



ORIENTAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER 109
November - December 1987



Pride of place this month goes to a fabulous one thousand mohur coin of the Moghal emperor Jahangir. This coin, minted in Agra in AD 1613 and weighing almost twelve kilograms, is being auctioned on 9 November along with a 100 mohur coin of Shah Jehan, by Habsburg, Feldman S.A. of Geneva. Our thanks are due to Habsburg, Feldman for permission to reproduce their photograph of the coin and for reproducing the following text from their auction leaflet: 'None of the legendary giant gold mohurs of the Moghal emperors was known to have survived until today. Travellers such as Tavernier and Manucci mention seeing gigantic coins in the treasury of Shah Jahangir. Shah Jahangir describes a number of such works of art in his autobiography. He presented a small number of gold mohurs of 100, 200, 500 and 1000 tolas only to highest dignitaries. The 1000 mohurs, of which four or five are mentioned, were reserved for the ambassadors of the powerful rulers of Persia.'

Translation of the legend on the face illustrated overleaf is: 'Father of the Victorious, radiance of the Faith, Mohammed Jahangir, emperor, warrior. The Faith of the die and gold receive one thousand kinds of honour from the design of the name of Jahangir Shah, son of Shah Akbar. It would not be strange, if born from the marriage of die and fire in his mint, it received its instant reward'.

ONS News

1. In Newsletter 108 we mentioned the ONS meeting that took place in Tübingen earlier this year. Some additional details, provided by Hans Wilski, follow.

Meeting of ONS-members in Tübingen/Germany, on 23/24 May 1987.

About 20 ONS members and guests met at the Max Planck Haus in Tübingen for two days for the discussion of problems of mutual interest, mainly questions of Ottoman numismatics. The following talks were given: St. Heidemann: 'The events of the years 1260 and 1261 in Syria in the light of a new coin hoard of 586 pieces.' L. Ilisch: 'The monetary system of the Ottoman Empire as it is described in German traveller books of the 16th century.' E. Kern: 'The gold coins of the campaigns of sultan Selim I.' H. Wilski: 'The counterstamps of Plomari/Lesbos.' L. Ilisch: 'Ottoman coins from Yemeni minting places.' The congress was initiated by Dr. Lutz Ilisch; the organisation lay in the hands of Dr. Claus Pelling. A more detailed description of the congress will be published later this year in the "Geldgeschichtliche Nachrichten", Frankfurt. The next meeting is planned for 30.4 / 1.5. 1988, again in Tübingen. Everybody is welcome.

2. In Newsletter 107 we mentioned the difficulties some members in the South Asia Region not resident in India were having in obtaining Indian currency for paying their subscriptions. Mr. Kulkarni has written to say that anyone paying the Rs 75 subscription to him can do so by drawing a cheque payable for an equivalent sum in UK£ or US\$ at any bank in Bombay. Cheques encashable outside India are also acceptable provided appropriate bank commission is added. All instruments should be drawn in favour of the ONS, Nagpur Office.

3. A summary of the Society's accounts for the year ending March 1987 is now available on request from your Regional Secretary.

4. The ONS American Region will have its annual meeting at the Sheraton Centre Hotel on Saturday 12 December 1987 during the New York International Numismatic Convention. The guest speaker will be Dr. Lawrence Adams who will give an illustrated talk on "The gold coinage of the Huns of Bactria and India". The meeting will be followed by the usual annual dinner. All ONS members attending are welcome to join in and are welcome to bring both family and guests to the meeting and the dinner. Anyone intending to attend the dinner should write to Bill Warden in good time before the event.

5. The next London meeting will be on Saturday 30th January at 9 Montague Street, W.C.1, commencing at 2.15 pm. Tony Holmes will give a talk on Java.

Members' News

1. Frank Payton (Glenholme, High Oakham Road, Mansfield, Notts., U.K.) can provide members interested in Bactrian, Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Kushan coins with a computer printout of auction prices relating to these series over the past 5 years or so. The prices are from a variety of sources both in the U.K. and elsewhere in Europe. The cost, including postage, is £1.
2. New member ... (first published in this Newsletter), is in the process of research on Sasanian, Arab-Sasanian coins struck at the mint of Sistan and asks that any members who have such coins in their collections please send him photographs and information on them, even if common types. The research, which he started at the ANS summer seminar 1987, he hopes to publish when complete.
3. In Newsletter 107 we mentioned the planned series of books on the coinage of the Indo-China area by Messrs. Pieratt, Cariou & Fox. Mr. Pieratt has written to add that this work will be bilingual – English & French – and invites both English and French speaking members (and, of course, any other interested members) who are interested in this area to provide input.

Museum News

Sasanian coins for Blackburn Museum.

Grants in aid amounting to £5000 from the Museums Commission, the National Art Collections Fund (through the Mrs. Beatrice N. Stuart Bequest), the Francis C. Scott Charitable Trust and the Granada Foundation have enabled Blackburn Museum (Lancashire, U.K.), to acquire the Keith Sugden collection of 128 Sasanian coins (224 - 651 A.D.), thus helping to further the Museum's coverage of the currencies of the Middle East and South Asia.

New and Recent Publications

1. The Catalogue of British India Historical Medals by R. P. Puddester has just been published by R. C. Senior Ltd. This 245 page book, illustrated throughout, also includes temperance, shooting and sporting medals, badges and a range of miscellaneous items. It is the first work to deal with this subject. The period covered is from 1662 up to Independence in 1947. More than 500 entries deal with medals of all kinds, commemorating and acknowledging events, personages, institutions and significant milestones and achievements in India when ruled by the British. The published price is £40. 500 copies only have been printed, half of which are expected to be sold in India. Further details from the publisher (see membership list).
2. Early & Medieval Coins and Currency System of Orissa, c. 300 B.C. to 1568 A.D., by Snigdha Tripathi. The work attempts a systematic and comprehensive study of the sporadic material in this series, from the earliest punch-marked coins to the coins of the Ganga dynasty. The book includes a large number of line drawings pertaining to the symbols found on the silver punch-marked coins so far discovered in Orissa. The price is Rs 500 (plus postage etc.) and is available from the Indian Books Centre, 40/5 Shakti Nagar, Delhi - 110007, India.
3. M. I. Mochiri has published a book entitled 'Arab-Sasanian Civil War coinage – Manichaeans, Yazidiya and other Khawarij.' Soft covers, 106 pages plus 21 plates. The book is being distributed by Brill of Leiden, Netherlands, with a cover price of Dutch Fl. 64. It is hoped to review this publication in a future Newsletter.
4. Two recent publications on countermarks on Ottoman coins:
 - i 'Die Deutung des griechischen Gegenstempels ΠΛΓ' by Mackenzie and Wilski, in Münsterische Num. Zeit. XVII, Heft 1 and 2 (April 1987).
 - ii 'Die Gegenstempel von Nigrita und Sirpa in Macedonien', by Hans Wilski, in Geldgeschichtliche Nachrichten vol. 119, p.132/3 (March 1987).
5. Spink Numismatic Circular for September 1987 contains an article by N. du Quesne Bird entitled 'An Arabian Aluminium Coin of 1897' – this being a ¼ anna of Muscat & Oman dated 1315 in aluminium – and an article by B. Juel-Jensen entitled 'A new silver coin of King Wazena of Aksum'. The October issue includes part V of Oliver Cresswell's article on 'The Bullet Coinage of Siam' and another, small item by B. Juel-Jensen entitled 'Vaccaro's Aksumite 'King Alelan': a ghost laid.'
6. Recently issued list 52 of Steve Album contains part 1 of an article of Iranian Silver Denominational Names 907-1295/1501-1878.

Book Review

TIBETAN PAPER CURRENCY, by Bhupendra Narayan Shrestha, 76pp. Published by: Transatlantic Authors Ltd., 6 Hall Place Gardens, St. Albans, Herts., U.K., 1987, at £12.50
Reviewed by N. G. Rhodes.

The Oriental Numismatic Society has rarely, if ever, mentioned the subject of bank-notes, but they are just as important a part of the currency system of a country as are coins. The publication by Colin Narbeth of the work by B. N. Shrestha on Tibetan Paper Currency provides a reason to rectify this omission.

As a Kathmandu money-changer, BNS has been in an ideal situation to do research on Tibetan banknotes, and he is to be congratulated on an exceptionally interesting and detailed study. The designs of the notes are fully described and explained in fascinating detail and the various seals used are well illustrated and most of them read and identified. The serial number systems are explained and ranges of numbers noted for each type and date, so that the number printed on each variety can be estimated. Also this enables forgeries to be identified more easily, as the forgers rarely put sensible serial numbers on their products. Some space is devoted to errors, and it is fascinating to see how poor the quality control was in this fascinating and beautiful series of notes, printed using wood blocks, and with serial numbers written in by hand.

The advanced collector may note a few minor variations that are not mentioned, such as the variety of Type 10a, on page 22, where notes up to No. 50 have the serial number written on the yellow background printing, whereas No. 51 and all later notes have a rectangular space in the yellow printing to allow the serial number to be written directly onto the paper. Also the list of forgeries and errors can easily be added to, and the range of serial numbers for each variety can often be extended. Finally it is unfortunate that a unique numbering system was not used for both the serial number analysis and the analysis of rarity. However, these are minor imperfections, and I regard this work as essential reading for all collectors of Tibetan currency, and it will certainly form the basis of any further research on Tibetan banknotes.

An eighth and sixteenth rupee of Farrukhsiyar struck at Masulipatnam. by H. A. Groenendijk

The 1/8 and 1/16 rupee illustrated below in the enlarged photographs appear to be unpublished. Both coins, which are struck from the same die, show the name of Farrukhsiyar. The mintname is Macchlipatan (Masulipatnam) as can be read clearly on the 1/8 rupee.

The weight of the coins is 1.46 and 0.72 grams respectively. The diameters are 12 and 7 mm. Both coins are in uncirculated condition.



The inscription on the coins is shortened from the standard inscription and reads:

sikkah mubarak Farrukhsiyar 1126

zuriba Macchlipatan jalus 3

سکه مبارک فرخ سیر ۱۱۲۶
صن عجبلی پتن جلوس ۳

The last digit of the year looks like '8', it appears that an attempt was made to change the digit 0 in the die into 7. The regnal year is 3. The third regnal year of Farrukhsiyar commenced on December 19, 1714 while the year AH 1127 commenced on December 27, 1714, so the coins were probably struck sometime during the second part of December 1714.

A double rupee of Arkat. by Jan Lingen

Occasionally new types and denominations turn up in the series of Indian numismatics and such is the case with this double rupee of Arkat¹ which has not so far been published nor was it known to Biddulph who published extensively on the coins of the Nawabs of Arkat.²

Description:

Metal : R

Size : 34 mm.

Weight : 22.96 g.

Edge : 'flower-edge' as on the contemporary coins of Mysore State.

Issue of the Nawab Walajah Mohammed Ali Khan (AD 1751-1795 / AH 1165-1209)
in the name of the Moghal Emperor Shah Alam II (AD 1759-1806 / AH 1173-1221)

The defender of the Religion of
Mohammed, Shah Alam Emperor,
Shadow of the Divine favour,
put his stamp on the seven climes.



Minted at Arkat in the year 27
of his reign of tranquil
prosperity.
With title 'Wala' above 'Seen'

Such a phenomenon requires some investigation as why and under which circumstances this coin might have been struck.

Double rupees, in South-India, were introduced on some scale for the first time during the reign of Tipu Sultan of Mysore. The earliest date known is 1198 AH (AD 1783/84).

This denomination seemingly gained popularity and the British East India Company issued double rupees from their mint at Madras.

These E.I.C. double rupees bear the mintname Arkat and the date AH 1172/ Ry.6 (AD 1759) but were actually issued in accordance with the Proclamation dated 15th July 1807.

Prior to these issues some rare double rupees were struck, probably as patterns or specimens, by the British and the French at their respective mints at Masulipatnam and at Pondicherry (with the mintname Arkat). But it is clear that the use, on a larger scale, of this denomination was mainly instigated by the issues of Mysore and it is obvious that these in turn were imitated by the Nawab of Arkat.

The weight and size of this double rupee is the same as the contemporary double rupees of Mysore of the same date (AH 1200/Ry.4). The coin shows on its higher parts some indications that it has been over-struck on another coin; furthermore the edge shows remains of a 'flower-edge' similar to that on contemporary coins of Mysore. This proves that a double rupee of Mysore was used as a 'blank' for this double rupee of Arkat.

The coin bears the title 'Wala' above the 'Seen' of the word 'Jalus' on the reverse. This is contrary to Biddulph's observation³ that Mohammed Ali did not use his title on his rupees and that it only occurred on the coins of his successor, Umdat-al-Umara (AD 1795-1801/ AH 1209-1216).

The coin was struck in AH 1200/Yr.27 (4.11.1785-9.2.1786). Five years prior to this date (2.12.1781, AH 1195/96) the Nawab assigned, by treaty,⁴ to the East India Company the management and control of the whole revenue of the State on condition that he receive 1/6 of it for his personal use.

Consequently the right of coining must have been suspended as well, because no coins are known which fall within the period of British administration.

In June 1785, however, the full exercise of sovereignty over and possession of the Carnatic was restored again to the Nawab.⁵ This occasion coincides with the date of this double rupee.

The double rupee seems to be an example of the first trials or patterns which (perhaps with other denominations too) must have been presented to the Nawab, and perhaps to some other officials, for approval.

Biddulph in JNSI XXIV, plate V-7, shows an 1/8 rupee (21.6 grains = 1.4 g.) of the same date and with the title 'Wala', which is otherwise unrecorded and presumably belongs to the same series of trials or patterns which were struck on the same occasion soon after the Nawab's resumption of the administration of the State.

After the fall of Seringapatnam and the death of Tipu Sultan in 1799 correspondence came to light which showed that the Nawab had been engaged in a treasonable conspiracy with Tipu and finally on the 31st of July 1801 (1216 AH) an agreement⁶ was made with the then new Nawab, Azim-ul-Dowlah, to hand over the administration of the State to the Company in perpetuity. No coins of the Nawabs of Arkat are known later than 1799 (1214 AH).

Notes

- 1 The coin was offered in Stephen Album's pricelist No. 50 - May 1987, lot 1206. He also kindly provided the illustrations which accompany this note.
- 2 JNSI XXI part II 1959: Rupees issued by the English and French East India Companies and the Nawab of Arcot in the 17th to 19th centuries.
JNSI XXII 1960: Rupees of the Nawabs of Arcot from mints in administrative regions controlled by local Governors appointed by the Nawabs.
JNSI XXIV 1962: Coins of the Nawabs of Arcot.
JNSI XXV 1963: Coins of the Nawabs of Arcot.
- 3 JNSI XXI part II 1959 p.166.
- 4 Aitchison, C.U.: A collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and neighbouring countries; Vol. X: Madras & The Madras States; Treaty no. IV, pp.51-52.
- 5 Ibid.: Treaty no. V, pp.52-56.
- 6 Ibid.: Treaty no. IX, pp.72-76.

Further views on the Afghan medal

In Newsletters 104 and 105 we published details of a coin-like Afghan medal. Colonel Sultan Zahur Akhtar of Rawalpindi has written casting doubts on Mr. Hamidi's attribution of this medal to Abdul Rahman. In the Colonel's view, this medal was struck by the British. The Shenwaris had created a lot of problems for the British during the second Afghan war and also during the battle of Jalalabad. After the war was over and the Shenwaris subdued, the British would have struck this medal in the same way that after the capture of Qandahar, they struck rupees with the Kalima on the obverse and 'struck at Ahmed Shahi' on the reverse. Colonel Akhtar believes that no Afghan would have struck a medal of this sort proclaiming victory over one of their own tribes.

Members are invited to comment further on this matter.

Summary of a Paper presented on the occasion of an Exhibition of Islamic Gold Coins at the Zamana Gallery, London. September 1986.

The Coinage of Damascus under the Umayyads: 692-750. by Michael L. Bates.

The paper discussed the origin of the Umayyad coinage by reference to coins attributable to the mint of Damascus. Three phases were identified covering the periods AH 72-74/AD 692-694, with Imperial images, 72-77/694-697, with Arabic images and 77-132/697-750 with Arabic inscriptions only. Gold coins from phase 1 can be divided into two sub-series, the earlier, for which only four specimens are known, having legends in Greek, and the later, in Arabic. Coins of both sub-series have pairs of Greek letters which, on Byzantine issues indicate the date. Their meaning on these Umayyad coins was discussed but it was concluded that they could not be dates. Phase 1 was dated to AH72 by reference to near contemporary accounts and the existence of dated silver coins of a similar 'Pahlavi' style which are named to Damascus.

Gold coins of Phase 2, known as the Standing Caliph type, are similar in style to undated bronze coins from Damascus. The rare mintless 'standing caliph' silver of AH75 is also considered to be from Damascus but the 'mihrab' type may be from another mint. Gold and silver of Phase 3, the 'reformed' coinage, show 'secret marks' below certain letters which may indicate separate mints for gold and for silver up to c. AH109, both probably sited in Damascus.

The Paper noted that dinars named to Ma'din Amir al-Muminin can be die-linked to some of the mintless 'Damascus' series, perhaps indicating the use of gold from the Hejaz rather than the opening of a new mint. Damascus was also proposed as the mint for the mintless half and third dinars, dated AH91-103 and with the same legends as dinars from Al-Andalus and Ifriqiya. Fractional dinars with Latin inscriptions are known from these mints for part of this period and it would be difficult to accept the need for two types circulating at the same time in the same area. The paper concluded by suggesting that a die study of Umayyad Syrian coins might well provide answers to many of these problems. MRB

Arab-Byzantine Coinage of Hims: Die Study



Andrew Oddy of the Department of Conservation, The British Museum, London WC1B 3DG, is working on a die study of the "Constans II" type of Arab-Byzantine coins of Hims and would welcome details from collectors, museums and dealers of coins in their possession. He is particularly keen to borrow photographs, or even the actual coins where this can be arranged, and owners and curators are asked to contact him at this address if they have one or more of these coins in their possession.

More Members' News

Joel Malter has written to say that his company have received for auction an important emsemble of Islamic and Indo-Greek coins. Two collections have come their way; the Dr. Frank Linville and the Gene Wilkin collections. The former collection is strong in Islamic coins, including Arab-Sasanian; the latter in Indo-Greek coins. His next auction will feature Indo-Greek, Sasanian and related coinages, while next year there will be auctions of Islamic gold and silver coins, Byzantine and Islamic glass weights. Catalogues available for \$20 within U.S.A.; \$40 elsewhere. See membership list for address.

Japanese coins in southern Vietnam and the Dutch East India Company, 1633 - 1638. by Dr. A. van Aelst.

Literature on Vietnamese numismatics¹ does not mention new types of cash coins being produced in Vietnam between 1577 and 1648. During this period the coins needed for circulation were most probably imported from China and Japan.² Not much is known about the types and numbers of the coins involved in these imports. A remarkable source of information in this matter can be found in the General State Archives in The Hague: the archives of the "Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie" (VOC), and more specific those of their trading post in Japan.³

Between 1633 and 1638 the ships of this company visited the southern part of Vietnam, then known as Quang-nam, where they took in goods for the Japanese market.⁴ These goods were bought with Japanese silver and Japanese copper coins. The reports of purchases of copper coins for this purpose in Japan can be found in the ledgers of the trading post at Hirado.⁵ It is remarkable that not just numbers and prices of the purchased coins are given but also the types of the coins. The following numbers and types of coins were bought from Japanese traders in strings of nominally 1000 pieces (in reality 4% less: 960 pieces):

type:	"Ierack"	"Saccamotta"	"Mito"	"Nume"	"Tammary"	Unspec.	Total
year							
1633	930	15,420	—	—	—	—	16,530
1634	360	9,724	—	—	—	—	10,084
1635	—	41,625	—	—	—	—	41,625
1636	—	5,385	—	5,250	—	2,865	13,500
1637	—	—	2,505	—	510	21,260	24,275
total	1,290	72,154	2,505	5,250	510	24,125	105,834

The "Ierack" (or "Erack") type is no doubt the Eiraku-tsuho, the original Yung-lo coin, imported in Japan from China between the fifteenth and the middle of the sixteenth century. These were official Chinese coins mixed with both Chinese and Japanese⁶ private castings. In 1608 the use of these coins was prohibited by the Japanese government,⁷ which explains the relatively low price of the 1290 strings: 0.75 tael string⁸, about 10% cheaper than the other coins that year.

"Saccamotta" most probably is the designation of coins cast in the coin foundry in Sakamoto.⁹ It indicates the foundry, not the type, but it probably concerns the Kanei-tsuho which was cast from 1626 onwards. There is, however, no mention in literature on Japanese numismatics that this foundry was producing coins before 1636. In this year (Kanei 13) the Japanese government ordered large quantities of Kanei-tsuho to be cast in the foundries of Tokyo and Sakamoto.¹⁰ The VOC bought more than 72 million coins cast in the Sakamoto foundry, but at least 66 million¹¹ of them were bought prior to the Kanei-13 edict, for 0.80 - 0.85 tael a string, and they were not able to buy more than 5.5 million¹² of the new official coin in 1636, for which they paid the 12% higher price of 0.95 tael a string.¹³



Eiraku-tsuho



Kanei-tsuho

From 1626 onwards Kanei-tsuho were cast in Mito,¹⁴ and the 2.5 million coins the VOC purchased in 1637 were most probably of the K-103 type¹⁵ cast in 1636, fetching the new price of 0.95 tael a string.

If the 0.95 tael price is an indication for the post-1636 Kanei-tsuho then the 'Nume' and 'Tammary' lots were of that type, but I have not been able to locate these two foundries.

Of the coins in column 6 the origin was not mentioned, but they fetched a price of 1 tael a string, indicating the newly minted government Kanei-tsuho.

In addition to the VOC, Japanese and Chinese traders exported large quantities of Japanese copper coins to Vietnam.¹⁶ If in the five-year period between 1633 and 1638 the VOC alone transported 1.25 million Eiraku-tsuho and over a 100 million Kanei-tsuho to Vietnam to be put into circulation there, we can imagine the role of these coins in the 17th century Vietnamese economy. This is not the place to discuss the economic effects of these transactions, but to the numismatist it has to be clear that the Japanese Eiraku- and Kanei-tsuho deserve the same place in Vietnamese catalogues as the Chinese Yung-lo tung-pao in Japanese numismatic works. These Japanese coins were no occasional guests but an everyday part of Vietnamese money transactions.

- 1 E. Toda: "Annam and its minor currency", 1882, repr. in: *The East Asia Journal* 6 (1983); A. Schroeder: "Annam, études numismatiques", (Paris, 1905); J. Novak: "A working aid for collectors of Annamese coins" (1967).
- 2 Nguyen Thanh-nha: "Tableau économique du Vietnam aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles" (Paris, 1970): pp.164, 167.
- 3 Archive inventory: M. P. H. Roessingh: "Het archief van de Nederlandse factorij in Japan" (Den Haag, 1964).
- 4 This period is treated more extensively in: W. J. M. Buch: "De Oostindische Compagnie en Quinam" (Amsterdam, 1929).
- 5 Algemeen Rijksarchief, archief factorij Japan: nos. 977-981 grootboeken 1628-1637, nos. 832-837: *Journalen 1628-1637*.
- 6 T. Takizawa: "Early currency policies of the Tokugawa's, 1563-1608" in: *Acta Asiatica* 39 (1980), p.22; N. Jacobs, C. C. Vermeule: "Japanese coinage" (New York, 1972), p.19.
- 7 Takizawa, p.22.
- 8 One Japanese tael was counted for fl. 3.13 until 1636, after that year for fl.2.85.
- 9 N. G. Munro: "Coins of Japan" (Yokohama, 1904), p.113; Jacobs & Vermeule, p.26.
- 10 Munro, p.117; Jacobs & Vermeule, p.26.
- 11 66,769 strings.
- 12 5,385 strings.
- 13 L. Blusse (e.a): "Dagregisters van het kasteel Zeelandia, Taiwan, 1629-1669" (Den Haag, 1986), p.283.
- 14 Jacobs & Vermeule, p.84; Munro, p.12.
- 15 Jacobs & Vermeule, p.84.
- 16 Buch, pp.28, 67.

A Strange Tale of Talismans – Part 2 by P. R. Bauquis

To try and answer these questions I took it upon myself to study the inscriptions. This, however, turned out to be a difficult task for the non-specialist and in the end did not achieve any concrete results for reasons that will become clear later on. Nevertheless, the study did produce some interesting information and this is summarised below.

Study of the inscriptions

Arabic texts

The spherical and disc-shaped objects are generally decorated with brief inscriptions containing the name of Allah, Muhammed or descendants of the prophet. Sometimes the entire Kalima can be found. On the disc-shaped items there are often sequences of figures giving the impression of dates. It is the rectangular plaques that appear most interesting as the texts on them are more extensive.



Javanese texts

Among the specimens I was able to collect, two 'pétanque balls' bearing inscriptions in Javanese. The texts are as follows:
Ball 1: "kowe mantep tur setuju ngakal hulet daging kulitmu" which can be translated as "You ought to be certain and agree to think profoundly, as if it were a question of your flesh and your skin."

Ball 2: "ratuning pengasih sejatining wong agung" which can be translated as "a generous king is truly an eminent man". This text is clearly visible in the illustration above. One learned Javanese claimed that this text represented a date in the form of 'candra sengkala': Ratu = 1, Pengasih = 6, Sejati = 7, Wong agung = 1. The date would be 1761 A.J. or 1833 A.D. Be that as it may, these texts do not provide any information on the origin or use of the balls on which they are engraved.

Chinese texts

The examination of the Chinese inscriptions was to turn out more interesting whilst at the same time leading me along a number of wrong tracks. I arrived quickly at one conclusion, which, at the time, I considered particularly interesting: all the items bearing inscriptions in Chinese, whether they were tiny ingots less than a centimetre long, large or medium-sized balls, small

or large flat pieces, blades or spear-heads; all, without exception, mentioned the name San Po, together with the usual surnames of this great ambassador-navigator: San Po Kong, San Po Tai Jin (San Bao Da Ren).

This finding naturally led me to take an interest in the cult dedicated to San Po by certain Indonesian communities of Chinese origin. Alas, the visit to the Chinese temple of Semarang dedicated to San Po produced nothing: not a trace of any of these objects. I had set even greater hope on discovering the key to the mystery at the temple of Ancol (Da-Bo Gong Miao): as a number of the pieces showed a mixture of Islamic and Chinese characteristics, I thought that this half-Chinese, half-Islamic temple should lead me to hybrid communities, whose existence I was already picturing in my mind. The fact that San Po was himself a muslim strengthened this hope, as did the fact that one of his lieutenants and his wife were buried in this temple. Alas, this visit, too, proved abortive: the caretaker knew who San Po was alright but he had never seen the famous balls or plaques that I showed him.

The translation made by some devoted people of two works in Indonesian about San Po did not provide any clues either, though another publication did maintain my conviction that these objects had an old origin. In effect, I was informed that the magazine *Majalah Arkeologi* had published an article (vol.III, 1-2 Sept.-Nov., 1980) on a spear-head found at Lombok in 1972, analogous to those that I had collected from the dealers (see illustration above.)

It was clear, according to this article written by a historian of repute, Sukarto K. Atmodjo, that the hypothesis of a recent date was not envisaged. The author mentions the name of the discoverer and the approximate date of the find (during the 1940s), and concludes that this was an important archaeological discovery. Despite the reassurance that this article was able to give me concerning the early date of the iron blades engraved with the name San Po, my examination of the Chinese inscriptions was not to lead to any results that enabled me to answer the questions I continued to set myself, viz. who? when? why?

An Unexpected Conclusion

Somewhat discouraged by so much fruitless effort, by the not inconsiderable number of purchases, and by false leads, I had practically given up my research autumn 1982; my conclusion at that stage was that they had to be talismans, good-luck charms or something similar of probably ancient origin but still being produced (an intermediary had undertaken, for a considerable sum, to get me a specimen with my own initials incorporated into the design!). The condition of certain pieces, with lustrous metal and seemingly brand new, gave strength to this conclusion. Further reinforcement came (and this practically clinched the matter for me) when Henri Chambert-Loir acquired from a dealer in Yogyakarta a lot of brand new good-luck charms. These were made of iron or brass, the former etched, the latter engraved and seemed to be the modern day representatives of this family of objects. Amongst them were an iron nail with Arabic inscriptions, a small silhouette of a semar in the same material, a small whip (also of iron) identical to that depicted on a number of my specimens, etc.

Finally it was chance, once again, that came to my aid and provided a more precise conclusion – and a somewhat unexpected one. Passing through Jakarta during September 1982, Claude Guillot, a specialist in Indonesian religious matters, took it upon himself to carry out some research on these objects, which I had shown him. While questioning various dealers, he finally managed to get himself taken to a workshop near Surabaya, from where he had been assured certain of these objects came. Imagine his surprise when he found ten or so people working there fabricating the whole range of “talismans” that we had come across from the “oldest” to the “newest”, with designs and inscriptions in Arabic, Chinese or Javanese. Once the owner was assured that his little business was of interest not to a competitor or a dealer, but to a man from a university with no commercial interest in the matter, he told his story.

Some thirty years ago, his father used to work for a cement company near Gresik (north west of Surabaya) where there were scrap-heaps of damaged or split metal balls used in the crushers. One day it occurred to him to take home bit of these balls then to take a wax pipette (of the type used for designing batik). He then proceeded to make some wax inscriptions on the metal before dipping it in acid. As some metal fragments presented a concave surface, he drew on them a fine spiral pattern calling to mind the thumb-print of a supernatural black-smith – an old Javanese myth well-known to our man. Satisfied with the results, it then occurred to him to give these objects as presents to friends and neighbours. He told them they were very old, magical good-luck charms. Later on, these people spoke highly of the virtues of these talismans and called for more. Our man kept his secret to himself and set to work to meet this unexpected demand. His success grew and grew, obliging him to create a veritable workshop where the whole family were employed while carefully maintaining due secrecy. In order to increase the credibility of these talismans, he obtained for himself an old work on Indonesian magic (*kitab mujarabat*) which enabled him to copy numerous traditional motives known to those initiated into esoteric mysteries.

Thus for a period of some twenty years, his trade developed, the designs and shapes multiplied and the clientele apparently remained exclusively local. Then the inevitable happened, some shrewd middlemen got hold of some specimens and, probably in 1977, for the first time, offered these mysterious objects to dealers in Singapore and Hong Kong, whence they arrived in Europe and the United States that same year. What happened then is well known.

Epilogue

The account given to Claude Guillot by the man responsible for a talisman workshop probably provides a conclusion to my enquiry. The story as related is compatible with all the observed facts and is thus very likely. The only question that remains is whether the starting date for this industry is exact and whether its creator was not in fact reviving a tradition and a technique that existed previously. Only additional research would provide a definitive answer to this question.

Obituary

As we go to print we have just heard of the death of Tony Webdale. Tony joined the ONS in its early days and was known to his friends and fellow members as a very enthusiastic collector of Islamic coins. The London ONS meetings were often enlivened by his cheerful conversation and many a budding student of Islamic numismatics will have received his unstinted encouragement. Tony leaves a widow and young son. We shall miss him and we offer his family our deepest sympathy.