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Members news

We are sorry to record the recent death of Dr. Paul Balog in Rome last month. His studies, particularly those on Mamluke and Ayyubid coinage, will be well known to many members.

The ONS annual accounts are available from the Treasurer, Mr. Vic. Brown. Please send SAE or IRC. Mr. Ken Wiggins has some Persian coins for disposal; anyone interested may contact him.

The coinage of the Mrohaung Dynasty of Arakan: 1430 - 1635 AD

Part 1. Coins with legends in Persian only

by M. Robinson

In ONS Newsletter no. 77 I described four new coins of the Mrohaung dynasty of Arakan, with dates ranging from 996 BE to the fall of the dynasty in 1146 BE (1784 AD). These coins had a legend in Arakanese letters, repeated on both sides, as was the custom for all the coins from 996 BE onwards. With this additional material, and those listed in my book with Lewis Shaw, 'The Coins and Banknotes of Burma' [1], it is believed that the series of coins with Arakanese legends only is now fully catalogued (as far as is known at the present time) apart from minor varieties.

The coins of the earlier part of the dynasty, from 1430 to 1635 AD, are, however, far more difficult to ascribe and/or read the legends. The letters are sometimes crudely formed and those in Persian and Bengali are very hard to read. As a result on San Tha Aung's 'Arakanese Coins' [2] several of the readings given in [1] from this period need slight correction, and new types were illustrated. These have been further supplemented by specimens recently observed in the collections at the British Museum, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the American Numismatic Society in New York, or acquired by Dr. R. Domrow and myself. In view of this it is desirable to look afresh at these early coins, and to give an improved classification. In the light of these problems the series has been split up into three fairly distinct groups; the early type with archaic Persian script from roughly 1430 to 1530, the smaller series with Arakanese/Persian or Arakanese/Bengali script at around 1550, and the trilingual coins with Arakanese, Persian and Bengali script from roughly 1560 to 1622. All these coins are silver. In this first article I shall describe those with Persian script; the other groups will be dealt with in two subsequent papers.

The early history of the Mrohaung dynasty

Since early times there have been several dynasties in Arakan (on the west coast of Burma) with capitals at Vesali, Launggyet and Mrohaung. Coins of the 'bull/trisula' type were issued by the Vesali dynasty, but there is no evidence for the use of coinage under the Launggyet dynasty (1250 - 1404). The coin in [2], plate 20, suggested for this dynasty is, I believe, certainly much later, being of the trilingual type.

During troubled times around 1404, king Naramaikla of Arakan was driven from his country and took refuge in Bengal. The Bengal Sultan helped Naramaikla to get back the Arakanese throne in 1430 when he founded the new city of Mrohaung, sometimes known as Mrauk-U. He was therefore effectively subservient to the Bengal Sultan and the Moslem religion held great sway at the Arakanese court for many years afterwards. Possibly out of deference to Bengal the Arakanese rulers gave themselves a Moslem title in addition to the Arakanese; in fact some kings seem to have had three or more titles. This may also have been continued for the benefit of the large Moslem population of Chittagong, which was frequently under Arakanese rule after it had been conquered by Basawpyu in 1459. Note, however, that in the period around 1518 the city was under Bengal with a Bengali, rather than Arakanese, governor. It is also asserted that the Arakanese king was then a vassal of Bengal, which may possibly have a bearing on the issue of coinage.

The chronology of the country from 1430 to 1530 is somewhat uncertain and differs according to which chronicle is consulted; but I give below the list of kings with their titles and dates both as presented in [2] and in the well-known work by Phayre [3], for the period of interest.

<i>King and titles</i>	<i>Date from [2]</i>	<i>Date from [3]</i>
Naramaikla / Min Saw Mun / Saw Mun Khan	1430 - 1433 AD: at Mrohaung	1430 - 1434
Naranu / Min Khari / Ali Khan	1433 - 1459	1434 - 1459
Basawpyu / Kalima Shah	1459 - 1482	1459 - 1482
Min Dawlya / Mawku Shah	1482 - 1492	1482 - 1492
Basawnyo / Mahamauk Shah	1492 - 1494	1492 - 1494

Min Ranaung / Nuri Shah	1494	1494
Salingathu / Thingathu / Thet Kaukdawla Shah	1494 - 1501	1494 - 1501
Min Raza / Ilias Shah (acc. to [2])	1501 - 1513	1501 - 1523
Gazapati / Ilias Shah (acc. to [3])	1513 - 1515	1523 - 1525
Min Saw-O / Thirithu / Zala Shah	1515	1525
Thazata / Ali Shah	1515 - 1521	1525 - 1531
Min Khaung Raza	1521 - 1531	king not listed

With Arakanese coins no two specimens are likely to be absolutely identical. The first coin listed is that illustrated and the others cited will differ in minor respects. I shall mention first the four coins shown in [1], namely RS 7.1 to RS 7.4, followed by photographs of more recent discoveries. Note that the illustrations from [2] are enlarged. The abbreviations used are – RS = Robinson and Shaw [1]; STA = San Tha Aung [2]; P = Phayre [3]; Ash = Ashmolean; ANS = American Numismatic Society; BM = British Museum.

1. RS 7.1 = P 28: 10.17 gm., 10.00 gm. (BM)



Obv.: لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله خلا الله الملكه
(Kalima) lā ilah illā Allah Mohammed rasūl Allah Khallad Allah al Mulkahu

There is no God but Allah, Mohammed the Messenger of Allah.
May Allah perpetuate his Kingdom

Rev.: الرحمن ابو المظفر عليشتر سلطان خلاله الله صا
al rahman abū Al-muzaffar Ali Sh(ah) Sultān Khallad Allah (? Mulkahu)

Sultan Ali Shah, Father of the victorious (and merciful)
May Allah perpetuate his Kingdom
This coin is fairly definitely of Thazata / Ali Shah (1515 - 21 AD)

2. RS 7.2 = P 29: 9.62 gm. (BM)



Obv. Kalima as 7.1

Rev. ابو النصر abu al nasr (?)

Phayre read 'Ilias Shah' on the reverse, but this is not certain. If this reading is correct, then the coin would date from just after 1500 AD.

3. RS 7.3 = P 30: 9.24 gm. (BM), 9.35 gm. (ANS)

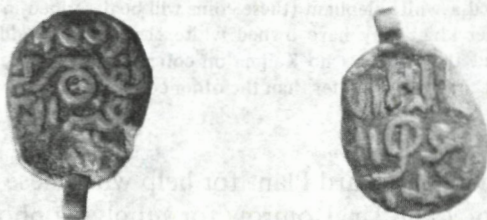


Obv. مو mu (?)
رحمن
سكندر Sikandar

Rev. Kalima

The obverse of the ANS specimen is identical to the BM, but extra letters ن and ز are visible at 11 and 9 o'clock respectively. The name 'Sikandar' is likely, but not certain. Only Min Palaung (1571-93) is known to have used this title but, on reflection, this seems too late for a coin of this type. San Tha Aung attributed the coin to Salingathu (1494-1501) with the remark that 'he could have taken the title Sikandar Shah'. No evidence was given.

4. RS 7.4 = P 31: 5.62 gm. (BM)



Phayre claimed to discern the Kalima on the obverse, and on this basis San Tha Aung attributed it to Basawpyu (1459-82) who was known as Kalima Shah; but I cannot make out anything of the legend except the letters 'u' and 'h' on the RHS.

We now come to the new coins, most of which bear the Kalima on one side. They can be fairly reliably placed in the period 1430 to 1531, since there is evidence that Min Bin (1531 - 1553) and his followers used Arakanese inscriptions on at least one side of their coins.

5. 9.6 gm. (Domrow), 8.52 gm. (Robinson), STA Pl. 22a (wt. ?)



Left: unread

Right: Kalima

X-ray fluorescence analysis on the 8.52 gm. coin gave a reading of 94% silver, 5.25% copper, 0.29% gold, 0.46% lead.

6. 9.53 gm. (BM), 9.9 gm. (Domrow), STA Pl. 22b; 24a (wt. ?)



Left: Kalima

Right: محمد
سكندر Mohammed / Rahman / Ahmad
beginning of Sikandar ?

7. Ash



Left: Kalima

Right: احمد
سكندر Ahmad / Rahman ?
Sikandar

The Ashmolean coin is base silver (13% silver and 87% copper). It seems likely that both 6 and 7 are of Sikandar; and they are very similar to 3.

Finally, three coins from ref. 2 (weights unknown) with diameters probably similar to the other coins of this type. The other illustrations in [2] are from [3] and have been described already.

8. STA pl. 22c



Left: Kalima

Right: unread

9. STA pl. 21 b



Left: ابو
الدين
... محمود
سلطان Abu
ed-din
Mahmud
Sultan

Right: unread

Mahmud could possibly be Mahamauk (1492-94), but I suspect a later date.

10. STA pl. 21c.



Left: Allah
saheb fil (owner of the elephant)

Right: possibly contains 'Sultan Taj ed-din'

If Saheb fil is correct, this coin may be of the time of Min Raza Gyi who, in 1601 acquired a white elephant (these coins will be described in part 3). Of course earlier kings may have owned white elephants. In addition, it should be noted that there is no Kalima on coins 9 and 10 and, for this reason I suggest they may be later than the other coins shown.

This completes the known coins of this group. I should like to thank Richard Plant for help with these coins, the Ashmolean for permission to reproduce the photograph of no. 7 and Dr. Domrow for supplying photos of his coins.

References

- 1 The Coins and Banknotes of Burma, by M. Robinson and L. A. Shaw, published by the authors, 1980.
- 2 Arakanese Coins, by San Tha Aung, Rangoon 1979: English translation available from M. Robinson.
- 3 The Coins of Arakan, of Pegu and of Burma, by A. P. Phayre, Numismata Orientalia, London 1882.