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Members news

Mr. Tony Pardoe of Kent has changed his interests and is now concentrating on Parthian and Punchmarked silver coins. He has miscellaneous Indian and Islamic coins available for exchange. Dr. Parmeshwari Lal Gupta of Bombay and Shri K. K. Maheshwari are involved in establishing an Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies at 507 Raheja Centre, 214 Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021. A trust has been established to ensure continuation of the project and material is being collected for the library, photographic archives and coin museum. Research facilities, seminars and a periodical publication are also proposed. Dr. Gupta would welcome any help that ONS members can provide. The British Numismatic Trade Association held its annual fair (Coinex 80) at the Europa hotel in London on September 25 - 26th. and a number of ONS members from both sides of the Atlantic were able to meet.

Early Burmese coinage and King Bodawpaya's re-strikes*by Michael Mitchiner*

During the period circa AD 200 to 550 culture across the base of the South East Asian peninsula was dominated by the Kingdom of Funan. In this region urban settlements clustered in the fertile valleys of the Mekong, Menam and Irrawaddy rivers, as well as along the western coastlands of Arakan and the eastern coastlands of Vietnam¹. The archeology of urban sites in the three river valleys just mentioned attests a pattern of cultural homogeneity that appears to have extended at this period from Oc-*eo* in the lower Mekong valley across to Beikhano in the middle Irrawaddy valley². Arakan showed some individual traits and the culture of the east Vietnamese coastlands was strongly influenced by that of China.

The Kingdom of Funan, which was probably centred on Oc-*eo*, arose on the pedestal of increasingly far-flung commerce that grew up during the last years of the 2nd century AD³. With this increase in trade came the development and geographical radiation of characteristic pottery forms⁴ and the establishment of a flat silver coinage⁵. Some details of Funanese history are recorded in Chinese annals where certain conquests in the west are also cited. Local Sanskrit inscriptions of the later Funan period are also extant.

The archeological evidence shows extension of characteristically Funanese pottery forms from Oc-*eo* across the sites of the Menam valley (eg. Chansen, U-thong) to Beikhano and Hmawza, near Prome, in the Irrawaddy valley. The cultural uniformity of the Funanese period at these various sites tends to form a marked contrast with the essentially local cultures attested by artefacts from earlier strata at the same sites. Radio-carbon and Thermoluminescence datings from the Funanese strata in the sites of Chansen and U-thong (Central Thailand) show that Funanese influence spanned the period from the 3rd. to the 6th centuries AD⁶. Radio-carbon datings from contemporary strata at Beikhano (Central Burma) span the 2nd to 4th centuries AD⁷.

A characteristic type of silver coinage bearing "Rising sun / Temple" designs is closely associated with sites yielding Funanese type pottery and it is only this particular form of the early 'symbolic' coinage that has a geographical distribution ranging from Oc-*eo* as far west as Beikhano, Hmawza and Sitthaung in Burma⁸.

Kingdom of Funan, circa AD 200 - 550

AR Unit (circa 9.4 gm)

- 0/ Obv. Rising sun within a circle-dot-circle border
Rev. Formalised temple with dot at centre:
sun (right) and moon (left) above
swastika (left) and damaru (right) beside.

(Mitchiner 9.43 gm.: for other specimens see eg. Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins & their Values III. Non-Islamic States & Western Colonies*, nos. 2567 - 2572. This particular coin was first published by U. Guehler, *J. Siam Soc.* 1949, pl. I, 1 and later as Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins I*, no. 5252. The AR 1/4 and 1/10 Unit were also struck in this series: vide Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins III*, nos. 2573 - 77)



Though the influence of Funan in more westerly regions was probably more commercial than political, it is only with the fall of Funan circa AD 550 that local kingdoms rose to prominence in the Irrawaddy and Menam valleys. The Mon kingdom of Dvaravati (c. AD 550 - 1030)⁹ was consolidated in the river Menam valley and the Pyu kingdom of Srikshetra (3rd century - AD 832)¹⁰ in the Irrawaddy valley. Henceforth the silver coins characteristic of the Menam valley tend to be found only in Thailand, while the equally characteristic Srikshetran silver coins are only found in Burma. Srikshetra, the earliest Burmese kingdom, was to endure until AD 832 when the king of Nanchao mounted a southern campaign that resulted in destruction of the Srikshetran capital and establishment of Nanchao suzerainty over most of the Irrawaddy valley¹¹.

The silver coinage of Srikshetra is divisible into three main series that have recently been discussed¹². All coins bear a Damaru symbol (ritual hand drum) on the obverse, enclosed within a linear and dotted border. They also all bear a 'temple' design on the reverse, but the reverse designs of each series differ both in the nature of symbol depicted within the temple and in terms of the ancillary symbols placed around the temple. Coin fabric and coin weight also tend to differ slightly between each series. The three series of Srikshetran silver coins may be represented by the following examples: —

Kingdom of Srikshetra, c. 3rd. century - AD 832

Series A: Lingam in temple

AR 1/4 Unit (c. 2.44 gm)

- 1 Obv. Damaru symbol (ritual hand drum) within linear and dotted border
Rev. Temple containing upright lingam flanked by row of 4 dots either side:
sun (right) and moon (left) above
thunderbolt (left), sankh shell (right) beside

(Mitchiner 2.55 gm. Design details are clearer than on the other published specimen - Mitchiner III no. 2621. AR Unit was also struck, Mitchiner III nos. 2617 - 20)

Coins of this series always have a broad scyphate fabric and they were struck to a slightly lighter weight than coins of the other two series. Two denominations were issued, the Unit (c. 9.75 gm) and its Quarter.

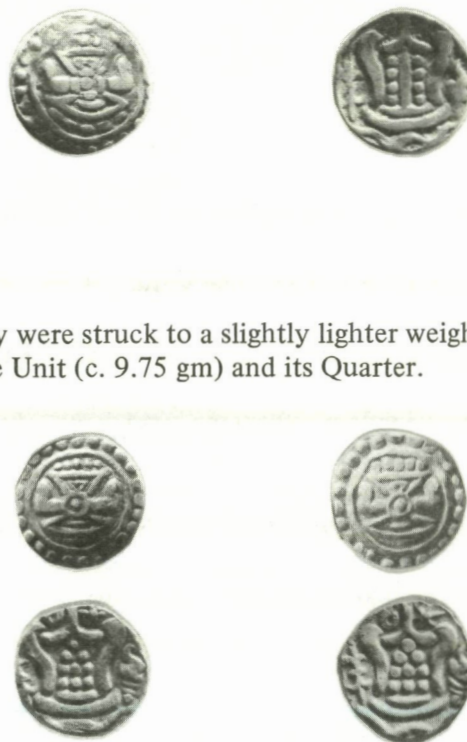
Series B: Group of Dots in temple

AR 1/4 Unit (c. 2.7 gm)

- 2- Obv. Damaru symbol within linear and dotted border
3 Rev. Temple containing group of Nine Dots arranged in rows:
sun (right) and moon (left) above
thunderbolt (left), sankh shell (right) beside

(Mitchiner 2.92, 2.77 gm.: further specimens Mitchiner III nos. 2624 - 2627. AR Unit was also struck: *ibid.*, III nos. 2622 - 2623)

Coins of this series are slightly more compact than those of the first series and their flans are only slightly scyphate. The Damaru symbol tends to be more angular. Comparison of the 2 coins published here with other coins of this type shows that there exist several minor varieties in the form of the Damaru symbol within this series. So far as the reverse design is concerned the precise arrangement of the group of dots shows some variation between coins and their number may be 9 (nos 2-3 here: M. III, 2624-27: British Museum 2.29 & 2.65 gm) or 10 (BM 2.68, 2.62 gm). The sun and moon symbols are sometimes transposed and the moon may have the form either of a circular ring or of a similar ring containing a central dot. Two denominations are also known for this series, the AR Unit (c. 10.8 gm) and its Quarter.



Series C: Sankh shell in temple

AR Unit (c. 10.8 gm)

4- Obv. Damaru symbol within linear and dotted
5 border

Rev. Temple containing a Sankh shell within:
no ancillary symbols around temple

(Mitchiner 11.30 gm., Craig Burns 10.07 gm.: the latter is M. III, no. 2628)

AR Half Unit (c. 5.4 gm)

6 Similar designs

(British Museum 5.51 gm.; = Mitchiner, Some early Arakan and Pyu-Mon coins, J. Numismatic Soc. of India 1972i, Pl. III no. 9)

Details of the design vary slightly between coins of this, the rarest of the three series. Coin fabric tends to be slightly more compact than is the case with the other two series and specimens are only slightly scyphate. The absence of ancillary symbols around the temple is noteworthy. No other denominations were struck in the series and the author is not aware of any further specimens.



After the Kingdom of Srikshetra had been destroyed (AD 832) by the king of Nanchao there ensued a decline in external trade and the use of flat silver coinage fell into abeyance.

Just over a millenium later the Burmese king Bodawpaya (AD 1782 - 1819: BE 1143 - 1181) conquered the western coastlands of Arakan in 1784 (BE 1146) and incorporated the Arakanese kingdom into his own realm which was centred on the Irrawaddy valley. He struck flat silver coins of Arakanese type for use in that province¹³. Some years later he decided to introduce coinage to Ava, his capital in the central provinces of the Burmese realm. To achieve this aim Bodawpaya sent a commision to the East India Company mint at Calcutta in 1795¹⁴. Silver coins were to be struck bearing designs modelled on those of the Ancient Burmese coinage of his homeland and copper coins were to be struck bearing new designs¹⁵.

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 and 100,000 copper coins, together with the dies and minting machinery that would enable king Bodawpaya to strike more coins¹⁶. Although further coins were struck at Ava the experimental currency of king Bodawpaya was not a success. Most of the coins appear to have been melted down and, apart from a few patterns of other later proposed coinages, the general adoption of flat coinage in Burma had to await the reign of Mindon Min (AD 1853 - 1878).

Calcutta striking, delivered to Ava 1797

AR Unit (c. 9.9 gm)

7- Obv. Damaru symbol within linear and dotted
8 border

Rev. Temple containing a sankh shell within:
no ancillary symbols around temple

(British Museum 9.88, 9.90 gm: the museum also possesses a die duplicate of the first coin - 10.04 gm)

These coins are struck on flat, machine made flans and they bear designs simplified and formalised from those on the original coins. They also weigh about One gram less. Specimens of the Calcutta striking are made of good silver and they have their edges finished by hammer. There are three such specimens in the British Museum, two from one pair of dies and a third from different dies. They were first identified as the Calcutta re-strikes by Phayre (op cit.: the 9.88 gm. BM coin published here) and re-published by U. Guehler (op cit.: pl. II, 3). Specimens from the British Museum have been published by Mitchiner (JNSI 1972i, pl. III no 11) and by Lewis Shaw (op cit.) whose illustration is reproduced by Krause Mishler (1981 p. 220 no. J1).

Calcutta striking, delivered to Ava 1797

AR 1/3 (?) Unit

9 Similar designs

(British Museum 3.44 gm)

Only one specimen of this denomination is known to have survived. It has been published by M. Mitchiner (JNSI 1972i, pl. III no 12) and by Lewis Shaw (op cit. A3b) whose illustration is reproduced by Krause Mishler (1981 p. 220 no H1)



Ava striking, from 1797 for a short period

AR Unit (c. 9.9 gm)

10 Similar designs

(BM 9.80 gm.: obv. die-linked with 9.90 gm. coin supra)

By comparison with the Calcutta striking the coins struck at Ava are made of noticeably baser silver and they have rougher designs and un-finished edges. The three coins of this type in the British Museum (9.80, 9.89, 9.92 gm) appear to have been struck partly from locally engraved dies and partly by the dies originally despatched from Calcutta. The specimen shown here has been struck from the same obverse die (cfr. eg. the die flaw on right arm of Damaru) as one of the Calcutta coins, but after the condition of that die had deteriorated quite markedly¹⁷.



Ava striking, from 1797 for a short period

AR Unit of Funan type (c. 9.6 gm)

11 - Obv. Rising sun of standard Funanese type
12 within ornamental border

Rev. Temple containing a central dot:
sun (above l.), 2 dots (left), symbol (right)

(Mitchiner 9.45, 9.70 gm.: struck from the same pair of dies)



These two coins have been struck on flat, machine made flans. Their somewhat base metal is of comparable quality with that used at Ava for striking the Srikshetran type coins illustrated above and the mediocre quality die engraving is also of similar order.

- 1 Discussed by R.C.Y. Ng, *The geographical habitat of historical settlement in mainland South East Asia*, pp. 262 - 272 in *Early South East Asia*, ed. R. B. Smith and W. Watson, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1979.
- 2 P. Wheatley, *Urban genesis in mainland South East Asia*, pp. 288 - 303 in *ibid.*, B. Bronson, *The late prehistory and early history of Central Thailand with special reference to Chansen*, pp. 315 - 336 in *ibid.*, A. Thaw, *Report on the excavations at Beikthano*, Rangoon 1968.
- 3 For a general survey see D. G. E. Hall, *A history of South-east Asia*, 3rd. edn., MacMillan, London 1968; M. Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and their values II. The Ancient and Classical World*, London 1978, pp. 646 ff.: III. *Non-Islamic States and Western Colonies*, London 1979, pp. 316 ff.
- 4 The site at Chansen in Central Thailand has been investigated in some detail and discussed with reference to other cities by B. Bronson (op cit). See also H. H. E. Loofs, *Problems of continuity between the pre-Buddhist and Buddhist periods in Central Thailand*, with special reference to U-Thong, pp. 342 - 351 in *Early South East Asia*. Comparison may be made with A. Thaw's (op cit) findings in Central Burma and with reports by L. Malleret concerning Oc-ao in the lower Mekong: *Les fouilles d'Oc-ao (1944): rapport préliminaire*, Bull. de l'Ecole Française de l'Extrême Orient, Hanoi, 1951, 75 - 88; *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mékong*, 4 vols., Paris 1959 - 1963.
- 5 Coins of Funan are recorded from Oc-ao (Malleret, op cit), from numerous sites in Thailand that yield pottery of Funan type (R. le May, *The coinage of Siam* pl. I & p. 3, *Siam Society*, Bangkok 1932; U. Guehler, *Essay on the symbols and marks of old Siamese coins*, *J. Siam Soc.*, 1948, 124 - 143; W. H. Kneedler, *Coins of North Siam*, *J. Siam Soc.* 1937, 1 - 28; S. Piromya, *Coins in Thailand*, Bangkok National Museum 1973) and from sites in Burma that include Beikthano, Hmawza and Sitthaung (A. P. Phayre, *Coins of Arakan, of Pegu and of Burma*, London 1882; U. Guehler, op. cit.: A. Thaw, op. cit.: Maung Ko U and U Hla Sein, *Burmese coins*, Rangoon 1970).
- 6 B. Bronson (op cit) and H. Loofs (op cit). See also R. B. Smith, *A check-list of published Carbon-14 datings from South-East Asia*, pp. 493 - 507 in *Early South East Asia*.
- 7 A. Thaw (op cit) and R. B. Smith (op cit).
- 8 References cited above.
- 9 M. Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins III*, pp. 318 ff.: D. G. E. Hall (op cit): E. Lyons, *Dvaravati, a consideration of its formative period*, pp. 352 - 359 in *Early South East Asia*.
- 10 M. Mitchiner, *ibid.* pp. 321 ff.: D. G. E. Hall, *ibid.*: A. Thaw, *ibid.* Aung Thaw's radio-carbon datings from Beikthano (also cited by R. B. Smith, op cit) range from the 1st. to 4th. centuries AD.
- 11 Discussed by D. G. E. Hall (op cit).
- 12 M. Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and their values III. Non-Islamic States and Western Colonies* nos. 2617 - 2628. This up-dates the classification adopted in Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and their values II. The Ancient and Classical World* nos. 5238 - 5245. Previously published coins are mainly of Series B (Group of dots in temple) cited below. A specimen (AR Unit) forwarded to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1844 was re-published by U. Guehler (op cit., II, 2) from Phayre's (1882 op cit) re-publication of *JASB XV*, pl. 3. Later specimens were acquired by the British Museum from R. Temple who collected in Burma (*Currency and coinage among the Burmese*, *Indian Antiquary* LVII, 1928). Specimens have more recently been recorded from the excavated site of Beikthano (A. Thaw, op cit) and others noted by Maung Ko U and U Hla Sein (op cit). Since 1978 a hoard of these coins of Burmese provenance (incl. Mitchiner III nos. 2622 & 2627) has been reaching Western markets. The author's coins of series A are also of known Burmese provenance (Mitchiner III nos. 2617 to 2620) and coins of series C were chosen as prototypes when king Bodawpaya instructed the East India Company to strike coins of Ancient Burmese type (vide infra).
- 13 A. P. Phayre, op cit., Pl. I, 23; Lewis Shaw, *Survey of coinage in Burma since the 18th. century*, *Oriental Numismatic Society Information sheet* no. 17, 1977; M. Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins III* nos 2562 - 2564 (= 2815 - 2817); C. L. Krause and C. Mishler *Standard Catalog of World Coins*, 1981 edn., p. 219, 20 - 22.
- 14 The British sent a mission to the Burmese Court at Ava in 1795 with the aims of regulating the Arakanese / British Indian 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.
- 15 Obv. 2 fishes. Rev. Bodawpaya's accession date in Burmese script "1143 era / Tabodwe la / byi gyaw / 14th" (AD 1782, 14th day of the waning moon in the month of Tabodwe : cfr. Lewis Shaw op cit).
- 16 A. P. Phayre, op cit., p. 35; also R. C. Temple, op cit. Phayre was appointed first British Chief Commissioner of British Burma at Rangoon in 1862.
- 17 The rough surface of the coin suggests that the die was rusty.