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Etymology of Zhunbil and Identity of the Rulers of Kabul and Zabul in Seventh -Ninth Centuries C.E.

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Abstract

This paper deals with the political and religious situation to the south of Hindukush following the occupation of Sistan by Arab Muslims during the caliphate of 'Usman, the third Caliph of Islam. The origin of the popular cult of god Zhun and identity of its followers, being obscure, will be highlighted in the light of Iranian religious history and Pashto phonology of the name Zhun. Similarly, effort will be made to determine the correct form of the long debated title of Zabul rulers in Seventh-Ninth centuries in the light of Iranian priestly traditions and sound system of Pashto language. Moreover, Afghans' presence to the south of Hindukush during the period, though totally overlooked by scholars, will be established. Regarding the identity of the rulers of Kabul and Zabul from seventh to ninth centuries, there is a difference of opinion but the dominant view considers them Turks whose origin is obscure. Among the historical accounts of the period, Tabari's (d.923) account could highlight the identity of these rulers but it is considered confused and, therefore, greatly reconstructed. An effort is made here to reevaluate his account, without the assumptions introduced from time to time. As a result, a new interpretation of Tabari's account is offered, which not only highlights a new origin and identity of the rulers of Kabul and Zabul, but also throws new light on the history of the region in Seventh-Ninth centuries C.E.

Introduction

Arab Muslims appeared in Sistan in 32/652-53 towards the last stage of overwhelming Iran and after the death of Yazdagird III, the last Sassanid king in 31/651. A year later, the Arab forces advanced against Zabulistan and surrounded the shrine of Zhūn, the 'Mecca' of its followers, in Zamindawar in 33/653-54. Xuanzang, the famous Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, had visited Zabul a decade earlier in 644, who described, in Da Tang Xiu Jee, the shrine of *Suna* or *Zhuna* in some detail, but he neither mentioned its origin, nor the identity of its followers. At that time,

according to Xuanzang, the ruler of Kapisa-Kabul-Gandhara was a Buddhist and of Kshatria class, while the king of Zabulistan was the follower of the cult of Zhun and successor of a long line of kings. The new Arab Governor of Sistan, 'Abd al-Rahman bin Samurah launched an offensive against these rulers and reduced both kingdoms during 664-65. He was, however, relieved from the governorship in 666 which led to the loss of these kingdoms as quickly as they had been captured. The new rulers of Zabul, called by the title of Rutbil or Ratbil in the Arab literature, became famous for their tenacious resistance to the Arab advance towards the east and northwards to Kabul. Closely associated with them were the rulers of Shahiya dynasty of Kabul, founded by Kabul Shah or Barhategin in 666. Both the rulers and their dynasties, which survived for about two centuries, were considered by the Arabs as Turkish, though the opinion of modern scholars greatly differs with regard to their origin and identity. Regarding the title of Rutbil, it has been maintained that it should be read as Zunbil/Zhunbil, the first part representing the name of god Zhun. Etymology of the second part has, however, not been satisfactorily explained so far, which has recently led some eminent scholars to disagree with the emended vocalization.

Historical accounts of the period generally overlook the internal relations between the rulers to the south of Hindukush. Tabari's (I : 2706) account throws some light on their political relations but his account is believed to be confused. Scholars have reconstructed a great part of it but the restoration has led to loss of some valuable information. The origin of Zhun and etymology of Zhunbil could be explained in the light of Iranian religious history and phonology of Pashto, the language of Afghans, but scholars mostly consider Zhun to have Indian origin and therefore, look for its explanation in Indian religious world. The purpose of this brief essay is to explore the origin and followers of the cult of Zhun and present a new etymology of Zhunbil which will not only confirm the Zhunbil title of Zabul rulers but make most of what Tabari said understandable. It will also present a detailed reconsideration of Tabari's report and the emerging picture will lead to a new identity of the rulers of Kabul and Zabul, which diverge from the widely accepted conclusions of the period.

1. Origin and Followers of the Cult of Žun

Before the advent of Islam in Afghanistan, people followed different religions, some widely known like Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, while others not so well known but were locally very popular and zealously followed. One such indigenous religion, with a large following in Zabulistan during 7-9 centuries, was the cult of god Žun. Xuanzang, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, described the god as *Suna* or *Žuna*, based on the worship of an idol, whose shrine was set on top of Mount Zhunagir¹, located in Zamindawar. According to Balladhuri (d. 892) 'Abd al-Rahman bin Samurah raided Zamindawar and surrounded the shrine of Žūn set on a hill called Zur. He cut one arm of the statue that was embodied in gold to show to its followers that the god was incapable of doing good or harm (Murgotten 1924: 144). The cult of Zhun survived in Zabulistan for over two centuries after the arrival of Islam but its origins and followers are obscure. Modern scholars have not been able to add much to what was already known from Chinese and Arab sources. Marquart (cited in Bosworth 1968: 35) considered the cult to be neither Buddhist nor Zoroastrian, and suggested that it might have links with the shrine of the Hindu Sun-God Āditya at Multan. As this view still prevails, scholars mostly look for the origin of the cult in Indian religious traditions. *Zruvān 'time', on the other hand, must have become Žun as in Pashto the stressed

The name Žun can, however, be explained in the light of Iranian religious traditions and Pashto phonology. The expression of Pashto *žo*, earlier *žo*, 'by god', according to Morgensteirne (1982: 516-518), is derived from Avestan **zruwā*, 'time' and is compared to the name of god Žun. He adds that the consonant cluster of ancient 'zr' in Pashto had regularly changed to ž'ğ and ancient u/awā changed into 'o', as in Pašto (feminine) from ancient **Parsuwā*. The stressed Iranian 'a' normally becomes 'o' but before a nasal it becomes 'u', like ancient **Parsuwā* became Pašto but *Parsuwān* became *Paštūn* (Afghan). Similarly, ancient **zruwā* became *žo* but **Zruvān* must have become Žun. The names Žulad (of Guzgan, the king of gar) (Sims-Williams, 2007: 6-8) is derived from *Zruvādata*, 'given by Zruvā' and Žunlad from *Zruvādata*, 'given by Zruvān', (the king of Rob, modern Rui in second half of seventh century).

¹ Zhunagir most likely reflect Zhunaghar, the 'Zhuna mountain' in Pashto. Kuwayama (2000, p.59) has restored it as Zhunahira.

Two names of the god are thus attested; *žo* < **zruwā* and *Žun* < **Zruvān* ; the first survived in the name *Žulad* and the Pashto expression ‘*žo*’ or *žo*, ‘by god’, while *Žun* is attested in the name of *Žunlad* and *suna* or *Žuna* of Xwanzang. Such names must have been common to the south of Hindukush, though these are not attested. The change of *-data*, ‘given’ into *-lad* appears to be Pashto as evident from Pashto change of ancient *dita* and *dāta* into *lid* and *lod* respectively (Morgensteirne 2003: 42). This change occurs regularly in Bactrian too but no examples of ‘*zr*’ becoming ‘*ž*’ are found in Bactrian. The *Ž* sound of *Žun* and *Žunbil* or *Žobil* has most probably changed to ‘*Z*’ under the influence of Arabic and Indo-Aryan languages which resulted in *Zun*. Kuwayama (2000: 59) reads “*Žun* or *Žuna*, a restored name from Chinese “Sui history and Xuanzang” which confirms Pashto sound of ‘*zr*’ into ‘*ž*’ in the name of the god.

Like the Pashto *Žun*, the Sassanid *Zurvān*, the god of time, is also believed to have been derived from ancient **Zrvan* or **Zruvan*, ‘time’. *Žun*, however, is clearly not derived from *Zurvān* as the ancient cluster *zur-* could not have changed to ‘*Ž*’ in Pashto. The Sogdian *Zrv*, though represented Indian god Brahma in the Buddhist texts, is identified with Sassanid *Zurvān* (Levinsky 1996: 422). *Žun*, *Zurvān* and, *Zrv* are presumably derived from the same source but their worship and priesthood developed differently over a long period of separation. The cult of *Zhun* appears to have acquired Hindu characteristics which must be the result of a long stay of the god in Indian environments. The influence of *Žun* and *Zurvān* is evident from theophoric names like *Žunlad* and *Žulad* in North Afghanistan and *Zurvāndukht*, ‘daughter of *Zurvān*’ and *Zurvāndad*, ‘given by *Zurvān*’ in Iran (Boyce 1979: 119-122.). It appears that the followers regarded the ‘god of time’ a powerful divinity, for such names are obviously given to children who are born in answer to prayer. Xuanzang confirmed the influence of *Žun* when he wrote:

He is severe or good, causing misfortune or exercising violence. Those who invoke him with faith obtain their wishes; those who despise him reaped misfortune. Therefore people, both far off and near show for him deep reverence; high and low alike are filled with religious awe of him (Beal 1884, vol.2: 283).

Regarding origin of Žuna, Xuanzang had only mentioned that it was initially brought to Kapisa, later Begram² from “far” and later moved to Zabul. There is no consensus as to who brought it and when. By identifying Žun with Sassanian Zurvān, the cult of Žun *or* *Zruvān can be viewed in a much wider context of Iranian history and religious developments. Žun, Like Zurvān, most likely represented the ‘god of time’, a heresy in Zoroastrianism, which originated in response to the religious reforms introduced during second half of Achaemenid Empire. Setting of Žun shrine on mountain tops near Kapisa and later, Zhunagir in Zamindawar conform to Iranian tradition of worship in high places. *Zruvān was most probably personified in human form at an early time. The later evidence shows that the cult was well organized with priests, probably Magis, who claimed magical and curative powers (Boeworth 2008: 244). Žo and Žun are clearly Pashto derivations from ancient Zruvā and Zruvān which shows that its followers were mostly Afghans who, presumably, brought it to the south of Hindukush during their migrations from the north, long before the coming of Hephthalites and Turks. Since Zruvān was a heresy in Zoroastrianism, its Afghans followers were, most probably, initially Zoroastrians. Mention of Žun and its devotees disappeared with the end of Žunbil dynasty of Zabulistan in 870. Its followers, according to Ibn Athir, accepted Islam (Qasmi 1989, vol.11: 87-88; Abdullah 1997, vol 12: 568), which is in line with Afghan tradition of their mass conversion to Islam.

2. Presence of Afghans to the South of Hindukush

Historical and linguistics evidence suggests the presence of Afghans in Zabulistan long before the seventh century but scholars have generally overlooked their presence. “Their original home”, according to Morgensteirne (1940: 143), “extended from Arachosia and the Helmand to the Suleman Mountains and to Ghazni and Kabul”. Xuanzang had mentioned that the language and writing of the people of Zabul differ from those of other countries. Since Xuanzang was well familiar with Bactrian, Indian and Turkish languages, it is most likely that the language spoken in Ghazni was Pashto (Cunningham 1876, .3, 41; G. Scarcia, 1967: 41). The deep influence of Indian languages on the vocabulary and phonetics of Pashto points to an early arrival of Afghans and contact with Indians. The

² Begram is situated at the confluence of Ghurband and Panjshir Rivers of eastern Afghanistan, near Charikar.

earliest recorded name of Afghans in the form of *Avagāna* was, till recently, by the Indian astronomer Varaha-Mihira of the mid 6th Century in his *Brhat Samhita* (XI: 61 and XVI: 38) where he speaks of the *Avagāna* (Afghans) alongside the well known Pahlavis and White Huns or Hephthalites. The recent discovery of a letter in the Bactrian Archives “contains the earliest datable reference to the Afghan people” in the form of *Avagāna* in the fifth century. The reference is in connection with a dispute over horses with the “men of Rob”, now Rui, north of Hindukush (Sims-Williams 2008: 94).

Linguistic evidence reveals traces of Pašto language to the south of Hindukush much earlier than the Afghan name. Morgenstierne (1940: 143) maintained that the oldest loan words in Pashto date back to Greek occupation of Bactria and Kabul. The title of Saka king of Ujjain in the first century, *Čaštana*, is believed to be the exact equivalent of Pashto word ‘*čaštan*’ ‘master, lord’³ (Morgenstierne (1973, 89). *Paštānə* (plural of *Pashtun*), a Middle Pashto form, was borrowed in some “Indian border dialects of an archaic type in the form of **Paštāna*” which became modern Indo-Aryan *Paṭhān* (Morgenstierne 1940: 143-144). Early Afghan settlement in south-east Afghanistan is also well reflected in the development of ancient hydronyms and toponyms, as stated by Morgenstierne (2003). The change of the names of rivers *Xvastra* to *Xvash* (p.96), *Heithumant* to *Helmand* (p.35), *Hušaapā* to *Žob* (river) (p.29), *Krumu* to *Kurma* ‘the river Kurram (ancient female gender retained) (p.39)’ and place-names like *Maštān* to *Matūn* (p.53), *Vaharkana* to *Urgūn* (p.89), *Xvastu* to *Khost* and *Gomati* to *Gomal* (p.27) show development of Pashto sound changes. Some of these sound changes occur in Bactrian and other languages too but Pashto, being the language of the people living in the area, has most probably developed these changes. In view of the geographic horizon of Pashto names in Zabulistan and etymology of the god Zhun, it can be said that the Iranian dialect that was spoken in Zabul was most likely middle form of Pashto.

³Morgenstierne thought that the Pashto *čaštan* may have been derived from **čars(t)ana* and the Pashto ‘*rs*’ must have reached or approached the stage *št* by the beginning of common era

3. Etymology of the Title of Zhunbīl/Zunbīl

The rulers of Zabulistan were known by the title of Žunbīl, called Rutbīl in the Arab sources, from seventh to ninth centuries. Kingdom of Zabulistan bordered on Kabulistan in the northeast and in the south and west it included areas of al-Rukhkhaj, the modern Kandahar region, Zamindawar and area upto Bost on the confluence of Arghandab and Helmand rivers. Sulaiman Mountains formed the eastern border. Ghazni was the winter capital of the kingdom while Zamindawar was the summer capital and religious and pilgrimage center devoted to Žun or Zun. Žunbīl is first mentioned in connection with his re-capture of Zabulistan from Arab Muslims in 667. The Zhubils effectively resisted Arab raids into Zabul and also Kabul from the south. The exact form of the title is still subject to a great deal of controversy. Markwart (cited in Bosworth 1968: 34-35) suggested that the correct form of the title was Zunbīl or Žunbiīl, a theophoric name, the first element representing god Zun/Žun. Majority of scholars agreed with the suggested form of the name as a valid alternative to Rubīl, but the suffix *-bīl* has not been satisfactorily explained so far. Frye (1975: 77) agrees with the vocalization of Žunbīl and states that quite a few scholars have suggested that the title represent something like “the leader for (or servant of) the god Zun”. According to Harmatta (1996: 367-372), the name was registered in the Tang sources in two forms, “Shih-yü and Shih-k’ü,” but both spellings represent variants of the same name, Zivil or Zibil, which confirms Žobil < Zruvāpati. He considers Rutbil and Zunbil as misreading of the title. Kuwayama (2000:64) citing same Chinese sources, consider the restored form as possibly “Zābul”. In the edition of *Tarikh-i-Sistan*, the editor reports that the manuscript gives the name *Znbyl*, which support the reading Zunbil (Bosworth 1968,n.7: 37) But, lately, some eminent scholars (Rehman 1979 :180; Sims-Williams 2002: 235; Inaba 2005 : 2) began to agree with Bombaci’s (1970 as cited in Sims-Williams 2002: 235) tentative suggestion that the title of Rutbil is correct and should be understood as a corrupt form of the Turkish title Iltabir, Ilteber or Hilibēr.

According to Jiu Tangshu (Vol.194), the Tung Yabghu Kaghan had given the title Iltabir to all the rulers of the Western Regions (Inaba 2005 : 7) but it is strange that none of these titles, except that of Zabul rulers, had been corrupted to Rutbīl by Arabs. The Turkish title, according to Kuwayama (2000: 54) was given by the Chinese king to the

ruler of Zabul in 720 but Arabs seems to have called all the rulers of Zabul from 667 onwards as Rutbīl. Carrying a lower title of *Ittabir/Rutbīl*, denoting a governor or high military commander, (Bosworth 2008: 244; Rehman 1979: 180) for so long, when the rulers of Zabul had effectively ruled for over 200 years, makes no sense. Moreover, these rulers were in frequent contact with the Arabs of Sistan, who must have been well aware of the correct title of the rulers. The view that Rutbil may be a scribal error appears to be correct as in Arabic script the difference of Zunbīl and Rutbīl is very small. When two dotes are put over the second letter, the word can be read Rutbīl but if the dots are put slightly away from each other, رتیبیل 'رتیبیل' the word becomes Zunbīl. It is very likely that the name was Žunbīl or Zunbil but has been misread as Rutbīl. Žunbīl could not be explained so far by scholars probably because of overlooking the presence of Pashto language to the south of Hindukush, and the belief, since Marquart's time, that the cult of Žun was not Zoroastrian. Marquart seemed to have correctly identified the first element as Zun or Žun but his assertion that the cult was not Iranian but Indian led many scholars to look for its explanation in Indian religions. It was seen above that Žun was a middle Pashto form of ancient Iranian *Zruvān, 'the god of time'. When the first part is accepted as Pashto, an East Iranian language, one is justified in Iranian meaning for the second part too. Etymology of Žunbīl can be explained in the light of Zoroastrian priestly traditions and Pashto phonology.

Major changes were introduced in the Zoroastrian religion and worship by Achaemenid king Artaxerxes II (404-359 B.C.E) who revived old gods like Mithra and Anahita and introduced cult statues in temples (Boyce 1979:62). *Zruvān, as a god of time, most likely originated, like Sassanian *Zruvānism*, as a response to the religious changes introduced during this period. The heresy appears to have equated Ahura Mazda, the supreme god in Gathas, and Angra Mainyu, the demon, as twin brothers created by *Zruvān. Zurvānites believed that Zurvān (or *Zruvān) 'time' "did not merely provide the framework for cosmic events but was actually in control of them, hence a sentient being" (Boyce 1979: 68). In view of later evidence of Žun, *Zruvān was most probably worshiped in human form from an earlier time, which must have led to the development of its own priesthood and rituals.

Introduction of cult images in shrines was an innovation in Zoroastrian worship, which necessitated coining of new names to describe such temples. Most Iranian languages suggest that the term used for the image shrine was derived from Proto-Iranian **bagina*, ‘place of gods’ and its high priest from **baginapati*, which changed to *bagnapet* in Parthian and *vaghnpat* in Sogdian, ‘chief (priest) of the image shrine’ (Boyce 1979: 85-88, 98). The new practice is believed to have led, as a reaction, to introduction of temple fires, itself an innovation in Zoroastrian worship. Divine images and sacred fire were often housed in the same temple or temple complex and the community mostly worshipped both of them (Boyce and Grenet, 1991, n.71: 66). Moreover, in Parthian period, presence of more than one divinities or both Greek and Parthian divine images, are reported to have been worshipped in the same temple or **bagina*. Such temples may have been called **bagina*, ‘place of gods’ because they housed more than one divine images. A shrine dedicated to Mithra is attested in Armenia which was called after the cult as *mehean* in Armenian, ‘place of Mithra’ (Boyce 1979: 88-89) but the designation of its chief priest is not mentioned. The Sassanians, according to most likely accounts, were hereditary guardians or high priests of a great temple of Anahita at the city of Istakhr which once contained idols (Boyce 1979:101-106). No information, however, is available about the designation of the high priest. The cult of Žun, as known from later evidence, had one central temple in Zamindawar, which housed the cult statue of Žun and was known as the shrine of Žun earlier **Zruvān*.

Like the early Sassanians, the family of the king or chief (when not in power) of Žun followers provided hereditary high priests of the temple, known as Žunbil, a Middle Pashto form of **Zruvānpati*, the suffix *-pati* or *-bil* denoting ‘chief, master or lord’. It appears that normally a prince of the family performed such functions but at times the religious and temporal functions were combined in the king, as evident from Žunbils’ rule of Zabulistan from seventh to ninth centuries. The followers presumably formed a distinct political and religious group who visited the shrine of Žun called ‘Mecca’ (probably so named after contact with Muslims) on an auspicious time of the year. Xuanzang reported that “princes, nobles and people of this as well of foreign countries assemble every year at a season of rejoicing which is not fixed and offer gold and silver and precious objects of rare value... (Beal 1884, vol.2: 283). The

cult of *Žun* had only one shrine in Zabulistan and its followers worshiped it once a year during the annual pilgrimage. In view of the large number of people visiting it, the shrine must have had elaborate priestly organization. **Zruvānpati* must have, from the beginning, presided over the priestly proceedings during the annual pilgrimage. In addition, the chief priest acted as the overall religious leader of the cult in the kingdom. **Zruvā* (n) *pati* literally meant ‘chief of **Zruvān*’ but since **Zruvān* or *Žun* was the name of the god’s only shrine, the title most likely denoted ‘the chief (priest) of *Žun* (shrine)’ or ‘chief for/chief (priest) of god *Žun*’. A somewhat similar title is found in the early Sassanid period when king Hormazd (r. 272-3) gave the title of ‘Ohrmazd Mobed’, ‘the chief priest of god Ohrmazd’, to Kerdir, the most influential religious figure of Sassanid Iran.

The first element of *Žunbil* was seen to have been derived from **Zruvān* and the suffix *-bil* of *Žunbil* is most likely Middle Pashto form of suffix *-pati*. In Middle Persian, the suffix *-pati* had changed to *-bed* as evident from **magupati* > *mobed*, Avestan **aēθrapaiti* > *erbed* or *herbed* and so on. In Middle Pashto, the sound of intervocalic ‘*p*’ had changed to ‘*b*’ as in Persian but ‘*t*’ had changed to ‘*l*’ which was a characteristic feature of Pashto sound change. A few examples of the change of ancient *-p-* to ‘*b*’ and *-t-* to ‘*l*’, according to Morgenstein (2003) are: *āpāh* > *obā*, ‘water’ (p.7); *Hušaapā* > *Žob* (river) (p.29), *hapārasi* > *obāxta* ‘juniper’ (p.7); *upā- čita* > *bejal*, *bojal* (*t* also changed to *l*), ‘mound, pedestal’ (p.13); *hapaθni* > *bān*, ‘co-wife’ (p.14); *upantai** > *bānde*, ‘on, upon, above’ (p.14) and many more. A few examples of the change of intervocalic ‘*t*’ to ‘*l*’ in Pashto are: *satəm* > *sal*, ‘hundred’ (p.74); **čitaka* > *čalai* ‘cairn or pillar of mud or stones’ (p.17); *pitar* > *plār*, ‘father’ (p. 62); *čathwar* > *cal’or*, ‘four’, (p.17); *paθana* > *plān* ‘wide, broad’ (p.62); *Haētumant* > Helmand, ‘River Helmand of Afghanistan’ (p.35); Armenian *margarit* > *maryarəla* /*maryaləra* ‘pearl’ (p.51); Sanskrit *kuncita* > *kunjəla*, ‘sesame’, (p.39); **sančita* > *sanj’ala*, ‘wild olive’, (p.74); and more. These examples clearly shows that ancient *-pati* had resulted in ‘*-bil*’ in Middle Pashto. However, the suffix of *Žunbil* has a lengthened *ī* whereas *-pati* would probably have changed to *-bil*. The long *ī* may be due to dialect variation in Pashto or the *-bil* transformed to *bīl* in the Arabic writing (Scarcia 1967: 1). Thus the ancient **Zruvā* (n) *pati* had changed to *Žobīl* or *Žunbīl* which represented the chief priest of

the shrine of *Zrūvān or *Žun*. It follows that the cult had, unlike Sassanian Zurvan, elaborate priesthood and rituals right from the beginning. The etymology of *Žunbīl* gets further support from Ibn al-Athir (d.1233) report, related to ninth century, saying that *Žunbīl* resided on the sacred mountain (of *Žun*) called Mecca, the ruler there, the *Zunbil* was (divine) and was carried on a golden throne by twelve men (cited in Bosworth 1968 : 35; Qasmi 1989, vol.11 : 87-8; Abdullah 1997, vol 12 : 568). *Žunbil* had residence on the sacred mountain of *Žun* and was divine, perhaps, not because he was the ruler, but he was also the chief priest of the popular cult of *Žun*. The religious title, retained by the Zabul rulers for over 200 years, certainly helped in motivating the mainly Afghan followers of *Žun* to follow the lead of their leaders for so long. It may be pertinent to mention that Afghans have, on many occasions in their history, converted a political conflict into a religious war, led by a religious leader, to sustain a long struggle against a powerful enemy.

4. Coming of Arab Muslims to Southern Afghanistan

The king of Zabul in 643 was, according to Xuanzang, the successor of a long line of kings and follower of the cult of Zhun. The same king or probably his successor was ruling in Zabul during Mu'awiya's Caliphate (661-680). Xuanzang did not call the dynasty Indian or Turkish which could thus be considered of indigenous. In the Kapisi section, Xuanzang called the king of Kapisi-Kabul-Gandhara in 629 as a follower of Buddhism and of Kshatria caste. Kuwayama, basing on Chinese sources, calls the king of Kapisa-Kabul-Gandhara in 658 as Ghar-ilchi of the Khingalide dynasty (called Nezakides by some scholars) and the same king was probably confirmed by Tang China as the king of Kapisi in 661 (Kuwayama 2000: 42, 59).

Great events occurred in Iranian Empire when Xuanzang was travelling in India and Afghanistan. The Iranian Empire collapsed as a result of the determined attacks of the Arab Muslims during the Caliphate of 'Omar (13/634-- 23/644), the Second Caliph of Islam. Xuanzang was probably unaware of these events as he did not mention them. The wave of Muslim expansion continued under the third Caliph, 'Otmān (24-35/644-56). The last king of Sassanid dynasty, Yazdegerd III was killed in 651 by a common miller with whom he was hiding. In 32/652-53, 'Abd-al-Rahmān b. Samura was sent who re-conquered Sistan and annexed Bost. He then

advanced to Zamindawar and surrounded the shrine of Žun from where Arabs collected a large booty (Murgotten 1924: 144). Thereafter, the history of Kabul and Zabul is intimately linked with the history of the governors of Sistan.

The second tenure of Ibn Samura as Governor of Sistan (663-66) (Bosworth, 1968: 22; Rehman 1979: 57-58) had profound effects on the political situation of the region. Soon after arrival in Siestan, Ibn Samura launched an offensive against Kabul through Marv⁴ and reduced the town after some hard fighting in 44/664-665 (Rehman 1979: 57). Probably leaving some force in Kabul, Ibn Samura returned to southern Afghanistan where he captured Khwash, Bust, and Khushahak. Rukhkaj, the classical Arachosia, was reduced after hard fighting. He then advanced against Zabul “who had broken the treaty”, its people attacked him but they were defeated (Murgotten, 1924: 146-147). The king of Kapisa had, in the meantime, reasserted his authority, Kabul was, therefore, attacked and recaptured again after a long siege (Rehman 1979: 58)⁵. The Khingle king, before being executed, accepted Islam and was probably allowed to rule under Muslim patronage. Ibn Samura was relieved from command in 666 which prompted Kabulshah or Barhategin to capture Kabul by killing the king and ousting the Muslims in the same year (Ibid. : 47). Zhunbil recovered Zabul, Rukhkhaj and Bust but withdrew on arrival of reinforcements from Basra under Rabi b Ziad (Murgotten, 1924: 147-48) in, according to Rehman, (1979: 64) 667-68. The new rulers of Kabul and Zabul were considered as Turks but not belonging to the Western Turks. The origin and identity of the rulers and their dynasties are subject to a great deal of controversy among the modern scholars. Barhategin established Shahiya dynasty of Kabul while Zhunbil revived the old dynasty of Zabulistan. The new dynasties effectively checked Arab advance towards Indus valley for two centuries, though the Arab rule had been ‘firmly established in Seistan, Badhghis, Gozgan, Tokharistan and Transoxania and even in Sind by the beginning of the eighth century’ (Harmatta 1996 : 373).

⁴ The direction appears to be correct as Ibn Samura could not have attacked Kabul from the south through Zabulistan which was not yet conquered.

⁵ Rehman refers to *Tarjuma I Futūhāt* which says that the siege lasted one year.

5. Identity of the New Rulers of Kabul and Zabul

The events of Mu'awiya's rule to the south of Hindukush are covered by Islamic authors, Balladhuri, Tabari and al-Beruni and the Korean pilgrim Hyecho, the later two only briefly referred to the change of dynasty at Kabul. Balladhuri's (d. c. 892) account, though well connected, overlooks the internal political relations of the rulers. He mentioned capture of Kabul by Ibn Samura in 664-665, its recovery by Kabul Shah in 666 and occupation of Zabul and area upto Bust by Zhunbil (Murgotten 1924: 146-147). Al-Beruni(cited in Kuwayama 2000: 58-59) , briefly referred in *Ta'rikh al-Hind* to Barhategin and his conquest of Kabul:

The Hindus had kings residing in Kabul, Turks who were said to be of Tibetan origin. The first of them, Barhatakin, came into the country and entered a cave in Kabul ... Some days after he had entered the cave, he began to creep out of it in the presence of the people ... Now people honored him as a being of miraculous origin, who had been destined to be king, and in fact he brought those countries under his sway and ruled them under the title of Ashahiya of Kabul. The rule remained among his descendants for generations, the number of which is said to be about sixty.

Al-Beruni's report clearly indicates obscure origins of Barhategin and also the fact that, before usurping power in Kabul, he was neither a ruler of Kabul as mentioned by Kuwayama (2000: 61-65) nor of Gandhara as claimed by Rehman (1979: 63). He calls him a Turk but of Tibetan origin. Hwei-ch'ao presumably referred to the same dynastic change saying that the father of Wusun Tegin Shah, the ruling Turkish king of Kabul in 726, surrendered to the king of Kapisa along with his followers. On gaining strength, he killed the Kapisa king and made himself lord of the country. Hwei-ch'ao also referred to the fraternal relations between the kings of Kabul and Zabulistan_(Harmatta 1996: 367-368). Tabari reported some important information about the internal relations of the rulers of Kabul and Zabul and how they gained power but the report is considered "confused" and, therefore, greatly reconstructed by scholars. Correct interpretation of this report is crucial to the understanding of the identity of Kabul shah or Barhategin and Zhunbil. Salient aspects of Tabari's famous passage (I : 2706) as translated by G. Rex Smith (1994: 75-76), are given in Parts A to E below:

- A. “At that (Caliph Mu’awiya) time the ruler (Shah) fled from his brother who was called Zunbil, to an area called Āmul and (he and his followers) paid allegiance to Salm b. Ziad, at the time the Governor of Sistan”.
- B. The Governor “was pleased with this (development), made a pact with (the ruler and his followers) and allowed them to settle in this area”.
- C. According to Calph Mu’awiya “the area between Āmul and Zaranj was where there were difficulties and trouble”.
- D. “After Mu’awiya’s death when there was civil war, the ruler rebelled and conquered Āmul”.
- E. “Zunbil was afraid of the ruler, so he took refuge from him at a particular place...But he did not take kindly to this, when people ignored him and he began to covet Zaranj. So he attacked (the town) and besieged (its inhabitants) until reinforcements arrived from Al-Basra.

Tabari’s passage relates to political events which happened to the south of Hindukush during Mu’awiya’s Caliphate (661-680). Scholars have restored a great part of it but the multiple replacements appear to have distorted the information contained in the passage. The distortion mainly occurred when scholars assumed that the event (Part-A) happened after Kabulshah or Barhategin gained power at Kabul, thus limiting the occurrence of the event to Kabul and the period to after 666. Tabari had, actually, not mentioned Kabulshah or Kabul (Part-A) but the same was assumed. Kuwayama (1999: 62-63), like others, then wondered as to how Kabulshah could run away from Zhunbil, his brother, at Kabul when Balladhuri had clearly said that Kabulshah captured Kabul in 666. Scholars like Marquart (cited in Kawayama 1999: 63) and Rehman (1979: 66) naturally assumed that instead of Kabul Shah, his brother Zhunbil, must have fled to Āmul after 666. Since there was no place by the name of Āmul to the south of Hindukush, Zabul was substituted for Āmul where Zhunbil subsequently ruled. Occupation of Zabul and area up to Bust by Zhunbil in 667, reported both by Tabari (E) and Balladhuri, and his subsequent rule of Zabulistan was assumed to have been done as the governor of Kabul Shah (Ibid. p.64). The event of fleeing of ‘Shah’ or Zhunbil was assumed to have occurred during Salm b. Ziad’s Governorship (681-83) (Ibid. 67; Inaba 2002: 1-2).

Tabari's original report, apart from some chronological confusion and mistaken names, explains well the internal political situation of the region, and, at the same time, confirms the accounts of Balladhuri, al-Beruni and Huichao. Moreover, the origin and identity of the rulers of Kabul and Zabul can only be explained through Tabari's report. It is evident from reports of Balladhuri and Tabari (Part E) that Zhunbil had, after expulsion of Muslims from Kabul by Barhategin, independently occupied Zabul, Rukhkhaj and area up to Bust in 667. Zhunbil is always associated with Zabul whether it was its liberation from Muslims or its rule. Balladhuri shows him as a ruler who negotiated with 'Ubaid Allah b. Abi Bakrah, the Governor of Sistan in 51(671-72) the terms of "peace for his own country and the land of Kabul" (Murgotten 1924: 148). No evidence exists to show Zhunbil in Kabul or as a subordinate of Kabul Shah. Tabari's statement (Part-A) that the 'Shah' fled from Zhunbil is correct but the event, evidently, happened at different place and earlier time. The passage becomes meaningful when we assume that Tabari's 'Shah' was actually the king of Zabulistan and his brother Zhunbil was with him at Zabul. This statement gets further confirmed by the etymology of Zhunbil, who as chief priest of Zhun, naturally belonged to Zabul. Zhunbil, a prince and high religious leader must have had great influence and power. Due to some reason, he dethroned the king who, according to Tabari, fled to a place called Āmul (Part A). Āmul could not be Zabul because the king was already there. Āmul could not be Sistan either because the 'Shah' later conquered Āmul (D), whereas it is known that Sistan was never captured from the Muslims during or after Mu'awiya's time. Moreover, Part C clearly suggests that Āmul could be at the other end of Muslims difficulties. It follows that the only other place where the 'Shah' could flee from Zabul was Kabul. Tabari, therefore, meant Kabul from Āmol as also suggested by the translator of Tabari's volume_ (Smith 1994, n. 338: 75-76).

Part A of the report further mentions that the 'Shah' fled during Mu'awiya's caliphate to Āmul where he paid allegiance to Salm b. Ziad, the governor of Sistan. This statement is obviously contradictory as Salam was appointed governor after the death of Mu'awiya. Most scholars (Rehman 1979: 66; Inaba 2005: 2) consider Mu'awiya to be mistaken and assign the occurrence of the event to the period when Salam was Governor of Sistan (681-83). It, however, seems that Salm is mistaken because the

‘Shah’ paid allegiance to the Governor of Sistan at Kabul, which, as we know, was not under Muslims occupation during his governorship. The Shah must have escaped to Kabul before the Muslims were ousted from Kabul in 666. Moreover, the Shah must have been dethroned by Zhunbil before Zabul was occupied by Ibn Samura in 665. It, therefore, follows that Zhunbil dethroned the Zabul’s ‘Shah’ sometime in 664-65 when Zabul was still independent, though seriously threatened. The name of Salam b. Ziad must, therefore, be replaced with ‘Abdar Rehman Ibn Samura who gave asylum to the fugitive Shah during Mu’awiya’s rule and allowed him and his followers to settle” somewhere in Kabul region (Part-B). The account further says (Part-C) that the ruler rebelled after Mu’awiya’s death and conquered Āmul_(Kabul). The timings of this statement are generally considered correct but are obviously not so according to our interpretation of Tabari’s account. The statement implies that Kabul was under Arab occupation when Mu’awiya in 680 and that the ‘Shah’ recaptured it after his death. The historical situation of the time does not support such a statement. It is well known that Kabul was recaptured from the Muslims in 666 and it remained under Kabulshahs for a long time thereafter. Part C, therefore, refers to the occupation of Kabul in 666 during Mu’awiya’s Caliphate. Tabari confirms accounts of Balladhuri, al Beruni and Huei-ch’ao_regarding change of Kabul dynasty when he says that the ‘Shah’ rebelled and conquered Kabul. All the three reports refer to the same person, though differently attested, who captured Kabul in 666.

Tabari’s account also confirms the proposed etymology of Zhunbil to the extent that he belonged to Zabul; that the title already existed before 666, which could not have been Rutbil; and the first element of the title certainly reflected the name of the god Zhun. Moreover, this interpretation supports the generally agreed view that Tabari’s Shah was actually Kabul Shah or Barhategin and Zhunbil was his brother. But it also highlights a subtle difference which has important bearing on the identity of these rulers. The Shah was initially ruler of Zabul who, after being dethroned by Zhunbil, fled to Kabul in 664 where he miraculously usurped power in 666 and thus became Kabul Shah. Part-E apparently looks confusing but fits well in our interpretation. It possibly relates to the time when the dethroned ‘Shah’, of Zabul had usurped power at Kabul while Zhunbil was still hiding somewhere in Zabul or on the Indian frontier. A year or so

after the fall of Kabul, Zhunbil regained control of area upto Bust until reinforcements arrived under Ar-Rabi, the new governor of Sistan (Murgotten 1924: 47-48,). The same is reported by Tabari who says (Part-D) that Zhunbil besieged Zarang until reinforcement arrived from Al-Basra. Both reports imply that Zhunbil did so independently of Kabul Shah or the 'Shah'.

Based on above analysis and interpretation of Tabari's account, the political movements in the region during, and immediately after, the second tenure of 'Abdar Raman b. Samura as Governor of Sistan are explained as follows: The king of Khingle or Nizuk dynasty was ruling Kabul while Zabulistan had a king who was a follower of Zhun. Zhunbil, besides being a prince, was the high priest of the popular cult of Zhun. Ibn Samura, after reaching Sistan, launched an attack against Kabul from the direction of Merv in 664 and captured it. Knowing well Ibn Samura's earlier attack of the temple of Zhun in 653-54, Zhunbil probably realized a serious threat not only to the kingdom of Zabul but also to its religion. He dethroned the king, his brother, in 664-65, probably for being too conciliatory towards Muslims, and assumed political leadership of Zabul under the religious title of Zhunbil. He thus gave religious orientation to the struggle against the Muslims which appeared to him to be a long one. The Shah'' of Zabul, along with his followers, fled to Kabul and paid allegiance to Ibn Samura and the titular king of Kabul. The fugitive 'Shah' and his followers were allowed to settle somewhere away from Kabul, probably near Gandhara. The defeat of the king of Kapisa and his conversion to Islam must have greatly demoralized the mainly Indian population of the kingdom. Moreover, the consecutive defeats and occupation of Kabul region must have disorganized and scattered his forces. The fugitive 'Shah' built up his strength slowly and waited for the right moment. The departure of Ibn Samura, one of the successful Muslim commanders, and the eventual withdrawal of Muslim forces from Kabul for being too far away from their base at Sistan, gave him the chance. The fugitive Shah or Barhategin emerged from his hide out as a savior, mobilized the people against the last king of Khingle dynasty of Kapisa before he could reorganize his forces, and killed him. Thus Tabari's 'Shah' or al-Beruni's Barhategin or Baladhuri's Kabulshah, all one and the same person, established Shahiya dynasty of Kabul in 666.

Zhunbil, soon after, came out of his hideout, collected his forces and, according to both Baladhuri and Tabari, captured Zabulistan and area up to Bust and probably threatened Zaranj when Rabi bin Ziad arrived with reinforcements in 667-68 who forced him to withdraw. Zabul had most probably changed hands thrice around the mid sixties of seventh century; once when Zhunbil assumed political control of Zabul by expelling his brother probably in 664-65; the second time when Ibn Samura captured Zabul in 665 from Zhunbil; and finally when Zhunbil recaptured Zabul in 667 after withdrawal of Muslims. The first mention of Zhunbil is assigned to the time of 667 but Tabari mentioned him in connection with the dethroning of the king of Zabul in 664. The title of Zhunbil, as chief priest of Zhun, therefore, existed since long and was not given by Turkshah after 666 as claimed by Rehman. The title was retained by the rulers of Zabul till the end of the dynasty in 870 which indicate that the religious orientation given to the war with Arab Muslims by the first historical Zhunbil had helped in sustaining the war for so long.

The fugitive Shah's rise to power in Kabul in 666, within about two years of losing his kingdom of Zabul, certainly made him look like someone, in al-Beruni's words, of "miraculous origin and destined to be a king." Zhunbil was the brother of the 'Shah' before 666; he was brother of Barhategin or Kabul Shah after 666; it follows that Tabari's 'Shah' was actually Kabul Shah or Barhategin. The fraternal relations between the rulers of Kabul and Zabul are also confirmed by Hueich'ao. Alberuni's assertion of sixty generation long rule of Shahya dynasty, though exaggerated, fits better is case of the fugitive shah, who had been successor to a long line kings in Zabul before establishing the Shahiya Dynasty of Kabul. Thus the new ruler of Kabul initially belonged to the indigenous dynasty ruling in Zabul and, like Zhunbil, was the follower of the cult of Zhun, an offshoot of Zoroastrism. By identifying Tabari's 'Shah' with Kabul Shah and Barhategin, it has become possible to bring out the later two from the shadows of perpetual obscurity where history had placed them.

6. Ethnicity of the Rulers of Kabul and Zabul

The Muslim geographers mostly regarded the rulers of Zabul and Kabul and their followers and even the people on the Indian border as Turkish. But a large number of scholars disagree. Regarding the name Turk, Wink (1990: 116) says: “the Arabs appear to have applied this term to all their opponents on the eastern Iranian and Indian frontier”. He says elsewhere that Turkshahs “like the Zunbils of Zabul were not Turks” (1992: 767). Gibb writes that “the Arabic records are misleading by their use of the word Turk for all the non-Persian peoples of the east” (1923:10). Bosworth states that “the Arab sources ignorantly describe the Zunbil’s followers as Turks” (1968: 33-34). The ambiguity of the word Turk is evident from al-Beruni who called Barhategin a Turk but of Tibetan origin. Hueich’ao, the Korean pilgrim, described the first Turk Shah as T’uChueh but “not in the same line as Northern Turks” (Kuwayama 2002: 262). Similarly, Ou-kong, during his visit in middle of 8th century, connected Turkshahs to the famous Kanishka of Kushan dynasty (Wink 1992: 767). YU Taishan (2011:15) states that in the “Rājatarāṅgiṇī (I, 170) there is a reference to the fact that the Turkic ruler in Gandhāra claimed his ancestor was Kanishka”.

The rulers of Zabul and Kabul had been given Turkish titles by the Chinese kings probably because of the high prestige of such titles at that time. Moreover, by showing connection of the rulers with Turks, the titles meant to impress the Arab Muslims with the strength and links of these rulers. The successor of Barhategin is known as Khurasan Tegin Shah, whose name or title not only shows that he was linked to the Turks but also indicate his exaggerated claim of being the ruler of a vast area to the south and north of Hindukush. Since the Turks had mostly been subdued by the time the next Turk Shah ascended the throne in 739, he called himself Fromo Kesaro, a Bactrian form, meaning Ceasar of Rome. The name implied “an anti-Arab programme and propaganda” indicating links with Byzantine Empire (Harmatta 1996: 372). Zhunbils, though believed to have been given Turkish titles, were always known to Arabs by their native titles of Zhunbil, though erroneously recorded as Rutbil. The Chinese also called the rulers of Zabul by names which are restored by Harmatta as Zibil, Zobil and Kuwayama as Zābul indicating no connection with Turkish names. Barhategin and Žunbil were both, at different times, rulers of Zabul and also followers of Zhun, though Kabul Shah or his son

may have accepted Buddhism after becoming rulers of Kabul. They and the dynasties they established in Kabul and Zabul were therefore, neither Turkish nor Hythalite but of indigenous origin with roots in distant Iranian past.

Linguistic evidence indicates that majority of the followers of the cult of Zhun were Afghans and the dialect that was spoken in Zabul was most probably Pashto. Zhunbil and Barhategin or Kabulshah were both followers of Zhun and might have been Afghans. The long and resolute resistance of the Zunbils to the Arab attacks was probably mainly by the “ancestors of the Afghans or Pathans, who supplied troops to fight against Islamic expansion” (Fry 1975: 92). However, in view of the popularity of the cult of Zhun in the region, it is possible that many other people must have become followers of the cult during its long stay south of Hindukush. Some scholars are of the view that the rulers of Kabul and Zabul were Khalaj Turks (Rehman 1979: 42-43; Inaba 2005: 15-16). In view of the roots of these rulers in Iranian past, they cannot be Khalaj Turks unless Khalaj were Afghans as believed by some scholars. Reference to the Kushan lineage of Kabulshahs by Ou-kong and al-Beruni may actually connect the kings of Kabul and Zabul from seventh to ninth centuries to the Kushana dynasty. It is worth noting that Sakas and Afghans presumably moved south through Herat to Sistan and Arachosia in the second century B.C.E. (Morgensteirne 1979: 22-23). Kushanas closely followed them who established their dynasty in the beginning in first century CE with capital at Peshawar. It appears that Huvishka had extended the Kushan rule to East Afghanistan. Many Kushan soldiers and people might have followed and settled and ultimately amalgamated with Afghans and become followers of the god Zhun. After the disintegration of Kushana dynasty, the Zabul rulers probably continued to rule independently or at times under the patronage of Iran.

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