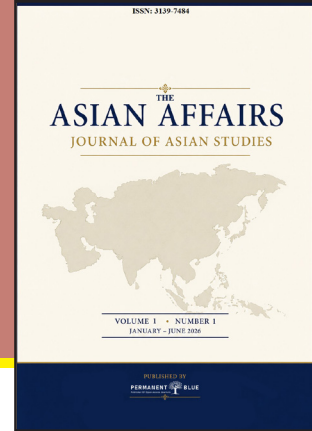




Dhaka's Early Mughal Foundation and Rethinking the Chronology of the Mughal Era's Dhaka Mint: From a Posthumous Akbar Square Rupee

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Abstract: The conventional chronology dates the origin of Mughal Dhaka to 1610 CE under *Subahdar* Islam Khan I. This paper challenges that timeline using an extraordinary numismatic evidence : a rare square silver rupee minted in Dhaka, dated AH 1015 (1606–1607 CE). The coin features the posthumous inscription of Emperor Akbar and was struck early in Jahangir's reign. This material proof shows that Dhaka possessed a functional monetary infrastructure years before the capital shift. The mint's presence stems from Raja Man Singh's strategic headquarters established in Dhaka in 1602 CE to fight the *Baro-Bhuiyan* resistance under Musa Khan. This study demonstrates how numismatics can correct textual omissions in frontier history.

Keywords: Akbar, Bengal, Dhaka, Man Singh, Mint, Square Rupee

Received: 18 June 2026

Revised: 20 July 2026

Accepted: 05 August 2026

Published: 30 September 2026

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Dwip Raj (2026). Dhaka's Early Mughal Foundation and Rethinking the Chronology of the Mughal Era's Dhaka Mint: From a Posthumous Akbar Square Rupee. *The Asian Affairs: Journal of Asian Studies*, 1: 1, pp. 105-109.

1. Introduction

Mughal historiography states that *Subahdar* Islam Khan I founded Dhaka in 1610 CE (p. 1). Textual sources like the *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* claim he moved the capital from Rajmahal and named it Jahangirnagar (p. 1). This conventional timeline treats Dhaka's urban rise as a sudden institutional event (p. 2).

However, court chronicles often overlook slow material transitions on the empire's edge (p. 2). This paper challenges the sudden-origin thesis by introducing an exceptionally rare primary source: a square silver rupee minted directly in Dhaka in AH 1015 (1606–1607 CE) (p. 2). This specific coin bears the name of Emperor Akbar but was struck seven months after his death during the volatile transition of Jahangir's early reign (p. 2).

Operating a high-quality square rupee requires a functional financial infrastructure, access to bullion, and skilled die-engravers (p. 2). The coin proves Dhaka had this active machinery three to four years before Islam Khan I's formal transfer of the provincial capital in 1610 (p. 2). This setup matches the extensive military camp built by Raja Man Singh during his second subahdari between 1601 and 1605 CE (p. 2).

Recent studies still blindly accept the 1610 CE timeline (p. 2). Sharif (2022) used Central Place Theory to examine 138 Mughal sites in Dhaka based entirely on the 1610 CE starting point (pp. 2, 11). Sharif explicitly noted that the indicator tracking the application of precious metals could not be analyzed due to limited museum access (p. 2). This AH 1015 coin fills that exact gap (p. 3). It proves administrative and fiscal centrality existed years earlier than structural models assume (p. 3).

2. Historical Background: The Volatile Bengal Frontier

Mughal control in Bengal was unstable after the nominal 1575 CE annexation (p. 3). Chroniclers called the province *Bulghakkhana* or the "house of turbulence" (p. 3). Factional mutinies, environmental issues, and late pay constantly disrupted the imperial camp, leading to the murder of governor Muzaffar Khan Turbati by his own men (Karim, 1992, pp. 109–116) (p. 3).

To secure the frontier, Akbar sent Raja Man Singh as *Subahdar* in 1594 CE (p. 3). Man Singh built a fortified capital at Rajmahal in 1595 CE but faced heavy naval resistance from Isa Khan (p. 4). Following military stalemates and the death of his elder sons, Man Singh left Bengal for Ajmer in 1598 CE (Sarkar, 1948, pp. 211–213) (p. 4).

Isa Khan died in 1599 CE, and his son Musa Khan renewed the resistance (p. 4). Man Singh returned vigorously to Bengal in 1601 CE (p. 4). He marched directly to the Dacca district, establishing his primary military headquarters there by February 1602 CE (Sarkar, 1948, p. 214) (p. 4). From Dhaka, Man Singh managed a vast intelligence network, built outposts, and checked local rebels (p. 4). When he was recalled to Agra in early 1605 CE, Dhaka was already a functional administrative base (p. 4).

Akbar died on October 15, 1605 CE (p. 4). Jahangir immediately sent Man Singh back to Bengal as governor in November 1605 CE (Sarkar, 1948, p. 215) (p. 4). Man Singh governed until September 2, 1606 CE, when Qutbuddin Khan Koka replaced him (p. 4). Koka was killed within a year, leading to a quick turnover of short-lived governors (Nathan, 1936, p. xiv) (p. 5). This timeline shows that during AH 1015, Man Singh's established military setup was still actively managing the Dhaka base (p. 5).

3. Numismatic Analysis of the AH 1015 Square Rupee

The primary evidence is an exceptionally rare square silver rupee issued directly from Dhaka (p. 5).

3.1 Metrology, Fabric, and Calligraphy

- **Denomination:** Square Silver Rupee (*Jalali Rupiya*) (p. 5).
- **Weight:** 10.85 grams, matching Akbar's standard imperial parameters (p. 6).
- **Catalog Number:** Listed globally as KM# A86.1 (p. 6).
- **Shape:** Square, which required specialized dies and cut flans (p. 6).
- **Calligraphy:** High-quality imperial *Nasta'liq* script (p. 6). The fine die-cutting proves this was an official state issue, not a crude local fake (p. 6).

To check the weight, we can compare it to other genuine Akbar square rupees:

- A Lahore Urdu Zafar Qarin camp mint coin (AH 1000) weighs 11.29 grams (p. 6).
- A Bang (Bengal) mint coin (AH 1010) weighs 11.16 grams (p. 7).

The Dhaka coin's weight (10.85 g) falls within a normal half-gram tolerance margin (p. 6). Wear, circulation, and clipping account for the minor difference (p. 6). It confirms the Dhaka mint followed central imperial standards (p. 7).

3.2 Epigraphic Legends

Obverse: Features the horizontal Islamic *Kalima* declaration inside a square border (p. 8). Margins show traces of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs (p. 8).

Reverse: Carries the imperial title *Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar Bādshāh Ghāzī* (p. 8).

Mint Legend: Bottom register explicitly reads *Zarb Dhaka* (Minted at Dhaka) (p. 8).

Date: Clear Hijri date 1015, matching May 1606 to April 1607 CE (p. 8).



Figure 1: Obverse (left) and reverse (right) of the square silver rupee, *Zarb Dhaka*, AH 1015, struck in the posthumous name of Emperor Akbar (10.85 g; KM# A86.1) (p. 5).



Figure 2: Obverse and reverse of a comparandum Akbar square rupee, *Urdu Zafar Qarin* (camp) mint, AH 1000 (11.29 g; KM# 82.8) (pp. 6-7).



Figure 3: Obverse and reverse of a comparandum Akbar square rupee, *Bang* (Bengal) mint, AH 1010, “Kaab-e Roushan” couplet type with “Jhar” mint mark (11.16 g) (pp. 7-8).

3.3. The Fiscal Logic of the Posthumous Mint

Akbar died in AH 1014 (October 1605 CE) (p. 9). The year AH 1015 began seven months later, matching the end of Man Singh's third subahdari (p. 9).

During this succession crisis, the frontier army at Dhaka was isolated from Rajmahal (p. 9). Since Bengal troops frequently mutinied over late pay, the local command faced a massive crisis (pp. 3, 9). Transporting silver safely across rebel-held rivers was impossible (p. 9).

The local command solved this by running a garrison camp mint (*Urdu*) in Dhaka (p. 9). They used the imperial dies left behind by Man Singh's administration (p. 9). They kept Akbar's name on the coin as a tactical choice (p. 9). In early modern trade, using a deceased, trusted king's name prevented market panic and merchant resistance (p. 9). Strnad (2001) confirms that Akbar's silver coins remained the dominant currency across India for years into Jahangir's reign due to low initial minting by the new emperor (p. 10). The Dhaka coin fits this standard imperial pattern (p. 10).

4. Conclusion

The AH 1015 *Zarb Dhaka* square rupee deconstructs the 1610 CE origin myth (p. 10). Dhaka's mint was not built out of nothing by Islam Khan I (pp. 10-11). It grew from the survival strategies of Raja Man Singh's army between 1602 and 1606 CE (pp. 4, 11).

The coin proves that Dhaka was an official, recognized imperial repository four years before the capital shifted (p. 11). Islam Khan I's 1610 CE decree simply gave formal capital status to an already working financial and military hub (p. 11). Recent archaeological models, such as Sharif (2022), explicitly flag the unavailability of precious-metal artifacts as a limitation (p. 11). The AH 1015 rupee supplies exactly this evidence, pushing Dhaka's history back by several crucial years (p. 11).

Acknowledgments

The author thanks the anonymous peer reviewers of *The Asian Affairs: Journal of Asian Studies*. The author acknowledges using generative AI tools solely for English grammar and layout formatting assistance during drafting.

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