



## **THE COUNTENANCE OF THE OTHER**

### **The Coins of the Huns and Western Turks in Central Asia and India**

1 December 2012 to 29 September 2013

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Coin Cabinet

Curated by Michael Alram, Anna Filigenzi, Michaela Kinberger, Karel Kriz, Daniel Nell, Matthias Pfisterer and Klaus Vondrovec

The Coin Collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum is showing a special exhibition on the coinage of the “Iranian Huns” and the Western Turks in Central Asia and north-western India in collaboration with the Bernisches Historisches Museum and the Collection Jean-Pierre Righetti (Switzerland). The show’s chronological timeframe is set from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century AD to the Islamic period.

#### **Historical Background**

Over time, “Huns” referred to a number of different peoples - from the tribes against whose onslaught the Chinese built the Great Wall to the formations under the command of the legendary King Attila († AD 453) who devastated Europe. All in all, however, this was a relatively short episode. As the exhibition documents, the Huns left a very different legacy in Central Asia and northern India where they profoundly influenced the region’s culture, history, and coinage.

In the 4th century AD the Huns set out from the Altai Mountains in central Asia on their great westward migration. Around AD 375 some of the later Attila Huns had already crossed the Volga and were advancing westwards. Another group turned south, invaded the region of Sogdiana (in what is now Uzbekistan), crossed the River Oxus (Amu Darya) and settled in Bactria (now northern Afghanistan). From there they moved over the ranges of the Hindu Kush into the regions of Gandhara, Uddiyana (Swat Valley), the Punjab (in what is now Pakistan) and north-western India.

There are no records of coinage created by European Huns - in contrast to their prolific Iranian relations, whose coins provide unique testimony of the history of central Asia and north-western India in late antiquity. These coins offer surprising insights into the self-perception of the Hun rulers and the manifold political, economic and cultural influences they were exposed to.

Contemporary sources describe the Huns as ugly, two-legged beasts but their coins feature princely portraits whose strange elegance and outstanding artistic quality present a very different image.

The Huns' foremost enemies in central Asia were the Persian Sassanians, who - like the Romans in the West - lived in perpetual conflict with various Hun tribes. In India it was the Gupta emperors who tried to halt the advance of the Huns. Here, too, coins offer unique historical testimony.

In the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century a new nomadic power entered the fray: the western Turks who, together with the Sassanians, ended the Huns' domination of Central Asia around AD 650. A century later the powerful Sassanian empire fell to the Arabs who were advancing towards eastern Iran and Central Asia after having conquered Iran. As early as AD 665 Kabul was looted by the Arabs for the first time; soon, however, the Turkish Kabul-Shah was able to reestablish his authority. The kings of Kabul and Zabul led the defensive fight against the Arabs, a war that continued for two centuries and is documented on contemporary coinage.

### **The Findings of a Six-Year Research Project**

This exhibition is the result of a six-year research project that was supported by the österreichischer Wissenschaftsfonds (FWF - Nationales Forschungsnetzwerk, The Cultural History of the Western Himalayas from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, Vorislamische Münz- und Geldgeschichte, Project NFN S 9806 G21). We hope to introduce visitors to the exhibition to a long-lost chapter of central-Asian history - the history of a region that is again at the centre of international politics and conflict. In this context the awareness of one's own history plays an increasingly important role in modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan. The inscription over the entrance to the Afghan National Museum in Kabul - reopened after three decades of civil war - reads "A Nation Stays Alive When Its Culture Stays Alive", documenting the seminal role accorded to cultural awareness in today's Afghanistan.

Geo-communication also plays a central role in this exhibition: in collaboration with the University of Vienna, Institut für Geographie und Regionalforschung, we have put together a fascinating multi-media presentation for visitors to the exhibition. The aim is to raise visitors' understanding of former geographic and historical ties with the help of various cartographic media, among them a large floor map that visitors can walk on/into, short



films, detailed maps and a digital exhibition catalogue as well as additional content and links that can be accessed via a portable online-portal (go to <http://www.khm.at/dasantlitzdesfremden>)

The show is organized in collaboration with the Bernisches Historisches Museum. Additional loans come from the Collection Jean-Pierre Righetti (Switzerland), the Goldmuseum of the Austrian National Bank and the Natural History Museum.

## PRESS PHOTOS

---

**Anonymous King of the Alchan**  
 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century  
 Drachma (silver)  
 © Collection Jean-Pierre Righetti



**Kidarites, Kidara**  
 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> century  
 Denarius (gold)  
 © Bernisches Historisches Museum



**Kidarites, Peroz**  
 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> century  
 Drachma (silver)  
 © Bernisches Historisches Museum



**Anonymous King of the Alchan**  
 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century  
 Drachma (silver)  
 © Bernisches Historisches Museum



**Alchan, Zabocho**  
 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century  
 Drachma (silver)  
 © Collection Jean-Pierre Righetti





**Anonymous King of the Hephtalites**  
1<sup>st</sup> half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century  
Drachma (silver)  
© Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien



**Anonymous King of the Nezak**  
1<sup>st</sup> half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century  
Drachma (silver)  
© Bernisches Historisches Museum



**Turk-Schahi**  
2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century  
Drachma (silver)  
© Collection Jean-Pierre Righetti



**Chorasan Tegin Schah**  
Drachma (silver)  
© Bernisches Historisches Museum



**Sandan**  
1<sup>st</sup> half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century  
Drachma (silver)  
© Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien

---

**Itinerary** of the Chinese monk  
Song Yun to India, AD 518 - 522  
(after S. Kuwayama)  
© University of Vienna, IfGR



---

**Viwe from Kaschmir Smast**  
Gandhara (NW-Pakistan)  
© Klaus Vondrovec





## OPENING HOURS AND ENTRANCE FEES

*Valid until end of 2012*

---

<b>Kunsthistorisches Museum</b>	Adults	€ 12,-
Maria Theresien-Platz	Concessions	€ 9,-
1010 Vienna	Vienna Card	€ 11,-
	Groups of 10 or over	€ 8,-
Tuesdays – Sundays	Guided tour, p.p.	€ 3,-
10 a.m. – 6 p.m.	Children under 19	free
	Annual ticket	€ 29,-

---

## CATALOGUE

---

An interactive catalogue will be published: [www.khm.at/dasantlitzdesfremden](http://www.khm.at/dasantlitzdesfremden)

---

## PRESS OFFICE

---

Nina Auinger-Sutterlüty, MAS  
Head of the Department of Communication and Marketing  
Kunsthistorisches Museum mit MVK und ÖTM  
1010 Vienna, Burgring 5  
Tel.: + 43 1 525 24 4021  
Fax: + 43 1 525 24 4098  
e-mail: [info.pr@khm.at](mailto:info.pr@khm.at)  
[www.khm.at](http://www.khm.at)

---