

COINAGE OF TRAVANCORE KINGDOM: A GLANCE

SOORYA.P.

Research Scholar, Department of Archaeology, University of Kerala, Karyavattom Campus,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

Abstract

Studying coins is one of the main sources for the reconstruction of history and one of the important component of ancient history. Travancore kingdom was one of the prominent kingdom in Kerala. In this paper attempting the origin and development of the Travancore coins in Kerala. By examining this data help to understand the economic status and social fitness and political power of these dynasty. This is a primary attempt to understand the coinage Travancore.

Keywords: Travancore, Chukram, Anantan kasu, Kaliyan Panam, Pagoda, Anantarayan, kali fanam.

Introduction

Venad was till the end of the 11th century AD, it was a small principality in the Ayi kingdom, who were the earliest ruling dynasty in southern Kerala, who, at their zenith, ruled over a region from Nagercoil in the south to Thiruvananthapuram in the north. Their capital during the first sangam age was in Aykudi and later, towards the end of the 8th century AD, was a Quilon present day Kollam. Though a series of attacks by the resurgent Pandyas between the 7th and 8th centuries caused the decline of the Ayi, the dynasty was powerful till the beginning of the 10th century. The history of Travancore began with Marthanda Varma, who inherited the kingdom of Venad (Thrissappur), and expanded it into Travancore during his reign (1729–1758). After defeating a union of feudal lords, he expanded the kingdom of Venad through a series of military campaigns from Kanyakumari in the south to the borders of Kochi in the north during his 29-year rule (Sreedharamenon 19)

Coins of Venad Rulers

The origin of the Travancore coinage may began from the Venad principality. It rose to political prominence in the 12th century A.D. with the disappearance of the Kulasekhara as the imperial power in Kerala. In the second half of the 12th century, the Venad family shifted into Thiruvananthapuram. Ananthasayanam coins and rasi coins were the important coins circulated by Venad rulers. The Sree Krishna rasi coins were also noticed by some scholars which has the feature of Krishna playing flute on the obverse and adaptation of Viraraya with sun and crescent on the reverse. The Ananthasayanam coins depict the image of Ananthasayana the presiding deity of Padmanabhaswamy temple at Thiruvananthapuram. These coins were round in shape and made of both copper and bronze. The

obverse of the coin shows the reclining Vishnu on coiled Anantha. The right hand lies below and the left hand holds a mudra. The reverse shows Sankhu, Chakra, Elephant, Garuda and seated figures with Parasu and Chakra. Punch marked coins were also used in some instances. Thirai Cash coins were also used by the rulers of Venad which were introduced after the Ananthasayana series, and are much smaller in size.

Coins of Trvancore Rulers

The earliest coins of this state are the four old pieces, three of lead and one of iron, presented to Sir W. Elliot by the rajah. "These coins appear to date from a period anterior to the seventh or eighth century. The reverse of all four is smooth, and the obverse, which is much worn, exhibits an imperfect outline of what may have been a sankha shell, the ancient cognizance of the Travancore state, which it still retains.

The oldest coin of Travancore was a gold coin called *rasi* which had 5.8 g weight, a degraded representation of a sankha shell on the obverse and on the reverse side resembling the vira-roya fanam of Calicut. Copper, Bronze, Silver and Gold coins were prominent in the circulation in the state of Travancore.

Copper Coins: The copper coins of the state consists of 1 Cash, 2 Cash, 4 Cash, 8 Cash, 1/4 Chukram, 1/2 Chukram, 1 Chukram and 1/2 Panam. 1 Cash issued by Uthrittathi Thirunal Gowri Parvathi Bayi, Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma, Uthram Thirunal Marthanda Varma, Ayilyam Thirunal Rama Varma, Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma (Figure 2) and Chithira Thirunal Bala Rama Varma. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges between 0.48g and 0.68g, and the diameter of the coins ranges between 6mm and 11.3mm. 2 Cash issued by Uthrittathi Thirunal Gowri Parvathi Bayi and Uthram Thirunal Marthanda Varma. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges in between 1.2g and 1.12g and the diameter of the ranges between 12mm and 13mm. 4 Cash issued by Uthrittathi Thirunal Gowri Parvathi Bayi, Uthram Thirunal Marthanda Varma and Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges between 2.32 g and 2.6 g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 14mm and 17.6mm. 8 Cash issued by Uthrittathi Thirunal Gowri Parvathi Bayi and Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges between 4.8 g and 5.0g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 20 mm and 22 mm. The Chukram including 1/4, 1/2 and 1 were issued by Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges between 2.56 g and 10 g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 12 mm and 26.7 mm. 1/2 Panam issued by Avittam Thirunal Bala Rama Varma. There is a another type in the copper coinage of Travancore was known as the "Anantan kasu "; on the obverse was a five-headed cobra, and on the reverse the value of the coin, one, two, four or eight "cash" written in Tamil (Fig.1)



Fig.1 Ananthan kasu issued by Rani Parvathybai courtesy coinarchive.com



Fig. 2. Copper Cash issued by Uthram Thirunal Marthanda Varma (Courtsey Coinarchive.com)

Bronze Coins: The coins made of bronze include 4 cash, 8 cash and 1 chuckram (Fig.3) issued by Chithira Thirunal Bala Rama Varma. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges between 1g to 8g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 17.5 mm and 27 mm.



Fig.3 Bronze 1 Chuckram of Travancore (courtesy from numista.com)

Silver Coins: A huge number of Silver coins were circulated in the state of Travancore. $\frac{1}{2}$ Chukram issued by Avittam Thirunal Bala Rama Varma. 1 Chukram issued by Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma, Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma and Ayilyam Thirunal Rama Varma. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges between 0.37 g to 0.38 g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 6.38 mm and 7 mm. 2 Chukrams issued by Avittam Thirunal Bala Rama Varma, Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma and Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma (Fig.4). From the available sources the

weight of the coins ranges between 0.75 g to 0.8 g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 8.5 mm and 10 mm. The Fanam coins were issued by Ayillyam Thirunal Rama Varma, Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma, Pooradam Thirunal Sethu Lakshmi Bayi and Chithira Thirunal Bala Rama Varma. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges between 1.41 g to 1.51 g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 13 mm and 15.76 mm. The Veerarayan Fanam in Silver has the weight of 0.3g and diameter 8mm. The Rupee coins including $\frac{1}{4}$ Rupee and $\frac{1}{2}$ Rupee and issued by Moolam Thirunal Rama Varma, Pooradam Thirunal Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, Chithira Thirunal Bala Rama Varma and Chithira Thirunal Bala Rama Varma. Some Rupee coins issued by Sree Chithra Thirunal were known as Chithra Rupee. From the available sources the weight of the coins ranges between 2.54 g to 5.44 g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 20 mm and 24 mm. In the obverse of the old velli fanam (kali fanam), the obverse is stamped with floral wreath round the edge and the reverse a double branch facing both right and left, the whole within a Tamil legend indicating the value. The new velli fanam which is equivalent to four chakram. Obverse side has Sankha shell and crescent. In 1 chakram the reverse is a curved object and twelve pellets and Figure of Vishnu. In the case of double chakram, the obverse is Sankha or conch shell and pellets. Reverse has two equilateral triangles interlaced, forming a six-pointed diagram, commonly known as "Solomon's seal." Half chakram has Sankha or conch shell obverse and Solomon's seal on the reverse.



Fig.4 Travancore Silver Chakram (courtesy coinarchive.com)

Gold Coins: Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma issued the Anantarayan coins in Travancore. Viraraya Fanam in Gold were also prevalent in Travancore (Fig.5). Kaliyan Panam was issued by Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma. Ayillyam Thirunal Rani Gouri Laxmi Bayi issued the special type Puvitta Ananthrayan Panam. The golden Pagoda including $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, 1 and 2 were issued by Ayillyam Thirunal Ramavarma and Visakham Thirunal Ramavarma. From the available sources the weight of the pagoda ranges between 0.64 g to 5.1 g and the diameter of the coins ranges between 11mm and 20 mm. In some gold fanams the Nandipala symbol and pellets can be seen on the reverse. Sometimes the gold fanam represents a dagger on the obverse and heart-shaped device containing twelve pellets, crescent above on the reverse side.



Fig.5 Vira raya fanam coin (courtesy archive.com)

The Travancore dynasty had adopted the punching technique for minting coins in the earlier period. The earlier silver and copper coins were coined by using the dies and punches. During the reign of Karthika Thirunal the coins were minted from the old mint at Padmanabhapuram the then capital of Travancore. When the capital was shifted to Thiruvananthapuram the mint was also shifted to there. Later this was shifted to Mavelikkara, Kollam and Paravur. There was also a mint at Anju thengu. In 1824 the mint was permanently established at Thiruvananthapuram. The vestiges of the mint can be seen in the present Kammattom Ganapathi Kovil at Thiruvananthapuram.

Conclusion and Discussion

Symbols and designs of the Travancore coins showing the influence of the vaishnavism. Deities Vishnu, Krishna, five headed serpent which is considering as the vehicle of Vishnu are represented in the coins. The cognizance of the Travancore state is the sankha, or conch shell was also appeared in the coins. In the 18th century onwards they started to depict their name, initials in Malayalam and English. As well, Bust of the king is also new feature added by later. In the early coins dieties portrait was depicted. In the early coins of Travancore legend and year was absent, characters and symbols are appeared. Silver, gold, copper and Bronze they used as denomination with various weight and values circulate the coins. Travancore coinage showing the prosperity and wealth of the Kingdom.

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