

ORIENTAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

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Members news

Please note the new ONS subscription rates (as from 1st. August 1980): they are listed above. David Sellwood's paper on Sassanian coinage has now been circulated to members. The next Information sheet is expected to be on the coinage of the Sikhs. An addendum to the list of ONS members is also being prepared. Mr. James Silver (5) has changed his interests to Middle and Far Eastern amulets and coin-jewellery. Dr. R. Domrow (438) is further restricting his interests to the Buddhist States of SE. Asia and has lists of coins for disposal or exchange from the Indian Native States, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and the areas now encompassed by Indonesia (including the Philippines): his lists for the Malay world and for cash (China, Japan, Korea) are in preparation. He also notes that the denomination of Kathmandu mint token no. 4 in his recent paper (N/L 62/3) should read "0.01".

The next ONS meeting in London will be held on Saturday 8th. November. Mr. Wiggins is seeking an alternative site in Central London as the cost of St. James' Hall has increased considerably. If any members know of a suitable alternative Ken Wiggins would like to hear.

Cleaning Nickel coins

In reply to the query by Dr. Hans Wilski (N/L 64), Mr. Keith Wilford writes: 'In my experience most, but not all, nickel coins may be cleaned with the use of Ethylene diamine tetra-acetic acid di-sodium salt†. This chemical is a white, water soluble, powder which - macroscopically at least - does not appear to scratch the coins. I use it damp, as a paste, and rub either with my fingers, or with a stiff brush. I would suspect that the cleaning is most probably abrasive in action, although the chemical chelating properties of the 'EDTA' may also play a part'.

†supplier: British Drug Houses, Poole, Dorset. Product no. 28025 2B. Cost for 100 gm, £2.

It is also thought to be sold in Germany under the trade name Tritiplex III by E. Merck of Darmstat.

Mr. Wilford would be willing to supply a small sample free to UK residents.

ONS meeting in Rotterdam

report by Jan Lingen

The ONS meeting in Rotterdam, which coincided with the 10th. anniversary of the Society and was held on the 10th. May at the Ethnological Museum, was well attended. Thirty two members and 5 guests came from various countries in Europe (Belgium 2, France 1, Germany 5 + 1, Holland 19 + 4, Switzerland 1, UK 4). Those attending were welcomed with a cup of coffee and at 11 am. the regional secretary, Dr. H. J. van der Wiel, opened the meeting and introduced Dr. K. Gabrisch. He gave a talk 'Zur Kenntnis der Tibetischen Goldmunzen und deren Falschungen' (Introduction to Tibetan gold coins and their imitations). In the course of this lecture Dr. Gabrisch showed about 30 slides illustrating the details and differences among genuine 20 Srang gold coins of Tibet and comparing them with their Chinese, Nepalese and Indian imitations.

After this interesting talk Mr. Nicholas Rhodes gave a lecture on 'A dating system for Gaden Tangkas'. Gaden tangkas, which were struck for almost a century (c. 1840's - c. 1930), have been divided by Rhodes into 8 major groups which together contain approximately 50 major and minor sub-varieties. His proposed system of dating is the result of a detailed study of over 5,000 Gaden tangkas and a painstaking research of contemporary records; records such as the descriptions written on coin envelopes by Walsh in 1904.

Lunch was arranged in the Rotterdam 'space tower' Euromast, which is within walking distance of the Museum: a pleasant walk in the fine spring weather. Having enjoyed the splendid view over Rotterdam and its harbour from the Euromast, everyone returned to the Museum for the afternoon session. Dr. v. d. Wiel opened this session with a talk on the Dutch Coinage of Ceylon. Much of this was concerned with the Dutch coinage for Ceylon, since most coins circulating in Ceylon were struck in India, Batavia or Holland. He pointed out that Dutch coins actually struck in Ceylon could be more or less regarded as emergency coinages struck as and when required, mostly in copper or base metal. During the tea break some of the Dutch coins used in Ceylon were shown by Dr. v. d. Wiel from specimens in his own collection.

The afternoon session was concluded with a talk by Mr. Jan Lingen who gave a verbal and visual account of a journey in India. As a continuation of Dr. v. d. Wiel's talk he showed, with the help of some 60 slides, the various coinages of the European Trading Companies (Dutch, Danish and French) and the places where they were struck. Starting in Tanjore, from which centre the Companies obtained their permissions to open factories or trading posts along the southern Coromandel coast, slides were shown of Negapatam, Karikal, Tranquebar and Pulicat. An impression was thus given of what old remains and how much foreign influence could still be found in those places today.

Besides the lectures many members also brought coins with them to show or to exchange. A special display covering 2,500 years of Turkish coinage was arranged by Nico Arkestein. By 5 pm. the pleasant gathering came to an end.

Many thanks are due to Dr. A. F. Ros and his Museum Staff who enabled us to use the auditorium free of cost and arranged everything from an exhibition of coins of Tibet, Nepal and Ceylon (from the Museum Collection) to the projector and sound equipment; as well as the equally important coffee and tea.

The accompanying photograph was taken on top of the Euromast.





Husain Shah of Bengal and his victory over Kamata

by N. G. Rhodes

In the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies for 1973, Simon Digby published an interesting tanka of the Bengal Sultan Husain Shah.¹ Since this coin has not been fully published in a numismatic context, it seems worthwhile recording another specimen² and mentioning its historical significance.

Obv. Inside a double octafoil, the Kalima. The names of the four Imams around.

Rev.

Below -

دار الضرب ٩٠٠



السلطان المتوكل
علي الله الفاتح للكا
و الكاشته بتأييد الله سيد
علا و الإنيا و الإين
ابوالمظفر حسين شاه
سلطان كاشته فتح

Diameter 28 mm., Weight 10.7 gm.

This new type of tanka differs from the normal 'conqueror' coins of Husain Shah in that it only refers to the victories over Kamrup and Kamata, with no mention of Jajnagar and Orissa. The implication is, therefore, that Husain Shah had successfully invaded Kamrup (Western Assam) and Kamata (the area around Cooch Behar) by 900 AH. (1494 AD), whereas the expeditions against Jajnagar and Orissa only took place later.

This conclusion appears to disprove the theory that Husain Shah invaded Assam in 1498 AD, which has been accepted by many historians from J. Prinsep⁴ onwards. This date is, however, based on a relatively late version of the Assam Buranji, whose dating cannot be trusted until the late 17th. century: so a true date for the invasion of 1494 AD is not unreasonable.

M. R. Tarafdar has suggested, on the evidence of normal 'conqueror' coins dated 899 AH, that the military expeditions against all four places (Kamrup, Kamata, Jajnagar and Orissa) must have commenced in 899 AH, during the first year of Husain Shah's reign⁵. This seems unlikely, purely on logistic grounds, and it is more likely that the date of 899 on these coins referred to the accession of Husain Shah, rather than to the date of issue; and that coins bearing that date were struck later in the reign. Since the next date noted by Tarafdar as appearing on the 'conquest' coins was 910 AH⁶, the invasions of Jajnagar and Orissa may only have taken place shortly before that date. In fact, these expeditions probably took place after 907 AH since an inscription of that year refers to Husain Shah as 'the conqueror of Kamru and Kamtah', with no reference to his other conquests⁷.

A further interesting feature of the new type is that it has only been found bearing the mint name 'Dar al-darb'. Although this is usually presumed to refer to the main branch of the mint at the capital, this interpretation is far from certain. Simon Digby has suggested that this type of coin could have been struck at Kamata itself. It was not unusual for a mint to accompany such an expedition for propaganda purposes and for converting captured bullion, without delay, into pay for the troops. This would explain the use of the phrase 'Fath - i - Kamata' (the conqueror of Kamata) at the end of the reverse inscription.

In conclusion, this new type of tanka proves that the initial invasion of Assam and Cooch Behar by Husain Shah took place no later than 900 AH (1494 AD), and it is possible that the coins were actually struck in Kamata at the conclusion of the expedition.

1 Simon Digby, 'The Fate of Daniyal', SOAS Bulletin, Vol. XXXVI, part 3, 1973, pp. 587 - 602

2 Other partially read specimens were published in BMC (no. 118) and IMC (no. 201). The specimen published by Simon Digby is in the British Museum. Another fine specimen is in the collection of Stan Goron.

3 The transcription of the inscription is as given by Simon Digby, although I must express some reservation over the phrase in the third line. The BM and Goron specimens have the last two words transposed, which makes better sense.

4 Useful tables, 1858 edition, p. 273

5 'The Dates of Husan Shah's Expedition against Kamrup and Orissa', JNSI vol. XIX, part 1, 1957, pp. 54 - 58

6 Unfortunately the dates on many of the 'conqueror' coins are badly written, so it is dangerous to rely on published readings. The date 910 AH is taken from a coin in Botham's Assam Museum Catalogue, which I have not been able to check.

7 H. Blochmann, 'Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal', 1968, p. 131. Reprinted from JASB 1873.