



Unpublished Sasanian Coins Preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum: Unveiling with Identification and Exploring the Cause-Period of Their Arrival in Bengal

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Authors' Contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. The corresponding author made the highest contribution to this work. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The Sasanians were the last pre-Islamic Persian dynasty that ruled present-day Iran and its neighbouring extensive territories, succeeding the Parthians from 224 A.D to 651 A.D. It was the second-longest reigning Persian imperial dynasty, enduring over four centuries until the Muslims defeated the last Sasanian Emperor, Yazdegerd III. Six unpublished coins of this dynasty stored among the rich collections of nearly fifty-eight thousand manifold coins of the Bangladesh National Museum are matter of surprise and curiosity because Bengal was neither a part of their Empire nor ever ruled by them. These coins were discovered in Bengal in the early twentieth century. They have been identified recently, although they were unidentified for a long time following collection. Typically, coin from one region found in another conveys a trading identity. The early Arabs used Sasanian coins along with other coins as currency before introducing their purely Arabic coins in 696 A.D. They were traditionally traders and had commercial contacts with South and Southeast

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Asia since the seventh century. They might have used these unpublished coins in the seventh century as a means of exchange in Bengal because the region was well-reeled in ancient times and drew traders from all over the world. This article has unveiled these hitherto unpublished coins with their identification and conducted a comprehensive numismatic endeavour virtually to give insight into the inferential cause as well as the timeframe of their arrival in Bengal.

Keywords: *Bangladesh National Museum; Sasanian; The early Arab; Bengal; Arab-Bengal trading contact.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh National Museum is one of the earliest and most renowned national institutions in the Indian sub-continent as well as in Bangladesh. It has been playing a pioneering role in collecting and preserving coins since the beginning of its journey in 1913 under the name of Dacca Museum. This museum, the custodian of Bengal history and heritage, is currently located at Shahbagh in the heart of the capital Dhaka. It is the second largest multi-disciplinary museum in South Asia with over ninety-four thousand objects, comprising about fifty-eight thousand manifold coins made of gold, silver, copper, and other metals. Both in number and uniqueness, the museum is affluent in coin collections. Six unpublished Sasanian coins in its reserve collections are matter of surprise and curiosity because Bengal¹ was neither ruled by the Sasanians nor included in their territory. Moreover, there is no historical evidence of their arrival in Bengal. These coins remained unidentified for a long time following their collection, either due to the inability to identify them or because they went unnoticed by specialists. We have recently identified and classified them as significant historical artifacts. It is important to note that the early Arab Muslims overthrew the Sasanian Empire in 651 A.D. Before introducing their own purely Arabic coinage in 696 A.D., the early Arab Muslims used Sasanian coins along with other coins as a medium of exchange. Additionally, they had commercial ties with South and Southeast Asia since the seventh century. As part of South Asia, Bengal was a prosperous region in ancient times that drew traders from all over the world. It has been mentioned by numismatists based on the discovered Umayyad and Abbasid coins in Bengal that Arab-Bengal trading contacts began

in the eighth century during the Umayyad (661-750) and developed during the Abbasid (750-1258) [1]. However, the discovery of Sasanian coins in Bengal suggests that this interaction existed before the eighth century. This study aims to unveil these hitherto unpublished coins with their impeccable identification and employs a numismatic approach to explore the presumptive cause as well as the timeframe of their arrival in Bengal.

2. METHODS

This study has adopted an analytical approach, applying the qualitative research method and incorporating primary and secondary sources to explore the underlying meaning and concepts affiliated with the research objectives. The efficacy of research has hinged on the analysis of collected data. Primary data of Sasanian coins, such as weight and diameter, have been collected using a coin weighing machine and scale. The authenticity and originality of the material of these coins have been verified by the conservation laboratory of the Bangladesh National Museum. The discovery history of these coins has been collected from the inventory center of the Museum. These coins contain Pahlavi inscriptions (Middle Persian). Their scripts have been transliterated into English. This method has provided information on the issuing dates, mints, and the names of the rulers associated with these coins. Derived information from the inscriptions of these coins has been correlated with various secondary sources, such as books, journals, catalogs, newspapers, and articles etc. to obtain the best outcome of this research

3. MATERIALS

This paper has been divided into two sections. The first section includes a comprehensive discussion and analysis of Sasanian coins with principal identifications, which serve as the primary materials of this research, as well as the primary sources of history. As the discussion and result

¹ Bengal refers to the area situated roughly within 270 and 210 latitudes and 92.50 and 870 longitudes. It once encompassed the regions of Samatata, Harikela, Gawda (Gawr), Vanga, Radha, etc. However, Bengal has been used here to denote the present Bangladesh and the Indian eastern state 'West Bengal' known as Paschim Banga.

of this study, the second section will focus on exploring the cause-period of the arrival of Sasanian coins in Bengal. Before going into the discussion and analysis of Sasanian coins, it is imperative to briefly introduce the Sasanians and delve into the history of the discovery of their coins in Bengal.

3.1 Brief Introduction to the Sasanians

The Sasanians were the last pre-Islamic Persian dynasty that ruled Iran and its extensive neighboring territories from 224 A.D to 651 A.D., centering its capital at Istakhr (224-226 A.D) and later at Ctesiphon (226-637 A.D) of Iran. Ardashir I (224-242 A.D.), a petty vassal of the Parthians in Persis, was the founder of the dynasty. He founded the dynasty by defeating the last Parthian Emperor, Artabanus IV (208-224 A.D.), in the Battle of Hormozdgan in 224 A.D. He then extended Iranian dominions in an effort to revive the Achaemenid Empire's reputation. Zoroastrian priest Sasan was his grandfather. The dynasty derived its name from him (Sasan), and in historical records, the Empire is referred as the Sasanian Empire. Many names have been given to this Empire, such as Sasanid, Sassanian, and Sassanid. This Empire is sometimes called the Neo-Persian or Second Persian Empire due to its status as the second Persian originated from Pars (Persis) following the Achaemenid Empire. It encompassed the territories of present-day Iran, Armenia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, eastern Turkey, Central Asia, a part of Syria, Caucasia and Arabia etc. Following the Parthian Empire, the Sasanian dynasty emerged as the second longest-ruling Persian imperial dynasty, lasting for more than four centuries until the last Sasanian Emperor, Yazdegerd III, was overthrown by the Muslims in 651 A.D.

3.2 History of the Discovery of Sasanian Coins in Bengal

Bangladesh National Museum possesses rich collections of nearly fifty-eight thousand multifaceted coins, accounting for approximately 61% of the total collection. In light of what is currently known, it subsumes coins spanning from ancient eras to more recent historical periods, including the Punch-marked, Greece, Scythians, Kusanas, Guptas, Samatata, Khadhga, Harikela, Tripura, Arakan, Umayyad, Abbasid, Sultanate of India and Bengal, Mughal dynasties, British, Pakistan, and Bangladesh periods etc. While partly completing the annual verification of these coins in 2022, we found six

Sasanian coins preserved here, which are unpublished and unidentified that require historical analysis. They were mud-roofed and not cleaned after collection. In 2022, they were cleaned through H₂O by the Conservation Department of the Museum. Five of the six coins are made of silver, while one is made of copper. The acquisition history of these coins was not comprehensively recorded in the museum document. It is not known the precise spot of discovery of these coins. The Bangladesh National Museum's inventory center provides a bit of information in this regard, stating that these coins were in the official collections of Nalini Kanta Bhattashali². He mentioned that M.F.C. Martin had collected these coins from Bengal and donated them to the then Dacca Museum but did not go further on who Martin was or how these coins were discovered. We have found that M.F.C. Martin was a British military major, a writer, and an official collector of the Dhaka district in the early twentieth century. He travelled to several locations in eastern Bengal and gathered valuable artifacts which were stored at the office of the deputy magistrate in Dhaka. These important artifacts were later donated to the then Dacca Museum. In addition to these coins, he donated another twenty two silver coins to the museum, including twelve Umayyad and ten Abbasid coins. The numismatists have presumed that M.F.C. Martin collected these coins from the Cumilla-Noakhali region, which was part of the Dhaka District during the early twentieth century [2].

3.3 Identifications and Descriptions of the Coins

All Sasanian coins are in the Sasanian style and they bear the Pahlavi alphabet (Middle Persian). Five of these coins are well preserved and one is broken (likely, this was broken into two pieces while excavating land). The most difficult aspect of studying these coins was identifying and deciphering them because there is no Sasanian coin specialist in Bangladesh. We have identified and deciphered them by studying different books and catalogs related to Sasanian coins. Our identification of these coins has been verified by

² Source: *The Special Accession Register No.09 of the Inventory Center of Bangladesh National Museum. It is noted that Nalini Kanta Bhattashali (1888-1947) was a renowned Bengali historian, archaeologist, iconologist, epigraphist and numismatist. He was the first curator of Dacca Museum from 1914 to 1947*

Dr. Daryoosh Akbarzadeh, a renowned Sasanian numismatist of Iran. The identifications and descriptions of these coins are the following:

1. Accession No. 5409, **Material:** Silver, **Diameter:** 30 mm, **Weight:** 4.04 gm, **Ruler:** Khosrow I, **Mint:** GW (at or near Goyman/Gorgan, Iran), **Language:** Pahlavi, **Denomination:** AR. Drachm, **Date:** RY 30 (561 AD). **Provenance:** Dhaka

Obverse: Within a dotted border, the bust of the ruler Khosrow I facing right, wearing a three-toothed crown with a crescent in front and a diadem tie below the elevated globe, six-pointed stars above the crescent and back head. Crescents are visible at three, six, nine, and twelve o'clock at the outside of the border. To the right of the bust, we find his name 'hwsrb' (Khosrow I) inscribed.

Reverse: Inside a dotted border, a fire altar (*ateshtan*) with overturned coronet ties, two facing attendants wearing crowns with the globe, holding stick stagnating on the ground in front, with star to the left and crescent to the right of the flame. To the right of the right attendant, the mintmark is GW and to the left of the left attendant the date is RY 30.



Fig. 1. Obverse (left) and reverse (right)

2. Accession No. 5410, **Material:** Silver, **Diameter:** 30 mm, **Weight:** 4.03 gm, **Ruler:** Khosrow I, **Mint:** HWC (Gunde-Shapur, Khuzistan), **Language:** Pahlavi, **Denomination:** AR Drachm, **Date:** RY23 (554 AD) **Provenance:** Dhaka

Obverse: Within a dotted border, the bust of the ruler Khosrow I facing right, wearing a three-toothed crown with a crescent in front and a diadem tie below the elevated globe. Six-pointed stars above the crescent and back head. Crescents are visible at three, six, nine, and twelve o'clock at the outside of the border. We

find his name 'hwsrb'(Khosrow I) inscribed to the right of the bust.

Reverse: Inside a dotted border, a fire altar (*ateshtan*) with overturned coronet ties, two facing attendants wearing crowns with the globe, holding stick stagnating on the ground in front, with star to the left and crescent to the right of the flame. To the right of the right attendant, the mintmark is HWC and to the left of the left attendant the date is RY 23.



Fig. 2. Obverse (left) and reverse (right)

3. Accession No. 5411, **Material:** Copper, **Diameter:** 26 mm, **Weight:** 6.08 gm, **Ruler:** Peroz I **Mint:** WH=Veh-Ardashir (Central Iraq), **Language:** Pahlavi, **Date:** unidentified, **Provenance:** Dhaka

Obverse: Within a dotted boarder the bust of Peroz I facing right, wearing crown with two crenellations, crescent to front, crescent and globe above pair of wings, diadem tie behind each shoulder; short beard, ball of hair and moustache. We find his name inscribed to the right of the bust.

Reverse: Within a dotted boarder, fire altar (*ateshtan*) with diadem ties. Two attendants looking at altar holding stick stagnating on the ground in front. To the right of the right attendant, the mintmark is WH and to the left of the left attendant the date is inscribed.



Fig. 3. Obverse (left) and reverse (right)

4. Accession No. 5412, **Material:** Silver, **Diameter:** 21 mm, **Weight:** 3.65 gm, **Ruler:** Bahram IV, **Mint:** WH=Veh-Ardashir (Central Iraq)?, **Language:** Pahlavi, **Denomination:** AR Drachm, **Date:** RY 15 (403 A.D)?, **Provenance:** Dhaka.

Obverse: Within a dotted boarder the bust of Bahram IV depicted at the centre. He is seen wearing a crown adorned with a diadem and a single pair of wings, a crenellation, two fillets and a globe. His name was inscribed to the right of the bust but effaced by rubbing away.

Reverse: Within a dotted boarder, fire altar (*ateshtan*) with diadem ties. Two attendants are in wearing crowns with globe, raising hand, looking at the altar. Mintmark and date of this coin are unidentified. But its features indicate the mintmark is WH the date is RY 15.



Fig. 4. Obverse (left) and reverse (right)

5. Accession No. 5413, **Material:** Silver, **Diameter:** 27 mm, **Weight:** 3.06 gm, **Ruler:** Hormizd IV **Mint:** MY (Meshan) = Southern Iraq? **Language:** Pahlavi, **Denomination:** AR Drachm, **Date:** RY12 (591 A.D), **Provenance:** Dhaka

Obverse: Within a dotted border, the bust of the ruler Hormizd IV facing right, wearing a crown with a crescent in front and a diadem tie below the elevated globe. Crescents are visible at three, six, nine, and twelve o'clock at the outside of the border. We find his name is inscribed to the right of the bust.

Reverse: Inside a dotted border, a fire altar (*ateshtan*) with overturned coronet ties, two facing attendants wearing crowns with the globe, holding stick stagnating on the ground in front, with star to the left and crescent to the right of the flame. To the right of the right attendant, the mintmark is MY and to the left of the left attendant the date is RY 12.



Fig. 5. Obverse (left) and reverse (right)

6. Accession No. Nill, **Material:** Silver, **Diameter:** 29 mm, **Weight:** 3.68 gm, **Ruler:** Hormizd IV **Mint:** SK (Sistan), **Language:** Pahlavi, **Denomination:** AR. Drachm, **Date:** RY 10 (589 AD) **Provenance:** Dhaka

Obverse: Within a dotted border, the bust of the ruler Hormizd IV facing right, wearing a crown with a crescent in front and a diadem tie below the elevated globe. Crescents are visible at three, six, nine, and twelve o'clock at the outside of the border. His name is inscribed to the right of the bust.

Reverse: Inside a dotted border, a fire altar (*ateshtan*) with overturned coronet ties, two facing attendants wearing crowns with the globe, holding stick stagnating on the ground in front, with star to the left and crescent to the right of the flame. To the right of the right attendant, the mintmark is SK and to the left of the left attendant the date is RY 10.



Fig. 6. Obverse (left) and reverse (right)

Above mentioned all Sasanian coins are circular. They are significant archaeological artifacts. There is no doubt about their originality and authenticity. According to our identification, out of the six coins, two were issued by Sasanian Emperor Khosrow I (531-579), two by Hormizd IV (579-590), one by Peroz I (457-484), and the other one by Bahram IV (388-399). Their official state religion, Zoroastrianism, was highlighted on these coins using the Middle Persian script. Each

coin depicted an *ateshtan*, known as 'fire altar' on the reverse. This image sometimes alternated between incense burners and attendants. It is common for these attendants to be representatives of the Magi, which are Zoroastrian priests; nonetheless, there are rare instances in which the attendant becomes the Emperor himself. It is a frequent misconception that Zoroastrians worship fire itself; rather, the holy flame is the main tool by which they converse with and gain knowledge about God, *Ahura Mazda*. In this sense, the appearance of the *ateshtan* on the reverse of Sasanian coins is analogous to the presence of the cross on the reverse of the Sasanian Empire's major competitor, the Late Roman/Byzantine Empire. The obverse of Sasanian coins invariably features a bust of the Emperor, known as the Shahanshah, meaning king of kings. Each Emperor had his individual and personalized crown, with various components representing qualities of monarchy, such as wings for victory, ties (ribbons) for glory, and crescent for piety.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Unpublished Sasanian coins have been unveiled with identification and analysis in the first section of this study. This section will discuss and explore various factors pertaining to the inferential cause and timeframe of the arrival of Sasanian coins in Bengal, such as the importance of coins, contacts of the Sasanians with India, China, and Bengal, coinage system of the early Arabs, the Arab conquest of the Sasanian Empire, trading contacts of the early Arabs with Indian Ocean regions, the discovery of some coins in Bengal used by the early Arabs and geographers' accounts etc.

4.1 Exploration of the Cause and Period of the Arrival of Sasanian Coins in Bengal

Coins have been regarded as an essential source to know the history of any civilization. They are material artifacts that reveal an important aspect of history about which reliable documents are scarce. Although they used to serve as a symbol of sovereignty, they were more commonly used as a medium of exchange in commercial transactions. The Sasanian Empire mostly relied on an agriculture-based economy, although they engaged in trade with several Western and Eastern countries to facilitate the import and export of products. They exchanged their coins to conduct commercial activities. They began communicating with India

in the late third century. The Kushana and the Gupta were obliged to them. From the mid 5th century forward, they maintained active trade-diplomatic relations with India and China [3]. They mainly imported paper and silk from China, as well as spices from India. Khosrow I extended trade network. Throughout his reign, the Sasanian ruled over international trade in the Indian Ocean, Central Asia, and South Russia [4]. Indeed, they exerted dominion over a substantial expanse of Asia; yet, Bengal was never subjected to their control nor did they make any incursion into Bengal.

The early Arabs, in addition to Byzantine coins, imported Sasanian coins for commercial purposes from territories under the dominion of Sasanian rulers like Iraq and Persia and used them as medium of exchange. That particular sort of coins was widely used by the early Arabs till before 651 A.D. [5]. Following the conquest of the Sasanian Empire by the Muslims in 651 A.D., all Persian trade came under Muslim hegemony, and over time the rising Arab traders took over the maritime trade into their own hands [6]. Upon the fall of the Sasanian Empire, the Arab Muslims successfully acquired complete control of the vast Empire. From that point forward, Arab rulers started issuing Arab-Sasanian coins, which they continued to use for more than 164 years (651–815) despite having Arab-Byzantine coins up to 696 A.D., and massively started using reformed purely Arabic coins from 696 A.D. [7]. During the early years of their reign, the Umayyad continued to use silver Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian coins in Iran and Iraq, and gold and copper Byzantine coins in Syria and Egypt [8]. In 77 A.H/696 A.D., Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik reformed the coinage system by introducing the pure Arabic coin 'Dinar (Gold coin)', and subsequently he introduced Dirham (Silver Coin) in 79 A.H/698 and Phals (Copper coin) in 81 A.D/ 700 A.D [9]. Since then, the Arabs started using these coins predominantly as a medium of exchange. His reformed coinage system was later adopted by the subsequent Umayyad and the Abbasid. It should be noted that Umayyad Dirham (silver coin) was directly derived and developed from Sasanian *drachm* (silver coin).

The Arabs were traditionally a trade-oriented nation in ancient times due to the scarcity of enough arable land in the Arabian Peninsula and the fact that the majority of the Arab territories were desert. They were the world's most prominent navigators and seafarers at the time.

Prior to the rise of Islam, the Arab territories had a crucial role as a pivotal connecting point in the trade routes that linked the Eastern and Western regions through the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. These sea passages encompassing the Arab Sea, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean were under the absolute dominion of Arab Muslims after the advent of Islam [10]. There was active trading contact between India and Arabia long before the rise of Islam throughout the Arab world. The Arab traders came to the sea coasts of India and carried Indian goods to European markets by way of Egypt and Syria [11]. As part of India, Bengal for its enormous natural resources and moderate climatic conditions had been a coveted country of attraction for foreigners from the time of yore [12]. It is easily presumed that Bengal drew the early Arab traders who were trading with the South and Southeast Asian islands in the seventh century and onwards. As a result, the regions located in the southeast of Bengal, specifically on the eastern side of the river Meghna had developed through time into a thriving hub for commercial activities. It is noted that the Arabs conquered Sind in 712 A.D., but had little influence on Bengal since they were unable to establish effective rule in India. They did, however, have trading relations with India and China before the arrival of Islam in the Indian Subcontinent. Sasanian coins with earlier dates of the Sind invasion indicate the trading contact of the early Arabs with Bengal for a substantial period before the Arab conquest of Sind. Arab traders established settlements in Ceylon (Srilanka) in the early seventh century and engaged in commercial activities with that country [13]. They might have travelled to the coastal areas of eastern Bengal from that time. It is speculated that some of them made their settlement on the fertile coastal lands of Bengal, because at the time, the region was rich in a variety of valuable commodities; in particular cotton, spices, and wood. However, no written record or tangible source exists in this regard. It is necessary to mention a few archeological discoveries found in Bengal that are connected to the early Arab trading contacts with Bengal.

Unpublished one Arab-Sasanian and one Sasanian type coin are preserved in the cabinet of the Bangladesh National Museum. These silver coins came from the Baldha Collections. The precise place of the discovery of these coins is unknown. We know that Baldha Zamindar Narayan Roy Chowdhury (1880-1943) was an avid connoisseur of rare artifacts, a prolific writer,

a devoted nature enthusiast, and a skilled playwright. It is worth mentioning that in 1925, he founded a house museum at Wari, Dhaka which included a collection of about four thousand rare artifacts collected from the various parts of Bengal. After twenty years of his death, most of his collections including these two coins were donated to the then Dacca Museum in 1963. The Arab-Sasanian coin bears the year 79 A.H., issued from Merve but its issuer's name is unidentified. The Sasanian type half dirham bears the year 720 A.D issued by Farrokhan (711-728) from Tabaristan. It is assumed that they were brought in Bengal by the early Arabs. Four Sasanian coins are stored in the private collections of Engineer Md. Nurul Islam who purchased them from a local cultivator of Chittagong. It is reported by the cultivator that he found them while cultivating land. Additionally, Mr. Islam has also two Arab-Sasanian coins in his collections. All of them are on exhibit at his Museum. Presumably, they were also brought by the early Arab traders in Bengal for trading purposes in ancient times. It is noted that Mr. Islam began collecting coins in 1947 as a dedicated collector, and he has recently set up a museum in his residence in Agargaon, Dhaka, which houses approximately 20,000 coins from his collection.

Recently, a 69 A.H/690 A.D Mosque has been unearthed in the village of Ramdas, Panchagram union, Lalmonirhat district. The year 69 Hijri and *Kalima-e-Tayyibah* (Muslim testimony of faith in one God) were inscribed on the bricks discovered from that Mosque [14]. The Mosque is presumed to have been built 61 years after the construction of the Koanta Mosque (also known as The Huaisheng Mosque) in the 8th Hijri located in the Chinese port city of Canton, on the bank of the river Koanta. Tem Steel, a British archaeologist and researcher, inspected the relics of that Mosque and stated that in ancient times, both the Arabs and the Chinese used to come to this area and stay for commerce at nearby several locations.

Bangladesh National Museum reserve collections contain twelve Umayyad and ten Abbasid coins collected by M.F.C. Martin from Dhaka district in the early twentieth century. These are the coins of Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik, Al-Walid, Sulaiman, and Abbasid Caliph Abul Abbas-as-Saffah, Al Mansur and Al Mahdi. It has been inferred based on these discovered coins that Bengal was well connected with the early Arabs through maritime trade link and these

coins were brought in Bengal by the early Arabs in the eighth century during the Umayyad and the Abbasid for trading purposes. Numismatists concluded analyzing these coins that Arab-Bengal trade relation began in the eighth century during the Umayyad (661-750) and developed during the Abbasid (750-1258) [15].

Arab traders dominated trade links from the West to the East since the first century of Islamic history in the seventh century A.D. [16]. They were involved in the Indian Ocean trade from the sixth century A.D. onward and their maritime network extended gradually from Africa and Europe in the west to China in the east [17]. As early as the seventh century A.D., Arabs and Persians were the majority of the foreign trade population in Canton, China [18]. We found a bit of information in the writings of Arab-Persian geographers in this regard. While discussing Arab trading activities and trade routes from Arab world to China, they referred an inland Bengal port named Samandar. The commercial functions of the early Arab were linked to that particular port [19]. That port became prominent in the eighth century after the decline of Tamralipti port in the seventh century. Both were located in the eastern region of Bengal.

The above discussions imply the existence of the early Arab-Bengal trading contacts prior to the eighth century. Earlier, it was mentioned that the early Arabs had used Sasanian, Arab-Sasanian and Arab-Byzantine coins as means of exchange before introducing their own purely Arabic coinage in 696 A.D. Therefore, the presence of Arab traders in Bengal in the seventh century is indicated by the discovery of Sasanian coins in Bengal because the Sasanians did not come to Bengal, and no Arab-Persian religious leader came to preach Islam in Bengal before the 11th century, who might have brought these coins here. These coins were not brought to Bengal soon after they were minted. They were probably used to exchange through weight as they had metal worth. It is noted that the Arabs defeated the Sasanian in a series of campaigns culminating in the battle of Nihawand in 642 A.D. This sealed the fate of the Sasanian Empire, which finally came to an end with the assassination of Yazdegerd III in 651 AD. Since then, Arab traders diffused throughout the world. Likely, they began to arrive in the Bengal region after 642 A.D. It is assumed that Arab trade with Bengal began to expand after the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651 A.D. and the Arab control over the Persian trade routes. Much of this trade

took place with south-eastern Bengal in areas east of the river Meghna. The early Arab Muslims presumably used Bengal as a transit route to China to collect and purchase valuable products while traversing the extensive coastline region of the Bay of Bengal. The preceding discussions lead us to assume that the discussed Sasanian coins found in Bengal were most likely brought to the eastern Bengal in particular Cumilla-Noakhali region by the early Arab traders in the seventh century for trading purposes.

5. CONCLUSION

Coins as archaeological source, serve an important role in reconstructing history where reliable written documents are inadequate. There is no written record related to the early Arab-Bengal trading contact in the ancient times except some oblique references mentioned by the Arab-Persian geographers. Sasanian coins in the Bangladesh National Museum may be significant sources of history in this regard. They were most likely left in Bengal by the early Arabs as trademark. It is well recognized that Bengal was a thriving commercial hub in the ancient times. It is not impossible that the early Arab traders came to Bengal on their way back from trading with Southeast Asia and laid the foundation for trade links with Bengal in the seventh century. This is all merely our assumption. However, the disclosure of Sasanian coins with identification has ushered a new dimension for further research.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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