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NO COINS FROM GILGIT: PRECONDITIONS OF A NON-MONETARY ECONOMY

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During the German Hindukush Expedition 1955/1956, Professor Dr. Adolf Friedrich and Peter Snoy — then one of his students — stayed the winter for fieldwork in Chitral (Snoy 1960, 1960a, 1962, 1974). Due to the tragic death of Prof. Friedrich in spring 1956 before the end of the expedition, there is no comprehensive report. His fieldnotes, however, were made available to all interested colleagues. The small team intended to pass the winter in the valleys of the last pagans, the Kalash population, in the Valleys Birir, Rumbur and Bumboret. On the way to these places, between Chitral-town and Drosh, the road enters a narrow passage between the river and a terrace, formed when the bottom of the valley was considerably higher. At the rim of the terrace, ruins were visible. One of the local passengers had just seen a coin in the detritus spread over the scree slope and offered it as a gift to the foreigners. The coin was brought to Europe, inspected by my friend R. Göbl and identified as a badly worn copper coin of Kanishka I (Göbl 1984: 34, 61-64, *cf.* Tafel 4-7).

In later years, during my travels in Chitral and in the Diamir district, such a lucky coincidence has never happened again. Recently M. Bemmann inspected the coins offered for sale to the tourists in the shops of Gilgit. All were of the British period, interspersed by primitive fakes, possibly brought from Peshawar and Taxila. Old coins and buttons are frequently fixed as decorations on the caps worn by girls. On such headdresses in European collections, I have never seen ancient coins. There is now a well-stocked bazaar at Skardu, but Sagester (1989: 57-139) had no coins in her collection that were acquired in shops.

This numismatic vacuum calls for an explanation. In ancient Gandhara and its surroundings, each ruler eager to demonstrate his position, maintained his own mint. All sorts of affiliations, aspirations and antipathies were expressed in this way. So, the intelligent use of numismatics is the normal approach to political history, and we would expect information from this side.

Between the fourth and eighth centuries AD, most of the valley now forming part of Northern Pakistan were united in the state of the Patola-Sahis whose capital was near Skardu. Their ambition was to appear as the rightful kings of one of the major Buddhist states, certainly supported by literate Indian administrators. But they produced no coins, and that makes all attempts to trace their fate and final downfall most adventurous. My own attempt based on previous efforts of v. Hinüber (1987) has just been published (Jettmar 1993).

One explanation for the avoidance of coins is at hand. The book of Hassnain, based on the official records preserved in Srinagar, is quite informative in this respect: "Money payments are made in gold-dust which is still used as a circulating medium. An amount of the value of eight shillings is called *Baghaloo*." (Hassnain 1978:21).

The washing of gold-dust was possible in many places along the big rivers, "a considerable number of people in certain villages [of the state centred at Gilgit] found employment during the winter, a fixed tax of fifty-five pounds sterling called *Rai Dilki* was paid yearly." (Hassnain 1978:20).

According to the books focussing on the past, the same system, the use of gold-dust, was previously more common. When the fighting men were called to arms, the *Wazir* had the right of releasing one man in each fortified village in Gilgit from military service in return for which he received "3 *Baghaloos* of gold-dust" from the man so released. The amount was reduced when the imminent conflict was settled in a peaceful way (Hassnain 1978: 22). We can be sure that only a very rich man was able to obtain such a privilege, and that confirms the impression that gold-dust was reserved for official and noble payments. It had a respectable place in all tributes paid by the local rulers to foreign powers. Jafar Khan, lord of Nagar, agreed to pay 21 *tolas* of gold, two horses and 5 loads of apricots in 1867. Ghazan Khan of Hunza: 12 *tolas* plus 2 horses, in 1870. On the other hand, subsidies in return were paid in cash. Even valleys not belonging to monarchies paid tribute in gold-dust — *Daral*: 4 *tolas*. Gold was delivered even after the

establishment of the Gilgit Agency. Nagar paid "twenty-six *telloos* of gold equal to seventeen *tolas* and one *masha*, Hunza 25 *telloos* — a little less." (Hassnain 1978:31-48).

Gold tribute was extended to Chilas. After the conquest of this township and the following rebellion, the inhabitants were ousted from the Indus valley, but they got their land back after substantial payments: 223 *tolas* of gold. (Hassnain 1978: 55-60).

It should be mentioned that in contrast to gold bars or coins — which might consist of alloys of unknown composition — the quality of gold-dust produced in moderate quantities but in many places along the rivers was apparently easier to control.

Under several Islamic dynasties ruling in Western Central Asia (Samanids, Ghaznavids and Great Seljuks), the weight of the individual gold coins was surprisingly at variance, the difference often more than one gramme. The exact value for the intended payment, however, was reached by cutting up the coins. As mentioned by Davidovic (1980: 57) in an excellent study, hoards from the pre-Mongol period contain few intact coins (e.g. 10 intact pieces, but 107 fragments). Under such conditions, coinage by the State guarantees not the weight, but the alloy. The fineness reached 98%; 96% was normal.

Under such conditions, gold-dust locally put into gall-bladders of sheep, was quite fit to replace imported or locally produced coins for substantial transfers. Whether there was a local production of solid gold objects (Jettmar 1991: 10-17) is an open question. At present, mercury — easily available in medical shops — is used for an easier production. But, it is not clear when this process — mentioned but misunderstood already by Biruni — was introduced (*cf.* translation by Belenickij 1963: 222-226).

So it is comprehensible that no coins were needed for the transfer of high amounts, as "payment" of valuable objects, as savings elsewhere concentrated in the shape of gold or silver coins.

But that is hardly a sufficient explanation. In the sacred precincts of Butkara I in Swat, after a long period of careful excavations, 281 coins were found before 1976 and published: there were no gold and very few real silver coins, "the mass

being of debased silver.” (Göbl 1976: 41). Maybe here as well, gold-dust was used, but apart from that, small coins were needed for private marketing. So the complete deficiency in Gilgit and Chitral still remains enigmatic. In Chilas there might be a geographical explanation at hand: after landslides caused by earthquakes, the Indus was completely blocked by natural dams, as described by Drew (1976: 414-421). When such dams broke under the pressure of the accumulated lake (which might have been more than one hundred metres in depth with a length of 50 kms), an enormous wave, 20 m high, was brushing the soil of the valley. It was most destructive even at Attock. In case there had been coins in the soil at the bottom of the valley, they were certainly dislocated, washed away by the enormous gush of water.

But this observation does not explain deficiency at other places, e.g. Gilgit, where some “quarters” were situated on high terraces. Here we should assume a completely non-monetary economy even devoid of petty cash. Under such circumstances, no bazaar is imaginable.

In many areas we have no clear evidence concerning how such a non-monetary system actually worked, how urgent needs of the population for unavoidable imports could be fulfilled, because the disturbances in the 18th and 19th centuries were too grave. This was the case in Gilgit and, possibly, also in Baltistan.

Many changes, but no break, occurred in Chitral and in Hunza — and there we are rather well informed.

Chitral

There were some men of the local intelligentsia at Chitral, who helped us in understanding the inherited systems. I am happy to have met two such men, Shahzada Hussam-ul-Mulk and Wazir Ali Shah, who became my close friends. A systematic study on the economic background of a particular area is also available (Eggert 1990).

The problem was clearly seen by Barth. He recognised in ancient Chitral a “feudal organisation, operating totally independent from any form of currency.” (Barth 1956: 81).

Now we must ask what is understood by Barth under “feudal organisation” — certainly not the same concept which is current among historians dealing with

European feudalism. The principle of this structure never completely put into practice, but present in the minds of the rulers and their nearest advisors and executors, was that the land is the basic and only fortune of the state. We may follow the graphic formulation of Barth (Barth 1956: 81):

“As land was the only source of wealth, all persons could thus be categorised in terms of the duties associated with the particular fields of land they were utilising. All land belonged in the final instance to the *Mehtar* (literally ‘owner’) and the duties associated with any specific piece of land were to be regarded as payment, in service and produce, for temporary usufruct rights to that land.”

This concept did not cover all the relations between the ruler and the inhabitants of the state, but for the category called *Fakir Mushkin* (Biddulph 1971: 68) [this term has a long and extremely interesting history, with many aspects], it was correct. The *Fakir Mushkin* or *Yuft* (that means a family working at least with one pair of oxen!) were divided into three categories:

- 1) The *Patani*: families with their heads in the permanent service of the state. That meant a privileged position.
- 2) The *Boldoyu*, according to Wazir Ali Shah, were men who had an inherited task, a *boli*. More realistic is the explanation that the householders of such families formerly had to carry loads, they were porters. Apart from that there was the obligation to participate in public work for a fixed period of the year, and to deliver foodstuffs and other products in kind. Land attributed to such families was not considered as their property. We could say that they were hereditary leaseholders (since a distant past).
- 3) The Next and last category were the *Rayat*. They had accepted land from the state — often more and larger fields than those cultivated by the *Boldoyu*.

But for them all tasks and duties were heavier and often degrading. *Begar* (participation in public works) was a heavy burden. The loads were orpiment, grain, woollen cloth — but also the corpses of those who had died abroad, etc. Not only was the regular delivery of grain to Chitral-town required, but they had to provide food and shelter to travelling princes and high officials as well. They had no legal protection, in case their lands were allotted by the ruler or his officers to others. They were only tenant farmers.

In this system there was no problem to get all that was needed by the ruler and his court. In the same way it was possible to provide the administrators with food and

services. Just a part of the specific tasks and duties was branched off to the officers, and a part of the supplies allotted to them as well. Additional usufructuaries, working in the local administration, were helpful for control and the unavoidable pressing. Of course, the share corresponded to the rank.

Eggert's book, in spite of the fact that the focus is on the northernmost provinces of Chitral, contains the data reflecting this system. To the high civil servants extensive farmsteads were attributed, a part of the grain produced by the *Rayat* had to work for them. Even the lowest government servant got such rewards. At least a farmstead was allotted them free of other obligations, and a minimal quantity (i.e. 80 kg.) of grain.

One facet of this system was not understood and not properly recorded by Barth — because his informants were the representatives, we might say, the promoters and propagandists of a concept, a sort of "Benevolent Despotism" — which became nearer to practice only after the integration into the British Empire. That explains the misleading interpretation of *Mehtar* as "owner" (Barth 1956: 81).

What the informants did not stress was the fact that a considerable part of the population, the so-called *Adamzadas*, owned their lands not by the grace of the ruler. That does not mean private ownership, but such lands belonged to large communities: most similar to the clans in the Scottish Highlands. Before the demographic explosion in this century, such communities numbered between 200 and 1500 persons (Eggert 1990: 43-58). We may hardly call them "nobility"; there are considerable internal differences, ranks in wealth and position. The English speaking locals call the groups "tribes", and that is not quite wrong, as we shall see. The characteristic differences to the rest of the population are — apart from the existence of a common territory already mentioned —

- 1) In the past they were the fighting force of Chitral, with their own equipment, their own horses.
- 2) They were connected with the ruler by a system of milk fostership. The ruler gave his children in charge to them immediately after birth. The baby was nursed, in the optimal case, by the wife of the chief of the clan, but every lady able to do so joined her. So the prince or princess became an adopted member of the clan. For a boy, protection by his milk-fathers called *shirmush*, was essential; as he would be a pretender to the throne, he was endangered; they were ready to perform blood revenge in case he was insulted or killed.

They were his natural bodyguard. If the pretender was defeated and killed by one of his royal brothers, then the whole clan was involved. They could lose their lives and their lands — not to the state but to the milk-brothers and protectors of the victorious prince. That was a deadly game.

3) The clans were allowed to keep slaves, mostly descendants of prisoners of war.

This is a position comparable to that of a conquering race. When we hear that the clans monopolised previously “martial activities” — that fits in the same context. So it seems strange and inexplicable that the clans are declaredly of variegated origin. Some sprang up as collateral lines of the dynasty (which came from outside but not by conquest), while most of them are said to be descendants of later immigrants. A few others again profess to be aboriginals already distinguished by services to the previous dynasty.

The problem can be solved, but the surprising explanation needs a special study which I will submit for printing soon. To cut a long story short: the state was organised in the 16th century after the model of the Uzbeks. They discerned between the real Uzbeks, nomads clinging to their kinship order on the one hand, and the submissive peasants — the descendants of the indigenous population — on the other hand. After the transfer of this system into the mountains, kinship groups who were too strong or too dangerous were incorporated with the prerogatives of the Uzbek tribes as “pseudo-nomads.”

Starting from a custom that existed among the Uzbeks as well, beyond the military service the “clans” made an essential contribution to the “budget” of the ruler without losing their right of property and without changing the non-monetary economic system.

The early rulers of Chitral did not have a fixed residence. Chitral-town was the only place where the archives were kept, where stores of grain and other objects were established. For many months, however, the ruler was “touring” — and everywhere he was hosted by the *Adamzadas*. That explains the term *Ashimadek* (= foodgivers). They were “bound to supply the ruler and his retainers with food to the extent of eight sheep and eight *Kherwars* of wheat from each house whenever he (= the ruler) passes through their villages.” Only the *Sangallie*, i.e., his actual blood relatives, and the *Zundre* (a tribe consisting of descendants of former administrators) were exempted (Biddulph, 1971: 66-68). Thus we find a system of taxation which can be understood as a sort of obligatory gift to the

ruler, who is bringing (smaller) presents in return. We are in a world where sentiments are not separated from juridical obligations. Gifts and taxes remain on the same level, for those belonging to the freeholders.

But yet we cannot avoid wondering how such a system could cope with the actual needs of the population. "Manufactures are less esteemed than agriculture" was noted in Biddulph's well-informed book (Biddulph 1971: 65). The handicrafts had a more important position only in the Kunar valley below Chitral, in areas which were rather acquisitions. According to the same author, we learn of *ustads* (artificers), carpenters, wooden bowl makers, potters, musicians and blacksmiths. But they were not found in the province Kashkar Bala = Ludkho, and in other areas further north.

Apparently this diversification of handicrafts was due to Pashtun influence. But in central villages, the supply of utensils must have been deplorable.

A quotation from the *New History of Chitral* is illuminating (Ghufran 1982, translated by Wazir Ali Shah, p. 150):

"In 1827, i.e., eleven years before the death of Shah Katur, a delegation of Saiyid Ahmad Barlavi arrived in Chitral via Bajaur on their way to the Shah of Bukhara. The delegation was led by Mianji Muhai-ud-Din Chishti and consisted of nine others. They met the ruler of Chitral and delivered to him a letter from Hazrat Saiyid Ahmad. During their stay at Chitral, they were guests of the ruler of Chitral. On their departure from Chitral, they were escorted to the border of Badakhshan by the guides provided by the ruler. From the accounts of the members as mentioned in the *Tarikh-e-Mujahideen*, the people of Chitral lived in those days in complete simplicity. There were no lamps, and light was provided by burning pieces of deodar wood. Coins did not exist and trading was done by exchange of commodities. The members of the delegation had carried substantial quantities of curry, dried ginger, salt, needles and cotton cloth which they exchanged in the villages for other commodities. According to their account, they got twenty five to thirty apples and pears for one needle, and five or six bunches of grapes for a piece of curry or ginger. A piece of cotton cloth fetched a nice woollen gown. The members of the delegation thought that Chitral was quite prosperous in those days."

What is told here could be expressed in the professional wordings of the anthropologist. He will state a typical case of "inter-community trade" involving

the “acquisition of products (foodstuffs, raw materials, manufactured goods) which are unavailable in the importing community.” “Since this trade customarily requires travelling over considerable distances across political and ethnic boundaries, the potential for hostility and conflict is high, thus creating a need for peacekeeping...” [In this case, peacekeeping was easy by the high religious standard of the visitors] However, the typical peculiarities of “Visiting Trade”, the ceremonial re-orientation was rather absent (Cook 1973: 823-836).

But this was not the most important kind of “inter-community trade”. The main operator for exchange over long distances was — on the Chitrali side — the ruler himself, represented and supported by one of the top-officials of the state.

Very little is told about the negotiations in this respect — and that may easily be understood: the main export product of Chitral were slaves. This form of trade became scandalous under British rule, and all memory of this practice was suppressed. But early travelogues contain vivid descriptions, and I myself was told some relevant stories.

The most precious export product were girls. The beauty of Chitrali women was proverbial, and many beauties in the *harems* of Kabul and Peshawar had been exported, at times as small children. The girls were collected from the houses of the *Faqir Muzhkin* population. Males were sold as slaves as well, especially from houses where the head of the family or one of his sons was considered as rebellious or criminal (Durant 1974, 51; Eggert 1990, 72-74). To protect against such treatment, the peasants adopted boys of the *Adamzada* clans as foster sons, but that had often pernicious consequences. In case *Adamzada* clan had supported an unsuccessful pretender to the throne and was eradicated or driven into exile, all their copyholders related by milk-fostership were handed over to the slave-dealers, under the pretext that they might try blood-revenge.

I was told that this cruel custom had a beneficial consequence anyhow: Chitral had an astonishingly peaceful population, troublemakers being exported. Death sentences were rare — that would have meant squandering of a precious export-good.

It is heartless but important for the understanding of the economy of Chitral to note what was obtained by such exports, namely the goods not otherwise available. Surely luxury articles for the ruler and his family were imported in this way, but

we hear that the king was obliged to provide the officials and his personal supporters with liberal gifts during marriages and at other occasions. Using the jargon current among the adepts of economic anthropology we could say that the ruler was in the centre of a “redistributive sequence between a central actor and many peripheral actors.” That is one of the types conceived by Polany (1957, VII-IX, 243-270), mutual exclusive to a “market economy.”

As the traders (who did not work on state-level) came from distant areas — mostly from Badakhshan — with precious goods, they needed a port of trade where the exports of the country were waiting for them. It seems that Chitral-town remained important in this function. There the court settled down after touring through the countryside, waiting for the *Tajiks*, i.e., the merchants.

Such a system of “administered trade” is not flexible and that explains why — during the visit of the delegation headed by Muhai-ud-din-Chishti — curry, dried ginger and needles were among the items asked for. In any case, we may assume that many conducive things were distributed and sometimes handed over to the *Shirmush* families. Once more we see that coined money was not necessary.

The non-monetary economy was effective on three levels:

- 1) Taxes were paid in kind, as supplies or by services (*Begar*). In case that the formal right for taxation was problematic, hospitality was granted to the ruler — and rewarded by liberal gifts.
- 2) All salaries for government officials were replaced by a share in the system of supplies and services.
- 3) The rare export-goods (reproduction being the main production) were concentrated by the state and exchanged *en bloc* against the commodities urgently needed by the state (e.g. arms!) and the population.

This was a closed circle, effective even in the British period, so that no money was used in normal affairs. When the first telegraph office was opened at Chitral, one of the ruler’s sons, who was governor in one of the provinces, had a message to be sent for India. He possessed no cash — a sheep offered instead was not accepted. When he asked the governor of the next province, not even this equally rich and important man was in a position to help him.

Hunza

There existed no real touring in Hunza, the ruler had several castles, but at a walking distance. The import of the necessary commodities — and a few luxury goods for the ruler and his court — were secured by a “dual” system. Since the time when the Manchus reorganized the administration of Xinjiang in the second half of the 18th century, Hunza had diplomatic relations with China and used them for attaining grazing rights in territories which were considered as pertaining to the Celestial Empire. The Hunza-men, however, used such concessions for an expansionistic policy, forcing the Kirghiz population in the Tagdumbash Pamir to pay tributes. In spite of such regular exploitation, many Kirghiz camps were robbed, the nomads and their families brought to Hunza and sold by a recently ordained magistrate, also called *Diwan Begi* (the term used in Chitral).

Stellrecht, who speaks about these developments in her book on Hunza and China (Stellrecht 1978, 61-62), does not see that this meant practically the taking-over of the system prevalent in Chitral — apparently without enough experience, as the prices asked for such slaves were much too low. A good leather skin was exchanged against six Kirghiz slaves.

When Yakub Beg revolted successfully against the Chinese and carved out his own kingdom, the Hunzas extended their system of predatory raids further to the east to the Mustagh-pass and through the mountains south of the Tarim Basin, reaching the routes leading to the Karakorum Pass. That happened under the pretext that Hunza remained loyal to the Chinese overlords. On the other hand, Tagdumbash was controlled by Yakub Beg and protected against the Hunzas. A description of this policy and its results was given by Stellrecht (1978, 63-64).

After 1877, when China reconquered and reorganized the Central Asian colonial empire, the relations to Hunza were regulated, but only after some troubles when Hunza duplicitously collaborated with a fraudulent official posted to the Tagdumbash area. According to the age-old system, unruly neighbours were invited to submit to the emperor of China by sending modest tributes by a highly profitable delegation. Regularly envoys travelled to the Sola Amban at Yarkand and further to the Taotai at Kashgar. The delegates brought back generous gifts and formal letters, many times noticing reproachfully the misdeeds of Hunza raiders, who continued under many pretexts. The lucrative delegations still went on when Hunza became part of the British Empire.

For this study only one aspect is of importance. When delegations or raiding parties returned to Hunza, they were herded to the palace of the ruler. There they were stripped of all that they had brought with them. The chief of the diplomatic delegation, the official envoy, had not only to render the ceremonial gift to the ruler, as well as the pertinent letter, but all that had been handed over to him personally. Raiders were not treated otherwise.

After taking away the booty, the homecomers were rewarded by goods and services — even by land. When the first (empty) whisky bottle reached Hunza (apparently by a traveller, returning from British territory), it was greatly admired for its artistic qualities. The clever man submitting this gift to the ruler was rewarded by fields, later on called “the bottle-jagir” (*jagir* is the traditional term for a martial fief).

But normally the ruler got a stock of precious goods for re-distribution and for exchange with the merchants bypassing Hunza on the Badakshan-Yarkand “route”, leading through the Wakhan. Most of them were Badakhshani, others came from Bajaur (Stellrecht 1978, 70-72).

So, in a systematic way, the products gained by political actions (and robberies) were exchanged for commodities — arms (even a small cannon), cotton clothes, silk, tea, and teapots.

Coins and paper money were reserved for external use. The not so easily usable rest filled the treasury and was discovered by the somewhat baffled English officers after the conquest of Hunza.

For us, in this study, that is one more case of administered trade (plus administered robbery) followed by redistribution of the objects pooled in the royal household.

It would be a tempting task to deal with the question of how this system became obsolete in the statelets of the Hindukush — maybe the British subsidies in cash? When Pakhtun Wali Khan, for a while despotic lord of the valleys Tangir and Darel, allowed the woodcutters working for contractors from the Kaka-Khel to cut some forests in his domain, he earned so many Indian silver rupees that counting was replaced by weighing. But soon he was murdered, his treasure plundered. Maybe silver coins hidden by the peasants of the notoriously stingy Shin caste came from this hoard, plundered after the usurper’s end (Schomberg 1935, 237-241).

Certainly, 'Royal Distribution' was one of the possible systems of a non-monetary economy. Assuming that the economic system of Chitral was not too different from that which existed in the time before the incorporation into the British Empire (including the preceding period of interventions by Sikhs and Dogras) we could explain why no coins were found in Gilgit — and in other minor strongholds. The statelets acted as centres of redistribution.

But the situation was not always and everywhere the same, as indicated by the petroglyphs from the first millennium AD, which I have been studying since 1979 (Jettmar 1989).

The rock carvings and inscriptions found in large clusters on the rocks of the Indus valley, near Chilas, do not indicate the predominance of a central institution strong enough for establishing a system of administered trade. We may think that the population in the side valleys maintained some sort of traditional independence — not only in religious matters. Caravans arrived from different directions. The merchants belonged to people or tribes, foreign in language and religion (e.g. Sogdians). Was it possible to exclude direct contacts with the local population, resulting in unofficial trade? Who took care of the arriving travellers — totally exhausted and needing food and shelter? Had the Buddhist monasteries as well as the heathen sanctuaries the function of a mediating instance?

This problem must be seen in the context with other segments of the Silk Road system. There were certainly areas where the basic implements and the equipment for peasants and warriors were produced by craftsmen, mobile but settling down in places where locals and foreigners appeared regularly, e.g. during festivals or religious ceremonies. Then the craftsmen, gathering in the shelter of the sanctuary, could form their own guilds settling in close compounds, the proto-type of a "bazar". This meant an early (and incomplete) transition to a "market economy" — and for that a sort of currency allowing greater flexibility in the system of exchange was needed. Traders filled the gap between producer and consumer. That was certainly the system prevalent in the urban centres arranged like strings of pearls on both sides of the Tarim Basin. In Khotan the so-called Sino-Kharoshthi coins belonged to such a structure (Enoki 1965). The "tribal coins" of India had a similar background (Sharan 1972).

The other solution was to attach the production centres, the workshops and their staff to the 'residences' of chieftains and 'big men'. That implies protection, a

reliable allocation of provisions and raw materials — and a diffusion of the products in a larger net of redistribution. Even in such a system, currency is not needed, coins are superfluous, especially small denominations. All that the craftsman needs he will get from his lord. Maybe this was the system prevailing in ancient Chilas.

The systems observed in Chitral and in Hunza do not belong to this category, since the ruler held a monopoly and craftsmanship was poorly represented.

Without such an administrative centre holding exclusive rights, the seats of the chieftains, of warlike lords, may offer to artisans an adequate, even superior base. Between local lords there is often an intense competition favouring a remarkable production of jewellery and decorated arms, but also of poems and monuments. Maybe we should think of such a situation in the early Indus Valley (Jettmar 1992). This could also be the background for a system of traffic allowing a relatively free movement of the caravans. However, the activities of the Sogdian merchants were restricted to the areas north of the Indus — but that might be explained by a religious bias: they were not Buddhists — as most of the local chieftains.

N. G. Rhodes (Rhodes 1979) has described that in the second half of the 11th century the Tibetans made purchases with barley grain or with gold — both traded by weight. Gold circulated as “raw gold-dust, tied up in a small bag”. It is said that this locally panned gold was “very inconvenient for every day transactions, as it had to be weighed and scrutinised for impurities each time it changed hands.”

As for barley grain, “it continued to play an important role in Tibetan financial affairs until the present century, with a proportion of Government revenue and the salaries of officials was always expressed in grain”.

This information is not invalidated by the fact that in documents recovered by A. Stein in the “hidden library” of Tun-hunag and published by F. W. Thomas (1951, 251), a Khotani serving in the Tibetan army as cook caused so much annoyance that his execution was ordered by the authorities. However, his compatriots were ready to pay 4.500 *don-tse* in order to save his life. *Don-tse* is explained as a “frequently named coin” (maybe cowrie-shells?).

In other texts, ‘three *sran*’ (= ounces of copper) are mentioned (Thomas 1951, 258). We hear of 7 *zo* explained as a weight or a sum. Apparently a *sran* was

equal to 10 *zo* (Thomas 1951, 405). But in such cases we refer to a quite exceptional situation. In the Tarim basin, coins were known from the times of Chinese overlordship. Since the invading Tibetan army had to build up an administration, some system of currency was necessary. But this was basically an extension of the previous system to process a few basic substances (grain, gold, and here copper as well) in a form which could be controlled each time it changed hands.

As a result of these investigations we may dare to offer the statement that the development to a monetary system was not without alternatives. Local rulers may establish centres of redistribution. Similar trade-systems are possible at a lower level, the landlords acting as entrepreneurs, protecting craftsmen and merchants. In this way the commercial relations between Nuristan and Mungan were organized (Snoy 1965).

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Gold-washer in the Indus Valley near Chilas on the way to his work, carrying all necessary equipment on his back.