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REPORT ON MISSION AS FIELD EXPERT NUMISMATIST
AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM AT KABUL, AFGHANISTAN
(4 July 1962)

by

Dr. Robert GÖBL.

I. Dates

Dates of appointment: 11.3.6? - 10.6.6?

First working day: 17.3.6?

Last working day: 31.5.6?

II. The condition of the coin collections

Except for the comparatively few coins placed on exhibition all others were found stored in two rooms on the second floor of the National Museum. In one of these rooms leaks had permitted rainwater to enter which damaged many coins, particularly those obtained from archaeological excavations.

All of the coins, except those found in excavations, were kept in envelopes and small cloth sacks of different sizes. Each container had coins of different periods, which were registered in a curious system written on looseleaf in Farsi by someone who had no previous knowledge or experience in numismatics. Classification was based on whether the coins were made of gold, silver or copper. No scientifically trained curator is on the staff and the person who had been in charge was a simple guard (which seems to have been a deliberate policy of the Government to minimize theft, after a series of unfortunate experiences in the past decade).

Steel cases were purchased on the advice of Dr. Gabus. Four of them were in good condition but others arrived seriously damaged in transit and must be repaired, including the cases which can be closed by key. A number of paper cups (one for each coin) had also been ordered. These were partially spoiled or deformed by humidity due to the penetration of rain as mentioned above.

III. Arrangements made for the storage, inventory and display of coins - Procedures followed

A. Coin room

First the room destined for the display of coins was changed. At my request, the Director of the National Museum, Mr. Motamedi, placed at my disposal a small but very convenient room which was located next to his office on the first floor. The four steel cases and the most important series of coins were moved there. In addition tables and large shelves were also provided for the storage of books and other items necessary for the work to be done.

B. Inventory

Some difficulties were experienced at first as the "Directory" did not wish to abandon the old inventory system based upon the arrangement of coins according to the metals used. It was necessary to have talks with the Minister of Education and the Director of the Museum to convince them that no progress

could be made unless a scientific system was installed. Finally a compromise was achieved in which the old numbers were retained in red (from 1 to nearly 1,000) which were then noted upon all corresponding envelopes. A new and modern inventory book was obtained in which each coin was described scientifically, noting literary references, etc. In addition to the new inventory number the red number of the old inventory was also added which also made possible the control of the original inventory used.

C. Extent of my work

Since the collection consists of more than 30,000 coins and my mission was short (3 months) I had to decide on a series of priorities in order to simplify work in the future.

Having surveyed all the material and its distribution in different numismatic and historic periods the collection was roughly divided into the following parts:

1. Pre-Islamic coins, which range from the beginning of coinage in the Seventh century B.C. until the time of Mohammed in the Seventh century A.D. These were subdivided into:
 - (a) General series, consisting of single coins acquired one at a time locally of unknown provenance. This had to be arranged, according to international practice, geographically and chronologically.
 - (b) Hoards of coins. Each hoard had to be kept by itself and not mixed with other hoards or single coins, as otherwise all scientific value would be lost.
 - (c) Coins coming from archaeological excavations. Coins from a given excavation had to be kept together for scientific analysis.
2. Islamic coins range in time from Mohammed in the Seventh century to the present. These coins were also subdivided according to the plan followed for the pre-Islamic coins above.

D. Working plan

I proposed to do the following for all of the coins:

1. Prepare an Inventory of all the pre-Islamic coins since I am practically the only expert acquainted with all the numismatic fields of the Middle East of this period. I had, then, to undertake the inventory of the general series, the hoards and the coins found in excavations making a total of more than 3,000 coins. I was forced to exclude the large hoard of Mir Zakah which contains more than 17,000 coins and to which I will refer later (see G/3).
2. Prepare the Islamic coins for examination, i.e. subdivide them into general series, hoards, and coins found in excavations. These were placed in steel cases to facilitate the work of an expert in Muslim coins who should be engaged later (see discussion in G/2).

E. Work accomplished

All of the pre-Islamic coins, except for the Mir Zakah hoard have been inventoried. A large number of these coins were in comparatively poor condition due to the effects of rainwater while they were in storage. On my advice the restoration department cleaned some hundred silver and copper coins.

Islamic coins were placed in steel cases in accordance with the divisions used for the pre-Islamic coins, and following the sequence by metal as shown in the red numbers of the old inventory system.

As I found that the paper cups were unsuitable since they were deformed by humidity and also took up too much space I wrote to the Government proposing that they purchase instead 4 x 4 cm. bakelite cups made by an Austrian firm in Graz. This proposal was accepted and negotiations for their purchase were under way. These cups are black, have a higher border and cannot be deformed by humidity. Each steel case can now hold 13,000 coins instead of the 6,000 foreseen with paper cups. This means that only half of the cases will be necessary for the collection. I have prepared the collection so that a changeover can be made to the new cups and the present curator was given precise instructions on how to proceed.

Furthermore, the coins on exhibition were completely rearranged. Before my arrival the following were on display:

1. the hoard of Tohaman-i Hazouri
2. the hoard of Qunduz
3. the hoard of Tepe Marandjan
4. a small portion of the hoard of Mir Zakah
5. some mediaeval and modern coins of Afghanistan
6. some examples of significant coins from other hoards.

Since the exhibition contained forgeries (modern ones) brought in by some members of the former staff of the National Museum, and since, on the other hand, some important periods were not represented, I have changed the exhibition radically so that the following are now on display:

1. a survey of coins and currency of Afghanistan from the beginning to the present, which covers all the fields of numismatics having historical and economic interest to the country. Several coins were taken from the Mir Zakah hoard (which was not placed on special exhibition). This survey is very useful to the general visitor and particularly for school visits.
2. the hoards of Tohaman-i Hazouri, Qunduz and Tepe Marandjan. Forgeries were removed and the number of coins on display was reduced. Special emphasis was given to important types.
3. all coins on exhibition have a regular place in the storage cases where a note is placed locating the coin on exhibition. I also made a label which surveys all of the coins on exhibition so that the exact data and description of a coin can be looked up by visitors wanting this information.

4. the curtains over the windows were removed in order to admit more daylight as the small size of the coins requires stronger lighting and difficulties with the local electricity made the exclusive use of lamps impractical.

F. Suggestions and recommendations to the Afghan Government

As can be seen in the attached annexes I - III the following suggestions were made to the Minister of Education (H.E. Dr. Popol) and the Vice-Minister of Education (H.E. Dr. Anas):

1. Enlargement of the collection

- (a) establish a collection of the modern coins of Afghanistan
- (b) establish a collection of decorations and medals
- (c) establish a collection of weights and measures including all objects used in counting in commerce, trade and crafts.
- (d) establish a collection of paper currency.

This should be done according to the practice found in other large national collections where coins and currency are collected.

2. Relations between the National Museum in Kabul and the Provincial Museums

I was informed that coins of historic interest are to be found in some of the Provincial museums. During my short stay it was not possible to see them, but I suggested that a small selection of coins be made following the coins and currency now on display in the National Museum which can be given to the provincial museums, and to obtain from them all of their coins which should be placed in Kabul. At present only the National Museum has sufficient and adequate storage facilities and a place for their scientific study. There are some difficulties in this matter connected with the wishes of the local Governors, but I was assured by Dr. Anas that the matter will be considered.

3. Curator of coins and medals

During my work at the National Museum I was aided by Mr. Mohammed Ibrahim Rasul Kahn, aged 39, a member of the staff. He was at my personal disposal and apparently was designated to be in charge of the coin collection after the completion of my mission. He was formerly a student at the Nedjat school (language of instruction: German) and his command of German and English is sufficiently good for him to take over this task. I found him very interested in the subject and as he appears to be the best available individual I taught him as much as possible in the short time at my disposal. At first he was given only preparatory work but later more difficult tasks were assigned to him. I was very pleased with his work. Therefore, as the collection is large and its importance demands a permanent curator, I recommended to the Afghan Government that he be sent to Europe to complete his knowledge of numismatics and history, preferably to the University of Vienna where I am teaching. He should also spend a few weeks visiting the most important coin collections in Vienna, London and Paris. I also suggested that following this period of study he be appointed director of the department of coins and medals which would reflect the importance of the collections.

I have assured expressis verbis the Minister of Education as well as the Director of the National Museum and the Curator of Coins, that I shall be ready to aid the museum with its collection of coins, even after the completion of my mission, and shall be ready to answer questions through correspondence, to guarantee a real and permanent success of my work undertaken on behalf of Unesco.

4. Restoration of coins

I taught the Department of Restoration how to treat some of the problems of restoration of coins. In addition I gave the staff some hints on related topics, e.g. archaeology, general restoration problems, organization, etc.

5. Recommendations for further work on the coin collections.

Before my departure I gave Mr. Ibrahim Rasul, the present curator of coins, a list of recommendations for work to be done in the near future (See Annex IV).

6. Recommendations to Unesco regarding future aid

1. I should like to recommend that Unesco furnish a fellowship to the Afghan Government so that the present Curator of Coins and Medals can be sent to Europe for study as mentioned above in F.3.

2. An expert in Islamic coins should be sent for a mission of six months, which can be extended for a few more months should this be necessary. The collection contains more than 10,000 Islamic coins and I should like to recommend Mr. Dominique Sourdel of Paris for this task as he is the author of a book on some important Islamic coins found in the National Museum. His address may be obtained from Dr. R. Curjel at the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

3. Later, an expert in ancient numismatics (specialized in the coins of the Middle East) should be engaged to work on the hoard of Mir Zakah which contains about 17,000 coins ranging from Greek times to the Kushan period. This is perhaps the most important treasure trove of coins found in the Middle East. An inventory of the hoard should be made first. Based on my present experience it is clear that the expert should be engaged for a longer period of time. It is impossible for an expert, even though well acquainted with this difficult material, to complete the inventory of more than 1,000 coins per month. This task cannot be undertaken by an Afghan as it demands a high degree of specialization which can only be acquired in advanced study in Western schools and by working in this specialized field for a period of some years. Perhaps either I or a pupil of mine may be able to undertake this task at the request of Unesco. In any case I am at the disposal of Unesco for recommendations and suggestions.

4. The National Museum has practically no literature on numismatics. It would be advisable to supply the museum with several important books on numismatics to guarantee further good and successful work. This would cost about \$200 for 10 to 12 basic books.

5. Publication. I requested the Government's permission to publish some important material on the coin collection. The permit was obtained from

the Director of the Museum, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, dated 5 May 1962, to publish articles about:

- (a) all unique, rare and extant items in the collection
- (b) all hoards of coins except the Qunduz hoard (a publication on this hoard is now under preparation by the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan)
- (c) the coins from the French excavations of 1941, 1942 and 1946 in Begram, Kabul and Balch, as this material was studied during my engagement by Unesco in the National Museum.

As the coin collections of the National Museum in Kabul constitute one of the most important collections in Asia it would be best to publish in one book information about the coins mentioned in (a), (b) and (c) above. I would like to suggest that Unesco check the possibility of publishing this under its and the Government of Afghanistan's patronage. This would show in black-and-white the success of Unesco's experts in working in remote countries on such difficult problems. I have all of the necessary photographs with me as well as descriptions of the coins. I would place myself at the disposal of Unesco if this project is accepted. Otherwise, I will place the articles in some of the international numismatic journals.

H. Final remarks

First I would like to thank Unesco for having entrusted this interesting mission to me. I also wish to state that I am at its disposal for further inquiries resulting from this mission and - if desired - for other questions related to my special knowledge in these fields.

(signed) Professor F. Robert Gobl