

ORIENTAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

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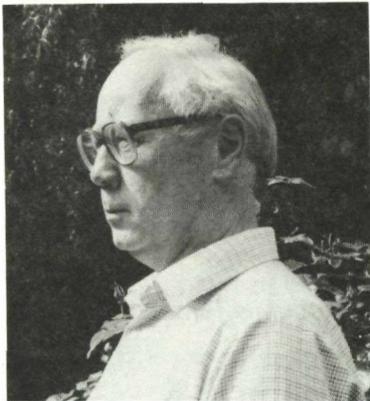
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NEWSLETTER no. 108

September - October 1987



This month's ONS personality is Michael Broome, our Secretary General.

The ONS owes a great deal to Michael, for it was he who back in 1970 provided the driving force for the formation of the society. This he did together with 11 others, eight of whom, it is pleasing to be able to report, are still members.

A civil engineer by profession, Michael currently works at the Department of Transport advising on the environmental effects of highways. This follows a period of 20 years working on construction sites and a spell at the Department of the Environment. His coin collecting began in 1963 with English coins. This stimulated him sufficiently to found the Reading Coin Club the following year (a link he still maintains as the club's current President). He was Museums Secretary of the British Association of Numismatic Societies for several years. His collecting interests spread to Maria Theresa talers after being given one minted at the Royal Mint, and he has written several studies on this subject.

Islamic coins first entered his life in 1969 when he bought five small "brass coins with squiggles on" for £3, only to be offered £5 each for them by the British Museum! (They turned out to be gold fractional dinars of the Saffarids of Sijistan). Since then, Michael's interests have developed according to the availability of material — Saffarids, Ayyubids, Mamluks. He has recently been concentrating on the Seljuks of Rum and other Islamic coinages of Anatolia, and is currently working on a type corpus of Seljuk of Rum coins. Other current, albeit desultory, pursuits are the Latin coins of the Amirs of Mentеше and the Beyliks, and research into the evidence for silver shortages in the Islamic world.

Michael is married with two grown-up children. Other interests include collecting books, Ordnance Survey maps, and Victorian photographs of Berkshire people, and indeed anything to do with Berkshire, the county where he has lived for the last 30 years.

From the Editor

I need articles urgently on all ONS subject areas, but especially on near and middle east series. Members interested in the latter series seem particularly reluctant to put pen to paper, despite the wealth of material. So, how about proving me wrong?!

ONS News

An ONS meeting took place in Tübingen, West Germany, in May, with 20 members present (predominantly collectors of Ottoman coins). It was agreed that another meeting would take place next year on April 30th / May 1st, also probably in Tübingen. Any member unable to attend the May meeting and interested in coming to the next one should contact Lutz Ilisch. More details in next Newsletter.

UK members are reminded that the next ONS meeting in London will take place on Saturday 3 October at 9 Montague Street, WC1, starting 2.15 p.m.

Members' News

1. Lutz Ilisch reports that an introductory course in mediaeval Islamic numismatics will be held during the next winter term at Freiburg University and that he will be responsible for its continuation in the following summer term.
2. Scott Semans is seeking to establish the relative rarity and confirm the existence of a number of 'bullet' coins of the current Bangkok (Chakri) Dynasty of Thailand. He invites anyone having or having seen published in unusual places any scarcer types, including any with multiple marks (i.e. three or more punches), to write for his survey sheet. He also asks if any member knows of good museum collections.
3. Mr. H. A. Groenendijk of Leiden, Netherlands, is also a collector of telephone and telegraph tokens and telephone cards. He would like to correspond with any members with similar interests and would be interested in buying or trading such items.
4. All members should now have received a copy of the revised membership list. Would you please check your individual entries and inform Michael Legg of any errors or changes.



The Royal Asiatic Society

In the last Newsletter we gave some information on the American Numismatic Society. Members may be interested to know about another venerable body, the Royal Asiatic Society, located at 56 Queen Anne Street, London W1M 9LA.

History

The Royal Asiatic Society was founded by the eminent Sanskrit scholar, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, on 15th March, 1823. In August of that year the Society received its first Royal Charter for "the investigation of subjects connected with, and for the encouragement of, science, literature and the arts in relation to Asia."

During the past century and a half many distinguished scholars have been associated with the Society and their work has been presented at its meetings. These have included Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson, a former President, whose research contributed substantially towards the decipherment of Old Persian and other cuneiform scripts, and Sir Richard Burton whose many works on different cultural groups in the Near East and Africa have provided a valuable basis for the development of relevant anthropological studies.

The Royal Asiatic Society in the Modern World

Over the last 30 years improved communications and the rise of new nations have brought the cultures of the world into closer contact than before. Because of this, and because of the fundamental importance of increased understanding between peoples, it is essential that those who have knowledge of different languages, traditions and beliefs should be able to meet for conversation, to hear and give lectures, and to have the necessary facilities and to publish on these subjects. The Royal Asiatic Society supports a wide range of activities and maintains an important library relating to the history, religions, languages, art and customs of the Orient.

Meetings, Publications and Awards

The Society arranges a full programme of lectures and discussions at its London headquarters for Fellows and for other interested visitors. Lectures are sponsored by the Society in other parts of the country. Each year a Journal is published in two issues. The Society also administers special funds for the printing of works of Oriental interest. These include the Oriental Translation Fund for the publication of original translations of Oriental texts and the Monograph Fund for the publication of original work on Oriental subjects. The Society biennially awards a Universities Essay Prize for a selected paper on an Oriental topic, and administers a scholarship and exhibition fund tenable at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London.

The Library

The Society houses a library of some 85,000 books including a Numismatic Section and volumes of periodicals which are consulted by readers from many countries. There are special collections on the different Oriental languages, literature, religions and related subjects and on the history and development of many Oriental countries and culturally-related regions. Books are also lent to other libraries and institutions. The library also contains a large collection of Oriental printed books and manuscripts, the most valuable of which are held on the Society's behalf by national museums. Current periodicals dealing with Oriental subjects are received from other institutions and organisations on an exchange basis.

The Society's Premises

The Society occupies an attractive Georgian house in Queen Anne Street in central London. An early resident of this building, which dates from the middle of the 18th century, was Sir William Duncan, Physician-in-Ordinary to King George III. For a number of years during the 19th century Major-General Lord Alfred Henry Paget, who was an Equerry to Queen Victoria, lived in the house. Extensive internal alterations were carried out during the 19th century, but there are still some fine Georgian features.

During recent years the Society has followed a programme of modernisation and expansion of activities aimed at increasing its contribution to the popular and professional knowledge of Asia.

Membership

Applicants with a professional or serious amateur interest in Asian subjects wishing to become Fellows of the Society should be nominated by one member and seconded by another. One of the recommending members should act on personal knowledge of the candidate. In the case of persons who are not acquainted with an existing member, it is within the power of the Council, on being satisfied as to the application of any candidate, to dispense with these conditions.

Library Associates can be admitted for a period not exceeding five years, and are then entitled to use the Library and borrow books. The procedure for association is the same as that for the election of Fellows.

A new numismatic society in India

New member Mr. R. Krishnamurthy reports that he is President of a recently formed society for the state of Tamilnadu. A meeting took place on 29 April to celebrate the centenary of Elliot's book on South Indian coins. The meeting was well attended and several papers were read.

Recent Publications

1. ONS member, Mr. Slobodan Srećković published recently in Belgrade a book entitled "OSMANLIJSKI NOVAC KOVAN NA TLU JUGOSLAVIJE" – Ottoman coins minted on the territory of Yugoslavia. (206 pages, illus., tabs., a map). It is in Serbocroat with translations of the most important parts into English and Turkish.

This is a complete catalogue of the Ottoman coins struck in the nine mints situated in the Balkan Peninsula (Ottoman Rume-
lia), which now all belong to the Republic of Yugoslavia. The history of every mint place, Bana Luka, Belgrad, Kratova, Kucayne, Nova Birda, Ohri, Sarayevo (Bosna), Usküp and Srebirnice is described in Serbian, English and Turkish. The mint place names are given in Arabic lettering in as many forms as they are actually found on the coins described. There is a short chapter concerning the inscriptions on the coins followed by a detailed catalogue, which includes coins struck during the

reigns of fourteen Ottoman Sultans, commencing with Murad II (1404-1451) and ending with Suleyman II (1642-1691). Every coin is illustrated, both by photographs and extremely clear drawings on which all the inscriptions are legible and can be easily deciphered.

The size, weight and provenance of every coin is indicated, whether from the author's own collection or from eighteen important collections in Yugoslavia, Turkey, Bulgaria, USA, Egypt and East Germany.

The book is printed on a good quality art paper, bound in printed laminated card covers. It is published in a limited edition of 500 numbered copies only. The book is available from the author, Mr. S. Srećković, ...; in USA from NUMISMATA ORIENT ALA, P.O. Box 212, Tenafly, NJ 07670. The price is DM 100 or equivalent.

2. Lutz Ilisch's PhD thesis entitled "Geschichte der Artuqidherrschaft von Mardin zwischen Mamluken und Mongolen 1260 - 1410 AD", 1984, has recently been published as a simple type-script offset-print. Although primarily dealing with the political history of the later Artuqids, it makes heavy use of otherwise unpublished numismatic data. Interested ONS members may purchase a copy directly from Lutz (see address above) for DM18 within Germany or DM20 elsewhere.

3. Cüneyt Ölçer has presented the ONS with a copy of his new book: Sultan Murad V ve Sultan Abdülhamidli Dönemi, Osmanlı Madeni Paraları. It is available from Michael Broome on loan (for 50p in stamps in the UK).

4. Trésors Monétaires vol. IX 1987 includes an article by Arlette Nègre on "Le Trésor Islamique d'Aurillac" – 49 gold dinars from North African and Spanish mints including two from the rare mint of Jayyan, near Granada.

5. Spink Numismatic Circular continues to serialise Oliver Cresswell's article on the Bullet coinage of Siam, while the July 1987 issue also includes an article by Samuel Lachman on The Ibrahimî, an Egyptian gold coin of the 16th - 18th centuries.

6. A number of publications are mentioned in the latest International Numismatic Newsletter. Items of potential interest to ONS members are:

- i. Arif, Aida S. – A Treasury of Classical & Islamic coins: The Collection of Amman Museum. London 1986.
- ii. Bank al-Maghrib, Rabat. – Banque du Maroc, 1987. (Includes "Le passé monétaire marocain", an illustrated history of the coinage).
- iii. Rodríguez Lorente, Juan, and Tawfiq ibn Hafiz Ibrahim. – Numismática de Ceuta musulmana. Madrid. The Authors, 1987.
- iv. Rodríguez Lorente, Juan. – Numismática de la Murcia musulmana. Madrid 1984. (Editorial Vico & Seqarra, Lope de Rueda 8, 28009 Madrid, Spain).
- v. Mukherjee, B. N. – Kushana Silver Coinage. Calcutta 1982.

7. Members collecting Chinese coins may be interested in the forthcoming People's Republic of China Year Book 1987, due for publication later this year. This book is the only official publication carrying illustrated comprehensive records of all major events in China in the previous years. It gives factual accounts of China's politics, economy, finance, military affairs, foreign relations, science and technology, culture, education and public health, sports, society and people's life. It contains data and reports on the country's history, major events and people in the news as well as laws and regulations related to foreign trade and overseas investment in China, etc.

Running to some 800,000 words, China Year Book published in both Chinese and English annually in Hong Kong is compiled by the Year Book Editorial Department of Xinhua News Agency and put out jointly by Xinhua Publishing House in Beijing and the Hong Kong-based New China News Ltd.

Beginning this year, a special section covering the 29 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in China's mainland as well as the 14 coastal open cities and four special economic zones has been added to acquaint overseas investors with the economic development, foreign trade and investment climate in these regions whose ties are growing with the outside world in recent years.

The price is HK\$ 650 or US\$ 95 per copy (including postage). Cheques or money orders should be made payable to: The Business Office of the Bank of China, Beijing, Account no. 50100148, and sent to: Mr. Deng Hongkai, ...

8. A new bulletin for Spanish Islamic numismatics, Jarique, has begun publication under the patronage of the numismatic group of that name. The journal will also include articles on North African coinage with Spanish connections. Subscription is US\$ 10 a year; enquiries to the editor, Sr. Juan Ignacio Saenz-Diez,...

Museum News

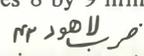
1. Since 18 February this year the coin collection of the Kestner Museum in Hannover has been housed in its own coin room. This museum contains the largest collection of Chinese and Japanese coins in Germany. Some 2000 coins and medals of all periods from the museum's collections are on display.

2. The Bank Negara Malaysia is setting up a Money Museum in one of the tower blocks of the bank's headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. The museum is due to open some time in 1988. The following themes are planned at this stage: primitive money; money of the pre-colonial period, of the colonial period, and of the post-colonial period; Bank Negara Malaysia currency issues; world currencies.

3. To honour the memory of Paul Balog, the Israel Museum will hold a conference on Islamic numismatics, weights and related subjects, accompanied by an exhibition of Dr. Balog's collection which was bequeathed to the Museum after his death in 1983.

A Half Anna of Aurangzeb by Dilip Shah



Until recently the half anna or 1/32nd rupee of Aurangzeb was known only from the Akabarabad mint. Another specimen, from the Lahore mint has now been found. This coin weighs 360 mg. and measures 8 by 9 mm. On the obverse it bears the word *Alamgir*  and the date 1109. The reverse reads *Zarb Lahore 42* 

The style of this coin and thickness of its flan would suggest that it is possibly a nisar, or scatter coin, though it certainly does not rule out the possibility of its having been used in commercial transactions.

While publishing this tiny coin, I would like to take the opportunity to note all such 1/32nd rupees known to date. The earliest Mughal half anna or 1/32nd rupee is that of Jahangir¹ minted at Agra and dated 1034/19. Of Shah Jahan, no coin of this denomination is known. Of Aurangzeb, only two specimens have come to light – one of Akbarabad² and the other published in this paper. From Shah Alam I onwards none has been found until Muhammad Shah's reign. Muhammad Shah, Ahmad Shah and Alamgir II issued this denomination from Khujista Bunyad mint, whereas coins in the name of Shah Alam II and Akbar II are known from Hyderabad mint.³ I have also encountered one such half anna in a private collection in South India, bearing the name of Shah Alam II and the mint name Gadwal. [Editor's note: some in Editor's collection too.]

Notes

1. Included in the paper read by P. P. Kulkarni at the 10th International Numismatic Congress, London, 1986, *Coin names in Mughal Chronicles etc.*
2. *Standard Catalogue of world coins*, 12th edition, p.1181, type 306.
3. Paruck F. D. J., 'Unpublished Mughal Coins', *Numismatic Supplement XXXVII*, pp.17f.

A Rupee in the name of the Moghal Emperor Ahmed Shah Bahadur from Koilkunda by Dr. S. K. Punshi

Koilkunda (or Kovilkunda) is a small town with an old fort located in the Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. During the sixteenth century this area and the fort were under the control of the Qutb Shahs of Golkonda. These were eventually ousted by the Moghal armies of Aurangzeb during the latter's Deccan campaign. When in 1724 Nizam-ul-Mulk assumed authority in the Deccan, Koilkunda along with much other territory became part of the Nizam's domains and remained so under the rule of successive rulers of the Hyderabad State.

Two coins of this mint in the name of Alamgir II have previously been published by Khwaja Muhammed Ahmed (RADN, 1929-30, p.54 and NS XLIII, p.28). The second one of these bears regnal year Ahad but no AH date. No other coin from this mint had come to light until the present coin and I am indebted to Prashant Kulkarni for determining its identification.

Obverse

حاکم
مبمنت
جلوس
کولکنده



Sikkah zad dar jehan be fazl illah
Shah Alam Panah Ahmed Shah
King Ahmed Shah, Refuge of the World,
struck coin in the world by the grace of God

Reverse

احمد شاه
فضل ال عالم
سکه زدر جهان



Jalus maimanat manus
Zarb Koilkunda sanah . . .
Struck at Koilkunda
in the year . . . of tranquil prosperity

Weight 11.3 grams. Diameter 23 mm.

This coin bears an "Alam Panah" couplet similar to that found on some of Ahmed's coins of Kashmir, and those of Imtiyaz-gadh. On the latter coins the word 'zar' (gold) replaces 'jehan'. The coin is dated AH 1166. At the bottom of the reverse a figure 6 can be seen. This may be the 6th regnal year of Ahmed Shah (the date fits), but as there seems to be another character or digit to the left of the 6, it may be a repetition of the AH date. Further research needs to be undertaken to ascertain why coins were struck at this place during the brief period evidenced by the published coins and under whose precise authority.

Oubeh: A Hitherto Unrecorded Islamic Mintplace by Steve Album



The city of Oubeh (Awbah in classical Arabic transliteration) lies on the Herat-Rud some 55 miles upstream (eastward) from Herat. It has never been a place of great importance, but was located along one of the roads that led eastward from Herat. During the Timurid and early Safavid periods (15th-16th centuries), it was mentioned occasionally in the contemporary sources, and was the chief town (qasaba) of a district, known in Timurid times as Herat-Rud¹, in the 17th century as the district of Shahfilan and Awbah (Oubeh)². The place is still to be found on the maps, either as Oubeh or Owbeh, but is no longer situated along a principal roadway.

I have recently acquired a Timurid silver tanka countermarked at Oubeh by the Shaybanid (Uzbek) ruler, Muhammad Shaybani. The host coin is a rather worn and very ordinary tanka of Husayn Bayqara struck at Astarabad between AH 896 and AH 903, but without visible date (cf. BMC 7:126). The countermark, which is bold and clear, may be deciphered as 'Adl Sarmuzd Awbah', "a full-valued sarmuzd coin of Oubeh". The countermark is framed by a flowerbud-shaped border, and appears in the following form: عدل سمرزد اوبه

The actual form of the countermark is reproduced in the drawing above.

Unfortunately, the countermark raises a number of difficult questions, viz., the meaning of 'adl as a coin term, the correct interpretation and meaning of the coin-name *sarmuzd*, and the dating of the countermark. Since I have developed some thoughts on these matters, this is an appropriate place for a short discussion of all three.

The Persian word 'adl can be roughly translated as 'justice', 'equality', 'equalization', 'making equal or balancing, as weight'. The last of these is appropriate to its use as a coin term, and I would propose it be rendered as "full-valued", or more grammatically, "a full-valued coin". One of the most common countermarks that includes this term is the Safavid 'adl *Shahi*, which I would interpret as "a full-valued Shahi (coin)". This countermark appears on a variety of host coins, whose weights typically range from about 3.5 to somewhat over 5 grams, whence it appears that the purpose of the countermark was to revalue all of the various host coins at the value of a *shahi* coin of the then current standard value. When followed by a city name (with or without the denominational name of *shahi*), it would indicate a full-valued shahi produced by a mint in that city. Thus the present coin may be read as a full-valued *sarmuzd* coin of Oubeh.

But what is the meaning of *sarmuzd*? Lowick suggested a possible reading of the term as *sharmard*, based on the observation that a pyramid of three dots was engraved above the *sin* or *shin* in one instance.³ Since the dot pyramid is found but once or twice out of hundreds of coins, it is more probable that the pyramid is merely an ornament, and not intended as part of any letter. It is clear from the context that Lowick was unconvinced of his own reading, and considered the matter still an open question. It has occurred to me that perhaps the 4th letter should be interpreted as *za* instead of *ra*, and the entire word as *sarmuzd*, which could very roughly be translated as the "top or cream of the remuneration", conveying the idea that the *sarmuzd* coin was "good" for any sort of payment, salary, or remuneration. Since some other coin terms of the period seem to invoke such qualities as "full-value", "prosperity (*behbud*)", etc., this interpretation of *sarmuzd* seems plausible. It is unfortunate that no contemporary references to the term have thus far been discovered.

The formula 'adl *sarmuzd* occurs together with a city name in several countermarks, for example, with Bukhara on a tanka of Husayn Bayqara struck in 896 at Herat, and with Nishapur on an early Safavid coin (presumably of Isma'il I) struck at Astarabad.⁴ In my collection, there are a number of additional pieces: (1) Herat, overstruck on a worn coin with earlier countermarks of Husayn and his son Badi' al-Zaman (ruled 911-914 at Herat); (2) Nishapur, on a late Timurid coin of Samarqand, probably struck by Sultan Ahmad (873-899); (3) Turbat, on a tanka of Husayn struck at Herat between 895 and roughly 910. A small number of additional specimens have appeared in the trade in recent years, but I have no record of them.

Even in our small sample of six pieces, the range of undertypes enables us to suggest a tentative dating of the countermark. It is my opinion that all of the *sarmuzd* countermarks were applied during a very short period of time, during the reign of Muhammad Shaybani (905-916), after his occupation of Herat in 913, the apparent first year of Shaybanid coinage. Aside from Oubeh, the represented mints, Herat, Bukhara, Nishapur, and Turbat, are all known Shaybanid mints for the reign of Muhammad.⁵ Moreover, Turbat was only under Shaybanid control during the last three years of Muhammad's reign, and once again briefly during the 930's (Kuchkunji and Abu Sa'id). Since all of the host types can be dated to no later than 913, it seems reasonable to place the entire countermarked group during the last three years of Muhammad's reign, i.e., during the years 913-916.

According to the *Mihman Nama-yi Bukhara*, after Babur had seized Qandahar in 913 and assigned it to his brother Nasir, Muhammad Shaybani, who had just recently established himself at Herat, raised up an army and marched against Nasir in Qandahar. Since he set out in the heat of summer, he took the mountain route, passing eastward from Herat through Oubeh. Muhammad barely paused at Oubeh, for he traversed the entire distance from Herat to Qandahar in just over eight days, whence we can assume that the coins could not have been produced during his sojourn.⁶ In all probability, the coins were produced either just before his appearance, as part of a general levy for the expenses of the campaign, or shortly afterwards, also for the same purpose. Equipment for engraving the countermarking dies and for producing the pieces may have been carried along with the royal entourage (usually signing as "Urdu" on the coins of the Shaybanids), or requisitioned from some local gold- or silversmith.

The present countermark provides a clear example of the precision to which most 15th and 16th century Islamic countermarks can and should be dated. Although there is very little direct evidence, it seems that in those centuries, primarily in greater Iran, coins were frequently countermarked for the purpose of raising revenue. In all probability, there was a fee for the application of the countermark, without which the coins in circulation would be substantially discounted for the payment of debts to the state. The fee was in effect a tax on wealth, and would have been used primarily in extraordinary circumstances, when the state was faced with an unexpectedly large expenditure, such as the financing of a major military action, either offensive or defensive. Two such opportunities occurred during the last three years of Muhammad Shaybani's reign, one in 913 for the defence against Babur and the reconquest of Qandahar, the second in 916, on the eve of the ultimately successful Safavid invasion of the western provinces of the nascent Shaybanid kingdom.

Notes

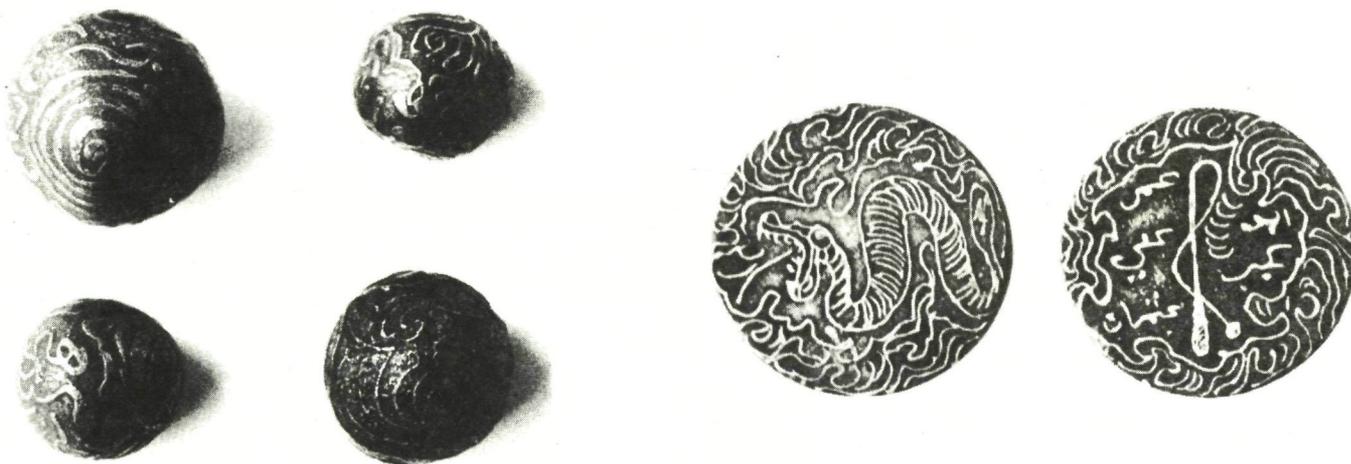
- 1 So it is described by Hafiz-i Abru (D. Krawulsky, *Hurasan zur Timuridenzeit nach dem Tarih-e Hafez-e Abru. II. Übersetzung und Ortsnamenkommentar*, Wiesbaden 1984, p.29).
- 2 Quoted from the 'Abbas-Nameh of Mohammad Taher Vahid-e Qazvin, by K. M. Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens in 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1966, p.16.
- 3 Lowick, "Shaybanid Silver Coins", *Numismatic Chronicle*, 7th ser., vol. 6 (1966), p.271.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.262. The Astarabad coin appears to be of the early type struck at that city in 910 by one of Husayn's sons, then in rebellion against his father. There are two such coins in my collection, one with a clear date 910, overstruck at Herat in 911, probably by Badi' al-Zaman.
- 5 For the first three, *ibid.*, p.272. For Turbat, there is a specimen in the author's collection.
- 6 Fadl Allah ibn Ruzbahan Khunji, *Mihman Nama-yi Bukhara*, ed. Dr. Manuchehr Sotudeh, Tehran 1341, p.184.

In Newsletter 72 (June 1981) Joe Cribb wrote an article entitled "Some Numismatic Fantasies from Indonesia". This described and discussed a series of iron balls and discs of various weights and sizes etched with inscriptions and designs, which had previously been described as iron bullet money from Borneo. The author rejected this description and postulated some form of fantasy items (probably religious) of recent fabrication. At around the same time, ONS member P. R. Bauquis was beginning his own research into this subject. In 1984 he published in Archipel 28 an article entitled "Une étrange histoire de talismans" which provided some definitive answers. This article is being reproduced here in translation in this and the next Newsletter by kind permission of the author.

A Strange Tale of Talismans – Part 1. by P. R. Bauquis

Looking through the stock of certain dealers, I came across some iron bullets and plaques engraved with designs and Arabic, Chinese and even Javanese characters. My curiosity aroused, I determined to find out the origin and purpose of these objects. The ensuing research taught me a lot about people's mentalities, whether those of dealers, specialists or other actors, foreign or Indonesian, who became involved in this instructive game of detection.

It all started in June 1981, when, rummaging through a second-hand dealer's in Balikpapan, the main town of East Kalimantan, I noticed a hand-full of rather rusty iron balls, varying in size from a cherry to a walnut, and which were engraved with geometric figures (spirals, dashes, dots, lines, etc.), certain worn designs (stars, faces, dragons etc.) and in some cases Arabic inscriptions. Beside these balls there were some flat pieces of the same material, but with more varied designs. These were about 5 cm in diameter and the engraving revealed a curious mixture of Chinese and Arabic inspired designs. The technique used to effect the designs and inscriptions seemed at first sight to be that of etching. The merchant assured me that they were Dayak "bullets" (projectiles) and money. This assertion did not surprise me as everything the second-hand dealers in Balikpapan sell to passing tourists, i.e. mainly expatriate oilmen, is described as Dayak. As I had been particularly interested in numismatics for many years and found these objects aesthetically attractive, I needed no further stimulus to decide to research them more seriously.



A Long Search

Back in Jakarta I began to ask several people about the origin and nature of these objects but did not get any worthwhile information.

A search through the literature at first gave no information either and I was surprised that no work or article published during the colonial period appeared to mention them. In particular, the few works dealing with Indonesian numismatics were silent on the subject, including the book by H. C. Millies (*Recherches sur les Monnaies des Indigènes de l'Archipel Indien et de la Péninsule Malaise*, The Hague 1871) which mentioned nothing like them, though it is still today the reference work in this area. Eventually, I found a publication which gave a description accompanied by numerous photographs which left no doubt that here were the 'balls' in question. In fact the book "Oriental Coins & their Values – the World of Islam", by Michael Mitchiner, 1977, devotes three pages (474-6) to them with numerous photographs, accompanied by the following note:

"Iron currency of the north-east Indonesian Sultanates"

Small rectangular iron bars were used as currency in Brunei and other parts of Borneo and the metal was both mined and valued in other east Indonesian islands. The iron specimens considered here are irregularly rectangular to spherical in shape and bear Arabic inscriptions. One group was sent to the west from Singapore and the other group from Hong Kong, the former was said to have been found in Borneo. Their legends resemble those found on certain Indonesian kris used for currency purposes; their shape could be conceived as a development from the "bean" shaped coins of Srivijaya, analogous to the evolution of the "bullet" coinage used in more westerly regions.

This note is followed by the description of the specimens depicted:

"Spinning top shape with pointed ends and a cylindrical waist. The faceted apices bear ornamental spirals. The waist has an inscription in Arabic letters. The designs are etched, not engraved, struck or cast. . ."

Because Mitchiner mentions only the spheroid items and not the flat types, I wrote to him to inform him of their existence, and, above all, to ascertain his sources and references. His response indicated that he was clearly not at all sure of his attribution and that these famous coins were perhaps nothing of the sort. He put forward a new hypothesis according to which they could be temple money (religious offerings) and asked me by way of conclusion to try to research the subject in order to confirm or not the interpretation published in his work. This response naturally aroused my curiosity and provided further stimulus for my research.

The latter in due course enabled me to confirm two things: it appeared first of all that none of the dealers or amateur collectors I questioned seemed to have the faintest idea of the true nature, age or origin of this "money". Equally, it appeared that these objects had spread around the world as recently as 1977 and that dealers were offering them in their lists with the same attribution as Mitchiner, whilst a few numismatists were taking an interest. Here are a few examples:

- "France Numismatique", a company located in Mulhouse, offered in its catalogue no. 191 of 15 November 1981 some "iron money from Borneo with geometric designs" and referred to Mitchiner.
- An American dealer, a specialist in primitive money, offered similar 'coins' in his lists (ref. World Coins, Scott Semans, list no.40) and also referred to Mitchiner. It should be noted that this inquisitive and honest dealer withdrew these items from his catalogue soon after, when he doubted their authenticity. He also sent me an interesting letter on this subject for which I was very grateful.
- The "European Union to search for, collect and preserve primitive and curious money" in Landau, West Germany, wrote to me saying that they were familiar with the Borneo iron balls but that "their use and origin remained obscure".
- Another specialist I consulted, the Rev. Richard Plant, wrote that in his view the spheroid objects were money whilst the disc-shaped items were religious medallions to be classed with temple tokens or talismans. He also reported having acquired examples of the disc-shaped ones at the 1979 New York coin fair.
- A specialist, working as an expert in Far Eastern art at a large London auction-house, declared that in his view these objects "probably came from Cheribon" and "would date from the 19th century".

Thus, researching the literature and consulting a fairly large number of competent individuals brought little enlightenment. The publication, at my request, of a photograph by the magazine Arts of Asia (September-October 1982) brought little better result.

With my curiosity still unsatisfied, I decided to carry out parallel research in the field by gathering as large a number and variety as possible of these objects to see whether studying the engravings and inscriptions could provide an answer to the questions: who had made the artefacts? when? and for what use precisely?

The Jakarta dealers became quickly aware of my interest and came to offer me some *new* types, whilst I was also able to acquire specimens in Singapore. But it was during a trip to Surabaya in September 1981, that I was able to make the finest harvest of these things. The town harboured a veritable mine of them. Several dealers offered them to me; they came in a procession to the hotel as soon as news of my interest had done the rounds. The study of this abundant crop revealed several elements:

- the scale of dimensions and weights was much wider than I thought (for the spheroid types, it went from the size of a small pea to that of a bowl used in pétanque, and for the flat types, the diameter went from that of a French coin to that of a dessert plate.
- the forms were also much more varied than I originally thought: rectangular plaques entirely covered with religious inscriptions in Arabic, spear-head shaped objects with inscriptions and designs of Chinese inspiration were added to the balls and discs (which however remained the most common);
- in addition to the "Arab" and "Chinese" characteristics, I came across three very fine balls engraved with Javanese legends and with drawings of people, including an easily recognisable Semar.

The study of all these objects left me rather discouraged in view of the number of contradictory indications:

- the overlapping of Arab, Chinese and Javanese cultural characteristics seemed inexplicable;
- the 'money' hypothesis seemed untenable (no consistent weight standard among the 150 or so pieces collected at that time; large pieces too unwieldy for such a purpose, the absence of earlier documentation etc.);
- the 'projectile' hypothesis seemed even less likely, for all these objects appeared to be related and it was difficult to see how flat, rectangular and circular shapes or the 'spear-heads' could correspond with such a definition;
- the 'temple money' hypothesis or 'talisman' remained the most plausible, but this hypothesis needed to be confirmed by the answer to three fundamental questions: who? when? and precisely what for?

The 1920 French Indo-China Fiasco Crises by John L. Pieratt

Between 1914 and 1920 minting of the French Indo-China piastre had stopped because of international crises and the volatile silver market. In fact little silver became available for export to French Indo-China. In 1916, because of this shortage, the silver price began to rise as did the value of the piastre. By 1919 there was a critical shortage of small silver coins. This in turn led to a scarcity of piastres. In order to recognise the rise in value of silver, the government thought up the idea of lowering the value marked on the coins. By a decree of 18 October 1919, it created the 1919 10 centimes and 20 centimes test patterns. Coins were countermarked 0,700 - 0,680 - 0,664 - 0,632. The 1919 10 and 20 centimes also exist as 'essais'. Fractional paper currency was issued in an attempt to relieve the continuing shortage. There soon followed another decree, of 18 January 1920, which prescribed the striking of 10 and 20 centimes coins with 40% silver to discourage hoarding. These coins were to be fabricated at the San Francisco mint, and were to continue to bear the Barre image of Seated Republic and the French Indo-China circular legend. Because of the haste of production and the volatile market, the coins were struck with no indication of value or weight, nor with any engraver's or mint mark on them. Not surprisingly, they were badly received and had to be quickly withdrawn from circulation. This fiasco caused the Bank of Indo-China to issue more small value notes. The withdrawn 10 and 20 centimes coins without value were destroyed and any surviving specimens today are very rare. The authorities had in fact considered countermarking the value in Hanoi to save destruction and subsequent reproduction costs, but decided against it. The new 1920 10 and 20 centimes coins had the value added by the San Francisco mint. The low tonage pressure used, however, resulted in soft strikes for these coins and the 1921, 1922 piastres. The mint may have lowered the tonage to increase the life of a die-set because they only had so many dies to complete the total mintage. Heaton mint used a higher tonage, which resulted in far better strikes. The San Francisco mint produced not only the coinage already mentioned but also the 1920 and 1921 centime, the 1940 10 centimes in cupro-nickel, and the 1941 10 and 20 centimes in cupro-nickel. After each mintage a French official was present to observe the dies being destroyed.

French Indo-China survived the 1920 Fiasco with honour. A decree of 12 January 1921 prescribed the production of 10 and 20 centimes coins of 0,680 fineness. Because the price of silver had begun to fall by this time, the piastre remained at 0,900 fineness. A decree of 1 March 1923 required any remaining 10 and 20 centimes coins above 0,680 fineness to be withdrawn from circulation.