

ORIENTAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

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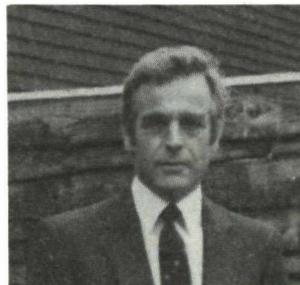
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NEWSLETTER 110

January - February 1988



C. M. WEBDALE

Colin Macdonald Webdale, universally known as Tony, died recently at the early age of 48 and members will have seen the brief announcement in the last Newsletter. With his friendly manner, wide command of languages and varied numismatic interests Tony was well known throughout the international numismatic world although, as far as can be discovered, he published virtually nothing of his many studies. Although a Londoner, through and through, Tony was a member of the Bedford Numismatic Society and had lived in Bedford for the last 20 years where he delighted in entertaining visitors from far and wide at his home on the Devon Park Estate. He was introduced to coins at an early age when his father gave him some Roman coins and went on to acquire a life-long interest in jetons. But his absorbing passion came to be the many series produced by the Islamic dynasties, particularly those from the Yemen, for which he built up a strong collection of Rassid and Rasulid pieces. However, all Islamic coins held a fascination for him and he was always eager to add a new ruler or mint to his collection. He developed a simple technique for recording coins using rubbings and his lists of duplicates, all illustrated by rubbings, still provide a clear record even when reproduced as a xerox. He joined ONS in 1970 soon after it was formed and took on the task of Regional Secretary for Asia, Africa and Australasia in 1975. During the next 5 years he built up the Region and made many friends but he happily handed over to Gilles Hennequin, saying, "I don't want to be a numismatic administrator for too long, I need to get back to my coins now". A clear statement of where his heart lay.

Tony was just as enthusiastic about his work with British Telecom where he was concerned at a crucial stage in the development of a market for radio-paging. He was quietly proud of the many friends he had in the organisation who helped him to sort out some of the day-to-day problems involved. In recent years a move to a new office at Euston enabled him to spend many lunchtimes in the library of the Royal Numismatic Society. Here, he was often to be found identifying and writing up his collection which he was beginning to expand into the area of Chinese cash. With access both to the reference books and to a xerox machine, Tony was able to build up a comprehensive working library of material otherwise impossible to acquire and to become extraordinarily knowledgeable in his own specialist areas.

His wife, Christianne, who will be well known to many members, has been left with a small son, Richard, to bring up on her own. Our thoughts go with her in the difficult months ahead. Many others will also miss his smiling welcome and genuine interest in all aspects of numismatics.

MRB

ONS News

1. The first ONS meeting of the South Asian region was held on 26 September in Bombay in the residence of Dr. S. K. Punshi. More than twenty members attended and there was much good discussion on how the Society should function in the region.
2. We are pleased to report that Dr. P. L. Gupta has been awarded the American Numismatic Society's Huntington Medal for 1987.
3. Occasional Paper no. 22 entitled *Mystery Mints of the Umayyads* by Michael Bates is due for publication in the new year. The next paper will feature the abstracts of the papers given at the Oriental Sessions of the International Numismatic Congress held in London September 1986.

4. The ONS is looking into the possibility of staging an Oriental Coin Fair each year in London, starting October 1988, to coincide with the BNTA Coinex, i.e. at a time when many numismatists and collectors from many countries are already in London. The size of venue and cost would depend on the number of dealers who are prepared to participate. The Fair would be limited to dealers in Oriental coins and paper money. All dealers who would be interested in principle in taking a table at such a venture are invited to write to the Editor with their views, comments and statement of interest.

5. 1990 and 1991 will see the 20th and 21st birthdays, respectively, of the ONS. This would provide a good opportunity for Regional Secretaries to organise special events to celebrate the occasion. For example, here in London, we are thinking about organising an Oriental Numismatic Convention with a seminar, 'workshops' and perhaps even a bourse. Planning is as yet at a very early stage, but as time has a habit of flying past, it is as well to begin the thinking process *now*.

In view of the high proportion of errors in the current List of Members, in nearly all Regions, a reprint will be provided after your Membership Secretary is satisfied that all necessary amendments have been made to the database.

Auction News

1. The next Spink - Taisei coin auction will take place on 11 February 1988 at the Hotel New Otani, Singapore. The sale includes a fine collection of Thai coins, as well as Annamese, Japanese, Chinese and other coins from India and South East Asia. Catalogues are available from Spink & Son Ltd., 5, 6, 7 King Street, St. James's, London SW1Y 6QS or from Taisei Stamps & Coins Pte Ltd, Liang Court Complex, 177 River Valley Road, Singapore 0617.
2. We understand that the two large Moghal gold coins mentioned in Newsletter 109 went unsold at the auction on 9 November.

Other News

1. Members interested in Byzantine coins will be interested to note that Simon Bendall, who for many years worked for the London firm of A. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd., has recently moved to California to become a Vice-President of Numismatic Fine Arts. Simon is particularly well known for his expertise in Byzantine coins and during his time at Baldwins also dealt with Islamic and certain ancient oriental series.
2. The 75th Annual Conference of the Numismatic Society of India was held on 13-15 December in Patna. We congratulate the Society on its 75 years of service to Indian numismatics and hope that it will continue to flourish for many more years.

The Royal Collection of Coins & Medals, Copenhagen

During a recent visit to Copenhagen, your Editor took the opportunity to visit the Royal Collection housed in the National Museum. Much of the collection is stored in the coin and medal department away from public gaze, but in the nearby public gallery there is a very interesting display of Greek and Roman coins, and a comprehensive display of Danish coins from mediæval times to the present day. Several hoards from different periods are also on show. The main collection has some good oriental material that will be of interest to ONS members. Foremost amongst this is probably the William Bramsen collection of Japanese coins, containing more than 200 gold coins, 300 silver coins and a great many bronze coins. The Indian section is not extensive but contains some fine rarities. Islamic coins found in Denmark also feature in the collection, as do other oriental series that time did not allow to be viewed during the all too brief visit. The National Museum has kindly provided the ONS with a booklet about the life of the aforementioned William Bramsen and his collection. This is in Danish, with a short English summary. Any member wishing to borrow it can apply to the Editor. Any member planning to visit Copenhagen and desirous of viewing the collection should write either to the Keeper of Coins, Jørgen Steen Jensen, or to Anne Kromann at the Royal Collection of Coins & Medals, National Museum, Frederiksholms Kanal 12, DK-1220 Copenhagen K, Denmark.

New and Recent Publications

1. News from Morocco. The Banque du Maroc has recently published a three volume corpus of Alawite coinage (AH1075/AD1664 to the present day). The corpus, printed in an edition of 4000 copies, comprises 1500 pages in all, 25 coloured plates, 44 black & white plates and a map of the mint places. Volume one deals with the monetary history of the Alawite dynasty, volume two the actual currency, and volume three contains the index and illustrations. Also available is a one volume corpus of Idrisid dirhems. This comprises 410 pages, 39 plates and a print-run of 1500 copies. Prices: The Alawite Corpus US\$250; the Idrisid Corpus US\$50. Interested members are invited to write to Banque du Maroc, Musée Numismatique, BP 445, Rabat, Morocco. Other volumes in preparation are: 1. Morocco's History through its Currency; 2. A catalogue of Almoravid currency; 3. A corpus of the Sa'adid currency.

2. Oxford University Press, India are publishing next March a volume entitled "Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India". It is hoped to review this book in a later Newsletter. No other details are as yet available.
 3. Spink Numismatic Circular for November 1987 contained part 6 of O. D. Cresswell's 'The Bullet Coinage of Siam' and a short, illustrated, item by K. D. Wilford entitled 'A Lead Baleseal of Penang'.
 4. Stephen Album's list no. 53 contains the second part of his paper on Iranian Silver Denominational Names.
 5. Issue no. 2 of *Jarique* (July 1987) includes brief information on papers presented at the II symposium of medieval coinage of the Iberian area, a synopsis of a recent graduation thesis entitled 'The Hispano-arabic coins as an expression of Islamic life in the peninsula' and the following short articles:
 - i. Clarifications and corrections of "A Dowry at the time of the Caliphs" by Josep Pellicer i Bru.
 - ii. A new obverse legend on a dirhem of AH 366 by Juan Ignacio Sáenz-Díez. This relates to a dirhem of the Cordoba Caliphs with the additional word "wahdahu" on the obverse.
 - iii. A find of Nazarite coins in the castle of Tabernas, by Salvador Fontenla Ballesta. Ten coins of semidirhem Nasri type were found during excavations in the castle of Tabernas.
- The first *Jarique* meeting was held in Zaragoza in 1986. The second meeting is planned for the spring of 1988 in Lérida. Michael Broome can provide xerox copies of the above articles (in Spanish) at cost.

More on the May 1987 ONS meeting in Tübingen

Hans Wilski has published summaries of the papers given at this meeting. These are given below in translation.

Stephan Heidemann: Events in Syria 1260/1261 in the light of an early Mamluke silver hoard

Using as a basis a new silver hoard of 586 coins from the period soon after the Mongol invasion of 1260, the speaker described the events and the problems surrounding the numismatic history of North Syria at this time. This period and region was of particular importance for the whole Islamic world because it was here that the decisive events took place that finally led to the transfer of the Caliphate from Baghdad to Cairo. In the first part of his talk, Herr Heidemann attempted, by means of a very painstaking die-study, to reconstruct the mint output for the years just before the Mongol conquest (1252-1260), of the mints Aleppo (Syria) and Mardin (North Mesopotamia) belonging to a single currency area. In so doing, he pointed out certain phases of increased output in different years in Aleppo and Mardin, which perhaps coincided with the movement of refugees from the Mongols and the changing of the articles of value they had brought with them into legal tender. In the second part, the speaker gave a more detailed account of a group of coins in the hoard. This group could be assigned to the rebellion of the Mamluke 'Condottieri' Shams-ud-din Aqush al-Barli in Aleppo in 1261. During the rebellion, whilst he formally recognised Baybars, the Mamluke ruler of Egypt, he allied himself with the Abbasid al-Hakim bi-amri'llah, who had managed to escape from the destruction of Baghdad in 1256. In this area, al-Hakim appeared together with Baybars on the coinage 1½ years before he was installed as Caliph in Cairo by the Mamluke Sultan (1263).

Erich Kern: The gold coinage of Selim I's campaigns (1512-20)

The speaker described the campaigns in which Selim I, during his short 8 year reign, almost tripled the geographical area of the Ottoman empire, i.e. from 2.4 to 6.6 million square kilometers. In the Ottoman empire it was usual to document the taking of a town by striking coins with its name on. On these coins appeared not the year of accession (as was usually later the case) but the actual year of striking, which was also the year the town was taken. Herr Kern showed some actual gold coins, e.g. Altins of Amid 918, Mardin 918, Bitlis 922, Kairo 923 and Damascus 924. The bellicose Sultan had defeated Shah Ismail in his first great campaign against the Persians and taken Tabriz in 920 (AD 1514). In the years 922/923 (AD 1516/17) he subdued south-east Anatolia, conquered Syria and thoroughly vanquished the Mamlukes near Cairo.

Lutz Ilisch: The currency system of the Ottoman Empire in German travel accounts of the 16th century

Dr. Ilisch referred to the importance that old travel accounts have for the understanding of the Ottoman currency system. The travellers of those days (just as they do today) necessarily came into contact with the coinage of their host country and had to be familiar with the rate of exchange. In studying old literature one must nevertheless be mindful of the fact that in those days many 'travel accounts' were written by people who had never visited the lands in question. Particularly noteworthy was a comment by Salomon Schweigger, who admired the unity of the Ottoman currency system in comparison with the confused situation in Germany. Equally noteworthy is the fact that German travellers could at that time (to a certain extent) correctly read the Arabic text on the Ottoman coins. One can also learn a lot about the contemporary designation of the coins from old literature. One finds, for example, that the names that are normally used today for Ottoman coins, were mostly not used when they were current.

Hans Wilski: The counter-stamp of Plomari on the island of Lesbos

The speaker talked about the "Ersatzgeld" that the Greek communities in the west of the Ottoman Empire used towards the end of the 19th century. This money was produced by counterstamping demonetised copper coins. The locality of Potamos in the south of the island of Lesbos at first used a small tughra as counterstamp, then the first three letters of the place-name. After the name of the place was changed to Plomari, new counterstamps were devised with the abbreviation for 'community of Plomari' in Greek and Arabic. The latter bore Hijra dates corresponding to the years 1888 and 1890 AD. Because, eventually, the church also participated in this counterstamping activity, most of the coins of Plomari that have come down to us bear four counterstamps.

Lutz Ilisch: Ottoman coins from Yemeni mints

The Ottoman coins of the Yemen are still mostly unresearched. New coin finds, however, have now brought to light some surprising material. Thus the speaker could show slides of small, crudely struck Ottoman silver coins of around 1 gram from the mints of Aden, Kawkaban, Sana'a, Ta'izz and Zebid. These places have been known for a long time as mints of earlier Yemeni dynasties, but Ottoman coins of Aden, Kawkaban and Ta'izz were hitherto completely unknown. All the rulers from Sulaiman I to Murad IV (except Selim II) were represented on the coins. Oddly enough, after the lecture Dr. Gerd-Rüdiger Puin came up with quite a surprise: he produced a coin-tray in which could be found most of the coin types depicted during the lecture. Dr. Puin is a specialist in the Yemen and had known of these 'new' Ottoman mints as long as the lecturer had. It is hoped that a detailed work will appear as soon as possible on this series.

Koilkonda or Golkonda

In Newsletter no. 108 Dr. Punshi published a rupee of Ahmed Shah Bahadur from Koilkonda. Dr. A. Shakoor Malik of Jhelum, Pakistan has written to say that the mint is in fact Golkonda. The mint name on the coin is spelt **كولندہ**. On earlier Moghal coins, Golkonda is spelt **كلندہ**, i.e. without a 'wa' after the first 'ka'. The spelling with 'wa' is, however, used on the copper coins of the Qutb Shahs. Examination of the illustration of the Koilkonda rupee of 'Alamgir II published in NS XLIII, reveals that this latter rupee is markedly different in style from Dr. Punshi's coin. Moreover, and more significantly, the mint-name on the 'Alamgir II coin is spelt **كولندہ**, i.e. with a 'ya' before the 'lam'. All this suggests that Dr. Malik's reading is the correct one, though it would be interesting to know why this coin would have been struck at Golkonda rather than neighbouring Haiderabad. Further comments from members are invited.

Interesting Native State Coins of India by Prashant P. Kulkarni

While going through my old correspondence files I found photographs and details of three attractive gold coins of Indian princely states. They were sent to me for identification a few years ago by some persons whose names now escape me. With due apologies to the owners the coins are being published here.

1. A Fractional Mohur of Baroda

Wt 2.8 gms, 15 mm.

Obv.



ख (गा)
१२७(x)

Kha Ga
127 (x)

Rev.



سلسلہ مبارک
سینا خاص خیل
شمشیر
مبارک

Parts of:
Sikkah Mubarak
Sena Khas Khel
Shamsher
Bahadur

This coin has been clipped at 12 o'clock. If this clipping was done after the coin was issued, its original weight will have been more than 3 grams and hence possibly a 1/3 mohur. If adjusted at the mint, then the coin is clearly a 1/4 mohur. This specimen is the only dump gold coin of Khanderao Gaikwad or any other ruler of Baroda state, that I have come across. I should be interested to know if other ONS members have other such coins.

2. A Mohur of Rewa

Wt 9.81 gms, 20 mm.

Obv.



वि स्व
सिका
सीवा
श्री

In centre:
Sikka Riwa
Around:
Viswanathsimha
Jai deva

Rev.



Sree
rama
dheka
ree

(He who is given
authority by
Lord Rama)

This mohur, the only known gold coin of Rewa state, has the same design as the copper coins of Vishwanath Singh. It thus belongs to a period from 1835 to 1843 AD.

3. A Mohur of Daulat Rao Sindhia of Gwalior

Wt 10.650 gms, 22 mm.

Obv.



دین محمد شاہ عالم بادشاہ
فضل الہامی
سلسلہ زرد برکتشور

din Muhammad Shah
Alam Badshah
Fazl-e-ilah Hami
Sikka zad bar haft
Kishwar

Rev.



مانوس
مہمانات
سنہ ۴۲ جولوس
زرب گوالیار

Manus
Maimanat
Sanh 42 Julus
Zarb Gwalialar

The above mohur seems to be the earliest full mohur of the Sindhias struck at Gwalior mint and published so far. The date 1215/42 helps to attribute this piece to the reign of Daulat Rao Sindhia.

The Maratha rupees of Jabalpur by Dilip Shah

Jabalpur, now a principal town in Madhya Pradesh was ruled by the Peshwa rulers of Poona during the 2nd half of the 18th century. In 1795 AD the Peshwa gave Jabalpur to Raghuji II the Bhonsla ruler of Nagpur. The town remained with the Bhonslas until 1817 AD when it was taken over by the British.

James Prinsep mentioned in his *Useful Tables*¹ that a base currency was struck at Jabalpur by Nana Ghatka. He has given the mint mark of these rupees as Nagari 76 (७६).² We have now come across a few coins similar to the Cuttack rupees if the Nagpur Bhonslas bearing what could be taken as the Nagari numeral 6. These coins weigh 10.8 gms and have a diameter of around 2 cm.

Obv.



Ahmad Shah Bahadur
Badshah Gazi
Sikka Mubarak

Rev.



Manus Maimanat
Sanah Julus 51
Zarb Cuttack

The date that looks like Nagari 6 is in fact Persian 5, followed by a 1. To the left of it is the pesh or U (س) of *julus*. This vowel-sign followed by the Persian 5 — ۵ — look like Nagari 76 as mentioned by James Prinsep. Why Prinsep did not mention the digit 1 is not clear, unless his specimen lacked this part of the legend.

Mr. Jenkins, the Resident of Nagpur wrote a letter to Mr. Swinton, the Assistant Secretary to the Government at Fort William on 15th November 1823. He mentioned that: "The mint at Jubbulpore was transferred there from Mundula. It was abolished by us on taking charge of the country in 1818 . . . The Jubbulpore rupees assayed in Calcutta in 1819 only give grains 148.144 of pure silver and those assayed in 1823 from 145.250 to 146.633, according to the statement given in Mr. Mackenzie's note, which must all be referred to Raghujee's and Parsojee's and Appa Sahib's reigns."

The above statement and Prinsep's reference proves that the coin published here was struck at Jabalpur by the Bhonsla rulers of Nagpur. The mint name Cuttack and the ruler's name Ahmad Shah were obviously copied from the Bhonsla coins.

I am thankful to Prashant Kulkarni for providing me with the unpublished reference from Jenkins's letter obtained by courtesy of the Director of Archives, Madhya Pradesh.

1. James Prinsep, *Studies in Indian Antiquities, History and Paleography etc. (Useful Tables)* p.29.
2. *Ibid*, p.68.

Base metal "Symbolic" coins from Burma: made after AD 1782 by M. B. Mitchiner

The 'coins' under consideration recently came to the west from Rangoon accompanied by the comment that at the present time they are readily available in Rangoon. The lot was split, some pieces passing to Dr. Robinson (MR) and some, via Scott Semans (SS), to the writer. The 'coins' are made in a greyish metal that is either lead or zinc. They are patinated and some have foci of white oxide corrosion. In other words, they do not look like recent forgeries, but appear to have some age. Most major series of classical silver 'symbolic' coins that once circulated in Burma are represented among these imitations, but these base metal pieces were made many centuries later than their prototypes. The key to their late date is provided by one of Dr. Robinson's pieces which has a reverse design copied from a silver coin of the Mrohaung ruler Maha Thamada. It is dated BE 1144 (AD 1782).

In the late eighteenth century, the earliest date when these 'coins' could have been made, there was a degree of nationalist interest in local classical antiquities. This is indicated among the Burmans by king Bodawpaya's request, in 1795, to the East India Company to produce silver coins for him bearing classical designs. Bodawpaya's silver 'symbolic' coins have recently been discussed by Robinson and Shaw (1980) and by Mitchiner (1980). The British sent a mission to the Burmese Court at Ava in 1795 with the aims of regulating the Arakanese/British frontier and of establishing a British Resident at Rangoon. Captain Cox, the new British Resident, received patterns for the proposed Burmese coinage and they were despatched to the East India Company mint at Calcutta. The coinage was duly struck at Calcutta and in 1797 Cox, on behalf of the Company, delivered to King Bodawpaya at Ava a consignment of 20,000 silver coins bearing classical designs (Damaru/Temple containing Sankh shell) and 100,000 copper coins bearing new designs (2 fishes/inscription), together with the dies and minting machinery that would enable the king to strike more coins. Although further coins were struck at Ava, King Bodawpaya's experimental coinage was not a success.

The situation among the Mon people of the south has been clarified by Dr. Robinson's recent study (1986) of the coinage of Pegu and Tenasserim. Base metal coins bearing a restricted range of bird (Pegu, pl.2; Tenasserim, pls. 8-10) and animal (Tenasserim, pls. 11-12) designs on one face had been in use since the late sixteenth century among the Mon people of Pegu and, from a more recent time, among those of Tenasserim. Then, in the early nineteenth century, a series of both silver and base metal 'coins' was produced bearing a wide variety of bird and animal designs; and also sometimes inscriptions (Pegu: pls. 3-4). The interpretation of the inscriptions is often uncertain, but some coins bear the Mon word "thake" (weight) and it is spelt in a way which indicates a date of manufacture for the 'coins' no earlier than the beginning of the nineteenth century (cfr. pl.3, no.13). These pictorial issues from Pegu show mould-links (they are cast; like the present imitations) between silver and base metal (80-95% lead) 'coins' and they do not appear to have been produced to any definable weight standard. Hence, it has been suggested that they may have been made as nationalist Mon medals, rather than for currency purposes. The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26), in which there was temporary British occupation of Rangoon (1824-26), followed by the permanent British annexation of Tenasserim (as agreed in the Treaty of Yandabo: 1826) could have provided the occasion for such an expression of Mon nationalism. The former Mon kingdom of Pegu had been conquered by the Burmese king Alaungpaya in 1757, and the Mon were normally subject to the Burmese until the British annexation of Pegu in 1852.

The group of base metal 'coins' now under discussion shares some characteristics with the early nineteenth century Mon nationalist medals and they could well have been produced in a similar context. Among their links one can, for instance, compare the 'Elephant within a border of large pellets' seen on Mon medals (cfr. no. A, below) with the same design seen on one of the base metal pieces (no.9). Alternatively, one can follow degeneration of the 'Temple' design on the base metal pieces to an 'Emblem accosted by two fishes' (cfr. nos. 6 and 9) and compare that with the 'Fish accosted by two crescents' seen on Mon medals (cfr. No. B, below). In like manner one can note that the obverse border of large pellets characterises both the Mon medals and also the base metal pieces.

Burma's classical 'symbolic' coins have been imitated in a variety of metals (silver, copper-base, lead, zinc) and they extend down to modern tourist products. The present group forms a coherent class of imitation which, one has reason to believe, appears to have been made in the early nineteenth century.

References

- Mitchiner, M.B., *Oriental Coins and their values: III. Non-Islamic States and Western Colonies*, London 1979.
 Mitchiner, M.B., 'Early Burmese coinage and King Bodawpaya's re-strikes', *ONS Newsletter* 68, Oct. 1980, 1-4.
 Robinson, M., *The lead and tin coins of Pegu and Tenasserim*, Sale 1986.
 Robinson, M., and Shaw, L.A., *The coins and banknotes of Burma*, Manchester 1980.

1. Rising sun / Temple 8.00 gm (SS)
(prototypes: Mitchiner 1979, nos. 2567-79)
2. Sankh shell / Temple 8.80 gm (SS)
(prototype: Mitchiner 1979, no. 2580)
3. similar 5.00 gm (SS)
4. similar 4.56 gm (MR)
5. similar 2.55 gm (MR)
6. similar, but the temple design is
very formalised 2.77 gm (SS)
7. Damaru / Temple containing lingam
3.00 gm (SS)
(prototypes: Mitchiner 1979, nos. 2617-21)



8. Arakan type 10.46 gm (MR)
obv. Humped bull left (Candra dynasty)
rev. 1144/ (Shwe) nan . . . (Mrohaung dynasty)
BE 1144=AD 1782; a design copied from silver
coins of Thamada (AD 1782-84)
9. Mon type 2.23 gm (SS)
obv. Elephant left; border of large dots
rev. the Temple design now reduced to an
emblem accosted by two fishes.



Comparative early nineteenth century
Mon nationalist medals:

- A. obv. Elephant left; border of large dots
rev. Fish right; number below - 1011
silver, 13.60 gm (MBM: cfr. Robinson 1986, pl. 4, 10)
- B. obv. Frog displayed; border of dots
rev. Crowned fish, accosted by two crescents
silver, 10.33 gm (MBM: cfr. Robinson 1986, pl. 4, 11)



Porcelain Chinese-Siamese Pee Tokens
"Ramsden and the 1/16 of a song-pei"

An essay to rectify the wrong conclusions of Ramsden after 75 years - Part 1

By G. Hollink



Introduction

One of the few sources that is always quoted regarding the Siamese porcelain tokens, is "Siamese porcelain and other tokens" by H. A. Ramsden, Yokohama 1911. This was reprinted in 1977 by D. J. Mackay, Chatham, England, but without the coloured illustrations of the original work. Less known are "Siamesische Token" by H. P. Hofrichter, Hamburg 1977, and "Les jetons de porcelaine du Siam" by K. Petit, Mons (Belgium) 1980. The latter being Ramsden's without the bronze, glass, and nacles tokens.

暹羅比錢通寶

The advanced collector will discover sooner or later, that the coins cannot be classified according to the value tables in the works of the authors that are mentioned.

These value tables are originally from "Siamese Coinage" by Joseph Haas, Shanghai 1879, and introduce a value of 1/16 or 1/18 of a song-pei. It seems that Ramsden did not know where to place this value. All tokens he could not identify were called 1/16 song-pei. Another value causing mistakes was 1 att = 100 wen.

Ramsden's followers Hofrichter and Petit also failed to explain the problem with the value tables, and quoted Ramsden without criticism. I am amazed by the statement of Petit, that with these tables: "... on n'éprouvera aucune difficulté ..."

Ramsden himself cited Gustave Schlegel's: "Siamesische und Chinesisch-Siamesische Münzen", Leiden 1889, Batavia 1890. Gustave Schlegel, German by birth, wrote this work in his native language. Being a Chinese linguist, and professor at the University of Leiden, he published many a work. One was about the collection of pee tokens that the Dutch Consul-general in Bangkok, P. S. Hamel, "recently" (1888 that was) donated to the "Ethnographischen Reichsmuseum". To Schlegel, mention of Leiden was superfluous! Ramsden, deceived by the German name and language, made it the "Royal ethnographical museum", in Berlin. Hofrichter probably did not check the facts, and translated it into "Königlichen Völkerkunde Museum" in Berlin. (According to Mrs. M. Staack, "Eastern coins and amulets", Berlin, there is no museum-collection of pees in Berlin).

The Hamel collection, although reduced from 149 to 111 items in the meantime, is still in the museum of Leiden, where I examined the tokens.

The existence of 1/16 song-pei

According to P. J. Donnelly (†1978), in his "Blanc de Chine, the porcelain of Tehua in Fukien", London 1969, 1/16 song-pei was that quantity of cowrie-shells (25 pieces) that was still convenient in trading. There was no name to this value, and it was just expressed in cowrie-shells. The porcelain coinage was set out to fill the gap between this convenient number of cowrie-shells and a quarter of a tical (i.e. salung).

Hitherto, however, I have not found a single pee token (among the 2000 different items that I have seen), which can without doubt be said to represent 1/16 song-pei.

The coins bearing the inscription 百文 or 1/8 are tokens with a value of 25 (wen) or 2½ (hun), which makes them song-pei. The keys to this conclusion are the pee coins depicted as figure 1 together with the arithmetical deductions set out below.

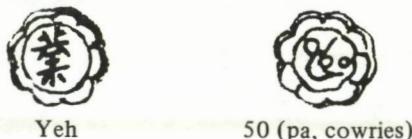
Figure 1



The same goes for the ½ att or solot (50 pa, cowries).

I think the tokens with 50 (Ramsden nos. 218 and 246) are fuangs. So far I have only been able to find one pee token (fig.2) that could be a solot. Since the value is in Siamese, I think 50 pa is meant, and not 50 wen (Chinese system). In his book "Pee tokens of the Hongks", Bangkok 1971, published in Thai, the Thai numismatist Chalerm Yongboonkird also mentions only this very same token as a solot.

Figure 2



That is why I think they were not common, and that generally speaking it can be said that the att (100 pa) was the smallest denomination for the pee coins. For a 1/16 song-pei 25 cowrie-shells were used, and nothing else.

Value tables and deductions

The tables from Haas, quoted by Ramsden, are:

- A 1 salung = 2 fuang = 4 song-pei = 8 pai = 16 att = 32 solot
- B 百文 (Chinese 100 wen) = 1 att
- C = 百文 (Chinese 200 wen) 分 = 1/16 song-pei
- D 98 (Siamese 100) = 1/16 song-pei

Since there were 800 cowries to the fuang, 1 song-pei was 400 pa (cowries).

From this, we can make the following deductions:

- 1 att = ¼ song-pei = 100 pa
- From B + C: 1/16 song-pei = 2 att
- From D: 1/16 song-pei = 100 pa = 1 att
- And A: 1/16 song-pei = 1/16 x 4 att = ¼ att

This gives: 1/16 song-pei = ¼ att = 1 att = 2 att, which is obviously nonsense.

The only right ratio is: 1/16 song-pei = ¼ att = 25 pa.

It is clear that Haas confused two different value systems: — the Siamese cowrie or pa, with the Chinese cash or wen — B, C and D from Haas' table are absolutely wrong; the right answers are:

- B' 百文 (100 wen) = 1 salung (¼ baht)
- C' = 百文 (200 wen) = song-salung (½ baht)
- C'' 分 (Chinese fen) = 1 hun = 1/5 fuang
- D' 98 (Siamese 100) = 100 (pa) = 1 att