishka I coins from District Khyber, with secure provenances and photographic records. The present lot, though small, is noteworthy for its provenanced recovery, including a rare gold quarter dinar with the Buddha image from Takhta Baig near Chaura Khwar. Alongside additional coins depicting diverse deities, this collection offers fresh insights into Kushan religious pluralism. It reaffirms the strategic role of the Khyber Pass in trade, cultural exchange, and the diffusion of Buddhist imagery.

**Keywords:** Kushan Empire, archaeology, Gandhara, Kanishka I, Helios, Oado, Orlagno, Athsho, Nana, Mithra, Mao, and Oesho, gold coinage, copper coinage, District Khyber, Buddhist, numismatics.

### INTRODUCTION

The Kushan Empire under Kanishka I (c. 127-150 CE) represents a pivotal phase in the political, cultural, and religious history of Central and South Asia. Coinage formed one of its most enduring legacies, functioning simultaneously as a medium of exchange and as a vehicle of imperial ideology. Through an unprecedented pantheon, spanning Iranian, Indic, Graeco-Roman, Central Asian, and Buddhist figures, Kanishka's gold and copper issues projected sovereignty, religious diplomacy, and cultural integration across a vast and heterogeneous empire.

Despite their importance, the majority of Kushan gold coins survive without secure archaeological provenance. Some of the most iconic specimens, such as the Buddha dinar in the Hirayama Collection (Kamakura), the coin once in Boston (destroyed in 1978), and examples dispersed in Paris and private collections, entered scholarship through the antiquities market with no

contextual data. Only the British Museum specimen from Ahin Posh near Jalalabad (Cribb, 1999/2000) can be reliably anchored archaeologically. This long-standing deficit has hindered efforts to integrate numismatic evidence with specific religious landscapes, circulation zones, and minting centres.

Against this backdrop, the assemblage of Kanishka I coins recovered during systematic doctoral fieldwork in District Khyber assumes exceptional significance. Documented with secure coordinates and contextual observations, the corpus spans multiple localities within Jamrud and its adjoining valleys. It includes:

- A gold quarter dinar of the Buddha from Takhta Baig (Göbl 66), one of the very few archaeologically provenanced Buddhist gold issues of Kanishka I.
- A gold dinar of Oado from Walo Mela, unprecedented in gold and previously

known only from copper (Göbl 783), marking one of the most important discoveries in Kushan numismatics.

- Gold issues of Helios, Orlagno, Athsho, Pharro, Ardoksho, Nana, Mithra, Mao, and Oesho, which collectively testify to the empire's religious pluralism and ideological inclusivity.
- Copper tetradrachms of Sakyamuni Buddha from Sur Kamar, Jalal Din, and Lashora, showing that Buddhist imagery extended beyond elite gold denominations into base-metal coinages accessible to wider social groups.

Conforming to a stabilised weight standard of 7.70-7.95 g for gold dinars (with quarter dinars c. 1.9-2.2 g), these coins can be securely attributed to the mature phase of Kanishka I's reign. Their diversity and distribution underscore the role of the Khyber corridor as both a frontier of imperial consolidation and a zone of religious and ideological experimentation.

The distinguishing feature of the District Khyber corpus is its secure provenance. This transforms the coins from isolated numismatic specimens into historically embedded artifacts, allowing a nuanced synthesis of typology, iconography, and circulation. The assemblage demonstrates how coinage operated simultaneously as an economic medium, a vehicle of religious diplomacy, and an instrument of imperial communication within a strategically vital frontier.

By integrating archaeological documentation with numismatic study, this research establishes a methodological benchmark for Kushan scholarship. It shows that only when provenance is rigorously secured can the interpretive potential of coinage be fully realised. A comprehensive die-linkage study, currently in progress, will further refine understanding of minting practices, circulation networks, and regional distribution.

### 1. JAMRUD TEHSIL AND ENVIRONS

Two important specimens were documented from Takhta Baig (Chaura Khwar. The first is a gold quarter dinar with Buddha reverse (Göbl 66), whose obverse bears the standard standing-king type, while the reverse depicts the standing Buddha adorned by the Bactrian legend BOΔΔO. This is one of the few securely provenanced Kushan Buddhist gold coins. Alongside it was

recovered a gold dinar with Helios reverse (Göbl 25), showing the solar deity frontal with head turned left and the Greek legend ΗΛΙΟC. Both coins were found in association with surface scatters of ceramic fragments, suggesting a substantial Kushan occupation horizon at the site.

From Baqarabad (near the pump station) derives a gold dinar featuring Orlagno (Göbl 63). Its obverse carries the standing king, while the reverse shows the deity with bird head-dress, armed with spear and sword-hilt, with the legend ΟΡΛΑΓΝΟ placed to the right and a tamgha to the left.

At Walo Mela near Lashora, a rare gold dinar was found bearing the figure of Oado. The obverse retains the standard king type, while the reverse portrays the deity running left with cloak held aloft, the Bactrian legend ΟΑΔΟ at right, and a tamgha at upper left. This issue is not recorded in Göbl's catalogue, making it a numismatic novelty. A further specimen from Wrando Mela, Lashora, represents Athsho (Göbl 47). The obverse shows the standing king, while the reverse depicts the god frontal, head turned left, holding a diadem, with the legend ΑΘΠΟ to the right.

At Bar Gudar Killi, a gold quarter dinar of Pharro (Göbl 74) was recovered. The deity is shown frontal with nimbus and winged head-dress, holding a spear and bowl, with the legend ΦΑΡΡΟ at left and tamgha at right. The coin weighs 1.93 g.

From Shahkas near Chaura Khwar comes a gold quarter dinar featuring Ardoksho (Göbl 77). The obverse carries the standard king type, while the reverse shows the goddess standing right, holding a cornucopia, with the legend ΑΡΔΟΧΠΟ at left and tamgha at right. The weight is 2.23 g.

Several sites, including Zor Gudar, Zur Gudar, and Azghu Mela, yielded coins of Nana with reverse legend NANA (Göbl 36). Additional specimens of the goddess, of the commoner Göbl 35 type, were documented from Sur Kamar, Bagyari Killi, Jamal Khel (Jamrud Bazaar), Medanak Khwar, Ghundi, and Shalkani.

Mithra reverses (Göbl 31), with the deity standing left and radiate nimbus, were recovered from Shingeer, Sur Kamar, Qadam, and Jalal Din. Coins dedicated to Mao (Göbl 53), showing the lunar deity with crescent symbols, were found at Shingeer, Jalal Din, Sur Kamar, and Medanak Khwar.

Specimens depicting Oesho (Göbl 51) were documented from Sur Kamar, Ali Masjid, and Medanak, the deity shown four-armed with the legend  $\text{O}\eta\text{p}\text{O}$ . A notable variant comes from Lala Cheena, where a quarter dinar bears a bust obverse combined with Oesho reverse.

Finally, from Lashora, Sur Kamar, and Jalal Din were recovered copper tetradrachms (Göbl 786; Cribb die 5). The obverse bears the standing-king type with abbreviated titulature ( $\text{pAO KA ... N}\eta\text{pKI}$ ), while the reverse depicts the Buddha frontal with left hand holding robe and right raised in abhaya mudrā. The legend  $\text{CAKAMAN..O BOY}\Delta\text{O}$  flanks the figure, with tamgha at left.

## 2.2 Wider District Distribution

Beyond Jamrud Tehsil, coin finds extend into other parts of District Khyber, particularly along the Bara River valley and the approaches to Tirah. These discoveries, although fewer in number, broaden the geographical reach of the assemblage and confirm the penetration of Kushan coinage deep into frontier landscapes.

In the Bara valley, several sites yielded specimens consistent with the main types already attested in Jamrud. Coins featuring Nana, Mithra, and Oesho were documented in contexts marked by ceramic scatters and traces of architectural debris, suggesting their deposition within settlement zones linked to transit routes along the river.

Further west, on the approaches to the Tirah uplands, isolated specimens of Nana and Mao types were recorded, extending the distribution of these cults into higher-altitude areas. While the contexts here are less extensively documented than those of Jamrud, the alignment of find-spots with known historic pathways indicates their role in linking the Peshawar Valley with the trans-montane regions of eastern Afghanistan.

Taken together, the finds outside Jamrud, though more scattered, reinforce the impression that Kushan coinage was not restricted to the valley floor or major settlements. Instead, it circulated across a broader frontier zone, embedding imperial presence within both riverine and upland landscapes.

Although the assemblage varies in density across sites, the overall distribution demonstrates a consistent Kushan monetary presence throughout District Khyber. The range of types, spanning Buddhist, Iranian, Indic, Graeco-

Roman, and Central Asian deities, shows that the standardised coinage repertoire of Kanishka I circulated across both settlement and transit landscapes. With their secure archaeological contexts, these finds form a reliable corpus for subsequent analysis of typology, circulation, and ideological scope.

## 3. TYPOLOGY OF THE KANISHKA I COINS FROM DISTRICT KHYBER

### Type 1 - Buddha (AV Quarter Dinar)

Among the very few known Kushan gold issues depicting the Buddha, the problem of provenance has long hindered scholarly interpretation. One such specimen, now in the Hirayama Collection at Kamakura (Japan), like many Gandharan antiquities unearthed by clandestine diggers, lacks any record of archaeological context (Tanabe, 1987). Of the three other examples most frequently cited in the literature, only the gold dinar in the British Museum (BMC 16b, accession no. IOC.289) can be securely traced to excavation, having been recovered at Ahin Posh near Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan (cf. Cribb, 1999/2000). The find spots of the remaining pieces remain obscure, with no certainty as to whether they were discovered in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Equally elusive is their mint attribution, though numismatic consensus places their origin in the principal mint of Kanishka I at Purushapura (modern Peshawar), one of the key imperial capitals (Tanabi, 1987, pp.133-34).

To date, most surviving specimens of Kanishka's Buddha coins are dispersed across international collections with uncertain or wholly absent provenances. The celebrated Ahin Posh dinar stands as the only securely excavated example prior to the present discovery. By contrast, the Hirayama Collection coin in Japan has no reported find spot, typical of Gandharan pieces entering the art market via clandestine digging. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston specimen (Acc. no. 31.895), stolen and destroyed in 1978, was never securely attributed to a discovery site. Another specimen in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (ex-Curiel Collection, 1.96 g) likewise lacks provenance. At the same time, further examples in Japanese private collections and the former Skanda Collection (USA), though published in sales catalogues, carry no archaeological attribution. In each case, the absence of

contextual data severely limits their utility for discussions of localised cult practice, circulation patterns, or the ritual setting of Buddhist imagery on high-value coinage.

Against this, the gold quarter dinar from Takhta Baig, near Choura Khwar in Jamrud Tehsil, District Khyber, assumes exceptional importance. Documented in situ during systematic doctoral fieldwork, it represents one of the most significant additions to the corpus of Kushan numismatics and the first firmly provenanced Buddha gold coin of Kanishka I from Pakistan. The obverse presents the canonical portrait of Kanishka I: the king stands frontally, crowned and diademed, spear in his left hand, making a sacrificial gesture over an altar to the left, with the Bactrian titlature  $\beta$ AONANO $\beta$ AO KANH $\beta$ KI KOPANO ("King of Kings, Kanishka Kushan"). The reverse portrays the standing Buddha, left hand drawing the robe, right hand raised in abhaya mudrā, with the Bactrian legend BO $\Delta$ AO to the left and a tamgha to the right. Identified as Göbl 66 (1984), this issue is exceedingly rare in gold. Both the obverse and reverse dies differ from those of the British Museum and Hirayama and all other known specimens, underscoring the diversity of die production for this scarce type. The rarity of such securely provenanced finds raises critical questions: was the Takhta Baig coin part of a donative hoard deposited at a Buddhist establishment, or a high-value savings hoard intended for later retrieval? Why were no comparable specimens reported from the Khyber region before, despite its strategic centrality in Kushan-era trade, pilgrimage, and religious transmission? The most plausible explanation lies in the absence of systematic archaeological work in the region until recent decades, which left potential deposits undocumented and unrecognised.

The Takhta Baig quarter dinar thus not only enriches the typological corpus of Kushan coinage but also provides a rare archaeological anchor for interpreting the ideological and devotional functions of Kanishka's Buddha issues. Its contextual integrity makes it a benchmark specimen for future debates on Kushan minting, Buddhist iconography, and the interplay of religion and imperial ideology along the north-western frontier of South Asia.

#### Type 2 - Helios (AV Dinar)

Among the noteworthy specimens from Takhta Baig is a gold dinar portraying the solar deity Helios. This type strikingly reflects the Kushan assimilation of Graeco-Roman iconography into their numismatic repertoire (Riggs, 2012, p. 449). The obverse follows the canonical Kushan convention of the standing king, crowned and diademed, performing a sacrificial gesture at an altar. It is, however, distinguished by the rare retention of a Greek legend: BACIAEYC BACIAEWN KANH $\beta$ KOY ("King of Kings, of Kanishka"), which situates the coin firmly within the early phase of Kanishka I's reign, when Kushan mints continued to employ Greek script in full before the gradual shift to Bactrian (Benjamin, 2018, p.189). This explicit reliance on the Hellenistic titlature underscores both continuity with earlier Graeco-Bactrian traditions and Kanishka's universalist aspirations, consciously framed in terms of Mediterranean political idioms of sovereignty.

The reverse depicts Helios in a frontal stance, head turned left, encircled by the characteristic nimbus of radiance. One hand resting upon his hip, while the other is raised in a gesture of benediction. The Greek legend HAIOC appears to the right, paired with the Kushan tamgha to the left. Classified as Göbl 25 (1984), this type exemplifies the cosmopolitan idiom of Kushan coinage, wherein Iranian, Indic, and Graeco-Roman divine figures were selectively appropriated to articulate a vision of kingship that transcended local cultic boundaries.

The recovery of this specimen at Takhta Baig, a key site within the Jamrud, is particularly revealing. Its archaeological context affirms that the Graeco-Roman solar imagery of Helios was not merely an aesthetic borrowing but a deliberate ideological statement, situating Kanishka within a cosmic framework of divine kingship. The use of the whole Greek script in this early phase further underscores the Kushan strategy of engaging a broad, multicultural audience by drawing upon recognisable idioms of legitimacy, both Hellenistic and indigenous. In this way, the coin embodies the Kushan Empire's broader project of imperial communication, religious pluralism, and cultural Synthesis along its north-western frontier.

#### Type 3 - Orlagno (AV Dinar)

A third specimen, recorded from Baqarabad near the pump station, features the cult of Orlagno on the reverse of the coin, one of the less well-understood figures within the Kushan religious repertoire (Rosenfield, 1967, p. 167). The obverse preserves the conventional type of Kanishka I standing frontally, diademed and crowned, grasping a spear in his left hand and performing a sacrificial gesture over an altar to the left. The reverse depicts Orlagno standing to the right, nimbate, and distinguished by a characteristic avian headdress, while bearing both a spear and a sword-hilt. The Bactrian legend  $\text{O}\rho\lambda\alpha\gamma\text{N}\text{O}$  is placed to the left, with a tamgha to the right. Classified as Göbl 63 (1984), this type is assigned to the Balkh mint, Phase 3 (Laddered Crown series). The representation of Orlagno has often been interpreted as the assimilation of a Central Asian steppe divinity, reflecting the Kushan dynasty's ideological strategy of integrating ancestral cults into their imperial pantheon (Harmatta, 1992, p. 324). Its presence within the numismatic corpus thus exemplifies the dynasty's Synthesis of Iranian, Indic, and Inner Asian religious traditions, articulated through the medium of coinage as instruments of both economic utility and symbolic communication.

#### Type 4 - Oado (AV Dinar)

The most exceptional discoveries of the District Khyber assemblage are a previously unattested gold dinar of the Oado series from Walo Mela near Lashora. This find dramatically expands our understanding of Kushan numismatic experimentation. While the region also yielded the rare quarter dinar of Kanishka I with a Buddha reverse from Takhta Baig, already recognised as one of the very few securely provenanced Buddhist gold issues, this Oado specimen assumes an even greater importance by its unprecedented iconographic content in gold. The coin presents the standard obverse of Kanishka I, crowned and armed, making a sacrifice over an altar. The reverse, however, is extraordinary: the deity Oado appears in a vigorous running pose, cloak billowing behind, accompanied by the Bactrian legend  $\text{O}\alpha\Delta\text{O}$  and a tamgha at upper left. This dynamic representation, evoking associations with wind, speed, or nomadic vitality, has never before been reported on a gold denomination. Until now, Oado was known exclusively from copper issues

Göbl 783 (1984), attributed to the Bactrian mint during Phase II of Kanishka's reign (Tondon, 2023, pp. 128-146). The elevation of this imagery into gold, confirmed through its secure provenance in the Jamrud sector of District Khyber, constitutes a significant anomaly in Kushan minting practice.

The implications of this discovery are far-reaching. Was the Oado dinar a special donative issue, perhaps commissioned for a local cultic centre, or an ideological experiment designed to project steppe-derived cosmologies into the highest sphere of monetary prestige? Its existence forces us to reconsider the mechanisms of iconographic selection within Kushan minting and challenges the prevailing assumption that specific deities were confined to lower-denomination copper coinages. Moreover, its findspot in the Khyber frontier suggests that this zone functioned as a laboratory of imperial communication, where religious pluralism, frontier identity, and political authority converged in material form.

In comparative perspective, the Oado dinar stands alongside, but in many respects surpasses, the Takhta Baig Buddha quarter dinar in its potential to reshape scholarly debates. Whereas the Buddha coin confirms the integration of Buddhist imagery into the gold series, the Oado dinar breaks entirely new ground, demonstrating that even rare and regionally inflected deities could be elevated to the most prestigious numismatic medium.

Taken together, these discoveries reaffirm District Khyber's unique position within Kushan imperial strategy. The Oado dinar constitutes one of the most significant contributions to Kushan numismatics in recent decades. This find compels us to revisit long-standing typological and ideological models of Kanishka's coinage.

#### Type 5 - Athsho (AV Dinar)

A single specimen recovered from Wrando Mela, Lashora features the deity Athsho, the Kushan god of metals and metallurgy, on the coin reverse. The obverse follows the standard Kushan convention, depicting Kanishka I standing frontally, crowned and diademed, holding a spear and performing a sacrificial gesture before an altar to the left. On the reverse, Athsho appears standing frontally with head turned left, one hand resting on his hip and the other grasping a

diadem. The Bactrian legend  $A\theta\beta O$  is inscribed to the right, with the tamgha placed at the left. Classified as Göbl 47 (1984), the issue belongs to the Balkh mint, Phase 2, based on Bactrian Legends (Tondon, 2023, pp. 128-146). The representation of Athsho emphasises the Kushan dynasty's recognition of metallurgical power and resource control, highlighting the material basis of imperial wealth and the divine legitimisation of coin production.

#### Type 6 - Pharro (AV Quarter Dinar)

A rare specimen from Bar Gudar Killi consists of a gold quarter dinar depicting the deity Pharro. The obverse preserves the canonical Kushan type of the king standing frontally, crowned and armed, in the Act of sacrifice over an altar. On the reverse, Pharro is shown standing frontally with the head turned right, encircled by a nimbus and distinguished by a winged head-dress, emblematic of his divine power. He holds a spear in one hand and a bowl in the other. The Bactrian legend  $\Phi APPO$  is inscribed to the left, with the tamgha positioned at the right. The coin weighs 1.93 g and has been classified as Göbl 74 (1984).

The significance of this piece lies in its rarity within the gold series, as Pharro is far more frequently represented in copper issues of Huvishka (cf. Göbl, 1984). Its appearance here in a fractional gold denomination under Kanishka I underscores both the continuity and fluidity of the Kushan divine repertoire across successive reigns. The selective transposition of Pharro from predominantly copper media into gold not only elevates his status within the pantheon but also reveals the experimental dimension of Kushan minting practices.

#### Type 7 - Ardoksho (AV Quarter Dinar)

A noteworthy specimen from Shahkas near Choura Khwar features the goddess Ardoksho on the reverse. The obverse follows the canonical Kushan convention, depicting the king standing frontally, crowned and armed, making a sacrifice over an altar. The reverse features the figure of Ardoksho, shown standing right and holding a cornucopia, an attribute conventionally associated with prosperity and divine abundance. The design is framed within a dotted border, with the Bactrian legend  $AP\Delta OX\beta O$  positioned at the left and a tamgha to the right. The coin, weighing

2.23 g, corresponds to Göbl 77 (1984), so the coin is known from only four dies reported by Göbl. The unusually light weight of this specimen and its small module suggest that it may represent a fractional denomination, distinct from the full gold dinar standard. The presence of Ardoksho, one of the most frequently attested deities in the Kushan pantheon, underscores her enduring significance as a divine guarantor of fortune, wealth, and political legitimacy. Notably, the coin's previous misattribution highlights the necessity of rigorous epigraphic scrutiny, as minor variants in script and iconography can substantially alter typological classification.

In a broader perspective, the Shahkas Ardoksho coin reflects both the continuity of Indo-Iranian divine imagery within Kanishka I is numismatic repertoire and the adaptability of Kushan coinage to localised contexts. The goddess's association with prosperity made her a particularly potent emblem for circulation in frontier zones such as District Khyber, where imperial control depended as much on symbolic communication as on economic integration.

#### Type 8.1 (variant) - Nanashao (AV Dinar)

A small group of coins (Plates 8-10) recovered from Zor Gudar, Zur Gudar, and Azghu Mela bear the image of Nana ( $NANA\beta AO$ ) on the reverse of the coins, goddess standing right, nimbate, holding a bowl and the protome of an animal, with the legend  $NANA\beta AO$  to the left and tamgha at right. Classified as Göbl 36 (1984), these coins underscore the centrality of Iranian divinities within the Kushan religious and ideological repertoire, particularly highlighting the pervasive cult of the goddess Nana, whose presence on coinage reflects the empire's assimilation of western Central Asian religious traditions. Numismatic evidence suggests that these issues were struck at Balkh, one of the principal Kushan mints situated at the crossroads of Iranian and Indic cultural spheres (Tandon, 2023, pp. 128-146). Belonging to the third phase of Kanishka I is coinage, they are typologically distinguished by the adoption of the so-called "laddered crown" on the royal portrait, a significant marker of chronological development within his series. The coins conform to a weight standard averaging between 7.80 and 8.00 grams, aligning them with the stabilised gold dinar system of the mature Kushan monetary economy.

### Type 8.2 - Nana (Variant) (AV Dinar)

A substantial series of coins (Plates 11-21), recovered from diverse localities including Sur Kamar, Bagyari Killi, Jamal Khel, Medanak Khwar, Ghundi, and Shalkani, attest to a widespread circulation of Nana types across District Khyber. In this iconographic variant, the goddess is depicted standing to the right, holding a bowl in one hand and a sceptre in the other, accompanied by the simplified Bactrian legend NANA and a tamgha positioned to the right. Classified as Göbl 35 (1984), these numerous finds demonstrate the pronounced monetary and symbolic presence of Nana coinage in the region, underscoring her cultic significance within the Kushan religious framework. Numismatic attribution situates these issues within the Balkh mint, and stylistic as well as typological considerations suggest their placement in Phase 2 of Kanishka I's coinage sequence. The series conforms to a stabilised weight standard averaging 7.70-7.95 g, and it is particularly noteworthy that within this group no specimen has been recorded to exceed 7.95 g, suggesting a deliberate adherence to a tightly controlled weight range.

### Type 9 - Mithra (AV Dinar)

Among the assemblage, five dinars (Plates 22-26) originating from Shingeer, Sur Kamar, and Qadam feature the deity Mithra. The obverse follows the canonical standing-king type, while the reverse depicts Mithra standing left, with a radiate nimbus encircling the head, grasping the hilt of a sword in one hand and raising the other in a gesture of blessing. The accompanying Bactrian legend MIIPO appears to the right, with a tamgha at the left. Typologically assigned to Göbl 31 (1984), these issues belong to the Balkh mint and are attributable to Phase 3 of Kanishka I's coinage (Laddered Crown series). The iconography underscores the continuing prominence of solar-Iranian deities within the Kushan religious repertoire, where Mithra served as a potent symbol of divine sanction and cosmic legitimacy.

### Type 10 - Mao (AV Dinar)

A further group of five dinars (Plates 27-31), originating from Shingeer, Jalal Din, Sur Kamar, and Medanak Khwar, is dedicated to the lunar deity Mao. The reverse presents Mao standing

left, marked by crescent symbols upon the shoulders, holding a sceptre in one hand and extending the other in a gesture of blessing. The accompanying Bactrian legend MAO is inscribed to the right, with a tamgha positioned to the left. These issues correspond to Göbl 53 (1984) and are attributable to the Balkh mint, Phase 3 (Laddered Crown series). The series conforms to a weight range of 7.80-7.95 g, further reflecting the stabilised standards of Kushan gold currency during this phase. The prominence of Mao underscores the Kushan engagement with astrological and calendrical symbolism, functioning as a complementary counterpart to the solar cult of Mithra and illustrating the dynasty's deliberate integration of cosmological deities into their imperial pantheon.

### Type 11.1 - Oesho (AV Dinar)

Five gold dinars (Plates 32-36), recovered from Sur Kamar, Ali Masjid, and Medanak, depict the four-armed deity Oesho. On the reverse, the god is shown standing frontally with head turned left, holding multiple attributes, accompanied by the Bactrian legend OṇṇO to the right and a tamgha to the left. These issues correspond typologically to Göbl 51 (1984). Oesho, widely identified with the Indic deity Śiva, exemplifies the Kushan dynasty's incorporation of South Asian religious traditions within its numismatic repertoire, thereby highlighting the Indic dimension of its broader religious pluralism. Attributed to the Balkh mint and datable to Phase 2 of Kanishka I's coinage (Bactrian legend phase), this series further illustrates the integration of Indic cults into the imperial ideological framework.

### Type 11.2 - Oesho (AV Quarter Dinar, Bust Obverse)

From Lala Cheena emerges a particularly notable variant in the Oesho series (Plate 37), represented by a gold quarter dinar. Unlike the standard dinars with the canonical standing-king obverse, this specimen depicts the bust of Kanishka I facing left, a relatively rare obverse type within his gold issues. The reverse maintains continuity with the broader Oesho series, portraying the four-armed deity standing frontally with head left, accompanied by the Bactrian legend OṇṇO and tamgha at the left. Classified under Göbl 51 (1984), the coin weighs 1.89 g, reflecting the reduced module of fractional denominations.

This bust-obverse quarter dinar adds valuable typological variety to the Oesho series. It may be viewed as evidence of mint-level experimentation in design, extending the representational repertoire of Kanishka's coinage while retaining established religious iconography.

#### Type 12 - Buddha (AE Tetradrachm)

A further noteworthy component of the District Khyber assemblage is represented by a small group of copper tetradrachms (Plates 38-41) recovered from Sur Kamar, Jalal Din, and Lashora. The obverse preserves the conventional standing king type, crowned and diademed, though here accompanied by an abbreviated titulature rendered as βαΟ KA ... ΝηβΚΙ. On the reverse, the figure of Sakyamuni Buddha is shown in a frontal pose, with the left hand drawing the robe and the right hand raised in abhaya mudrā. The legend CAKAMAN ... O BOYΔO flanks the image, while the tamgha appears at the left (Göbl 1984, 1984); Cribb die 5, this type is significant in

demonstrating that Buddhist iconography was not confined to high-value gold denominations but was also issued in base-metal tetradrachms, thereby extending its visibility and accessibility across broader social and economic strata of the Kushan realm.

The deliberate placement of Buddha's image on bronze currency, a medium that circulated extensively in everyday transactions, suggests a calculated strategy of imperial religious diplomacy. By disseminating Buddhist imagery into the hands of ordinary subjects, the Kushan state ensured that this devotional iconography permeated beyond elite and ceremonial contexts into the broader economic life of the empire. The District Khyber finds thus provide an important dataset for evaluating how numismatic media functioned simultaneously as currency and as vehicles of religious ideology, embedding Buddhist symbolism within the fabric of daily exchange.

#### APPENDIX: SUMMARY TABLE OF KANISHKA I COINS FROM DISTRICT KHYBER

No.	Deity / Reverse (Legend)	Denomination	Göbl Ref.	Plate No(s).	Provenance (Locality, Tehsil)	Notes	References
1	Buddha (BOΔΔO)	standing AV Dinar	66	1	Takhta Baig (Chaura Khwar), Jamrud Tehsil	Rare Buddha gold; secure provenance; wt. c. 1.9-2.2 g	Göbl 1984: Cribb 1999/2000
2	Helios (HAIOO)	frontal AV Dinar	25	2	Takhta Baig (Chaura Khwar), Jamrud Tehsil	Obverse with Greek legend	Göbl 1984: 25
3	Orlagno head-dress (OPAAΓNO)	with bird AV Dinar	63	3	Baqarabad (Pump Station area), Jamrud Tehsil	Central Asian deity type	Göbl 1984: 63
4	Oado running left (OAAO)	left AV Dinar	-(not in Göbl)	4	Walo Mela (near Lashora), Jamrud Tehsil	Unprecedented gold; previously, only copper issues	Not in Göbl; cf. Mitchiner 1978
5	Athsho diadem (AΘβO)	holding AV Dinar	47	5	Wrando Mela, Lashora, Jamrud Tehsil	Metallurgical deity	Göbl 1984: 47
6	Pharro & bowl (ΦAPPO)	with spear AV Dinar	74	6	Bar Gudar Killi, Jamrud Tehsil	Wt. 1.93 g	Göbl 1984: 74
7	Ardoksho cornucopia (APΔOXβO)	with AV Dinar	77	7	Shahkas (Chaura Khwar area), Jamrud Tehsil	Misattributed earlier as Pharro; wt. 2.23 g	Göbl 1984: 77
8.1	Nana bowl & sceptre (NANAβAO)	standing, AV Dinar	36	8-10	Zor Gudar, Zur Gudar, Azghu Mela, Jamrud Tehsil	Variant animal protome	Göbl 1984: 36
8.2	Nana sceptre (NANA)	standing, AV Dinar	35	11-21	Sur Kamar, Bagyari Killi, Jamal Khel (Bazaar), Medanak Khwar, Ghundi,	Multiple localities	Göbl 1984: 35

No.	Deity / (Legend)	Reverse	Denomination	Göbl Ref.	Plate No(s).	Provenance (Locality, Tehsil)	Notes	References
9	Mithra (MIPO)	radiate	AV Dinar	31	22-26	Shalkani, Jamrud Tehsil Shingeer, Sur Kamar, Qadam, Jalal Din, Jamrud Tehsil	Radiate nimbus, standing left	Göbl 1984: 31
10	Mao with lunar crescents (MAO)		AV Dinar	53	27-31	Shingeer, Jalal Din, Sur Kamar, Medanak Khwar, Jamrud Tehsil	Astral-lunar type	Göbl 1984: 53
11.1	Oesho, four-armed (OηpO)		AV Dinar	51	32-36	Sur Kamar, Ali Masjid, Medanak Khwar, Jamrud Tehsil	Shaivite-type deity	Göbl 1984: 51
11.2	Oesho, obverse (OηpO)	bust variant	AV Quarter Dinar	51	37	Lala Cheena, Jamrud Tehsil	Bust obverse; wt. 1.89 g	Göbl 1984: 51
12	Buddha frontal (CAKAMAN..O BOYΔO)		AE Tetradrachm	786 (Cribb die 5)	38-41	Sur Kamar, Jalal Din, Lashora, Jamrud Tehsil	Buddhist imagery on copper; obv. 786; pAO KA..NηpKI	Göbl 1984: Cribb 1999/2000

### Comparative Analysis and Distribution Patterns

The assemblage of gold and copper coins of Kanishka I from District Khyber provides a rare opportunity to examine Kushan coinage in a frontier zone through securely documented provenances. When set alongside other significant finds from Pakistan and north-western India, especially the Swabi hoard and the Skhakot/Malakand parcel hoard, distinct distributional and typological patterns become evident:

The Swabi hoard, discovered in 2013 near the Indus crossing at Hund (ancient Ohind), comprised 120 intact gold coins spanning three reigns: Vima Kadphises (one double dinar and two dinars), Kanishka I (thirty-three dinars), and Huvishka (eighty-four dinars). The composition overwhelmingly reflects the Balkh mint, with a minor Gandhara component represented in the later issues of Kanishka and Huvishka. The absence of fractional denominations or base metal issues marks this as a classic "savings" hoard, most likely deposited around 175-180 CE (Tandon, 2023, pp. 221-223). Whereas, the Skhakot/Malakand parcel hoard, reported in 2011, was initially said to number c. 800 pieces combining gold and copper. The studied parcel of forty gold coins consisted exclusively of Kanishka I dinars from the third emission, phases A1-A2, struck at Balkh. Die-link analysis shows one obverse paired with multiple reverse dies, confirming production-

batch striking practices at the mint (Khan, 2011, pp. 30-35). Like Swabi, the parcel contains only dinars, with no fractional AV or copper represented.

By contrast, the District Khyber assemblage (2018-2025 doctoral fieldwork) does not constitute a hoard but rather a series of contexted finds from settlement and monastic sites in Jamrud, Bara, and Tirah. The assemblage encompasses gold dinars depicting Buddha, Helios, Oado, Orlagno, Athsho, Nana, Mithra, Mao, and Oesho; gold quarter dinars showing the Buddha (Göbl 66), Pharro, Ardoksho, and an Oesho bust variant; and copper tetradrachms portraying the Buddha. Gold weights conform to the stabilized dinar range (7.70-7.95 g), while quarter dinars average 1.9-2.2 g. These finds reflect local circulation and deposition, distinct from the hoard profiles of Swabi and Skhakot.

### Typological and Iconographic Range

The Swabi hoard presents a broad typological range spanning three reigns. Within the Kanishka and Huvishka components, the reverses reflect the standard Balkh-mint repertoire, including Nana, Mao, Mithra, and Oesho. Notably, rare early issues such as "Year One" coins of Nanaia were also preserved (Tandon, 2023, p. 229), while the Skhakot parcel is more typologically restricted, confined to Kanishka I, the third emission at Balkh. Reverses are concentrated in Mao, Orlagno,

Oesho, Nana, Mithra, and Manaobago, showing the established Balkh pantheon of this phase. The recurrence of obverse dies across multiple reverses demonstrates systematic alternation of deity types during minting (Khan, 2011, p. 32).

The District Khyber assemblage overlaps with the Swabi and Skhakot deity sets (Nana, Mithra, Mao, Oesho, Athsho), but adds two distinctive elements absent from the hoards: (i) the Buddha on a gold quarter dinar and copper tetradrachm, and (ii) Oado in gold, previously confined to copper issues (Göbl 783). These provenanced finds extend the known circulation of Buddhist and "wind-god" iconographies into the Khyber corridor, linking them to monastic and settlement contexts.

### Weight and Mint Standards

The Swabi hoard confirms the stability of the Kushan dinar weight standard across three reigns, with only minor circulation wear observable. XRF analysis indicates a slight downward trend in gold fineness over time, and a consistent distinction between Balkh issues (higher purity) and Gandhara issues (marginally lower) (Tandon, 2023, pp. 235-237). In contrast, the Skhakot parcel adheres uniformly to the Balkh standard, without fractional denominations. Die studies strengthen its attribution to Balkh's production of emission III (Khan, 2011, p. 32).

The District Khyber assemblage likewise conforms to the stabilized system, with gold dinars falling within the 7.70-7.95 g standard and quarter dinars consistently around 1.9-2.2 g. No metallurgical testing has yet been conducted, but the recorded

weights align with the established Balkh-Gandhara standards.

### Geographical Distribution

The Swabi hoard was deposited at a central Indus crossing point, underscoring the link between Kushan monetary circulation and strategic riverine transit routes. Its mint profile reflects north-south connectivity across the Hindu Kush and the Skhakot hoard, from Malakand north of Mardan, lies in the Gandharan heartland. Its exclusive Kanishka I content confirms the deep penetration of Balkh-mint gold into this zone.

The District Khyber assemblage is distributed along the Khyber Pass artery, with finds at Takhta Baig, Walo Mela, Sur Kamar, Lashora, Shingeer, Jalal Din, and related sites. The presence of fractional gold and base-metal Buddha tetradrachms alongside full dinars highlights deposition not only in elite contexts but also within settlements and monastic complexes along the corridor.

### Comparative Synthesis

The Swabi and Skhakot hoards represent accumulations of high-value gold, dominated by dinars and diagnostic of mint production. They provide snapshots of savings and storage behavior. By contrast, the District Khyber assemblage captures circulation and deposition, revealing a more complete monetary spectrum including quarter dinars and copper. These finds document how Kushan coinage entered local economies and religious landscapes of the Khyber corridor, expanding the iconographic range with securely provenanced Buddhist and Oado types in gold.

Dataset	Context Date	& Count Denoms	/ Mint signal	Deity mix (headline)	Notes
Swabi	Intact hoard; buried c. 175-180 CE	AV 120 (1×double; dinars)	AV rest Balkh majority; Gandhara minority	Broad set (Nana, Mao, Miuro/Helios, Oesho, rarities)	Wear rate ~0.019%/yr; Au% declines over time; Gandhara slightly lower Au
Skhakot parcel	Parcel of larger hoard; late Kanishka	40 AV dinars (Kanishka only)	Balkh, emission III A1-A2	Mao, Orlagno, Oesho, Nanashao, Miuro, Manaobago	Many new dies; batch striking is visible
District Khyber	Multi-site field finds: Kanishka horizon	AV dinars + ¼-AV; AE tetradrachms	Consistent with the Balkh supply, local Gandharan circulation	Nana, Mao, Mithra, Oesho, Athsho; Buddha (AV ¼, AE); Oado (AV)	Secure provenances along the Khyber Pass; weights match the AV standard

### Conclusion

The discovery of gold and copper coins of Kanishka I from District Khyber constitutes a

landmark addition to Kushan numismatics. Distinguished by secure archaeological documentation, this assemblage offers a rare

Taken as a whole, the Khyber assemblage situates itself within the mature phase of Kanishka I's reign (c. 127-150 CE), a period characterised by the standardised standing-king obverse and an exceptionally diverse reverse pantheon. Beyond their classificatory value, these coins illuminate the multiple functions of Kushan coinage as both economic currency and ideological medium, embedding imperial authority within local religious landscapes while simultaneously projecting an ecumenical vision across a heterogeneous empire. Their secure provenance within the Khyber Pass corridor, a strategic artery

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(arranged by deity)

**Type 1 - King Standing / Buddha (AV Quarter Dinar)**



**Obverse** Crowned, diademed king standing facing, holding spear in left hand and sacrificing at altar at left; Bactrian legend: *𐎧𐏁𐎡𐎠𐎢𐏁𐎠𐎫𐎲𐎠 ... 𐎴𐎡𐎩𐎫𐎵𐎠𐎬𐎠* ("King of Kings Kanishka Kushan"). Reverse Buddha standing facing, left hand holding robe, right hand in *abhaya mudra*; Bactrian legend left: *𐎶𐎠𐎳𐎠𐎬𐎠*, tamgha at right.  
Provenance: Takhta Baig, near Chaura Khwar, Jamrud Tehsil.  
Reference: Göbl 66 (1984).

Type 2 - King Standing / Helios (AV Dinar)



2

**Obverse** Standard crowned king standing facing, holding spear and sacrificing at altar at left; Greek legend: BACIAEYC BACI ... AEWN KANH̄KOY.

**Reverse** Solar deity Helios standing facing, head turned left, one hand on hip, other raised in blessing; Greek legend right: HΛIOC, tamgha left.

**Provenance:** Takhta Baig, near Chaura Khwar

**Reference:** Göbl 25 (1984).

Type 3 - King Standing/ Orlagno (AV Dinar)



3

**Obverse** As type 1.

**Reverse** Orlagno standing right, holding spear and sword hilt, nimbate, bird head-dress; Bactrian legend left: OPAAΓNO, tamgha right.

**Provenance.** Baqarabad, near the pump station.

**Reference:** Göbl 63 (1984).

Type 4 - King Standing Facing / Oado (AV Dinar)



4

**Obverse** As type 1.

**Rev.** Oado running left, holding cloak up behind with both hands; tamgha upper left, legend OAΔO at right.

**Reference:** Not listed in Göbl coin catalogue, a sporadic series.

**Provenance:** Walo Mela, Near Lashora, Jamrud.

Type 5 - King Standing / Athsho (AV Dinar)



5

Obverse As type 1.  
Rev. God of metals Athsho standing facing, head left, one hand on hip, other holding diadem; Bactrian legend right:  $\text{A}\theta\text{p}\text{O}$ , tamgha left.  
Provenance. Wrando Mela, Lashora, Jamrud.  
Reference: Göbl 47 (1984).

Type 6 - King Standing Facing / Pharro (AV Quarter Dinar)



6

Obverse As type 1.  
Rev. God Pharro standing facing, head right, nimbate, winged head-dress, holding spear and bowl; Bactrian legend left:  $\Phi\text{APPO}$ , tamgha right.  
Provenance. Bar Gudar Killi.  
Reference: Göbl 74(1984); weight 1.93 g.

Type 7 - King Standing / Ardoksho (AV Quarter Dinar)



7

Obverse As type 1.  
Rev. Ardoksho, nimbate, standing right, holding a cornucopia; Bactrian legend to left; dotted border:  $\text{AP}\Delta\text{OX}\text{p}\text{O}$ , tamgha right.  
Provenance. Shahkas, Near Choura Khwar.  
Reference: Göbl 77 (1984), weight.2.23 g.

Type 8 - King Standing / Nanashao (AV Dinar)



8



9



10

Obverse As type 1.  
Rev. Goddess Nana standing right, nimbate, holding bowl and protome of animal; Bactrian legend left:

NANAġAO,

tamgha

right.

Reference: Göbl 36 (1984).

Provenance. Plate 8 - Coin from Zor Gudar; Plate 9 - Coin from Zur Gudar; Plate 10 - Coin from Azghu Mela.

Type 9 - King Standing Facing / Nana (Variant) (AV Dinar)



Obv.

As

type

1.

Rev. Nana standing right, holding bowl and sceptre; Bactrian legend: NANA, tamgha right.

**Provenance.** Plate 11 - Coin from Sur Kamar; Plate 12-15 - Coins from Bagyari Killi; Plate 16 - Coin from Jamal Khel near Jamrud Bazaar; Plate 17- Coin from Medanak Khwar; Plates 18 to 19- Coins from Ghundi; Plate 20- Coin from Ghundi, Gudar Killi; Plate 21 - Coin from Shalkani.  
**Reference:** Göbl 35 (1984).

**Type 10 - King Standing / Mithra (AV Dinar)**



22



23



24



25



26

Obv. As type 1.  
Rev. Mithra standing left, holding sword hilt and hand in blessing, radiate nimbus; Bactrian legend right: MIIPO, tamgha left.

**Provenance.** Plates 22 to 23 - Coin from Shingeer; Plates 24 to 25 - Coins from Sur Kamar; Plate 26 - Coin from Qadam.

**Reference:** Göbl 31(1984).

**Type 11 - King Standing / Mao (AV Dinar)**



27



28



29



30



31

Obv. As type 1.  
Rev.. Lunar deity Mao standing left, holding sceptre and hand in blessing, lunar crescents on shoulders; Bactrian legend right: MAO, tamgha left.  
**Provenance.** Plates 27- Coin from Shingeer; Plates 28 – Coins from Jalal Din; Plate 29 – Coin from Sur Kamar; Plate 30- Coin from Medanak Khwar; Plate 31 – Coin from Sur Kamar.  
**Reference:** Göbl 53 (1984).

#### Type 12.1 - King Standing Facing / Oesho (AV Dinar)



32



33



34



35



36

Obv. As type 1.  
Rev. Four-armed Oesho standing facing, head left, holding multiple attributes; Bactrian legend right:  $\text{O}\eta\text{p}\text{O}$ , tamgha left.  
**Provenance.** Plates 32 to 34- Coin from Sur Kamar; Plates 35 - Coins from Ali Masjid; Plate 36 - Coin from Medanak.  
**Reference:** Göbl 51.

#### Type 12.2 - Bust of King / Oesho (Quater Dinar)



37

Obv. As type 1.  
Rev. Four-armed Oesho standing facing, head left, holding multiple attributes; Bactrian legend right:  $\text{O}\eta\text{b}\text{O}$ , tamgha left.

**Provenance.** Plate 37 - Coin from Lala Cheena.

**Reference:** Göbl 51; weight. 1.89 g.

**Type 13 - King Standing Facing / Buddha (AE Tetradrachm)**



38



39



40



41

Obv. As type 1.  
Rev. Sakyamuni Buddha standing facing, left hand holding robe, right hand in *abhayamudra*; Bactrian legend:  $\text{CAKAMAN} \dots \text{O BOY}\Delta\text{O}$ , tamgha left.

**Provenance.** Plates 38 - Coin from Sur Kamar; Plates 39 - Coins from Jalal Din; Plate 40 - Coin from Lashora; Plate 41 - Coin from Sur Kamar.

**Reference:** Göbl 786; Cribb die 5.

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