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North America: Dr. Craig Burns

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**New Regional Secretary for North America**

Dr. Craig Burns of Westwood, California is the new Regional Secretary for North America in succession to Mr. Pat Hogan. The Society is grateful to Pat Hogan for his work over many years and appreciates that because of recent pressures he is now handing over to Craig Burns. Will North American members who have not yet paid their 1981 ONS subscriptions please send them to Craig Burns. The ONS membership list for North America is not quite in order, so if you know of any ONS members whose names seem to have been omitted from the mailing list please ask them to contact Craig Burns.

**Members news**

Mr. ..., USA is researching the Peking issues of 1900 and would be grateful to any member who can give him information, or references to any literary sources with which he may not already be familiar. Mr. ... has a collection of about 50 Annamese silver pieces and would welcome some help in differentiating between original strikings and any later fantasy or counterfeit products. Dr. ... has recently obtained his doctoral degree in Paris with a thesis on Almohade coinage (Les monnaies Almohades, aspects ideologiques et economiques). He has a paper in press for Revue Numismatique on Almoravid and Almohade (Mawahhid) coinage and plans to join the Tunisian Archeological Institute.

Occasional Paper no. 15 by Raf van Laere on 'The Larin - Trade money of the Arabian Gulf' is now being circulated to members. The next Information Sheet will be the first part of a paper on Sikh Coinage.

**ONS meeting in London**

The next ONS meeting will be at St. James' Hall, 6 Gloucester Terrace, London W 2. on Saturday 7th. March from 2 pm. until 6 pm.

***M. Robinson and L. A. Shaw, The Coins and Banknotes of Burma***

160 pp. plus 14 plates: including some 300 coin photographs in the text, 2 maps and tables of Burmese script. Thread sewn binding with laminated card covers. Published by the authors: c/o Lancashire and Cheshire Numismatic Society, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester 2. Price £ 10 - 50.

The two authors of this book have brought together much material not previously generally available and from it they have synthesised a convincing picture of Burmese currency from its commencement around AD 200, down to the present day. Their personal knowledge of Burma, its people and its language has given the authors a feeling for their subject that is manifest by their ability to present a complex subject in a manner which reads simply and is clearly presented.

The 18 chapters in the book are introduced by two useful maps and commence with a concise summary of Burmese script, dating and weight systems. The third chapter is concerned with the various forms of 'symbolic' silver currency used in the kingdoms of the Pyu and the Mon peoples, and that struck by the Candra kings of Arakan, during the first millenium AD. Following concise introductions to the various series the coins themselves are catalogued in a manner that is easy to follow. In each case the entry includes a description of the coin design together with the weights of individual specimens and reference to the present location of the

coins cited. The great majority of coin types are illustrated alongside the description. With these early series where relatively little evidence exists on which to base a historical picture and deduction enjoys a more prominent place the authors display a mastery of their sources. They deal with the majority of main coin types, but do not differentiate minor varieties. Inevitably, with the material available to anyone studying this early period, it should cause no surprise that their reconstruction differs in certain respects from views published by other authors; including the present reviewer. But on most such points the conclusions of Robinson and Shaw are just as valid as the views expressed by other scholars.

The same general format is followed throughout the remaining chapters of the book: historical introduction, description of coins, photographs alongside. In the case of more modern coinage the inscriptions are rendered thrice: in Burmese script, in western transliteration and in English translation. Standard contemporary Burmese character forms are used in the text, rather than the exact character forms observed on the coins. Banknotes are likewise considered in their historical context and they are catalogued alongside related coinage. But banknotes are illustrated, mainly in colour, in a series of 14 plates at the end of the book. The text ends with an appendix of valuations and a list of over 100 references to published works.

This is a book that can be recommended to a wide spectrum of readers since it caters equally for those already knowledgeable and for the uninitiated reader who would like to learn something of Burma's history and currency.

M. B. Mitchiner

## The cast copper coinage of Ancient Northern India

by Robert Tye

Uninscribed cast coins are the earliest copper coins of India. These attractive coins circulated throughout most of Northern India, probably from around the reign of Ashoka (272 - 232 BC), until production ceased, perhaps towards the end of the second century BC. I wish here to comment on three aspects of these somewhat neglected coins: i) weight standard, ii) provenance, iii) recorded types.

### i) *Weight Standard*

The coins were certainly intended as more than one denomination, but weight standards appear to have been poorly adhered to, especially amongst the smaller coins, so that it is difficult to reach any firm conclusions concerning their intended weights.

Only four of the coin types can be considered common, types 1, 2, 7 and 8 (see drawings). I recently had the opportunity to examine about 150 coins of type 2 and 60 coins of type 1. I shall confine my further comments to these two types. Mitchiner in 'The Origins of Indian Coinage' makes the important observation that a large proportion of coins of types 1 and 2 are after cast copies. He also ascribes them to two separate weight standards, the quarter Vimsatika of 25 rattis (c. 2.7 gm) for type 1 and the half copper Karshapana of 40 rattis (c. 4.5 gm) for type 2; and suggests that the former were produced during the Mauryan period, the latter under the Sungas.

A close study of the afore mentioned coins showed that, indeed, many of these coins were crudely produced after cast copies. However, a number could be picked out as being the products of a much more sophisticated minting process. These I took to be 'first generation' coins; and it would seem most likely that they were officially produced; also that the residue were unofficial copies, ie. contemporary forgeries. Amongst coins of type 2, a high proportion (25 - 30%) appeared to be official coins, and the weight of these official coins was fairly well regulated at around 3.8 - 4 gm, with a range of 3.5 to 4.3 gm in fine condition. Unofficial coins had a range of weights from 3.5 down to 2.5 gm. However, amongst coins of type 1 only 3 of the 60 coins appeared to be official issues, the vast majority being forgeries. The official coins weighed around 3.8 gm (3.87, 3.77 and 3.75 gm), unofficial coins again ranged from 3.5 down to 2.5 gm.

If I am correct in my observations, and the coins I have examined are representative of what circulated in the ancient period, then any difference in the weight standard of these two coin types is only apparent, they were both issued at around 4.0 grams, probably nominally the  $\frac{1}{2}$  Karshapana of 40 rattis (c. 4.5 gm). Further, I would hypothesise, leaning heavily on Occam's razor, that all these coins are  $\frac{1}{2}$  Karshapanas, or fractions thereof ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{8}$  and  $\frac{1}{16}$ th.). It would also seem that popular demand for a copper coinage at the time exceeded the official supply, and counterfeiters were able to step in and fill the gap to their profit; as has happened several times in subsequent Indian numismatic history.

### ii) *Provenance*

The detailed excavations recently carried out at Sonkh (Mathura) as published by Professor Hartel throw a great deal of new light on Indian numismatics. With respect to the present topic, one type of cast copper coin was reported from this site to the exclusion of all other types, that is type 11. This coin is quite a scarce type and my own observations and discussions with Indian collectors also suggest a Mathura provenance for this coin type. On the basis of the combined evidence it seems that this coin was a civic issue of Mathura produced around 200 BC, during the period of the decline of the Mauryan Empire.

It seems very likely, though it can be less conclusively demonstrated, that many other types were issues of a particular town or district. I would hypothesise : -

Types 13 - 14      Ujjain or district  
Types 15 - 32      Kausambi or district  
Types 9 - 10      unknown, but North-western India

(S. R. Roy has written further on this topic in JNSI 1967, but the lack of illustrations makes his text difficult to interpret)

The question as to whether or not some coins, notably types 1, 2, 7 and 8, are distinct Imperial issues, or merely widely circulated civic issues (of Gangetic origin) remains to be answered.

iii) Recorded Types

I append drawings of 32 types which have come to my attention. In addition to these 32 the following coin types are known: —

- a: Miniaturised versions, presumably smaller denominations, exist of the following — types 1 & 6 (both ½ and ¼ size) and types 3, 7 & 15 (½ size only)
- b: Mirror image versions of types vis 2, 4 and 8 (obverse only), 26 and 27 (reverse only)
- c: A few hitherto well recorded types including BMC nos. 1 and 2 page 85; BMC nos. 1 - 13 page 148 (Mitchiner 'Ancient and Classical World' 4580 - 4582 and 4588 - 4591).

References

Prof. H. Hartel, "The excavations at Sonkh", German scholars in India, vol. II, 1976

M. Mitchiner, "The Origins of Indian Coinage"

