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**ONS meetings**

Sanderstead: at Dr. Mitchiner's home on Saturday 20th. June from 2 pm.: contact Dr. Mitchiner please  
 London: at St. James' Hall on Saturday 24th. October from 2 pm.: contact Mr. Wiggins please  
 New York: in December 1981, please contact Messrs. Paul Bosco or Michael Bates

**Forgeries of Islamic gold coins***by M. B. Mitchiner*

In an earlier newsletter (no. 64: Feb. 1980) attention was drawn to forgeries of rare Omayyad dinars bearing the mint names Ifriqiyah and Al Andalus. These appeared to emanate from the Eastern Mediterranean region. Quite a number of forgeries of much commoner Islamic gold coins have been seen in London more recently. These too are of East Mediterranean origin and at least one group of forgeries emanated from Beirut. The newer forgeries are also carefully manufactured. They appear to have been pressure cast, though striking from cast dies cannot be excluded in some cases. In the instances cited below the forgeries have been identified because two (or more) coins originating from the same die pair and bearing the same die flaws also show identical striking defects – in most cases a minor degree of double-striking. In other words a slightly double-struck coin with a die flaw has been used as template for manufacturing a series of forgeries. Forgeries identified in this definitive manner include Omayyad dinars bearing fairly common dates (including AH 110), Tulunid dinars of Harun (AH 287), Fatimid dinars of Al Mustansir (Misr) and Ayyubid dinars of Al Kamil (Al Qahirah). Attention has been drawn to these forgeries through a characteristic fault in manufacture. One may suspect that a number of other counterfeits have also been produced: counterfeits of issues that one might expect to be readily accessible to anyone living in the general region of Beirut.

**Some Numismatic Fantasies from Indonesia***by Joseph Cribb*

In 1972 I saw a sign in the window of a Parisian coin shop offering for sale "Indonesian iron coins". As a student of oriental coins my interest was sufficiently aroused to enter the shop and inspect the goods on offer. They were small iron balls covered with etched designs – swirls and arabic inscriptions. The shop could offer no information concerning their provenance and function. As far as I have been able to discover this is the earliest known sighting of such objects.

In December 1976 the ONS newsletter (no. 46) contained a request for information about these objects which had been described in an American dealers sale list as "Borneo Iron Bullet Money". The following newsletter (Feb. 1977 no. 47) contained information from two members on the subject. Mr. K. Wiggins mentioned a late 19th century reference to the use of iron as a medium of exchange in Brunei and Dr. M. Mitchiner mentioned another 19th century reference to the use of iron bars as currency in Brunei and other parts of Borneo, and also an early 18th century report of the use of engraved iron bars for bride price in Sulawesi (Celebes).

It was apparently on the basis of these references that in his "Oriental Coins and their Values - Vol. 1 - World of Islam" (London 1977, pp. 474 - 476) Mitchiner described these iron "coins" as the currency of the "North East Indonesian Sultanates". He divided them into two different denominations, a larger (c. 40 gr.) and a smaller (c. 10 gr.) and also suggested that their shape was possibly derived from the silver coinage of Srivijaya (a native empire based on Sumatra, AD 7th - 13th century), and their decorations were possibly based on those found on Indonesian knives (kris) used as currency.

Meanwhile another group of Indonesian "iron coins" with etched designs began to appear on the market. These were also published by Mitchiner in his "Oriental Coins and their Values - Vol. 3 - Non Islamic States and Western Colonies" (London 1979, pp. 413 - 414). He attributed them to the Javanese Sultanates of Jogjakarta and Surakarta (1755 - 1940's). Of them he said "the present pieces, which only appear to be found in Java, may well have served some local currency needs in southern Java during the 19th century".

In the same volume (p. 412) he also published three bronze coins made by the same etching process: he attributed these to Sumatra, in the 1820's.

Subsequently some new items have also turned up made by the same etching process. Dr. Mitchiner recently showed me miniature brass versions of kris blades etched with the same designs and inscriptions as the "iron balls". An Australian collector showed me a group of six etched iron discs of identical fabric to the "Surakarta and Jogjakarta" issues which he had acquired in Bali. Three depict Javanese shadow puppets, the other three have Chinese religious designs. It does not seem sensible to seek attributions for these new pieces along the same lines as that used for those already published. A fresh view of the whole series of these etched objects must be taken.

### I Iron Balls

I have examined about 100 of these objects. They range in weight from c. 10 - c. 80 grams and are fairly evenly spread between these two limits. They are all made of iron and their designs are all hand drawn and etched. The inscriptions on them are all abbreviations or expansions of an Islamic religious formula saluting (Peace be unto them) the four orthodox (Sunni) Khalifs Abu Bakr, Umar (Faruq), Uthman and Ali. Most pieces are decorated with a characteristic swirl, but some also have other pictorial devices, such as stars, knives (kris), snakes or faces.

### II Iron Discs

#### a) Islamic types

I have examined more than 20 of these. They are all made of the same material and in the same way as the balls. The inscriptions on them are varied but are all orthodox Islamic religious formulae such as the Khalima. Depicted on them are various designs - the familiar swirl found on the balls, snakes, stars, flowers, an open book (the Koran), buildings (Mosques and Minarets etc.) and a male bust wearing a typical Indonesian "fez" (peci).

#### b) Javanese types

Only three of these have been seen. Their material and fabric are the same as those with Islamic types. Their inscriptions are in corrupt and illegible Javanese. They depict the shadow puppets Ardjuna (the hero of the Mahabharata - the Javanese ideal image of a nobleman) and Semar (his attendant, one of the most popular figures of the Javanese theatre, who is at the same time considered both at one with the common people and yet divine). The swirls found on both the iron balls and Islamic type discs are also contained in these designs.

#### c) Chinese types

Only three of these have been seen. They likewise show the material, fabric and swirl decoration of the other pieces. They depict a dragon (the benevolent bringer of rain and fertility, also used to symbolise the Chinese Emperor) or Maitreya (the Buddha-to-be). The inscriptions are very badly written and difficult to interpret; one piece for example is inscribed "The three protecting officials, the great man comes first". The three officials could be Daoist or Buddhist tutelary deities, the "great man" could be the Confucianist idealised sage-king, but the context offers no clear explanation.

### III Bronze Discs

Three of these have been seen, all in the collection of Dr. Mitchiner. They are bronze but have been etched in the same way as the iron pieces. Their weights are 9.4, 4.25 and 2.72 gr. Mitchiner (p. 412) has suggested they represent 3 different denominations a unit, its double and its quadruple. They all show on one side two cocks facing each other. The cock is copied from the keping tokens made with

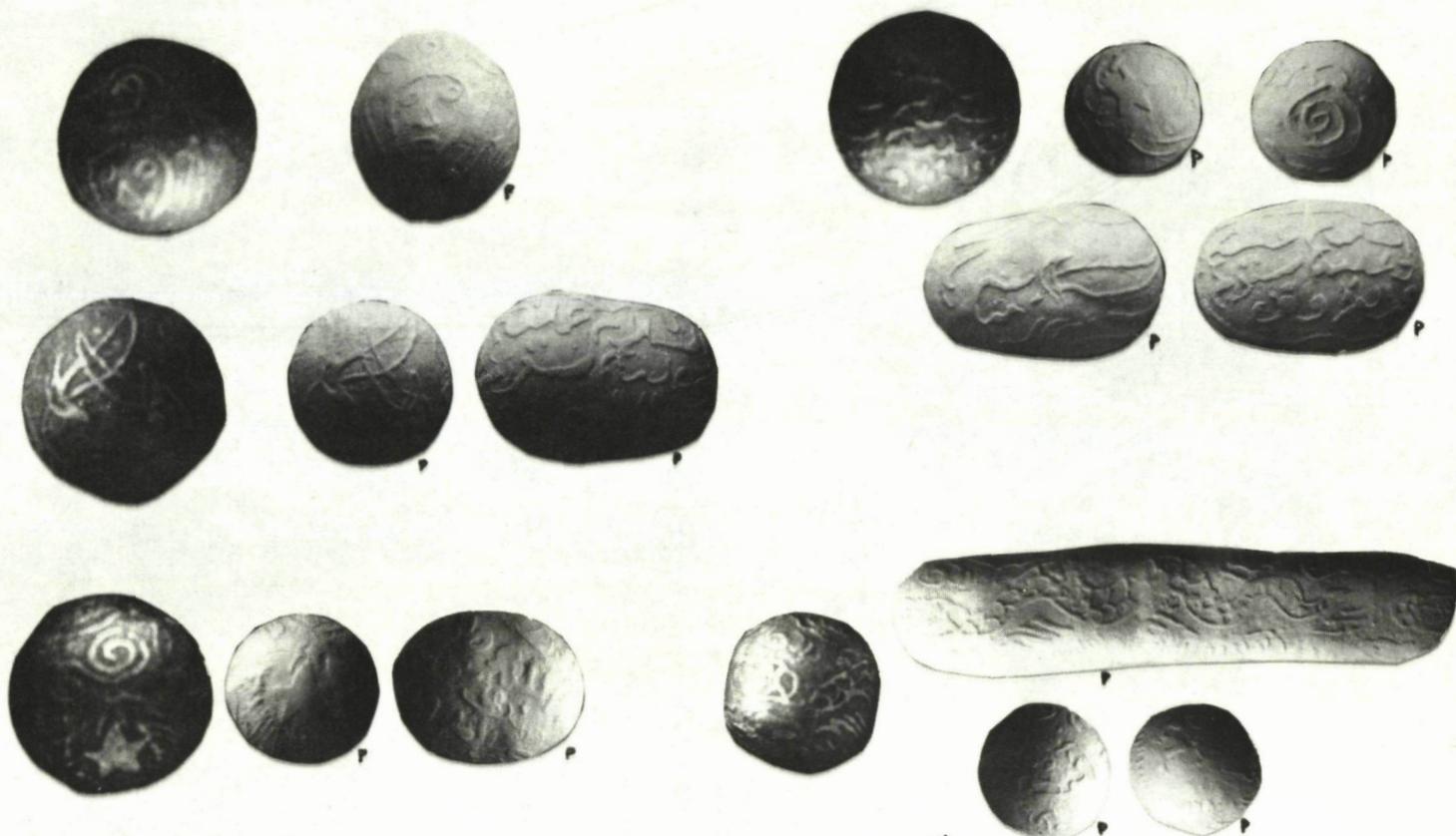
arabic dates approximating to 1804 and 1831 by Birmingham moneyers on the orders of British merchants trading from Singapore as a substitute for the Dutch copper duits which were the main low denomination coins circulating in the area (v. F. Pridmore, *The Coins of the British Commonwealth of Nations Part 2 Asian Territories*, London 1965, pp. 147 - 165). The largest piece also has an inscription copied from the keping, "Land of the Malays". It is also dated 822 in arabic numbers. The reverse of the largest piece shows crossed swords and the names of the four orthodox Khalifs as found on the iron balls. The reverses of the smaller pieces show the same Javanese puppet Semar as on the iron discs with Javanese types, but more simply drawn.

### IV Kris blades

I have only seen two of these, both from Dr. Mitchiner's collection (ex. Sotheby 25/4/1979 lot 445: cfr. also lots 446 - 447 and Sotheby 29/4/1981 lot 514: *editor*). Both are brass but etched in the same way as the iron pieces. They are inscribed with an abbreviated version of the inscription on the iron balls and are decorated with the distinctive spirals.

These objects are all decorated by the same process, ie. etching, they are also linked together by features of their design or inscription. It is clear from this that they all originate from the same manufacturer. The inclusion among these designs of Javanese shadow puppet figures suggests that they can only come from either Java itself or from Malaya where 19th century Javanese migrants introduced their native theatre. Orthodox Islam and Chinese popular religion are also present in both these areas. On balance Java seems the more likely location because both the Javanese and Chinese pieces were collected in Bali and Mitchiner reports the acquisition of Islamic disc shaped pieces from Java. The ball shaped pieces have been reported from Hongkong and Singapore (Mitchiner) and from Djakarta and Singapore (Australian collection). Why should a manufacturer in Java (or Malaya) make such objects. There can be no reason for supposing a monetary function. The references to the monetary use of iron bars in Borneo and Sulawesi in the 18th and 19th centuries clearly do not refer to these iron balls and discs or to the other etched objects described here. The iron balls show no fixed weight or weights. Etching is for obvious reasons too time consuming a process for the production of such low value objects if they were only intended to circulate as money. The disc shaped pieces borrow their shape from coins, but so do many other non monetary objects. There is no obvious monetary significance in any of the decorations or inscriptions except those parts of the design of the bronze discs copied from the Singapore merchants keping. There is therefore nothing about the objects themselves that suggests a monetary role, nor is there any likely circumstance in Indonesian history when such objects could have been needed for monetary circulation. Since before its Islamic conversion Java made monetary use of Chinese cash. Its Islamic rulers and later its Dutch and British rulers maintained their circulation alongside their own gold and silver issues. As the supply of Chinese cash dwindled they made their own substitutes in bronze, lead or tin, or even imported them from Japan. When the Dutch finally introduced a European style bronze coinage, the duit, it was also intended as a substitute for the Chinese cash. At no time was there either a demand for, or any economic justification for the introduction of an iron coinage.

All these etched objects have one common factor in their designs and inscriptions - religion. (Even the seemingly secular shadow puppets had in the Javanese mind a strong religious purpose. The figure of Semar or his Balinese equivalent is still used in exorcism in Java and Bali and until recently in Malaya). Perhaps the manufacturer of these objects was making them for a clientel with a demand for religious charms. In Java there is a strong tradition of the use of coin shaped religious charms (v. H.C. Millies, *Recherches sur les Monnaies des Indigenes de l'Archipel Indien et de la Peninsule Malaie*, The Hague 1871, p. 23) and among the Javanese little distinction is made in the popular mind between Islam and the traditional mythology of the shadow theatre. As Mitchiner notes (p. 413) I suggested to him that the objects with Islamic types might have a religious function. His rejection of this on the basis that belief in Islam is not widespread in Java belies the fact that the Javanese populace as a whole make use of Islamic



I. Iron balls ( designs illustrated with plaster casts<sup>(9)</sup>)



IIa. Iron discs with Islamic types

practices, in the same way that in our own essentially non Christian society the majority still make wide use of St. Christopher medals and celebrate Christmas. It seems most likely that these objects were made for a purpose related in some way to their religious contents.

When were they made? Mitchiner has suggested dates for them as early as the 18th century. He also interpreted the date 822 on the largest bronze disc as an abbreviated western date, ie 1822 (if the 822 is

an arabic date it would be equivalent to AD 1419, a date in the period of the earliest Islamic conversions in Malaysia, and possibly of religious significance).

As has been shown, it is unlikely that they are to be related to the 18th and 19th century accounts of the use of oblong iron bars in Borneo and Sulawesi, therefore they cannot be dated on that basis. The only certain date of significance is that of their first sighting in



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IIa. Iron disc with Islamic types

IIb. Iron discs with Javanese types



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IV. Brass kris blades.

IIc. Iron discs with Chinese types

1972. None of the 19th or 20th century writers on Indonesian coins before that date mention any such objects. I would suggest that it is very likely that they were first made only a short time before 1972. If they were not made for superstitious use by the Javanese, then they

might have been made for sale as "objects of antiquity" to tourists - or even unwary coin collectors - CAVEAT EMPTOR.

I would like to thank W. Shaw, P.J. Bridge and M. Mitchiner.