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Members news

Mr. Mohammed Limbada has changed his interests to Islamic coins up to AH 800, with especial interest for minor dynasties and for the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Yemen etc.). Mr. F. K. Sidi will reluctantly cease ONS membership due to failing eyesight and has books, coins and accessories available. Will anyone interested please contact him. Mr. R. Jain is now extending his interests to include ancient coins of India; those of the Sultans of Delhi and Bengal: also British campaign medals relating to India. Mr. R. Wynaub is now interested in Chinese 10 cash coins, Chinese and "hell" banknotes. Mr. A. L. Im is interested in Indonesian coinages and banknotes. Mr. Schaack is now also interested in Sasanian coins.

The next ONS meeting in London will be held at 28 Little Russell Street, London WC1 on Saturday 19th March at 2-30 pm, and the next meeting on the Continent will be at Dr. van der Wiel's home on the 4th. June.

The early copper coins of Dhar State

by Ken Wiggins

Information concerning the early coinages of the former Native States in Western Malwa is extremely sparse. Some coins of Ratlam and Sailana which may be dated to the late 18th and early 19th centuries have been successfully identified, but the contemporary coinages of such states as Barwani, Dhar and Jaora have so far defied recognition.

With regard to Dhar State information has been provided by Captain C. E. Luard, MA., IA.,¹ who wrote:—
“The Ponwar Rajas of Dhar had until 1888 a copper coinage of their own which was struck at Dhar by Bohoras and Baniyas, monopolists, who paid a royalty of Rs. 1,500 to 2,100 to the state for the privilege. The monopoly generally lasted for 2 or 3 years. At its renewal the device on the coins was changed and a fresh royalty taken. This accounts for the various devices that appear on the obverses of the Dhar coins which include a swastika, a hand, a bal leaf, a sparrow, a kunda, a cannon, a sword, a pharara, a jaripatka and Hanuman with mace in right hand and jaripatka in left. Out of these coins, the one bearing the device of a pharara was current during the first superintendancy. The pharara pice was superceded by the jaripatka pice and that in its turn by the Hanuman pice, which was struck in 1881.”

Captain Luard also mentioned that there were two denominations, a pice weighing ½ tola and a 2 pice weighing one tola (180 grains). These facts were undoubtedly collected by Luard during the early years of this century, and probably from some aged retainer of the Dhar State who was relying on memory. In some respects the information is at variance with that provided by the coins themselves.

The first known dated coin of Dhar (Cr.1; Fig. 1) is inscribed धर सरकर (Dhar Sarkar) with the date १२६६ (S. 1266). The obverse bears a staff with two pennants, which was the jaripatka, or the pennant of the Maratha Peshwa. The date on this coin has always been presumed to be the Hegira date, but it is more likely to be in the Fasli era of the western provinces, therefore corresponding to AD 1858. Dhar State was administered by a Superintendant from 1857 until 1864 because of its hostility during the Indian Mutiny, and it is possible that the coinage was reformed during this period. Luard referred to this coin as the pharara pice. A pharara in Hindi means a flag.

The next known issue is that dated 1289 (Y. B.1; Fig. 2). If this coin is dated according to the Fasli era then it was struck, as Luard stated, in AD 1881. It bears a figure of Hanuman on the obverse and the words धर सरकर on the reverse. So far as is known there was no issue intervening between these two, so Luard's jaripatka pice is unknown. It may be that he was confused between the terms jaripatka and pharara, when the matter was being discussed. The coins struck at Dhar terminated by 1887, when the production of their copper coins was undertaken at the Calcutta mint.

Other information given by Luard may be more helpful in identifying some of the coins of Dhar which, presumably, were struck under contract by the monopolists prior to 1858. Certain uninscribed coins exist which bear the devices mentioned by Luard; some appearing on the obverse and some on the reverse: whilst some coins have a combination of the devices on both sides. It is suspected that these are early coins of Dhar although the evidence of Luard's account is not entirely satisfactory and certainly not conclusive.

A number of these copper coins are depicted below. They are mainly crudely executed pieces of varying weight, either on a square or round flan. The majority of them appear to have been struck on older coins. The weight in grams is given against each coin: —

- Swastika: This device is frequently found on coins of ancient India, but rarely on the more modern coins. Fig. 3 shows a coin with this device and on the reverse are the figures '19'. Fig. 4 is also a coin with a swastika and a confusion of letters and symbols on the reverse.
- Hand: This is the only coin that I know bearing the mark of a hand, apart from some 19th century issues of Afghanistan. The reverse shows two jaripatkas: Fig. 5.
- Bal leaf: This leaf is from a plant sacred to the Lord Siva. It appears on the reverses of two coins depicted here (Figs. 6, 7) which have Hanuman on the obverse.
- Sparrow: I have been unable to locate any coins of similar fabric with any type of bird on them.
- Kunda: A kunda is an iron ring to which a chain is fastened. A kundal is a large circular ear ring. The only coins located bearing objects resembling these are shown on Figs. 8 and 9; but 8 may, of course, have been intended to represent a flower.
- Cannon: Fig. 10 shows a square coin with a cannon on the obverse and a broadsword, or khanda, on the reverse.
- Sword: The broadsword appears on a number of these coins as a reverse device accompanying others that occur on the obverse.
- Pharara: A pharara is a flag. The flags shown on these coins may be more accurately described as jaripatkas — the pennants of the Marathas. This device is seen frequently on Maratha coins.
- Jaripatka: Fig. 11 shows a coin with the principal device of a jaripatka.

Hanuman: Unfortunately, the monkey god appears on a number of copper coins, mostly unattributed, in various attitudes. The coins depicted here (Figs. 12 - 17) show him as the obverse figure, with other relevant symbols already mentioned on the reverse.

Two other coins are shown here which are similar in fabric and have the sword on the reverse. Fig. 18 has on the obverse a royal umbrella, whilst the other has an orb-like object which looks suspiciously like a grenade.

The attribution of the above coins to Dhar is based solely on the slight evidence of Luard's report. If any ONS member has further information, it would indeed be welcome.

1 Luard, Captain C. E., Central India States Gazetteer, Bombay 1908.
Thanks are due to Mr. Jan Lingen for the use of some of his coins in this paper.



Chinese engraved presentation pieces in silver and gold: late 19th - early 20th century. *Michael Mitchiner*

Since a group of eleven silver pieces was published in N/Ls 79 (Aug. 1982) and 80 (Oct. 1982) further information has appeared. The existence of gold pieces, in addition to the T'ai P'ing issue¹ already noted, has recently been cited by Arber-Cooke². A gold piece with a Republican obverse and amuletic reverse was noted; gold specimens with purely amuletic designs were also mentioned. The gold piece published here is comparable with silver issues bearing Imperial legends published previously (cfr. nos. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9) and purports to have been made in Peking during the T'ung Chih period (1862 - 1874).

Several silver specimens have been seen recently, some with Imperial designs but of variable quality and others bearing amuletic designs. The latter include a piece to be auctioned by Joel Malter³ and the two published here. These two are 'student amulets' bearing the standard inscription 'Chuan-yuan Chi-ti' found on many brass amulets of the late Imperial period⁴. One of them bears a maker's mark. They are of some help in supporting the view that even the amuletic issues were essentially products of an industry that flourished during the last decades of the Chinese Empire. One of Arber-Cooke's⁵ specimens was bought in Canton during 1910, but her Republican issue shows that some continued to be made after the fall of the Empire.

The purpose of these gold and silver pieces has been cited under the broad heading of 'Presentation' with the general view that those with Imperial legends were used by the Imperial Bureaucracy while those with purely amuletic designs were used by private individuals. Hayter⁶ admits the possibility of a specimen having been issued by the T'ai P'ing administration while Arber-Cooke mentions specimens made by goldsmiths and silversmiths; and sold by jewellers in Peking, Shanghai, Canton and "no doubt in other places" at the beginning of the present century. In some respects one might draw an occidental parallel with French jettons. These have been investigated in particular detail by d'Affry⁷, Feuardent⁸ and Barnard⁹ who published many specimens struck for presentation by the king, by administrators of many named government departments and in some cases by named private individuals and private corporate bodies. These were often distributed as an honorarium at New Year. Over and above these particularised issues were a mass of stock jettons that could be purchased by any person from commercial jetton manufacturers. When this concept is applied to the Chinese scene both official and private issues appear to be represented. The existence of specially made Imperial presentation cash in brass has been widely accepted — these were often distributed on the occasion of the Emperor's birthday; hence the name 'Birthday cash'¹⁰. The gold and silver pieces bearing an Imperial legend (with a mint, pseudo-mint or amuletic reverse) can probably be placed in the same category — presentation pieces distributed on special occasions by various departments in the Imperial bureaucracy. The issues of purely amuletic type can be conceived, along with their brass counterparts, as widely marketed commercial products. No doubt there is also some overlap between these two groups. But a distinct feature of the gold and silver issues, concomitant with their particular method of manufacture, is their short period of production within a span of not much more than half a century.

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|---|--|----|---|
| 1 | C. L. Krause and C. Mishler, Standard Catalog of World coins, 1981 edn., page 366. | 6 | Brian Hayter, 'Two Chinese cash style presentation pieces of the T'ai P'ing Rebellion', Seaby's C&M Bull., Dec. 1982, 369 - 70. |
| 2 | A. Th. Arber-Cooke, T'ai P'ing Rebellion, Seaby's C&M Bull. Feb. 1983, 39 - 40 | 7 | A. d'Affry de la Monnoye, Les jetons de l'échevinage Parisien, Paris 1878. |
| 3 | Joel L. Malter, Encino California, auction XXIV, March 1983, lot 576 (52 mm) — Wu-tzu Shih-ho (Five children in ten autumns: ie 5 sons in a decade). I am grateful to Mr. Michael Legg for drawing my attention to this piece. | 8 | F. Feuardent, Jetons et méreaux depuis Louis IX jusqu'à la fin du Consulat de Bonaparte, 4 vols., Paris 1904. |
| 4 | eg. M. Mitchiner, Oriental coins and their values III. Non-Islamic States and Western Colonies, 1979 nos. 4213 - 4215. | 9 | F. P. Barnard, The casting-counter and the counting board, Oxford 1917. |
| 5 | Arber-Cooke, op. cit. | 10 | eg. Mitchiner, op. cit. nos. 4191 - 4201 (esp. 4198-99); F. Schjoth, The currency of the Far East, Oslo 1929, cfr. p. 63 nos. 30 - 45; A. B. Coole, Coins in China's history, Kansas 1963, p. 60. |
- Photographs are twice enlarged.

12 "T'ung Chih currency"
 Gold: 3.35 gm., 22 mm. diam. (Mitchiner)
 Obv. T'ung Chih T'ung Pao
 Rev. Pao Chuan (Peking: B. Revenue)
 Engraved as previous issues: has been pierced,
 repaired and then mount attached.



- 13 Student amulet
 Silver: 3.75 gm., 29 mm diam. (Mitchiner)
 Obv. Chuan Yuan Chi Ti
 (May you win the Chuan-yuan [position
 of highest graduate])
 Rev. Kiang Shan Kung Lao
 (May the country ['rivers and mountains']
 participate in your experience [skills])
 Ornamental borders around obv. and rev. designs.

狀元及第
 江山共老



- 14 Student amulet
 Silver: 2.70 gm., 27 mm diam. (Mitchiner)
 Obv. Chuan Yuan Chi Ti
 Rev. I P'in Fu Ju
 (May you enter the number one rank of
 scholars)
 Manufacturer's inscr. in left and right obv. border

一品夫入



Grain tokens from Tibet

by Karl Gabrisch

The purpose of this note is to draw attention to a coin which appeared some time ago on the market at Kathmandu. In February of 1982 I had the opportunity to see and photograph this piece. It is a copper item. It appears to have been overstruck on a Tibetan 5 Sho copper coin. The minting was done on one side only. The die was pressed so firmly that the margin stands out. On the coin's obverse (photo 1) the legend is in Chinese characters. There are two characters in the central circle, looking from the left "MI LIANG" = millet ration. The legend in the outer circle at the top consists of three ideograms and could read "LA HSIU HAN". Translation gives the following meaning: to pull, to cultivate, a cliff¹. In addition, there are two Chinese characters which form a legend beneath the central circle. These characters could easily be translated as "SSU LIANG" = Four Ounces. The reverse of this coin (photo 2) presents something rather odd. Judged by the coin's appearance the surface may have been rubbed to remove the characteristics of the Tibetan die. Nevertheless the Tibetan dating "16 lo 26" meaning AD 1952, can still be identified. It would thus appear that the odd coin could be some sort of grain token: perhaps "for grain grown on the cliffs" of Tibet²?

Recently I received from Prof. L. Brilliant a photo of a second piece he purchased at Kathmandu. One can see without difficulty that this piece was struck from a slightly different die. The calligraphy of the Chinese ideograms varies (photo 3). The reverse is illegible (photo 4). Quite a new light can now also be thrown on the question of the meaning of the legend on the obverse. Mr. H. Chang, the well known Chinese numismatist, gives another reading for the legend on the obverse. Some 30 years ago, in the course of the "Chinese Communist Simplification of Chinese Ideograms", the character on the top right of the obverse received a new sense: FACTORY. Thus Mr. Chang's suggested reading would be "Lhasa Factory. Four Tael (of food). Ration". He suggests these tokens are genuine, too³.

Observers of the Chinese-Tibetan scene suggest that in the beginning of the occupation of Lhasa the Chinese strictly rationed food. Was there a famine after the change of the Government in Tibet? We don't know. Maybe these tokens are the first known evidence of such an event having occurred.

1 Fenn, C. H., "The Five Thousand Dictionary Chinese - English" 1976
 2 Reading supported also by N. G. Rhodes
 3 Information kindly provided by Prof. Dr. L. Brilliant.



Some recent publications

- Bailey, H. W.*, Two Kharosthi inscriptions, *JRAS* 1982 ii, 149 - 155
- Bergman, W.*, Alp Arslan – Grandfather of Turkey, *NI Bull.* July 1982, 211 - 2
- Broome, M. R.*, Al - Mu'tazz bi'llah – The Caliph 'made illustrious by Allah', *Seaby's C&M Bull.* Aug. 1982, 248 - 250 (see also Nov. 1982, 346 - 7)
- DeMarais, J.*, The British trade dollar in Hong Kong and Malaya, *NI Bull.* Oct. 1982, 303 - 7
- Dobbins, K. W.*, Vonones, Maues and Hermaios: the imperial coinage of Mithradates II, East and West, *IsMEO*, Rome 30, 1908, 31 - 53
- Eglseer, W.*, Amolis – primitive money from Ethiopia, *NI Bull.* Oct. 1982, 298 - 302
- Gabrisch, K.*, A hoard of coins from Ladakh, *NI Bull.* June 1982, 165 - 171
- Gabrisch, K.*, Notes on coinage of Jisnu Gupta of Nepal, *NI Bull.* Nov. 1982, 332 - 4
- Gabrisch, K.*, Malla coins that never were, *NI Bull.* Jan. 1983, 7 - 15
- Gabrisch, K.*, Beitrage zur Tibetischen Numismatik I: Die Sichuan Rupie und ihre varianten, *Munstersche NZ.* Dec. 1982, 44 - 7
- Hennequin, G.*, Die munzprägungen der Spatkuschanen und der Kushanosasaniden, *Der Munzensammler* (Munster), June 1982, 30 - 33 and July/Aug. 1982, 29 - 30
- Houten, G. M. M.*, Indian coin weights, *Spink's NC.* Dec. 1982, 339 - 40
- Ilisch, L.*, Ein Mas'udi-dirham des Sarifen-rebellen Gammaz aus Mekka 651 H., *Munstersche Numismatische Zeitung*, June 1982, 15 - 16
- Ilisch, L.*, Beitrage zur Mamlukischen Numismatik V: Inedita des Abbasidenkalifen al-Musta'in bi'llah aus Syrischen Munzstätten, *Munstersche NZ.* Dec. 1982, 39 - 41
- Jones, R. M.*, Oval coins from Japan's Tosa and Morioka mints, *NI Bull.* Jan. 1983, 26 - 27
- von Kleist, Ch-E.*, Einige bisher unbekannte fruhe munzen Nepals, *Munstersche NZ.* Dec. 1982, 43 - 44
- von Kleist, Ch-E.*, Einige bisher nicht beschriebene munzen der Malla-herrscher in Nepal, *M.NZ.* Oct. 82, 33-8
- MacKenzie, K. M.*, Qandarhari copper coins, *NI Bull.* Jan. 1983, 22 - 23
- Mitchiner, M.*, A Romano-Egyptian Defixio?, *Spink's NC.* July 1982, 197
- Mitchiner, M.*, Two Annamese cash cast for the Trinh 'Lord of the North', *Tong: AD 1570 - 1623*, *Seaby's C&M Bull.* Dec. 1982, 367 - 8
- Mochiri, M. I.*, A Sasanian-style coin of Yazid b. Mu'awiya, *JRAS.* 1982 ii, 137 - 140
- Plant, R.*, Sorry – not Mongol seal script, *Seaby's C&M Bull.* Feb. 1983, 33
- Rebello, F.*, Five xerafins of 1742, *Spink's NC.* July 1982, 196
- Robinson, M. and Shaw, L. A.*, Two new Burmese lead hare coins, *Spink's NC.* Oct. 1982, 271
- Seaby, P.*, Ismailis and Fatimids, *Seaby's C&M Bull.* July 1982, 211 - 3
- Singh, J. P.*, New Indian brockages, *NI Bull.* Aug. 1982, 229 - 33
- Singh, J. P.*, On the lion on Ahom coins, *Spink's NC.* Nov. 1982, 307 - 8
- Singh, J. P.*, Observations on Sikh tokens, *NI Bull.* Dec. 1982, 359 - 64
- Uphoff, J.*, Hindu image on an Islamic coin, *NI Bull.* July 1982, 205 - 6
- Warden, P. G.*, A classification of the symbols on the Indian silver punched-marked coins, pp. 75, *SIN.* Santa Monica 1981
- Williams, R.*, The Hephthalites, White Huns or Iranian Huns (350 - 650 AD), *S.C&M Bull.* Feb. 1983, 36 - 7
- Wilski, H. and Kerestecioglu, K.*, Turkish prison money, *NI Bull.* Oct. 1982, 310 - 11

Problems in Numismatics. This is the title for a series of lectures being organised by Dr. M. J. Price (British Museum) at the Institute of Classical Studies. Future lectures include 'The origins of coinage in India' by Mr. J. Cribb on 11th May and 'Domitian and the Jews' by Dr. I. Carradice on 1st. June: both at 4-30 pm.

Michael Bates of the ANS has prepared a computer printout catalogue of the ANS collection of coins of Axum derived from the Society's computer registration of its coins. The catalogue does not describe each coin completely, but it provides a checklist of the coins and can be expanded if user interest warrants. A copy of the catalogue can be obtained postpaid for 4-20 dollars in North America or 4-70 dollars elsewhere (US check or IMO). The catalogue is offered as a sample of what can be produced by the ANS computer registry. Other series in the Islamic and South Asian departments that are now completely registered include the coinage of the 'Abbasid era (all Islamic coins of c. 750 - 945 including contemporary dynasties), Nasrid coins and the coins of Arakan, Burma and Manipur. Some 13,500 Far Eastern coins have been entered. The price of printouts is 20 cents per page plus postage. Please contact Dr. Bates (Islamic) or Dr. Rose Chan Houston (Far Eastern) at the American Numismatic Society, 155th Street and Broadway, New York, NY 10032, USA.

Catalog of the Islamic coins, glass weights, dies and medals in the Egyptian National Library, Cairo

by N. D. Nicol, R. el-Nabarawy and J. L. Bacharach.

Undena Publications, PO Box 97, Malibu, Ca 90265, USA: pp. 313; pl. 38; price 39-50 dollars (cloth: 46-50).

Faced with the task of cataloguing 6,438 items the authors have been required to balance cost against length. They have chosen to present a concise description of the essential features shown by each piece in a semi-tabular format. The eight columns cite catalogue number, metal, mint, date, weight, diameter, registry number and lastly reference to a published specimen plus any special comments. This method of presentation is both an asset and a limitation. It is easy to evaluate the material in the Egyptian National Library and the presentation is both clear and generally accurate. If one is undertaking research into a particular coin series then, armed with the necessary reference books, the present catalogue is a valuable addition to published information. But to make good use of this catalogue it is necessary to have a comprehensive reference library to hand. This means that the book can be recommended to Museums and Research Institutes; but will be less useful to the general private collector. The method of presentation does have limitations in fields that have not been exhaustively investigated previously and this is especially noticeable in the case of the Glass weights, nos. 5283 - 6168. For instance, no. 5288 is described under the heading "Glass disks of the Roman period" as bearing the design "unidentified Greek monogram". Since the piece is illustrated one can re-attribute it as a Byzantine weight of a type published by G. Schlumberger in 'Poids de verre étalons monétiformes d'origine Byzantine', *Mélanges d'archéologie Byzantine I*, 1895, 315 - 335 (cfr. nos. 14 - 31). On the same page one might mention that the arabic inscription given to glass weight no. 5292 does not correspond to the transliteration cited. Despite such minor criticisms this book should find a valued place in numismatic literature, though the concise format will limit its readership.

M. B. Mitchiner

The lead coins of Pegu.

by M. Robinson

The city of Pegu (and its associated province) is in South Burma, close to Rangoon, and it was formerly an important port until the river silted up. Tradition has it that it was founded in AD 825 by the Mons with the name Hanthawaddy; being the supposed resting place of the Hantha (or Brahminy duck) when the surrounding country was beneath the sea. This symbol, the Hantha, was adopted by the city. The symbol also has connections with Cambodia where it was used on a 19th century silver issue as well as on coins from the 17th century. Mon territory included the area of Cambodia at one time. In Pegu itself Mon independence was effectively extinguished around 1539, although it re-emerged briefly in the mid 18th century, just before the Alaungpaya dynasty was established in Burma.

Stamped lead objects, many of which bear the Hantha bird on the obverse, have been found. The reverse is usually blank. They seem to fall into two types; a light group weighing around 3 to 4 gm., and a heavier group at around 12 gm: although weight variation is considerable. Two were illustrated by Robinson and Shaw¹, nos. 6.1 and 6.2 (chapters 4 and 6). Two more have recently been acquired by myself (6.2A, B) and another by Lewis Shaw (6.2C).

Obv. Hantha

Rev. Blank

6.1 (4.25 gm); 6.2 (11.34 gm); 6.2A (9.27 gm)

Obv. Coiled cobra ?

Rev. th(agiy)it / 653

653 BE = AD 1291/2

6.2B (12.63 gm): from its appearance the date seems far too early; maybe a modern addition.

Obv. Coiled snake

Rev. traces of Hantha ?

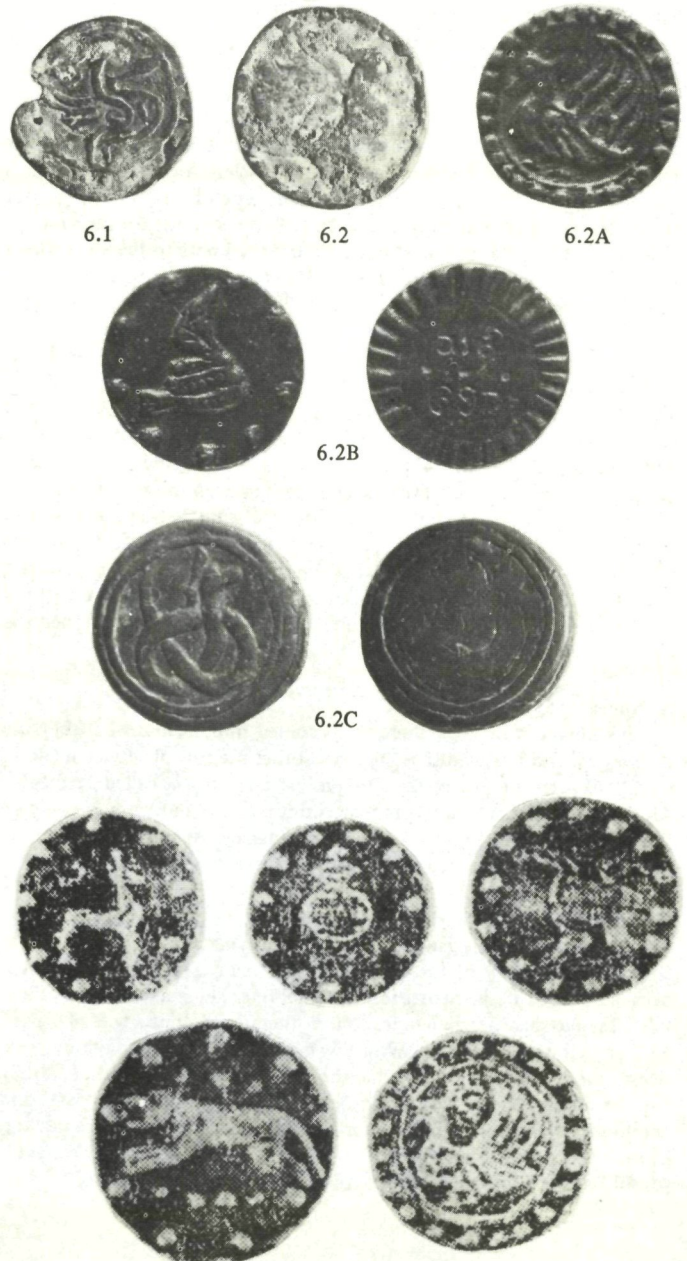
6.2C (12.94 gm)

Dr. Mark Pollard of the Oxford Laboratory for Archaeology has analysed some of these coins by X-ray fluorescence, with the following results: -

	Copper %	Tin %	Antimony %	Lead %
6.1	0.2	0.5	-	99.3
6.2	0.4	0.1	-	99.5
6.2A	0.1	-	0.8	99.1
6.2B	0.2	-	4.3	95.5

XRF only examines the metal near the surface, but unless this layer is totally unrepresentative of the mix, it appears that the coins are made of almost pure lead. The specific gravity of coins 6.1 and 6.2 is 10.61, also suggesting a high lead content.

Ko U² illustrated ten Pegu coins on pl. 83. These show a deer, a jar, a frog (?crab), a tiger and a Hantha on the top row of his plate; a coiled cobra and several unclear designs in the bottom row. Some are shown below:-



So much for the physical appearance and composition of the coins. According to Ko U² such pieces have been found in large numbers in the Pegu district. There is certainly no evidence for lead coins elsewhere in Burma, other than perhaps Tenasserim (where generally the coins were tin). In the rest of Burma uncoined lead was used, cut off in lumps. The Hantha bird also suggests an origin in Pegu. The problem that remains: over what period were they made? Ko U suggested that they may have been introduced, along with silver coins, in the reign of Bayinnaung (1551 - 81) in an effort to standardise weights (etc.) after a period of unrest between reigns. He did not rule out the possibility that they were older. Bayinnaung reigned at Pegu, but no European visitor mentioned any silver coins, and no specimens are known. Since there does not seem to be any firm evidence on lead coins from Burmese sources, one must turn to European accounts. When reading these it should not be assumed that the information was necessarily first hand. Sometimes writers quoted from much earlier accounts without adding new information. Also, the term 'money' does not necessarily mean coins; it could be any lump of metal. The early visitors were not coin collectors and did not always describe the 'money' in sufficient detail. A selection of the more important reports are given below. No writer on Pegu before Tomes mentioned anything other than gold, which of course would have been used in payment since the earliest times. The Portuguese were the first Europeans on the scene; later came the Venetian Caesar Fredericke and the Englishman Ralph Fitch. Spellings vary considerably: note that 1 viss = 100 kyat, about 3.65 lb.: my own comments appear in square brackets, [thus].

Tomé Pires; written in Malacca during 1512 - 15³

on Arakan: - The king was tributary to Bengal. 'The coinage of this country is canca, that is fruseleira in pieces, as we shall describe in Pegu when we speak of it, and also white cowries like those in Pegu'.
on Pegu: - 'The coinage of Pegu which is used in trading is fruseleira, which is called canca [sanskrit kansa, meaning bell-metal]. Some of this fruseleira is better and others less good. Fruseleira of copper and tin is better than that of copper, tin and lead, and worst is that of copper and lead. The canca of Martaban is the best. This is current throughout the country at ten callains, three arrates and five ounces to the vica, which is a cate and a half on the big scales of Malacca'. [Trading was by viss of ganza for viss of the commodity] 'The silver is in rounds marked with the mark of Siam, because it all comes from there. The piece in the round is called catura. The weight of it is a tael and a half which is 2 and 1/8 ozs'. 'The small currency of Pegu is small white cowries. In Martaban 15000 are used worth one vica [of ganza?] which is ten calains, when they are cheap 16000, when they are very dear 14000, and generally 15000. For 400 or 500 they will give a chicken, and things of that sort for the same price. If (you are) in Pegu the said cowries are not valid except in Martaban, and they are valid in the same way in Arakan', Pires stated that many of the cowries came from the Maldive Islands, via Malacca, to Pegu. Regarding Siam he stated that cowries, like those current in Pegu, were current throughout the country for small money, and gold and silver for larger coins. He also mentioned the tin coins of Malacca.

A. Nunes (1554)

'In this kingdom of Pegu there is no coined money, and what they use commonly consists of dishes, pans and other utensils of service made of metal, like frosyleyra broken in pieces; and this is called 'gamca' '. Allowing for the fact that Tome's account is translated from Portuguese the word 'coinage' may not refer to actual coins; but to the broken pieces of metal mentioned by Nunes.

Caesar Fredericke (1569)

'The current money is gansa or ganza, which is made of copper and lead. It is not the money of the king, but every man may stamp it that will because it hath its just partition or value: but they make many of them false by putting overmuch lead into them, and those will not pass, neither will any take them. With this money, ganza, you may buy gold, silver, rubies, muske, and other things, for there is no other money current among them. This ganza goeth by weight of Byze [viss], and commonly a Byza of ganza is worth, after our account, half a ducket. In each Byza there is a weight of 100 ganza. That money is very weighty, for 40 Byza is a strong porter's burden.'

Ralph Fitch (1586)

He mentions that the money was a 'kind of brasse which they call ganza' and quotes a 'biza' as 'worth half a crowne'.

D. G. E. Hall, quoting the East India Company accounts, stated that in 1650 one viss of gance was worth 16d sterling, and that in 1712, just 1d G. E. Harvey (History of Burma, 122) said that the ganza was either in odd lumps or in bars of specified weight, stamped by merchants of repute, but usually false. He did not cite any evidence.

Captain A. Hamilton (c. 1709)

'Plenty of ganse or lead, which passeth all over the Pegu dominion for money'.

W. H. Hunter (1782)

'The principal money of the country is silver, which is not coinage, but paid by weight.....For the payment of smaller sums they use money of lead, which is weighed in the same manner as the former.'

P. Kelly (1821 and 1835: not a first hand account)⁴

'Trade is here mostly carried on by barter: gold and silver are not coined in the country, but exchanged as merchandise. There is however a small coin called Ganza, which is a mixture of copper, lead and tin and worth about 1¼d sterling [per viss?]; but the price varies according to the demand and supply. Gold, silver, pearls, spices and other valuable articles are generally paid for in this money.'

The composition of the ganza quoted by Kelly was probably taken from much earlier accounts, as maybe was the use of the coin. In most cases Kelly took great trouble to check his information.

In conclusion one can say that the use of ganza for trading purposes was established by 1512 at the latest. It was originally a mixture of copper, lead and tin; or copper and lead. But by 1700 it had probably deteriorated to almost pure lead. Silver then had to be introduced for large transactions. The references to an actual coin are ambiguous; prior to 1560 the money seems to have been broken pieces of metal. From Fredericke's account we can deduce that 1 ganza weighed about 1 kyat, or 16.5 gm, just above the weight of the heavier coins. Kelly referred definitely to a coin; on whose authority it is not known. If his statement was still current, the coins may have been issued right up to the British occupation of 1852.

One may therefore suggest a period of c. 1650 - 1850 for the pure lead coins, and maybe back to 1560 for any containing sizeable amounts of copper. There still remains a possibility that some at least of the coins are really ancient; pre-1400. Coins may have gone out of use and come back later. It may be that the date 653 BE is genuine, although I doubt it. The only way of making more progress in dating these coins is from further archeological work, or discovery of new detailed written records.

References

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- 3 transl. Armando Cortesao, The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires, Hakluyt Society Publ., 2nd. ser., nos. 89-90, 2 vols. London 1944
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Further quotations from 16th century European visitors appear in: -

D. F. Lach, Southeast Asia in the eyes of Europe: the sixteenth century, University of Chicago Press, 1968.