

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COINAGE OF CEYLON

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(1) Introduction

Ceylon is a large island located close to the south east coast of India with an area of about 65000 square kilometres and a population of about 20 million. For size comparison, it is almost exactly the same area as the island of Tasmania.

Besides Ceylon, the other names by which this island has been known over the centuries are Lanka (Sanskrit), Lakdiva (Sinhala), Taprobane (Greek and Roman), Ceilao (Portuguese), Zeilan (Dutch), Ceylon (English) and finally Sri Lanka (its name after independence). Ceylon is a beautiful and very fertile island which has always had about it an aura of the exotic. The Chinese called it the "Island of Jewels", the Greeks and the Romans the "Land of the Ruby", and the Hindus, the "Pearl upon the Brow of India". A map of Ceylon is included as figure 1 for reference.

(2) Historical Overview

Ceylon has had a long and fascinating history. From around 483 BCE when Vijaya landed with his 700 followers from India and became the Chief Ruler of the Island a well documented chronology of over 180 Kings and Queens exists in the literature up to the last King of Kandy in 1815. (See Appendix 1). In 1505 the Portuguese subjugated the coastal area of the island and maintained colonial control for 153 years. In 1658 the Dutch East India Company (VOC) with the capture of Jaffna finally ousted the Portuguese and maintained their own colonial control for 138 years. In 1796 the British annexed the Dutch Colony and made Ceylon a British Crown Colony in 1802. In 1948, after 152 years of British colonial rule, Ceylon became an independent self-governing dominion of the British Commonwealth. In 1972 Ceylon became the Republic of Sri Lanka. Each of the above eras in Ceylon's history is represented by a rich legacy of coinage and examples of all of these periods up to independence are shown below. The text covers the period from 250 BCE to 1825 CE when the currency reverted to British Sterling. As the island has been known as Sri Lanka only in modern times I will refer to it throughout the text as its Sanskrit name, Lanka.

(3) Earliest Coinage – Kashapanas (250 BCE-600 CE)

The earliest coins in Lanka are known as kashapanas or puranas. Large numbers of these have been found in Lanka. These are flat pieces of silver cut from sheets or thin bars and trimmed to the correct weight and then stamped with various punch marks. They can be round, rectangular, square or multi-sided. They received strikes from several (5 is the common number on the obverse; 1 is usual on the reverse) punches that vied with each other for position on the surface. Most are only partially on the flan and often overlap at least one other of the punches. Each punch mark had its own particular meaning and over 300 have been identified by numismatic scholars. The punch marks include many objects including trees, animals, symbols of Buddhist worship, solar and planetary signs. The precise meaning of the punch marks is not certain but it has been suggested that they could represent a series of officials in diminishing order of authority, and that the always present symbol, the sun, would represent the Ruler himself, and the various arms of the six armed emblem representing the highest officials next under him. They are written of as being in use in the reign of King Dutugamunu in the second century BCE and scholars have documented their use in Lanka at least until the 7th century CE. One numismatic theory is that most of the puranas circulating in Lanka originated in India and were introduced to Lanka during very early trading activities between the two countries, with the only locally produced puranas being small numbers of cast copies. The enlarged photo shows a group of these small coins.



Silver Karshapanas or Puranas

(4) Lakshmi Plaques (1st Century BCE to 3rd Century CE)

These are rectangular pieces of Copper with a stylised figure of the goddess Lakshmi on the obverse and a railed swastika revolving to the right (or sometimes to the left) on the reverse. The plaques can be either cast or struck and their tenure has been uncertain. It is currently thought that they were current in the general period from 100 BCE to 300 CE and large numbers have been found in a number of hoards. Examples of both the cast type and the struck type are shown below.



Cast Lakshmi Plaque

Struck Lakshmi Plaque

(5) Elephant and Swastika (1st Century BCE to 3rd Century CE)

These are rare and ancient Buddhist themed copper coins. Their tenure is thought to be about the same as the cast Lakshmi Plaques, from about 100 BCE to about 300 CE. Buddhism was introduced to Lanka from India in 247 BCE. On the obverse there is a stylised elephant, walking left, above which is a symbol of three hills thought to represent mountains (“caitya”) with a railed swastika and a tree in an enclosure as well as the “dhajaya” and other Buddhist symbols. The reverse contains similar symbols but without the elephant and including the curious “nandipada”. Some of these symbols have been interpreted to represent phases in the life of Buddha with the elephant representing his birth, the railed tree his enlightenment, the railed swastika his ministry, and the Caitya his death. The dhajaya is seen as his standard. There are two types known. The type found at Anuradhapura is thin and struck with fine detail while the second type found at Tissamaharama in South West Lanka is thick and rough cast. An example of the former type is shown below.



Elephant and Swastika Coin

(6) Maneless Lion (2nd to 3rd Century CE)

These copper coins have been attributed to the 2nd and 3rd Centuries by Lingen and were certainly still in use during the reign of King Mahasena (277-304 CE). The specimen shown in the photo is well worn (as most are) but shows the maneless lion on the obverse and the four dots in a circle on the reverse.



Cakram Maneless Lion

(7) Roman and Indo-Roman Coins (4th Century to mid 7th Century CE)

Although only a very small number of Roman silver and gold coins dating from the first century BCE to the seventh century CE have been found in Lanka, large numbers of small bronze Roman coins of the fourth and fifth centuries CE have been discovered scattered throughout the island in over 30 hoards. The vast majority of the coins are of the Eastern Roman Empire, from the period 317-450 CE. These coins are present in Lanka because of indirect trading activities with the Romans over at least five centuries which reached a peak in the fifth century and then ceased altogether with the fall of Alexandria in 638 CE. This trading was indirect and carried out through Indian, Arab and Greek merchants acting as middlemen and transporting gems, pearls, spices, and other commodities from Lanka to the Mediterranean by the ancient maritime route via the Red Sea and Alexandria. In addition, crude copies of Roman coins minted in Lanka and originally called Indo-Roman coins by Codrington (1924), have also been found in considerable numbers in hoards, mainly in a limited coastal region in the south of the island known in ancient times as Ruhunu (modern name Rohana). These locally minted imitations of the roman bronze coinage are now known as Naimana coins. Latest research has shown that from about 200 BCE to the end of trade with the romans in 638 CE, although local trading was sometimes by barter, the principal small currency coinage used in the island was the silver punch marked coins from India known as puranas covered in Chapter 3. However, the small roman coins and the Naimana imitations were also used as a local currency for small village transactions in the 5th century, mainly in the Rohana area to the south, but hoards of both types have also been found in the north of the island. The Naimana coins also appear to have been favoured for temple offerings and donations. A selection of Roman and Naimana coins are shown below.



Roman and Naimana Coins of Fourth and Fifth Century

(8) Pallava Coins (668-740 CE)

The Pallavas were Kings of Southern India who controlled Lanka for nearly two centuries through a series of puppet Sinhala kings starting with Manavanna in the late seventh century and finishing with Aggabodhi IX in the mid ninth century. Pallava copper coins cover the period 668 to 740 CE and cover a variety of types. The pallava coin shown is a thick copper coin with a large vase sitting on a drum and holding a branched plant with a lamp symbol on either side. On the reverse is a large flowering tree held in a small vase flanked on one side by a boar and the other side by an elephant.



Pallava Vase Coin

(9) Early Pandyan Coins (824-943 CE)

The Pandyans were a dynasty of Indian Rulers who by the mid ninth century had risen to a position of ascendancy over the Pallavas in the southernmost region of India and controlled the fishing grounds in the Gulf of Mannar as well as the rich pearling grounds between India and Lanka in Palk Bay. After unsuccessfully invading Lanka in the mid-ninth century the Pandyans continued to exert considerable influence in the island and continued to trade. The Pandyan coins found in Lanka are copper and date to the period 824-943 CE. The two examples shown in the photos are as follows:

(a) Kongu Cera

Obverse – Elephant facing right, trunk pendant, in front a symbol (?), over back, a conch, all in beaded circle.

Reverse – Humped bull facing left, in front, lamp, over back a double crescent, all in beaded circle.

(b) Bull Series

Obverse – Bull sitting right, underneath two lines, over back, a crescent, on either side a lamp, all in beaded circle.

Reverse- Two fish facing opposite directions, underneath two lines, over a crescent, a thin lamp on each side, all in a beaded circle.



Pandyan Kongu Cera Coin

Pandyan Bull Series Coin

(10) Medieval Gold Coins of the late House of Lambakanna II Period (8th Century-1017 CE)

This anonymous gold coinage appears to have been initiated in the 8th Century long before RajaRaja Chola invaded Lanka in 990 CE and struck through the period the Cholas dominated the island. The standard gold coin produced was the kalanda (or kahavanu) of about 4.4 – 4.5 gms in weight. There were also fractional coins of gold with the half being called an ada, the quarter being called a pala and the eighth being called an aka.

The design of these first kahavanu coins is derived from Sinhala symbolism and formed the basic design motive of coins in Lanka for the next 900 years. It is now known widely as the “massa” design. On the obverse is a standing male figure, crowned and clothed in a *dhoti*. The figure is thought to be Kuvera, the Lord of Wealth. He is standing on a lotus plant stalk represented by a curved line of dots usually with buds at either end. In the right field of the coin is a group of three or four small circles, each with a dot in the centre. The right arm of the figure is extended with the hand and elbow over two symbols, the inner *srivatsa* symbol, and the outer lamp symbol. The left hand holds aloft one of a number of symbols. On the reverse side we have the figure Bahirava, a dwarf spirit, also holding a symbol in the left hand (which can be the same or different symbol to the obverse) but squatting on a rectangular frame throne known as an *asana*, divided lengthwise by a line and subdivided by vertical cross lines. On the left side of the figure (the right side of the coin) appears the legend in Nagari characters in three lines, commonly read as Sri Lanka Vibhu, the “Fortunate Lord of Lanka”. The following symbols held in the left hand can be recognised on these coins: Lotus, jasmine flower, adahanda or half moon (a crescent consisting of two small semi-circles, one within the other), chank (shaped like a lying down question mark), trident, full pot, ball, annulet, sun and moon emblem, flower, and srivatsa.

None of this series of coins identified the ruler on the coin. It will not be until after the Chola Occupation in another century that the Sinhala kings start to put their names on the bronze “massa” type coins. Codrington has however devised a scheme whereby various types of these anonymous gold kahavanus can be grouped as to origin, and he has recognised three types. Shown below are :

- a. A Type II Kahavanu together with matching pala and aka. They are all of the adahanda & lotus type.
- b. A Type III Kahavanu of the jasmine and chank combination.

There appeared to be little or no copper coinage minted in Lanka during this period except for the Chola Coinage from 990 CE (described below) and smaller transactions would probably have been undertaken using the barter system. The photos show all four coins described above (not to scale).



Type II Gold Kahavanu – adahanda and Lotus with Matching Pala and Matching Aka



Type IIIB Gold Kahavanu- Jasmine and Chank

(11) Chola Occupation coinage (990-1070 CE)

The Chola's were one of the longest reigning dynasties in medieval India and ruled the southeastern portion of India from the late ninth to the thirteenth centuries. The period of Chola occupation of Lanka began in 990 when RajaRaja Chola sent a large Chola army which conquered northern Lanka and added it to the Chola Empire. The rest of Lanka was annexed by his son Rajendra Chola in 1017, however the dispossessed Sinhala Monarchs continued to exercise some authority from the Ruhana region in the south of the island when they were not subjected to Chola attacks. In 1070 the Sinhala King Vijayabahu finally defeated the Chola army and resumed control of Lanka after returning to Polonnarura. The Cholas never returned to Lanka after that defeat.

The Cholas struck a gold, silver and copper coinage in Lanka. The gold and copper coinage of Rajaraja simply copied the “massa” style local gold coins which were then in use among the local Sinhala people. An example of the gold coinage (somewhat debased) is shown below, and the other example is a copper “massa” type coin of a curious convex shape and of rough execution.



Debased Gold Kahavanu of RajaRaja Chola (985-1014) Copper Massa of Chola Type

(12) Five Kingdoms Period (1056-1505)

This long period covered five separate Kingdoms of Sinhala Kings occupying six separate capitals at Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya, Kurunegala, Gampola, Raigama and Kotte (See Appendix 1). Aside from some minor gold coinage of the first King Vijaya Bahu I (1056-1111) almost all of the coinage output was in the form of copper “one massa” coins, with Parakrama Bahu I (1153-1186) and Dharmasoka (1208-1209) also producing small 1/8 massa coins. On the obverse of all these coins is a standing human figure quite similar to the obverse of the Kahavanu coinage and on the reverse is a similar seated figure with a legend giving the ruler’s name. The following monarchs issued massa coins:

- (a) Vijaya Bahu I (1056-1111)
- (b) Parakrama Bahu I (1153-1186)
- (c) Nissanka Malla (1187-1196)
- (d) Codaganga (1196-1197)
- (e) Queen Lilivati (1197-1200)
- (f) Sahasa Malla (1200-1202)
- (g) Dharmasoka (1208-1209)
- (h) Parakrama Bahu II (1234-1268)
- (i) Vijayabahu IV (1268-1270)
- (j) Buvanaka Bahu (1271-1283)
- (k) Parakrama Bahu VI (1412-1467)

The photos below show the reverse of massa coins minted by four of these rulers. The reverse is shown because only this side of the coin contained the Ruler’s name in Devanagari script.



Parakrama Bahu I (1153-1186) Queen Lilivati (1197-1200) Sahasa Malla (1200-1202) Dharmasoka (1208-1209)

(13) The Sethu Coinage from Jaffna (1215-1619)

The Sethu coins are a class of copper coin originating from the autonomous Hindu Kingdom of Jaffna in the Tamil speaking northern part of the island with Jaffna as its capital. After Kalinga Magha invaded Lanka from India in 1215 with Pandyan support he established the Jaffna Kingdom and ruled Lanka until his death in 1236. After that time the Jaffna Kingdom continued to exist as a tribute paying feudality of the Pandyan Empire in India. Upon the defeat in India of the Pandyans in 1323 the Jaffna Kingdom became independent and for a brief period in the early to mid 15th century again became the ascendant power in Lanka. Around 1450 it was overpowered and subjugated to the control of the Kotte Kingdom in the south and never again ruled Lanka. However it did retain its independence and continued as a Kingdom until 1619 when it fell under Portuguese control. There are two types of Sethu coins and the one shown is a copper Type II Arya Chakravati of 1462-1597. The obverse has the usual “massa” style but the reverse shows a reclining bull with large Tamil letters beneath reading Sethu.



Type II Arva Chakravati Of Jaffna Kingdom 1462-1597

(14) The Gold Fanam and Sinhala Silver Panama

The gold fanam is a very small gold coin used in Lanka over a long period. Its origins are not at all clear but it is considered that these were trade coins from the Malabar Coast of India and in use from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. They are only 8 mm in diameter and have distinctive patterns on each side but no script or date. The Sinhala silver panama on the other hand is a copy of the gold fanam and was minted by the Sinhala Kings in the seventeenth century during the Portuguese occupation and used well into the Dutch period (see below) The photos show a group of each of these tiny coins.



Silver Panamas



Gold Fanams

(15) The Portuguese Annexation (1505-1658)

In 1505 Francisco de Almeida, newly appointed first Portuguese Viceroy of the East, despatched his son to explore commercial prospects southwards from the Portuguese seat at Cochin in China. He returned in 1506 with a treaty from the King of Lanka, Parakramabahu VIII, who agreed to pay tribute in cinnamon and elephants. During 1509/10 the new Governor in Cochin, Alfonso de Albuquerque, established Portuguese maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean and sailed on eastwards, establishing Malacca in present day Malaysia in 1511. In 1512 Lopo Soares de Albergaria (who became Viceroy in 1515) established the first Portuguese Trading Settlement in Lanka in Colombo. During ensuing years further trading settlements were opened around the coast of Lanka and in 1597 the Portuguese King Philip I (1580-1598) was proclaimed sovereign of Ceilao (Lanka), followed by Philip II (1598-1621), Philip III (1621-1640), and John IV (1640-1656). In practice, however, the Portuguese only ruled the coastal lands and the Sinhala Kings of Kandy remained paramount in the interior of the island while the Tamil Jaffna Kingdom in the north retained its independence until 1619. Portuguese coinage struck in, or for, Ceilao all appears to post date the declaration of Philip's suzerainty in 1597. Local striking was ordered to cease in 1634, but had been resumed by 1640 when undated "gridiron" tangas were being struck. Local minting continued until at least 1645, but from about 1642 most silver coin destined for use in Ceilao was struck at Goa (India). Circulation of "St John" type silver coins was forbidden at Goa in 1650 and was replaced by the "Cross of Christ" type silver coin however the Goa mint continued striking of St John issues for use in Ceilao until 1653.

In 1638 the King of Kandy, Rajasinghe II called on the Dutch for help against the Portuguese and in 1658 the last Portuguese fortress on the island fell into Dutch hands.

The Portuguese Period in Lanka provides a very interesting and rare group of colonial coins minted in the region.

A selection of the silver Indo-portuguese coins is shown below.



Double Tanga 1633

St Filipe Double Tanga of 1641



Contemporary Forgery Double Tanga of 1641

St John Double Tanga of 1651



Single Tanga of 1632



Gridiron Tanga of Fort Sao Lorenzo

Silver Larins - Although not of Portuguese origin they circulated mainly in the Portuguese period and are included here. Larins were of thick silver wire flattened in the centre area with an Arabic inscription. One silver larin was 1/5 of an 8 reale piece. The undated larin coinage originated in the Persian Gulf and was used in that region and around the shores adjacent to the Persian Gulf as far as India and Lanka during the period 1500-1700. One difference in Lanka is that the larins were almost always bent into a fish hook shape while those from other regions were left straight. The type used in Lanka is shown below.



A Silver Larin Used in Lanka

(16) The Dutch Occupation (1658- 1796)

As mentioned under the previous heading the Dutch started to gradually occupy the Portuguese fortresses in 1638 but their occupation is usually dated from 1658 when they occupied the last Portuguese fortress in Jaffna. The Dutch first got a foothold in Lanka by assisting Rajasinghe II to eliminate the Portuguese power

from the island. The King naively assumed that the Dutch, after his aims had been achieved, would abandon Lanka leaving behind just a few small trading posts. As for the Dutch their colonial policy had always been that of gaining political and economic control over the lucrative spice trade to Europe and in this regard, Lanka was the jewel in their crown and so they established themselves as a colonial ruler. The Sinhalese rulers were not entirely subjugated and moved their courts inland but the Dutch retained control of most of the coastal areas and maritime trade for the next 138 years. The Dutch controlled Lanka through their autonomous trading company the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC which at the peak of its power in the Far East in 1669 had 40 warships, 150 merchant ships and over 10000 soldiers. The VOC produced a very interesting series of mostly locally produced coinage for use in Zeilan as follows:

(a) Earliest Dutch Coinage - Prior to 1660 the Dutch authorised the use of the existing Portuguese coins counterstamped at Galle, Colombo and Jaffna with the VOC and certain other counterstamps. Shown below is a 2 Tanga piece with the VOC counterstamp for Jaffna. Dutch counterstamps were also impressed on other current silver trade coins.



Portuguese St John Two Tanga with Jaffna VOC/I counterstamp

(b) Batavia Dollars – In 1644, owing to a temporary shortage of copper coinage in Lanka, the Dutch East India Company by a placard dated August 19th, 1644, granted the Chinaman named Conjok the sole right to cast copper quarter and half stuivers in Batavia for use in Banda, Malacca and Lanka. Strangely enough, a prohibition dated Sep 21st demonitised this issue just a few weeks after it had started production. There is some conjecture that this was done due to a scam based on the coin being of lighter weight than that agreed by contract. The coins have on the obverse a Sword with the words ANNO 1644 BATAVIA in the legend and on the reverse the VOC device with the words “1/2 St”. Putting this date into historical context it was also the period of the start of the English Civil War and the Battle of Lostwithiel was fought on August 21st 1644 at the same moment in history as this coin had its very brief period of currency. One is shown below:



VOC “Conjok” Batavia Half Stuver

(c) The Pulicat Series

In 1646 the Dutch received permission from the Golkonda Sultan to strike coins at Paliakate (Pulicat) on the south east Indian coast with the stamp of the King of Golkonda. This inscription degenerated during the years and the word Allah which was a wavy line in the beginning eventually was completely omitted. The denomination chosen for the Pulicat coinage was the “Kas” with 10Kas = 1stuver. Denominations of 1,2,4,5,8 and 10 Kas were struck. These Pulicat dumps were essentially for use in the Coromandel

area in India but a 10Kas and a 5Kas coin was authorised for Lanka followed later by a 4 and 8 Kas striking. A placard of February 1674 put an end to the issues for Lanka. Some examples are shown below.



VOC Ten Kas Pulicat Dump

VOC Two Kas Pulicat Dump

VOC One Kas Pulicat Dump

(d) The Negapatnam Coinage

On July 23rd 1658 the Dutch took Negapatnam, situated on the south east coast of India, from the Portuguese. From 1673 Negapatnam was granted limited minting rights which terminated in 1784 when the Dutch were forced to hand over Negapatnam to the British. During the Dutch occupation two series of copper dump coins were produced. The first of these were called the Kali coins of 1695 which were minted specifically for Lanka. The second was the series of VOC dumps minted from 1700 to 1784 for use in the regions controlled by the VOC. An example of a Kali 1695 two stuiver or 50 cash piece listed by Scholten as RRR is shown below. The obverse shows a highly stylised representation of the Tamil goddess Kali and the obverse states "Negapatnam" in three lines of Tamil script. The coin is very bulky and weighs 53 gms.



Negapatnam Kali 50 Cash Dump

(e) The Wreath Series

In 1660 the Dutch started minting anonymous undated "dump" style 2, 1, half and quarter stuiver copper coins bearing their value within a wreath on the obverse and the reverse. These were minted until 1720 and are grouped into three wreath types, depending on whether they were minted at Jaffna, Negapatnam or Colombo. An example of the Colombo one stuiver and also of the Jaffna ¼ stuiver are shown.



Wreath Series One Stuiver

Wreath Series Quarter Stuiver

(f) The Dutch Silver Home Coinage

Throughout its occupation of Lanka the Dutch supplemented locally produced VOC coinage with silver coinage imported from the home country. The most common silver coins by far were the 1 and 2 stuiver pieces which at the time circulated world wide as trade coins and were minted from 1614 to 1793.. Also used in Lanka were 6 stuiver silver coins from the Netherlands. Two of these are shown below. The earliest of these is a 1733 piece from Zeeland with crowned arms of Zeeland on obverse and on the reverse a lion couchant supporting a hat on a lance with castle mintmark above. The second six stuiver piece is dated 1736 from the province of Holland. It shows a man of war in full sail on the obverse with the arms of Holland separating the Value 6 S and the date above on the reverse. A few examples of the 1 and 2 stuiver pieces are also shown below.



Silver Six Stuiver 1733 Zeeland

Silver Six Stuiver 1736 Hollandia



Two Stuivers Frisia 1664

Two Stuivers Hollandia 1723

One Stuiver Hollandia 1730

(g) The VOC Doit copper coinage

From 1726 to 1794 small copper doits or duitens or “challies” were minted for the VOC in the five Netherland provinces of Holland, West Frisia, Zeeland, Utrecht, and Gelderland. They were not current in the Netherlands, being used solely in Lanka, Coromandel, Cochin and Malacca. Due to increased demand, a Half Doit or Duit was also struck in all five provinces. The VOC Doits were rated at 4 to the Stuiver and were minted in huge quantities. The non-VOC doits in the home country circulated 8 to the stuiver. The VOC duits show on one side the VOC insignia and the date with a mintmark above the insignia, and on the other side the arms of the issuing province. An example of the Doit and the Half Doit from the province of Utrecht are shown in the photos below.



Copper VOC Doit or “Challia” Utrecht 1744

Copper VOC Half Doit Utrecht 1753

(h) The Copper VOC “dump” coinage

Owing to the constantly increasing shortage of small change in the province, in 1783 the council of Colombo decided to locally mint one and two stuiver pieces as well as a $\frac{1}{4}$ stuiver piece and these are the famous VOC “dump” coins minted on flat chunks of copper. The range of weight of the 1 stuiver dumps is from about 12 to 14.2gms. The exchange rate between the duits and the stuiver was 4 duits to the stuiver. These wonderful dump coins were minted in Colombo, Galle, Trincomalee and Jaffna, with the mintmarks being C,G,T and I respectively. The dumps are sometimes round but are commonly oddly shaped due to the die flattening the soft copper flans in an uneven manner, which in many of these coins also causes part of the inscription to be missing on the flan. Dumps were produced from 1783 to 1795, with the latter date being quite rare. On one side of the dump is the large VOC emblem with the letter mark of the mint above while on the reverse is the denomination in writing and the date.



VOC Copper Dump Colombo One Stuiver 1792

Copper Bars of $4\frac{3}{4}$ Stuivers- It was decided by a resolution dated Oct 20th, 1785 to strike small bars of copper with two round VOC countermarks on either end and declare them current at $4\frac{3}{4}$ stuivers. The bars only had a short tenure and most were melted down to make the more convenient normal copper dumps. Genuine bars are therefore extremely rare and nearly all examples seen today, including the one shown below, are probably copies.



REPRODUCTION VOC $4\frac{3}{4}$ Stuiver Copper Bar

(j) Gold Trade Coins – The two most common gold trade coins used by the Dutch in Lanka were the Venetian Ducat and the Dutch Ducat. An example of each of these coins follows:



Venetian Gold Ducat of Alvise Mocenigo IV

Venetian Ducat – Wt 2.91 gm Obverse - The Doge receiving the gonfalon from St Mark. Around the periphery the legend SMVENET on left, ALOY.MOCEN on right continued by DVX to the right of the vertical banner which has a cross on top. Reverse- The standing figure of Christ within convex lens known as a mandorla with 16 stars of 5 points. The legend reads STTXPEDATQIV on the left and REGISISIEDUCA on the right. The type of mandorla shows that this is a ducat (known also as a zecchino or sequin) of Alvise Mocenigo IV 1763-1778. It is in EF condition and is of .999 purity.



Dutch Gold Ducat (Utrecht Mint) 1783

Dutch Ducat (Utrecht) – Wt 3.48 gm Obverse - Within ornamental square tablet the latin legend MO:ORD:PROVIN:FOEDER:BELG:AD LEG:IMP. Reverse – A knight facing right standing in armour with a sword in right hand and a sheaf of arrows in left hand dividing the year of issue 1783. Legend reads CONCORDIA RES PAR:CRES.TRA: It is of .986 purity and in EF condition.

(17) The British Administration (1796-1948)

Since 1658 the Dutch had been colonial rulers of the island of Sri Lanka (which they called Zeilan) through their autonomous trading company, the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC). In 1795, while England was at war with France and due to the French occupation of Holland that year which resulted in the formation of the new French controlled Batavian Republic, the Dutch Stadtholder (Chief Executive of the United Provinces of the Netherlands), William V, fled to England. He then requested assistance from the English King George III in the so-called Kew letters to prevent French occupation of Dutch colonial possessions in the east, including Zeilan. The English acted immediately by buying off a Swiss mercenary force in Ceylon originally contracted to the Dutch and sending a fleet to Trincomalee to take control of the island assisted by East India Company soldiers sent over from India. After a token Dutch resistance at the siege of Trincomalee which was quickly defeated all of the other Dutch strongholds in the island surrendered peaceably and by the end of 1796 the English had taken control of all of the Dutch colonial possessions in the island and had annexed administration of the island (which they called Ceylon) to the Presidency of Madras.

The Dutch maintained some hope that when the war with France was over England might relinquish colonial control back to the Dutch, however this was never the intent of the English who had long seen the great military and commercial advantages of holding Ceylon as a permanent colonial possession. The appointment on 19th April, 1798, of a Governor General and Commander in Chief of the United East India Company (UEIC) in Calcutta had the effect of putting British Ceylon, with the exception of the Kandy Provinces, under UEIC administration. In 1802 British Ceylon passed to the control of the Secretary of State for the Colonies and on 2nd March, 1815, after final British victory in the Kandian Wars, the cession of the Kandy Provinces placed the whole island under English colonial governorship.

It was not until 1801 that the the United East India Company (UEIC) decided to mint new “colonial” coins for Ceylon. In the interim period and by a proclamation dated June 8, 1796 currency was given to all Dutch copper coins issued by the late Dutch government and also to two UEIC copper coins minted in India. These UEIC coins were the 1/48 and 1/96 of an Indian (Arcot) Rupee valued locally at 1 stuiver and ½ stuiver respectively with an example of each shown below. Please note that coin photos in this article are not strictly to scale.



UEIC 1794 1/48 Rupee



UEIC 1794 1/96 Rupee

The obverse of these coins contained the company’s bale mark inscribed VEIC. On a broad rim incuse UNITED EAST INDIA COMPANY 1794. On the reverse, the company’s arms, below 48 or 96, in margin below TO ONE RUPEE, on broad rim incuse, AUSPICIO REGIS ET SENATUS ANGLAE. On the edge incuse, ENGLISH UNITED EAST INDIA COMPANY.

The first colonial coinage minted by the English administration in Ceylon was based on the old Dutch standard of the Rix dollar of 48 stuivers and consisted of copper and silver “dumps” minted locally under contract starting in 1801. The copper was minted into pieces of 4, 2, and 1 stuiver, with the respective denomination shown on the copper dump coins as 12, 24, and 48, representing 1/12, 1/24, and 1/48th of a Rix-dollar. The silver coins minted at the same time were Rix-dollars and half Rix-dollars. A double rix dollar silver dump was also minted in 1808 and 1809. The copper contracts were terminated in 1805 and the silver contracts terminated in 1809. In 1811 a local government mint was set up and operated until 1816. Four examples of this interesting “dump” coinage are shown below:



Copper Dump 1/12 Rix Dollar 1811



Copper Dump 1/24 Rix Dollar 1801



Copper Dump 1/48 Rix Dollar 1803

Silver Dump One Rix Dollar 1808

In 1801, the first colonial coinage to be struck in England for Ceylon was demanded by Governor North and minting of this coinage occurred at Mathew Boultons Soho Mint in 1802. It comprised 1, ½, and ¼ stuiver copper coins designated 48th, 96th, and 192nd of a Rix-dollar respectively. An example of the “192” dated 1802 is shown below:



1/192 Stuiver Coin Minted in London 1802

By 1814, the scarcity of small silver and copper coins was causing the Government great concern so to overcome this problem a silver “fanam” token coin was struck locally and issued to pass at 12 to the Rix-dollar (equivalent to 4 stuivers). This small silver coin blandly states “FANAM” on one side and “TOKEN” on the other and weighed only 0.52 gm. Minting ceased in September 1815.



Tiny Silver Fanam Token Coin (Much enlarged)

Also In 1814 an Order in Council authorised a silver and copper coinage for Ceylon from the Royal Mint of 10000 Rix-dollars in silver and 200000 Rix-dollars (value) in copper. A few silver Rix Dollars were struck in 1815 but never circulated, however the copper coinage of 2, 1, and ½ stuiver denominations was struck and circulated in 1815 bearing the profile of George III. The 1 and ½ stuiver are shown below.



One Stuiver George III 1815

Half Stuiver George III 1815

In October 1821, the British Treasury ordered a silver Rix-dollar to be struck for Ceylon at the Royal Mint and 400,000 of these coins dated 1821 were minted bearing the profile of George IV. The coins were received and circulated in Ceylon in 1822 and were not minted again.



Silver Rix- Dollar Minted in London 1821

In 1825 an Order in Council authorised Sterling as the legal currency and the Ceylon Rix-dollar for the purposes of exchange was rated at 1shilling 6d Sterling. Following this order, Sterling coins, both silver and copper were imported from England for normal use, but two other copper denominations were minted specifically for Ceylon. These are the Half-Farthing minted from 1828 to 1856 and the Quarter Farthing minted from 1839 to 1853. The quarter farthing was used only in Ceylon while the half farthing was also made legal tender in England in 1842. In addition, a small silver 1 ½ pence coin was minted from 1834-1837 in the reign of King William IV and from 1838-1862 in the reign of Queen Victoria for specific use in Ceylon and Jamaica. These were the last of the unique British “colonial” coins minted for Ceylon in England and examples are shown in the photos below.



Half Farthing 1847

Quarter Farthing 1853

Silver 1 ½ Pence 1834

In the 1850's gold sterling coinage also became scarce in certain British colonies and to alleviate this situation in 1856 an order was made declaring Australian gold coins (sovereign and half sovereign) struck at the Sydney mint as legal tender in Ceylon as well as in the British colonies of Mauritius and Hong Kong until the order was revoked in 1869. Examples are shown below at about twice normal diameter.



Australian Gold Sovereign 1856

Australian Gold Half Sovereign 1856

It is interesting to note that while these two gold coins were described in British Government correspondence with Ceylon in 1856 as “Australian” coins, Australia up until 1901 only existed as a geographic entity and did not exist as a country. Each of the six English colonies which finally federated in 1901 to become the Commonwealth of Australia were using Sterling coins and each had to separately declare the gold sovereigns and half sovereigns as legal currency in their respective colonies. In addition, the Sydney Mint was until 1901 only a branch of the Royal Mint in London and therefore a case can be made that these coins were in fact colonial English coins, and that only coins minted for the new nation of Australia after 1901 should be designated as Australian coins. In fact the first coins officially minted for the new nation of Australia were not minted until 1910, but even these were minted in England.

After 1825 the wide use of Sterling coins in Ceylon lasted only a few years as local government expenditures exceeded revenue and Sterling coins became scarce. In addition, in 1831 all copper coins that had been minted in Ceylon were demonitised. This resulted in a shortage of small coinage and in 1832, in order to correct this shortage, informal authority was given to allow British-Indian silver coinage based on the Arcot Rupee to be current at fixed exchange rates. After 1833 all importation of Sterling silver coins ceased and large imports of British-Indian Rupees were made. This Indian coinage together with its smaller denominations was used unofficially at various sterling exchange rates until 1869 when it was formally declared as legal tender in Ceylon. This same order of 1869 authorised the Governor of Ceylon, with Royal Treasury approval, to request the royal Mints in India to mint whatever small copper or silver coinage he thought necessary for Ceylon based on a decimal system with 100 cents equivalent to the Rupee. Following this order, ¼ cent, ½ cent, 1 cent and 5 cent copper coins were introduced in 1870 and silver 10, 25 and 50 cent coins were introduced in 1890. These coins were unique to Ceylon and on the reverse featured various forms of the talipot palm, which is a large palm tree found in India and Ceylon which lives for up to 80 years and flowers only once in its lifetime after which it dies.

With many minor changes this basic coinage system is still in place today.

In 1948, after 152 years of British colonial administration, Ceylon became an independent self-governing dominion of the British Commonwealth and in 1972 Ceylon became the Republic of Sri Lanka.

(18) Forgeries

There are a large number of coin forgeries on the market today worldwide, often sold through ebay, but also by vendors selling to tourists in the tourist shops and in the street. Sri Lanka is no exception. Forgeries fall into two categories, contemporary and modern. Contemporary forgeries are those made during the same era as the copied coin. These can have some value depending on their use. Modern forgeries are those made within the last few decades trying to replicate old coins of any country and are quite worthless. An expert can usually tell the difference between a fake coin and a real one simply through experience. On the other hand some modern forgeries are well made and difficult to recognise. For this reason the “provenance” or “pedigree” of any coin is important to help establish that it is genuine. In particular it is very helpful if you know that a coin has come from the collection of a previous respected owner or that it has been uncovered in an archeological dig. Forgeries, even good ones, can often be identified by the repetition of certain shapes and/or features on the fake coins

which have all been struck from the same fake die. As Dr. Ratnatunga points out in his excellent website it is much easier to prove a coin to be fake than to prove that it is genuine. My own view is that aside from the obvious forgeries, other coins deserve to be considered genuine unless proven otherwise.

(19) Acknowledgements and References

This paper contains no original research. A number of existing published sources contain excellent and detailed information regarding the coinage and numismatic history of Ceylon but are written in considerable detail for the specialist numismatist and none provide a coherent condensed view for the non-specialist reader. I hope that this summary provides such a need. For the text I have borrowed generously from the following sources:

- (a) Ceylon Coins and Currency - H.W. Codrington 1924.
- (b) Price Catalogue of Ancient Coins of Ceylon – T. M. De Silva Abeywardene 1952
- (c) Website “Lakdiva Coins” provided by Dr. Kavan Ratnatunga. This is an excellent website set up by a Sri Lankan numismatic expert and is recommended for anybody seeking more detailed information about Sri Lankan coins.
- (d) Website “Sirimunasiha.wordpress.com”
- (e) C. Scholten: The Coins of the Dutch Overseas Territories, 1601-1948
- (f) The ZENO Oriental Coins Website at <http://www.zeno.ru/showgallery.php?cat=875>

I have also had personal communication with Dr. Kavan Ratnatunga as well as with Mr. Jan Lingen (a well known Netherlands based expert and author on colonial and local coinage of South East Asia) concerning a number of facts relating to my article.

(20) Appendix 1

This appendix is a chronological list of Lanka Monarchs starting from King Manavanna in 691 CE to the start of Portuguese Colonial control over King Parakramabahu VIII in 1518. The list is taken from the Lakdiva Website.



FIGURE 1 - MAP OF SRI LANKA SHOWING MAJOR TOWNS OF INTEREST