

'Urdu Zafar Qarin' Rupees of Akbar – Some misconceptions.

By Amit Mehta

It is commonly believed that the coins issued in the name of Akbar with the mint name 'URDU ZAFAR QARIN' were issued at the mobile camp mints that accompanied Akbar on his expeditions to meet day to day expenditure. 'Urdu Zafar Qarin' has been translated as "Mobile Camp of Victory". Most coins bear the date 'Alf' which is the year 1000 or the Millennium. While this may be reasonably true for the copper coins with this mint name, some recent information that has come to light shows that contrary to this earlier belief, Rupees with the mint name Urdu Zafar Qarin were not issues of a travelling mint and the year Alf / Alif read on the coins is not the year AH 1000.

A study of the mints of the Mughal Empire under Akbar will show that most mints were transient in nature, established to supply money necessary during the many expeditions Akbar undertook to expand his empire. These camp mints, as records indicate, always minted coins with the name of the town where the army had camped. There were only around 7 major mints that minted Silver / Gold and a handful of copper mints that continued minting throughout his reign.

A study of the coins of Akbar shows that from AH 990 almost all mints of the Empire, (with the exception of Ahmadabad) did not mint any coins. Najaf Haider, in his paper 'The Monarch and the Millennium – A new Interpretation of the Alf Coins of Akbar' refers to the secretly written History of the Mughal Empire by Abdul Qadir Balauni and mentions that Akbar took some unusual decisions when he ordered the coins to be struck with the date 'Alf' and to write the Tarikh I Alfi (History of the Millennium) from the demise of the Prophet. Based on this information, Najaf Haider mentions that Akbar reckoned the duration of Islam to be a thousand years from its advent (612 AD) and not from the date of the flight of the Prophet in 622 AD, on which the orthodox Islamic Calendar was based. This was as per the tenets of a particular Islamic philosophy called '*nuqtawi*' philosophy. As mentioned by Najaf Haider, Balauni states that Akbar continued using the date 'Alf' even after the Hijiri Calendar was officially abandoned. It is seen that no coins dated 990 to 993 are seen from any Mint of the empire (other than Ahmedabad). It was in AH 993 that Akbar introduced the Ilahi era and the dating system (Ilahi 30). It is around this same time that we come across a spurt in the coins with the mint name 'Urdu Zafar Qarin'.

In a Facebook discussion, Arthur Needham mentions that in the years AH 990 – AH 993 there was a marked change in the outlook of Akbar in more ways than one. The defeat of Mirza Hakim in AH 990 seemed to have brought about the thought of establishing a consolidated Multi-ethnic Empire in Akbar's mind. This was the period of expansion in fort building and the general consolidation of what was an expanded empire. This may have resulted in the necessity to have a relatively large number of coins of a specific type struck in a short time. This style of coin issued with the same mint name from many parts of the empire was the sign of the power of the Empire. He reasons that at this time of expansion and fort & town building, as the ultimate sign of central power, coins were issued from a central mint or at least issued in the name of one central mint.

He further states that the word '*Urdu*', is often translated as "*Camp*". The normal translation of the phrase '*Urdu Zafar Qarin*', is "constant companion of the conquering armies" From a mystical angle, the meaning of '*Qarin*' is Jinn (spirit) - a persons' constant companion. In Arabic / Persian literature '*Qarin*' has been used to describe a fearless tribe or enemy (as an adjective). So we have two meanings - the actual one "constant companion of the conquering army (ies)" and the mystical one - "spirit of the conquering army (ies)". The Rupees with this mint name '*Urdu Zafar Qarin*' were minted in most cases in the years AH 990 – 992 which would also support the theory that the Rupees with the mint name Urdu Zafar Qarin with the date 'Alf' were minted in this period between AH 990 & AH 992.

Shailendra Bhandare (also in various Facebook discussions) mentions that the coins (Rupees?) with the mint name Urdu Zafar Qarin were most likely struck at Fatehpur and then from other prominent mints with dies engraved at a single workshop and dispatched to the provincial headquarters. He mentions that, to date, there is no evidence to suggest that the coins were struck from a mobile or military mint "traveling with the Mughal army". In fact, during the years that these coins were struck (AH 990 - 992) Akbar was mostly stationed at Fatehpur and Agra. These coins were minted as a part of a specific political picture for Akbar. The mint name suggests that Akbar was anticipating a major "victory" which was crucial to his idea of Kingship. As a millennial sovereign, Akbar wanted to declare himself a Supreme ruler. The choice of the mint name reflects his politics (the mint name had appeared a few years earlier while Akbar was pursuing a campaign against Mewar and again it was used with a specific political agenda this time around). Soon after AH 990, anonymous Ilahi type coins (without Rulers name and the mint name) were minted. The first recorded date on any such coin is the Ilahi year 30 (AH 993) though it is yet not known whether such Ilahi coins were struck at all the major mints of the Empire or only at a few selected mints. He adds that though Urdu Zafar Qarin originally referred to a 'travelling mint', referred to by Mughal chroniclers as 'Mu'askar-i-Iqbal', the term was later employed as a generic term on coins as a 'universal' mint-name. Perhaps this was a 'unifying measure' taken by Akbar, in accordance with his other experiments about Kingship, religion and governance. He also mentions the close similarity these coins bear with coins of 'Udaipur Maftooha (conquered)' issued in AH 984 leaving little doubt about the term meaning (at least initially) the 'Victorious Military Camp'.

From the above it can be safely concluded that URDU ZAFAR QARIN as seen on the Silver Rupees of Akbar is not a mint name for a travelling mint as has been widely believed but is a generic name used on the coins of Akbar for a brief period of the Nuqtavi Millinium (AH 990).

This article is based on information collected from Facebook and information in public domain. The author does not claim any intellectual rights on this information nor can he vouch on the correctness of the said information which has been put out to help newbie collectors ... the myth of the name of the mint and the date on the coins. The accompanying image is of coins from my friend Mr Mitresh Singh from New Delhi, India, used with his permission.

