

## **Rajapur's transition to Islam Bandar and vice versa in the Mughal-Maratha War for Konkan c. 1687-1736 A.D.**

- **Dr. Mahesh A. Kalra**
- **Director**
- **Centre for Numismatic Information & Studies (CENNUMIS)**

### **Introduction**

The Konkan region of Maharashtra forms a natural geo-political region in the form of a thirty miles wide coastal strip wedged between the Arabian Sea on its Western side and the steep Sahyadri range on its Eastern side. This coastal littoral spreads from Daman to Vengurla and is blessed with a nature-made seclusion from the Desha mainland in the form of steep hill ranges. The region is further divided into North Konkan and South Konkan by the Island of Bombay; the former stretching from Daman to Thana with a flat alluvial belt conducive to cultivation and the latter from Bombay to Vengurla with hilly land barely fit for cultivation.<sup>1</sup> In the seventeenth century, North Konkan stretching from Daman to Thana was officially under Portuguese influence forming the *Provincia do Norte* (Province of North) with Bombay officially handed over to the English in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

The South Konkan region spreading from Chaul to Goa was thus open to influence by Indian powers viz. the Siddis of Janjira, the Desai of Kudal or Sawantwadi and the Marathas led by Chhatrapati Shivaji with the Adil Shahis maintaining a nominal influence over the three powers. Chhatrapati Shivaji took a lead over the other powers and established his influence over South Konkan in a very short time by fortifying numerous hillocks including his fortified capital, Raigarh which became important once the Mughals took over his original homeland around Poona, Supe and Chakan. Rajapur (16.67°N 73.52°E) is a coastal town in South Konkan situated at the head of a tidal creek about fifteen miles from the sea. In the medieval times, it was an important maritime trading town which grew under the benevolent gaze of the Adil Shahis of Bijapur in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries serving as an entry point to the Deccan for its

flourishing Persian Gulf and Red Sea trade. Rajapur also served as an exchange depot between Ratnagiri and the Deccan proper for various essential goods.<sup>3</sup>



### Konkan in relation to Maharashtra in the Seventeenth Century

Image Courtesy: Stewart Gordon, New Cambridge History of India, History of the Marathas

## History

The English East India Company encouraged by the Adil Shahi governor of Rajapur built a trading post in the port city which was established in 1638 for receiving pepper and other goods from the hinterland of Deccan. Rajapur itself produced significant amounts of pepper during this period. The English Factors under Ravington strived to make Rajapur ‘the greatest centre in the Deccan for export of pepper, cotton goods, saltpetre, etc.’<sup>4</sup> The town thus serving as a transit point for various goods and imports of bullion came to be coveted by rival powers viz. the Mughals and the Marathas for its rich toll tax collections. The Marathas gained access to Rajapur in 1660 after Chhatrapati Shivaji defeated Afzal Khan’s Bijapuri army and became the virtual master of South Konkan. Chhatrapati Shivaji also imprisoned three English Factors from Rajapur from 1661 to 1663 when he took over Rajapur for selling grenades to Siddi Jauhar during his siege of Panhala fort at the Adil Shah’s orders in the previous year.<sup>5</sup>

The South Konkan region had poor monetization despite its rich natural resources due to its poor connections with the Mughal mainland as the two major trade routes, Burhanpur to Surat and Burhanpur to Bijapur bypassed the region altogether. According to Stewart Gordon, the economy of the Maratha ruled areas was majorly run on payments in kind including revenue payments since the times of Malik Ambar.<sup>6</sup>

This view is even confirmed by a letter (dated 23 October 1673) by the EIC’s Factors from Bombay to the London Council which states

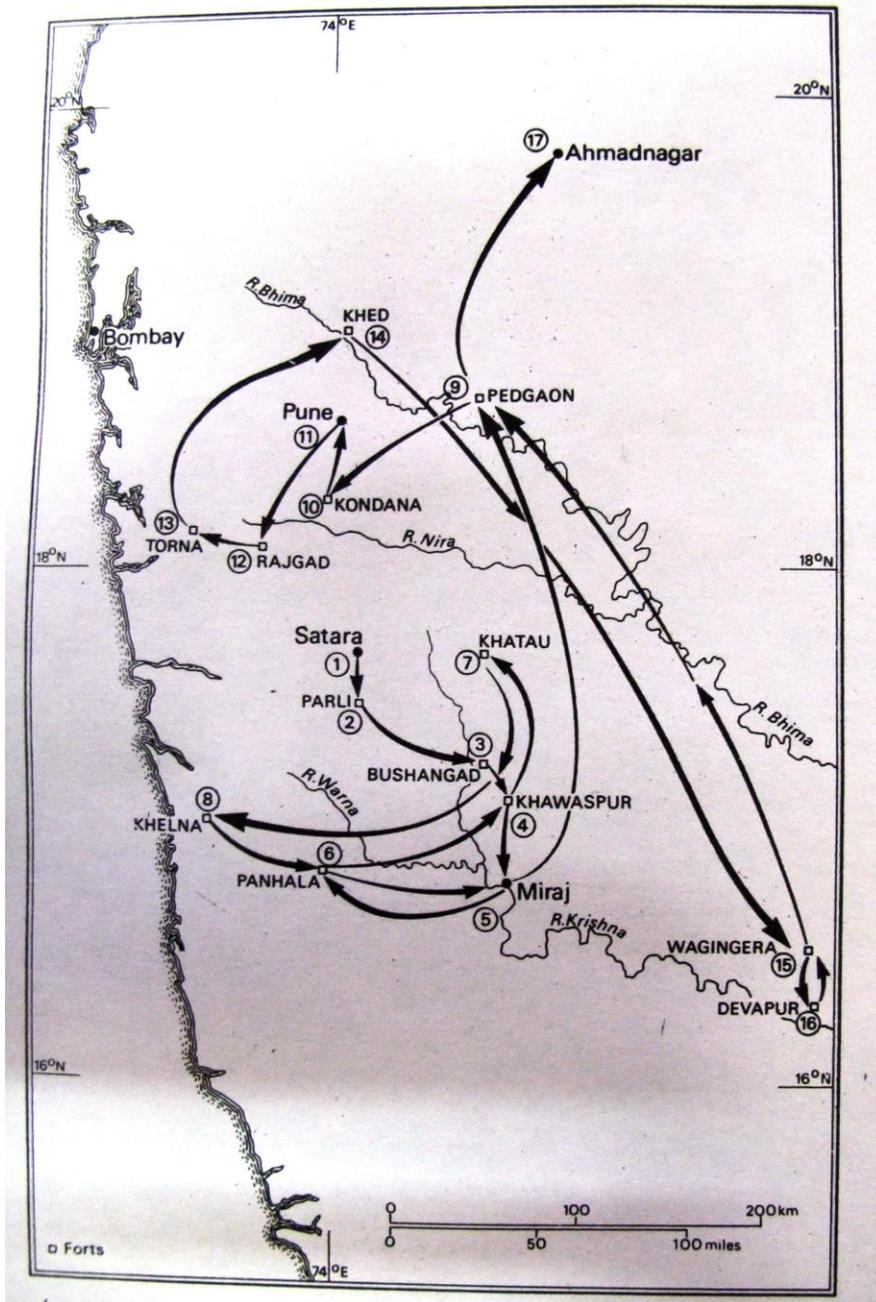
‘Your mint of Bombay we trust in God will be very profitable unto you in the consumption of Copper and Tinn and especially the latter, your President having a small parcel of Tinn returned (to) him from Atcheen by Shipp Recovery just before the Dutch arrivall kept it in Bombay for the use of your Island, and when the coast was clear cast it into the small Budgrooks or Tinnys, the greatest part whereof were disposed (off) in the Island, to the great accommodation of the people, the remainder he sent abroad to Choule (Chaul) and Sevagee’s Country, and put them off there to good profit.’<sup>7</sup>

This under monetization of the economy of South Konkan is reflected in usage of only base currency in the region till the period of domination under the Mughals led by Aurangzeb who launched a full-fledged invasion of North Konkan in 1682 while chasing his rebellious son, Akbar who took refuge with Chhatrapati Sambhaji I. The Mughals began to invest Shivaji's Swarajya lands in Desha region more easily as it could be subdued using Mughal cavalry and musketry from its base in Aurangabad while Emperor Aurangzeb took the Deccan Sultanates in a bear hug to absorb them into his empire. However, South Konkan with its hill forts took longer to subdue because of its difficult terrain and the gritty determination of the Marathas to preserve the legacy of the House of Shivaji during Sambhaji's reign despite the imperial army swamping the entire region after his death. The Mughals were however aided in the last year of Sambhaji's reign by large forces released for deployment in Konkan after the formal subduing and settlement of Golkonda, the last of the Deccan Sultanates.<sup>8</sup>

Aurangzeb, himself camped at Brahmapuri which was renamed Islampuri and built a fortified camp to oversee the operations of the imperial army. The Mughals were fortunate to have a leader in the form of Matabar Khan, a Sayyid of the Navaiyat clan of Arabs long settled in Kalyan as their leader. Matabar Khan began as the Thanedar of Nashik but rose by his pro-active approach of enlisting the locals of the Western Ghats and then capturing one fort after another.<sup>9</sup> By 1689, the entire Konkan region had passed into the possession of Matabar Khan. He was the master of all the fifty forts in that territory. Except for the capture of Raigadh, which was also invested by Zulfiqar Khan, the Mughals had conquered all the forts in Konkan. Their armies were marching unhindered in all the other parts of Maharashtra as well.<sup>10</sup> Matabar Khan followed the occupation of Raigarh with the occupation of the ports of Chaul and Rajapur. Thus, the Mughal forces assumed the responsibility for collection of revenue of South Konkan for the next decade which was done in collaboration with the Siddis of Janjira who were made in charge of the coastal region. The Siddis of Janjira got the Sanad to some territories in South Konkan and they utilized it to incorporate the coastal forts of Rajpuri and Raigadh in their dominion with the districts of Suvarnadurg and Anjanvel in 1699 after contesting with the Marathas.<sup>11</sup>

Aurangzeb camped in Maharashtra at his base camp in Brahmapuri from 1695 till 1705 to oversee the campaign against the Marathas. Throughout his campaign in the Deccan, Aurangzeb

showed a penchant for giving Islamic names thereby creating an Islamicate veneer to his grand plan of subduing infidel regions beyond his territory. This was reflected by the names given by Aurangzeb to the capitals of Adil Shahis and the Qutb Shahis who were infidels in Aurangzeb's view; the former's capital city-, Bijapur was appended the epithet, *Dar-uz-Zafar* (Gateway to Victory) and the latter's capital city, Haidarabad was called *Dar-ul-Jihad* (Gateway to Holy War) which are also incorporated in Mughal coins issued from the region in the name of Alamgir Aurangzeb. Similar instances abound in the captured Maratha territory like Brahmपुरi, his base camp was renamed Islampur (1695); Miraj was renamed Murtuzabad, Raichur was renamed Firuznagar, Jinji as Nusratgarh, Akhuj was renamed As'adnagar, Pedgaon was renamed Bahadurgarh.<sup>12</sup>



**Aurangzeb's Deccan Campaign against Maratha Hill Forts (1700-07 AD)**

**Image Courtesy: Stewart Gordon, History of the Marathas**

## Discussion

The credit for the identification of Islam Bandar with Rajapur goes to the numismatic scholar, Dr. G. P. Taylor who describes an Aurangzeb Rupee of Islambandar mint with date missing with regnal year 4x indicating a date between 1108 and 1118 A.H. (1696-1706 A.D.). To locate the place, Taylor got help from his friend Henry Cousens, M.R.A.S. who wrote back to him “I have an old native map of Bijapur city, just covered with marginal notes in Persian. On it are names of muhallas and villages of Aurangzeb’s time. One of the entries is Islambandar urf Rajapur in Persian. The note’s translation is as follows

“The port Khal Bati (Bhatkal?) seven thousand, the port Chapul [Chaul?] fifteen thousand, the port Sank ten thousand, the port Guwa [Goa], thirty-seven thousand and five hundred, which after a short time again passed into the possession of Christians, Islambandar alias Rajapur twenty gold dinars, port Shasti ten thousand, port Kharapaltan (Kharepattan??) five thousand, port Harchari five thousand, port Satuli three thousand and five hundred, port Muhammadabad alias Shadhut five thousand and the port Khabra five thousand.”<sup>13</sup>

Additional pointers are that all coins of Aurangzeb come with the date in his Regnal 40 onwards; two extant samples in the collection of the CSMVS Museum, Mumbai have the date R.Y. 47 and 48 corresponding to the year 1703-4 and 1704-5 A.D. respectively. Maheshwari and Wiggins maintain that the coins of Islam Bandar in their collection had no date except the fraction of the Regnal Year 4x which is seen in the two extant specimens seen by the author (see coin catalogue).<sup>14</sup> These coins point to the important fact that the Islam Bandar coins were issued either to pay local soldiery or smaller transactions but in the larger picture as part of the twin sovereign rights of Khutba and Sikka of the Mughal Emperor in the newly captured region.<sup>15</sup> However, the more important point these extant samples of Islam Bandar raise is that the Mughals under Aurangzeb finally attempted to monetize the economy of the South Konkan as a conscious effort to regularize its payments into the Mughal treasury a view echoed by Malekandathil in his work on North Konkan. Although in Malekandathil’s view, the entire Deccan project was envisioned by Aurangzeb for integrating this important coastal region with the interior of the Mughal Empire without disturbing the equilibrium of dominant powers except becoming their overlord.<sup>16</sup>

The Mughals domination over Konkan and the rest of Maharashtra however was transient in nature as the Marathas survived as a power under the leadership of Chhatrapati Rajaram and after his death under the regent, Tarabai and finally under Chhatrapati Shahu I after his release by the Mughals after Aurangzeb's death by Bahadur 'Muazzam' Shah Alam I in 1712 to divide the Marathas.<sup>17</sup> The Maratha position in South Konkan became stronger with the rise of Angrias as a naval power in direct competition to the Siddis of Janjira. According to Nairne, Kanhoji Angre offered his support to Shahu in 1713 in return for the grant of Avchit Rajapur and Kharepattan which was negotiated by Balaji Vishvanath. The same powers were retained after the Marathas' rights over the Sardeshmukhi of Deccan were recognized by Muhammad Shah in Delhi in 1720. The situation remained stable with a stalemate between the Angrias and the Siddis till the death of Kanhoji Angre in 1731 and the senior Siddi in 1735 leading to wars of succession in both families. The situation finally led to Peshwa Bajirao I's intervention leading to the capture of Raigadh, Avchitgad (Rajapur) and other forts to the Marathas after half a century of dispossession.<sup>18</sup>

Mughal Silver Rupees were issued from Rajapur in the name of Muhammad Shah with the mint name 'Rajapur' which points to the Marathas reclaiming their place under the sun with renewed vigour. An extant example in the private collection of Mohit Kapoor, Mumbai examined by the author shows no dates. However, Maheshwari-Wiggins record a coin of Muhammad Shah from Rajapur dated 1148 AH corresponding to 1735-36 A.D. which signals that the coin was indeed issued by the Marathas after regaining Rajapur freeing it from the Mughal influence as well as the Angrias. These coins point thus to the re-establishment of trade in Rajapur which must have been affected by the half century old Mughal-Maratha and Angria-Siddi Wars off the Rajapur coast.<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusions**

The South Konkan came under the influence of the Marathas first under Chhatrapati Shivaji in 1660 when Rajapur was captured and put under Maratha rule. However, the region soon came under Mughal domination in the aftermath of the capture of the twin Deccan Sultanates of

Bijapur and Golkonda. The Mughals came to dominate South Konkan under Matabar Khan and latter the Siddis. Rajapur was probably renamed Islam Bandar and its economy monetized for the first time when Silver Rupees were issued in the name of Aurangzeb in the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, South Konkan in general and Rajapur in particular went back to the Marathas formally in 1735-36 when Peshwa Bajirao I took over Raigadh and Rajapur and probably issued coins in the name of Muhammad Shah with the mint name, Rajapur, a fact attested by coins dated 1148 AH corresponding to the dates 1735-36 A.D. Thus, this interesting set of coins reflect the fluctuations in the power control of the region between the two great powers of medieval India, the Marathas and Mughals in the coinage of probably the only Mughal mint in the Konkan region. The scarce to rare occurrence of extant samples of these coins in museum and private collections also point to the poor mintage of these coins in a region where trade flourished and revenue payments were accorded in kind through a major part of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

## Notes and References

1. H. K. Sherwani & P. M. Joshi, *History of Medieval Deccan (1295-1724), Vol. I (Mainly Political and Military Aspects)*, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1973, pp. 17-18.
2. Pius Malekandathil, *The Mughals, the Portuguese and the Indian Ocean – Changing Imageries of Maritime India*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2013, p. 140.
3. B. K. Apte, *A History of the Maratha Navy and Merchantships*, State Board for Literature and Culture, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1973, p. 68.
4. Sherwani & Joshi, *History of Medieval Deccan*, p. 22.
5. Ibid. p. 578
6. Stewart Gordon, *The New Cambridge History of India- The Marathas 1600-1818*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, First South Asian Paperback Edition 1998, Reprint 2012, pp. 20-21
7. Maharashtra State Archives/1671-1673/The Collection of Papers from the India Office, London Vol. 5, p.85.

8. Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib – Based on Original Sources, Vol. V. The Closing Years 1689-1707*, M. C. Sarkar & Sons, Calcutta, 1924, p. 145.
9. Ibid. pp. 145-157.
10. G. T. Kulkarni, *The Mughal-Maratha Relations: Twenty Five Fateful Years (1682-1707)*, Department of History, Deccan College Post-Graduate Research Institute, Pune, 1983, pp. 270-71.
11. Alexander Kyd Nairne, *History of the Konkan*, First Published 1894, Indian Reprint, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1988, p. 79.
12. Jadunath Sarkar, tr., *Maasir-i- 'Alamgiri- A History of the Emperor Aurangzib- 'Alamgir (Reign 1658-1707 AD) of Saqi Mustad Khan*, First published 1947, Reprint, Oriental Books, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 172-183.
13. G. P. Taylor, 'Islambandar 'Urf Rajapur' in Numismatic Supplement to the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal Vol. No. XVII 1912 (104), pp. 127-29.
14. K. K. Maheshwari & Kenneth W. Wiggins, *Maratha Mints and Coinage*, Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies, Anjaneri, Nashik, 1989, pp. 90-91
15. Sanjay Garg, *The Sikka and the Raj – A History of Currency Legislations of the East India Company – 1772-1835*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2013, p. 27.
16. Pius Malekandathil, *The Mughals, the Portuguese..*, p. 141.
17. John Keay, *India a History: From the Earliest Civilisations to the Boom of the Twenty-First Century*, Harper Press, London, First Published 2000, Reprint 2012, p. 363.
18. Nairne, *History of the Konkan*, pp. 82-83.
19. Maheshwari & Wiggins, *Maratha Mints and Coinage*, p. 91.

**COIN APPENDIX**



**Aurangzeb Silver Rupee Islam Bandar Mint, RY 4x**

**Image Courtesy: Classical Numismatic Gallery, Ahmadabad, Auction 15 Lot 153**



**Muhammad Shah Silver Rupee Rajapur Mint No Date**

**Image Courtesy: Mohit Kapoor, Kapoor Collection, Mumbai**