

# THE DATE OF THE EARLY FUNANESE, MON, PYU AND ARAKANESE COINAGES ('SYMBOLIC COINS')

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Two series of the early symbolic coins cited in the title are found across a broad strip of land extending from Burma to South Vietnam. Coins of the commoner series tended to circulate more across the hinterland of this region, whereas the coins of the scarcer series tended to circulate more along the maritime border. The geographical distribution of the former series coincides with the distribution of Funanese type pottery and other Funanese artefacts and the archeological levels also concur when these can be substantiated. The other series appears to have emanated from the Mon kingdom of Thaton:—

## 1) Funan.

Coins of the "Rising Sun/ Temple" type (Pl. 1, 2, 3)<sup>1</sup>: Mitchiner (*Oriental Coins and their values. III. Non-Islamic States and Western Colonies*, London, 1979) nos. 2567 ff. Findspots include Oc-éo in South Vietnam<sup>2</sup>, Cambodia<sup>3</sup>, U-Thong<sup>4</sup>, Prachinburi and Nakorn Pathom<sup>5</sup>, other sites in Thailand<sup>6</sup>, Brawrithet and Bawnin in the Shan States<sup>7</sup>, Halin<sup>8</sup>, Beikthano<sup>9</sup> and Pegu<sup>10</sup>.

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1. All coins illustrated in the plates are in the author's collection. Many of them have been published in M. Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and their Values*, vol. III. *Non-Islamic States and Western Colonies*, London, 1979.
2. L. Malleret, *L'Archéologie du Delta du Mekong*, 4 vols., EFEO, Paris, 1959–1963, vol. III, Pl. XLIV, no. 950.
3. G. Groslier, *Recherches sur les Cambodgiens d'après les textes et les monuments depuis les premiers siècles de notre ère*, Paris 1921, pp. 32 and 37-38.
4. J. Boisselier, *Récents recherches archéologiques en Thaïlande*, *Arts Asiatiques* XII, 1965, 125-174 : Pl. 27.
5. U. Guehler, *Symbols and marks of old Siamese coins*, *J. Siam Society* XXXVII ii, 1949, 124-143.
6. S. Piromya, *Coins in Thailand*, Bangkok National Museum, 1973, pp. 6-9 : Prachinburi, Nakhon Pathom, U-Thong, Supanburi, Manoram, Chai Nat, Sawan Kalok, Sukhotai, Tapanhin, Pichit.
7. U. Mya, *Some hitherto unknown Burmese coins*, *Archeological Survey of India*, 1930–1934, 331-335; Pl. CLIVa, no. 6.
8. Myint Aung, *The excavations at Halin*, *J. Burma Research Society* LIII ii, 1970, 55-64; Pl. XIII no. 2 : also the provenance recorded for a coin in the British Museum.
9. A. Thaw, *Report on excavations at Beikthano*, Rangoon 1968; Pl. LVIIIa. See also A. Thaw, *Historical sites in Burma*, Government of the Union of Burma, 1972.
10. U. Mya, *Some hitherto unknown Burmese coins*, *Archeological Survey of India*, 1930–1934, 331-335.

Several of these coins were recovered from excavations and reasonable dates can be proposed:

a: Oc-eo excavations. The Kingdom of Funan, of which this city was the major port, fell in the 6th. century AD<sup>11</sup> and coins found at Oc-eo can reasonably be dated earlier than this.

b: U-Thong. Excavations show this city to have both pre-Dvaravati and Dvaravati period levels<sup>12</sup>; the former corresponding with the much more extensive pre-Dvaravati levels excavated at the site of Chan-sen<sup>13</sup>. Boisselier<sup>14</sup> suggested that the two coins he illustrated from the U-Thong excavations belonged to the pre-Dvaravati period. The existence of the Dvaravati kingdom was recorded in the 7th. century

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11. This has been discussed by many authors and is well founded. The two major French writers on the subject, Coedès and Malleret, may have over-emphasised the political importance of Funan: vide G. Coedès, *The Indianised States of South-east Asia*, transl. S.B. Cowing, Honolulu 1968; L. Malleret, *op. cit.* More recent research is increasingly confirming the commercial importance of Funan and the wide radiation of its cultural influence, as well as the date of its demise. Vide, among others, A.H. Christie, *Lin-i, Fu-nan, Java*, pp. 281–287 in *Early South East Asia*, Oxford University Press 1979. I-Tsing writing a century later, (*A record of the Buddhist Religion as practised in India and the Malay Archipelago: AD 671–695*: transl. J. Takakusu, Oxford 1896, p. 12) said “Setting out south-westwards (ie. from Lin-i = Champa), one reaches (on foot) within a month, Poh-nan (kuo), formerly called Fu-nan. Of old it was a country, the inhabitants of which lived naked; the people were mostly worshippers of heaven (the gods or devas), and later on, Buddhism flourished there, but a wicked king has now expelled and exterminated them all, and there are no members of the Buddhist Brotherhood at all”. This conforms with the archeological evidence of a preponderance of Hindu (mainly Vaishnavite, with some Sivaite) artefacts among the minor statuary and amulets (and some seals) from Oc-eo, plus (superseded by) a small minority of Buddhist artefacts. The occupation of Funan by Chenla in the sixth century AD involved return to traditional Hinduism and led on to the subsequent establishment of the Hindu monarchy of Angkor. Hiuen Tsang (*Mémoires sur les contrées occidentales*, transl. S. Julien, Paris 1858, II, 82) placed Isanapura as the country east of Dvaravati. He travelled during AD 629 to 645 and at that time Isanavarman (floruit AD 627) was king of Chenla–Isanapura was his capital (cfr. G. Coedès, *op. cit.*, 69–70).
12. H.H.E. Loofs, *Problems of continuity between the pre-Buddhist and Buddhist periods in Central Thailand*, with special reference to U-Thong, pp. 342–351 in *Early South East Asia*, Oxford, 1979.
13. B. Bronson, *The late prehistory and early history of Central Thailand with special reference to Chansen*, pp. 315–336 in *Early South East Asia*, Oxford, 1979.
14. J. Boisselier, *op. cit.*

AD by each of the two Chinese travellers, Hiuen-Tsang<sup>15</sup> (travels: AD 629-645) and I-Tsing<sup>16</sup> (travels: AD 671-695).

c: The pre-Dvaravati levels of U-Thong and Chang-sen (also the contemporary site of Beikthano: vide infra) contain pottery of Funanese type; closely related to that of Oc-eo; and the coins of 'Rising Sun/Temple' type closely follow the geographical distribution of such pottery forms<sup>17</sup>. Radio-Carbon datings (also Thermo-luminescence datings) from the Funan-related levels (III and IV) of Chang-sen suggest the period AD 200/250 to AD 600/650 for this cultural phase.<sup>18</sup>

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15. Hiuen Tsang, *Mémoires sur les contrées occidentales*, transl. S. Julien, 2 vols., Paris 1858; II, 83: T'o-lo-po-ti. He travelled in AD 629-645. See also E. Lyons, *Dvaravati, a consideration of its formative period*, pp. 352-359 in *Early South East Asia*, Oxford, 1979; also G. Coedes, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.
  16. I-Tsing, *A record of the Buddhist Religion as practised in India and the Malay Archipelago: AD 671-695*, transl. J. Takakusu, Oxford, 1896. pp. 9-10: "Going east from the Nalanda monastery 500 yoganas, all the country is called the Eastern Frontier. At the (eastern) extremity there is the so-called 'Great Black' Mountain (ie. the chain separating Arakan from the Irrawaddy valley), which is, I think, on the southern boundary of Tu-fan (Tibet). This mountain is said to be on the southwest of Shu-chuan (Szechuan), from which one can reach this mountain after a journey of a month or so. Southward from this, and close to the sea-coast there is a country called Sriksheṭṭra (She-li Ch'a-ta-lo); on the south-east of this is Lankasu (ie. Mon kingdom of Thaton); on the east of this is Dvaravati (To-ho-lo [pa-ti]); at the extreme east, Lin-i (Champa). The inhabitants of all these countries greatly reverence the Three Jewels (ie. Buddhism: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha)". Note that Funan had by now been replaced by Chenla which was not Buddhist (but had exterminated Buddhism: vide supra). For further Chinese evidence relating to Dvaravati vide also P. Gutman, *The Ancient Coinage of Southeast Asia*, J. Siam Society, 1978, 8-21.
  17. The pottery, like the Rising Sun coins, speaks of a cultural conformity without implying that each artefact was actually manufactured in Funan. This Funanese cultural milieu is in marked contrast to the lack of cultural relationships between artefacts excavated from earlier levels at archeological sites. The period of the Funanese cultural milieu also contrasts strongly with the post-Funan period when Cambodia (Hindu kingdom of Chenla), the Menam valley (Buddhist kingdom of Dvaravati), the Irrawaddy valley (Phu kingdom of Sriksheṭṭra) and the base of the peninsula (Mon kingdom of Thaton) all had their individual cultures (and coinages). The chronological dividing line between these two distinct periods focusses around the beginning of the seventh century AD (destruction of Funan in the mid sixth century: establishment of Dvaravati before AD 625).
  18. B. Bronson (*op. cit.*): also R.B. Smith, *A check-list of published Carbon-14 datings from South East Asia*, pp. 493-507 in *Early History of South East Asia*, Oxford, 1979.

d: The north Burmese city of Halin, from which these coins have also been excavated, has provided Radio-Carbon dates in the 2nd/3rd century AD and the 6th. century AD<sup>19</sup>.

e: The central Burmese city of Beikthano, which is in archeological terms the oldest of the three major Pyu cities (Halin, Beikthano, Srikshetra) and where further specimens of these coins have been excavated (sites: KKG 15 gateway; KKG 3 stupa), has provided Radio-Carbon datings of 90 BC/AD 90, circa AD 70, circa AD 225 and circa AD 300<sup>20</sup>. This city appears to have been destroyed before AD 500. Hegemony of the region then passed to Srikshetra (Hmawza). In the seventh century AD reports of Hiuen-Tsang<sup>21</sup> and of I-Tsing<sup>22</sup> only two states were cited in Burma. These were Srikshetra (ie. the Pyu kingdom of the middle Irrawaddy valley) and the Mon kingdom of Thaton<sup>23</sup> to the "south-east" of Srikshetra.

## 2) Mon kingdom of Thaton.

Coins of "Sankh shell/ Temple without ancillary symbols" type (Pl. 4, 5: other types of 'Shell/Temple' coins with ancillary symbols around the temple are more specifically related to the Menam valley): Mitchiner III no. 2580.

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19. Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites in Burma*, 1972, 15. A seal with a Sanskrit inscription from Halin illustrated by Aung Thaw is strictly comparable with numerous seals from Oc-ee published by Malleret (op. cit.). The date when Halin (C-14 datings : 2nd/3rd century AD; 6th. century AD) was destroyed has not been established, though it was no later than the mid-ninth century. There are reasons for believing that Halin may have been destroyed substantially earlier than this date.
  20. Aung Thaw, *Report on excavations at Beikthano, Rangoon, 1968* : in combination with R.B. Smith, *A check-list of published Carbon-14 datings from South East Asia*, pp. 493-507 in *Early South East Asia*, Oxford 1979. A mould for casting various types of jewellery excavated at Beikthano and published by Aung Thaw closely resembles many moulds found at Oc-ee and published by Malleret (op. cit.). A clay sealing bearing the Sanskrit inscription *Samgha Siri* was excavated from the building named KKG 2.
  21. Hiuen Tsang (transl. Julien, op. cit.; II, 82-83) : *She-li Ch'a-ta-lo*. The Chinese 'She-li' corresponds with the Sanskrit *Sri* in many place names cited by Chinese writers of this period.
  22. I-Tsing (transl. Takakusu, op. cit.); passage cited above.
  23. Called *Lankasu* by I-Tsing (vide supra) and *Kamalanka* by Hiuen Tsang (transl. Julien, pp. 82-83) : "Going south east from Srikshetra there is in the bay of the sea *Kamalanka*; to the east of this, *Dvaravati*".

Findspots include Pegu<sup>24</sup>, Southern Burma<sup>25</sup>, Thailand<sup>26</sup>, and Oc-eo<sup>27</sup>. The Oc-eo coins would, from the chronology of that site, appear to have circulated earlier than the 6th. century AD<sup>28</sup>.

Apart from these two coin series with a wide geographical distribution. other local coin series were struck that appear to have circulated through restricted geographical regions:—

### 3) Dvaravati and the pre-Dvaravati period in the Menam valley.

A Mon coin belonging to one of the local Menam valley series (Shell/Temple with symbols: Pl. 6: Mitchiner III, 2586) found at U-Thong was dated by Boisselier<sup>29</sup> to the pre-Dvaravati period of that city. At present there have been too few stratified excavation reports from Thailand to cite the exact periods of specific coin series in archeological terms. Several coin series local to the Menam valley are extant and it remains a matter of judgement which belong to the Dvaravati kingdom and which to the culturally more individualistic city states of the pre-Dvaravati period. The present writer concurs with Boisselier in proposing that some local Menam valley coin series, interpreted in the light of local archeological evidence, should be dated to the pre-Dvaravati period. Since the Kingdom of Dvaravati had been founded by the time of Hiuen-Tsang's travels this means that local coinage was being struck before about AD 600.

### 4) Pyu kingdom of the Irrawaddy valley.

The major coinage attributable to the Pyu is of "Damaru/Dots in Temple" type (Pl. 7, 8, 9,): Mitchiner III nos. 2623 ff.

Coins of this series have been recovered in excavations from all three major Pyu sites: Halin<sup>30</sup>, Beikthano<sup>31</sup> and Srikshetra<sup>32</sup>.

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24. A.P. Phayre, *Coins of Arakan, of Pegu and of Burma*, London, 1882, Pl. IV nos. 6-7 : two from a group of 17 coins found 25 miles from Sittaung. These two coins are now in the British Museum.
  25. M. Mitchiner, unpublished.
  26. R. le May, *The Coinage of Siam*, Siam Society, Bangkok, 1932, Pl. I, no. 6.
  27. L. Malleret (op. cit.), vol. III, nos 948-949 : vol. II, Pl. CVII no. 12.
  28. Discussed above.
  29. J. Boisselier (op. cit.), Pl. 26
  30. Myint Aung, *The excavations at Halin*, J. Burma Research Society, LIII ii, 1970, 55-64; Pl. XIII, coin 3. U. Mya, *Some hitherto unknown Burmese coins*, Archeological Survey of India, 1930-1934, 331-335.
  31. Aung Thaw, *Report on excavations at Beikthano*, Rangoon, 1968, Pl. LVIIIa, from KKG 3 stupa and several on Pl. LVIIIb.
  32. C. Duroiselle, *Excavations at Hmawza*, Archeological Survey of India, 1926-1927, 171-181, Pl. XLIIe, f. Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites in Burma*, Government of the Union of Burma, 1972, p. 17.

a: One of the Beikthano coins was recovered in excavation of the stupa mound named KKG 3 and it can thus be dated prior to circa AD 500.

b: The Srikshetra coins published by Duroiselle were recovered in excavation of Khinba pagoda, coin Pl. XLIIe from the trench approaching the relic chamber and the various coins on Pl. XLII f from within and around the relic chamber. Other artefacts in the relic chamber included Sanskrit inscriptions whose epigraphy places them in the 6-7th. century AD.

c: Five coins of a slightly altered type, "Damaru/Lingam in Temple" (Pl. 10, 11: Mitchiner III nos. 2617 ff) were recovered inside a vase in excavation of the Bawbawgyi pagoda at Srikshetra<sup>33</sup> together with a clay tablet bearing the same designs (with ancillary symbols reversed)<sup>34</sup>. The associated artefacts included gold and silver scrolls whose epigraphy is also of 6-7 th. century date. It should, perhaps, be emphasised that both these two groups of coins recovered in excavations from in and around the relic chambers of Srikshetran pagodas were foundation deposits dating from the time when those respective pagodas were built. In each case that date was much earlier than the mid-9th. century when the city of Srikshetra was sacked.

d: Coins of another local Pyu series bearing "Damaru/Shell in Temple" designs (Pl. 12, 13, 14: Mitchiner III no. 2628) have been recovered in excavations at both Srikshetra<sup>35</sup> and Halin<sup>36</sup>.

### 5) Arakan.

Coins bearing "Seated bull/Trident" designs (Pl. 15, 16, 17, 18: Mitchiner III, nos. 2631 ff) are inscribed with the name of the issuing king. The major item for dating is the Sanskrit inscription of Anandacandra first published by Johnston<sup>37</sup>. He dated the inscription to circa AD 700. Using the reign lengths of kings cited in the inscription this would place the numerous kings of whom coins are extant during the period commencing in the 5th. century AD. The date of the inscription is not absolutely fixed but to suggest that it should be dated significantly later is both epigraphically and

33. Taw Sein Ko, Excavations at Hmawza, Prome district, Archeological Survey of India, 1910-1911, 89-93.

34. Taw Sein Ko, *ibid.*, Pl. XLVII, 9-10

35. C. Duroiselle (1927 *op. cit.*), Pl. XLII no. f, coin 3 : from the Khinba mound relic chamber in company with other coins cited above and inscribed plates epigraphically dated to the 6-7th. century AD.

36. Myint Aung (1970 *op. cit.*), Pl. XIII, 1.

37. E.H. Johnston, Some Sanskrit inscriptions of Arakan, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London, XI, 1943 - 1946, 357-385. U. San Tha Aung, King Anandacandra, 8th. century monarch of Arakan, Rangoon, 1975.

historically quite untenable. No doubt one should, among other relevant evidence, refer to later published inscriptions of Arakan<sup>38</sup> that were engraved after the time of Anandacandra, but earlier than the time of the Pagan monarchy<sup>39</sup>. Also to be noted are the numerous publications on the coinage of Harikela<sup>40</sup>, which was one of the kingdoms derived from the break-up of the Candra kingdom of Arakan<sup>41</sup>. Any view that the break-up of the Candra kingdom should be dated later than the early 7th. century AD would also seem to be negated by the testimony of I-Tsing. Writing in AD 671/695, I-Tsing referred to the kingdom of Harikela: "He (Wu-hing) worshipped the Buddha's tooth there (ie. in Ceylon), and again sailed for the north-east. He came to Harikela, which is the eastern limit of Eastern India, and is a part of Gambudvipa"<sup>42</sup>.

This is only a summary of some more important chronological evidence and, though one may raise questions concerning the precise interpretation of individual pieces of such evidence, the consensus is impressive. Many separate sources combine to present a picture of well established commerce and appropriate currency systems from the beginning of the Christian era. There is unequivocal evidence that coinage was circulating well before AD 500 and there is good reason to believe that some coin series had already become obsolete by AD 600.

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38. E.H. Johnston (op. cit.) : U. San Tha Aung (op. cit.) : G H. Luce, Sources of Early Burman History, pp. 31-42 in South East Asian History and Historiography, Essays presented to D.G.E. Hall, Cornell University Press, 1976.
39. Arakan was occupied by king Anawrahta of Pagan (AD 1044-1077).
40. Most recently : M. Mitchiner, Oriental Coins and their values, II, 1978, pp. 658 ff and *ibid.*, vol. III, 1979, pp. 83 ff. See also M. Mitchiner, A group of broad repousse silver coins struck by the Candra kings of East Bengal, circa AD 1000; Spink's Numismatic Circular, London 1978, 8-9. D.W. MacDowall, Eight coins of Arakan from Sylhet, Numismatic Chronicle, 1960, 229-234. B.N. Mukherjee, Coins of Harikela, Coin Review (Varanasi), Apr.-July 1976, 2. Further information has been published in a number of articles by Professor Mukherjee and the present author also has additional unpublished information.
41. Discussed in Mitchiner, Oriental Coins and their Values, III, 1979, 83 ff.
42. I-Tsing (op. cit.), page xlvi.

**Appendix**

## Coins illustrated on the plates

All coins are illustrated natural size and are in the author's collection. All are die struck and made of silver, except number five which is debased.

|  |                                      |
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| 1 Funan :                                    | Unit weighing 9.43 gm                |
| 2 Funan :                                    | Quarter Unit weighing 2.30 gm        |
| 3 Funan :                                    | Tenth Unit weighing 0.70 gm          |
| 4 Mon kingdom of Thaton :                    | Unit weighing 8.78 gm                |
| 5 Mon kingdom of Thaton :                    | Billon Quarter Unit weighing 2.43 gm |
| 6 Mon : Menam valley local type :            | Unit weighing 8.74 gm                |
| 7 Pyu : major series :                       | Unit weighing 11.05 gm               |
| 8 Pyu : major series :                       | Half Unit weighing 4.83 gm           |
| 9 Pyu : major series :                       | Quarter Unit weighing 2.77 gm        |
| 10 Pyu : minor series with yupa in temple :  | Unit weighing 10.1 gm                |
| 11 Pyu : minor series with yupa in temple :  | Quarter Unit weighing 2.55 gm        |
| 12 Pyu : minor series with shell in temple : | Unit weighing 10.07 gm               |
| 13 Pyu : minor series with shell in temple : | Unit weighing 11.30 gm               |
| 14 Pyu : minor series with shell in temple : | Unit weighing 10.8 gm                |
| 15 Candras of Arakan : Candrabandhu :        | Half Unit weighing 2.5 gm            |
| 16 Candras of Arakan : Niticandra :          | Half Unit weighing 2.9 gm            |
| 17 Candras of Arakan : Priticandra :         | Quarter Unit weighing 1.91 gm        |
| 18 Candras of Arakan : Dhrticandra :         | Quarter Unit weighing 1.90 gm        |