

Early Coinage of Cochin and Malabar -A Study

Arya P.N.

Research Scholar

Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala,

Kariavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram-695581, Kerala.

Abstract

The development of trade and commerce is not impossible without money. The term Numismatics denotes the study of Coins which requires knowledge in palaeography, archaeology, epigraphy and history. In ancient times the monetization of Kerala was under the power of regional rulers. This paper is a primary study of evaluating the Kerala coins in the Cochin and Malabar region in a comprehensive manner.

Key words: Numismatics, Chera, Malabar, Cochin, Samoothiri, Kolathiri, AliRaja

Introduction

The introduction of coins is a landmark in the history of civilization and is a great achievement of human race. The development of trade and commerce is not impossible without money. The term Numismatics denoted the study of Coins which requires knowledge in palaeography, archaeology, epigraphy and history. It is one of the main sources for the reconstruction of history and one of the important component of ancient history. The dynasties of Kerala were divided as four territories under the principalities Kannur, Calicut, Cochin and Travancore. The dominance of Cheras can be seen in the Cochin and Malabar region. In the present study the Coinage of the rulers in the region of Cochin and Malabar are taken. The numismatics studies provide some major information regarding foreign contacts, commercial strength, chronology and lineology of the rulers. The Kingdom of Cochin, originally known as Perumpadappu Swarupam, was under the rule of the Later Cheras in the middle Ages. The Nambudiri (the Brahmin chief) of Perumpadappu had married the sister of the last Later Chera king, Rama Varma Kulashekara, and as a consequence obtained Mahodayapuram, and Thiruvanchikulam Temple along with numerous other rights. After the fall of the Mahodayapuram Cheras in the 12th century, along with numerous other provinces Perumpadappu Swarupam became a free political entity. Perumpadappu rulers had family relationships with the Nambudiri rulers of Edappally. After the transfer of Kochi and Vypin from Edappally rulers to the Perumpadappu rulers, the latter came to be known as kings of Cochin. The Zamorins or Samoothiris, the most powerful Kingdom of the Malabar coast during the arrival of Portuguese in India, was the hereditary monarch of the kingdom of Kozhikode (Calicut) on the South Malabar region. Kolattunādu had its capital at Ezhimala and was ruled by Kolattiri Royal Family and roughly comprised the North Malabar region of Kerala state in India. Traditionally, Kolathunadu is described as the land lying between Perumba river in the north and Putupattanam river in the south. Arakkal kingdom was a Muslim kingdom in Kannur town in Kannur district, in the state of Kerala, South India. The king was called Ali Raja and the ruling queen was called Arakkal Beevi. The royal family is said to be originally a branch of the Kolathiri, descended from a princess of that family who converted to Islam. The

present work focuses on the detailed analysis of the coins of Cochin and Malabar and attempts to understand the typological and regional variation of the coins.

Coins of Chera Rulers

The Chera dynasty was one of the principal lineages in the early history of the present day state of Kerala and some parts of Tamil Nadu in southern India. There is evidence of coins of these four rulers from different parts of the region. As far as the Chera coin finds are concerned it is important to mention that 112 copper coins of the Cheras have been found in the Pattanam excavation whereas only three lead coins have been discovered. Most of the Sangam age coins found are copper so the Lead coins are unique (Fig.1). The coin belongs to the Elephant: Bow and arrow series of the Cheras (Cherian 2013). Most of the available coins of the early Cheras mainly exhibit the elephant figure on the obverse and bow and arrow symbol on the reverse. Such types of three double-die copper coins without legend were also unearthed from Parur near Alangad in the District of Ernakulam, Kerala. Among them two coins are almost semi-circular and the third is more or less square which is slightly thicker than the other two in shape. The obverse has the standing figure of a tusker facing to right and a staff tipped with a trident is placed in front of it. The reverse of all the coins bears a lamp-stand or a goad and arrow strung to a bow, the top string of the latter being very visible.



Fig.1 Led coin from Pattanam ;Elephant on the obverse and Bow and Arrow on Reverse

Coins of Cochin Rulers

The Perumpadappu Swarupam or Cochin royal house came into political prominence only in the beginning of the 16th century. The rulers of Cochin earlier didn't have a regular mint but resorted to temporary establishments when coin was required. But after the Dutch occupation they established a regular mint factory. The details about these mints are not available.

The *panam* of Cochi are available in two denomination and they were used silver and gold as metal. The silver one *panam* and double *fanam* are known as *otta puthan* (Fig.2) and *eratta puthan*(Fig.3). There is another variety of silver puthan called Kaliyamani or sankhalata puthan (i.e. puthan without sankhu shell). This coin has 4.9g weight, and the obverse side is similar as on the vira-raya fanams of Calicut, on the reverse side has few dots and lines imperfectly struck. Silver puttan, struck by the Dutch for the Cochin Raja in 1782 and 1790, during the Dutch occupancy of the Cochin Fort with different dies. It had 4.9g weight and on the obverse side has Conch or Sankha shell and on the reverse side has an inverted letter J with two or three rows of dots

below it. The double silver Puthan or eratta puthan, struck in 1820 have similar pattern like above mentioned with 16 g weight. In 1856 and 1858 struck silver puthan have 84 gm. The symbol on the reverse side is sitting figure of the god Siva, as worshipped in the Raja's temple at Tripunithura, with snakes on either side, a chaplet of skulls. The Silver puthen had wide circulation throughout Kerala coast from the 15th century to the later half of 19th century. Some scholars have the view that Symbols in both ottaputha and irattaputhan are similar. Vishnu holding conch, discus, club and lotus in four hands stamped on the obverse and crude figure of a female deity probably the Pazhayannur goddess on the reverse. The Silver puthen had wide circulation throughout Kerala coast from the 15th century to the later half of 19th century. The gold puthen is also small and the obverse carries a goad and 12 dots below it. The reverse carries the Vishnupada and a few dots and small lines resembling symbols found on the framework in which the deity of the temple is taken out in procession.



Fig.2 Silver coin of Otta Puthan Coin (Courtesy from numista.com)



Fig.3 Silver Coin of eratta puthan (Courtesy from Mathura arts.cm)

Coins of Samoothiris of Kozhikode

Kozhikode was an independent kingdom ruled by Samoothiris in the middle age and later captured by British rule. Arab merchants traded with the region as early as the 7th century, and Portuguese factories and forts functioned in Kozhikode (1511-1522). In 1615 British landed followed by the French (1698), and the Dutch (1752). In 1765 Mysore captured Kozhikode as part of its occupation of the Malabar Coast. The Samoothiris had coinage from the 15th century onwards. Virarayanpanam (Fig.4), taram and acchu etc were the important coin types.

Coins in circulation in the pre-Portuguese kingdom of Calicut included gold coins called Pagoda/Pratapa, silver Tangas of Gujarat, Coins of Bijapur, Coins of Vijayanagara and the Larines of Persia, Xerafins of Cairo, the Venetian and the Genoan ducats. Other coins in circulation in the kingdom of Calicut included Riyal ("Irayal"), Dirhma ("Drama"), Rupee ("Uruppika"), Rasi ("Rachi"), and Venadu Chakram. Rasi later gave way to the Kaliyuga Rayan Panam. There were two varieties in Kaliyuga Rayan Panam. One of these (issued

by Kannur) was afterwards imitated by the Zamorin called Virarayan Putiya Panam, to distinguish it from the coin of Kannur, which then became Pazhaya Panam.

The virarayan panams have weight 6.5g for double fanam and 3.2 g weight for single fanam. The Obverse has indistinct form of the sankha shell resembling the Nandipada symbol on the gold coins of Travancore, the device on almost every coin varies. Reverse, it exhibits a transverse bar, sometimes with the end turned up like the letter J, or simply elongated something like a crocodile or saurian; at other times with one or two dependent lines. Above this is always a number of dots arranged in two or three lines over each other. There are some sites where hoard and coins of Viraraya panam.

Nadawayal Hoard: A coin hoards of Virarayan type issued by the Samoothiris were found from Nadawayal in Wayanad district in 1999. About 203 gold coins were found from the hoard. The weight of the coins ranges between .395g to .400g. The diameter of each coin is found to be 9mm.

Nelluwayi Hoard: These hoards were accidently found Nelluwayi in Thrissur district in 2001, while renovating Nadappanthal of Mullakkal Devi Temple. About 1040 veeraraya silver coins were found. The hoard consisted of one, half and one fourth taras minted by the Zamorins of Kozhikode and the diameter of the same is 8mm, 7mm and 4mm respectively. The respective weights are .395g, .20g and .06g respectively.

Kozhikode: Two hundred and six Viraraya fanams and two silver bangles were discovered (IAR 1964 – 65) Silver coin *taram*, which were current on the western coast in the seventeenth century may have been struck at Kozhikode. They are small silver pieces weighing from one to two grains, which have a sankha shell on the obverse and a deity on the reverse.



Fig.4 Virarayan panam of Samoothiri

Coins of Kolathiri and Ali Raja of Kannur

In the 14th century the old mushaka country had come to be known as Kolathunadu and a new line of rulers called kolathiris was ruling over the kingdom. The history of the Kolathiri kingdom is not available to us in the regular chronological order of the line of its rulers (Sreedhara menon 1976). The Pazhaya Panam was issued by the Kolathiris of Kannur. The four Pazhaya Panams made a Rupee.

A.D.1764 and 1774 the Moplah chief of Kannur, Ali Raja, struck double silver and gold fanams with Persian inscriptions inscribed on the obverse side as Guardian of the Kingdom Ali Raja and on the reverse side has Praised be God, year 1178. Silver 1/5th rupee coins (Velli fanam or Bombay Billy) of Ali Raja were popularly circulated in Kannur (Fig.5).



Fig.5 Coin of Ali Raja (Courtesy The COIN INDIA coin Galleries:Kannur)

Conclusion

The lack of serious archaeological excavations is one of the important causes for the limited availability of coins in Kerala. Here the study is conducted based on the previous data. All the available coins were still not published clearly and there is no energetic local department that could throw light on or identify the whole Kerala coinage which was by and large non-catalogued. However it is clear from the available information that many types' coins from the present study area are discussed here.

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