

Some Ancient Foreign Coins from Kerala: - A Description

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Abstract

In Kerala, from the first century AD onwards, had trade relations with foreigners such as Romans, Arabs and Chinese. Several archaeological sources provide us with information on this subject. Coins are an important source of insight into the past social life of mankind. Coins can be studied in two ways such as external aspects and internal aspects. External aspects include script and iconography. Internal aspects include material and metallurgy aspects. We have received coins from all the foreign countries that have come to trade in Kerala. This paper deals with some foreign coins obtained from certain places in Kerala.

Keywords: -Ancient Kerala, Coin, Roman, Persian and Chinese

Introduction

Kerala, (north latitudes 8°17'30" and 12°47'40" and east longitudes 74°51'57" and 77°13'10") a narrow but long coastal strip, tucked away in the south-west corner of India extends from Mannjaeswaram in the north to Parashala in the south. The state is bordered by the Arabian Sea (Laksha Dweep Sea) in the west and the lofty high hill ranges of the Western Ghats in the east. With Karnataka and Tamil Nadu share the boundaries in the north-east and south-east respectively, (Kumar 2008). This place, which is geographically very special, has been visited by foreigners for trade in ancient time. Archaeological records in Kerala shows a remarkable change towards urban trends in the first half of the beginning of the Christian era. The literary and epigraphical sources mention about trade relation between South India and Romans, Chinese and Persian. Human's past can also be understood through the numismatic studies.

Roman Coins

Large chunk of Roman gold and silver coins were transferred to peninsular India through Kerala, much of them were went down underground secret as hoards of their metallic value. Hoards like North Kottayam and Valluvally hoards were evidences of such activity. Eyyal Hoard was found near Talappalli in Thrissur district in 1945. The content of the hoard are twelve aurei, sixty-eight denarii and thirty seven silver Punch Marked coins. Four denarii of Republican period, thirteen denarii of Caesar Augustus, 36 denarii of Tiberius, one of Claudius, six denarii of Nero and aurei were assigned as eight to Tiberius, one of Claudius, two to Nero and one to Trajan (Mangalam, 1992).

Kumbalam Hoard revealed Nine Roman aurei found from the Kumbalam, Ernakulam district in 1974. Four each were belonging to Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius and one to Hadrianus (Satyamurthy, 1992 & Berghaus, 1993). Poonjar Hoard has been discovered from Poonjar in 1945, currently situated in Kottayam district. Four aurei reported, among one each belongs to Nero and Claudius and two belonged to Antonius (Berghaus, 1993). Velluvalli/ Valuvally Hoard was found in 1983. Roman aurei and Indian Punch Marked coins were reported. Details of this hoard is not known, but approximately 252 coins were recovered by police and handed over to State Department of Archaeology but local

people say that the quantity of the hoard might exceed one thousand (Berghaus, 1994). Berghaus succeeded to trace 314 aurei altogether, they are as; Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius.

Kilalur (Kizhoor) Hoard is one of the hoards whose details are unknown, but Caption Drury mentioned about this hoard in Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal as Kilalur hoard, 24 miles from current Talassery in Kannur district. Drury refers, local people found gold coins while sifting sand from river bank and nobody knows how many were recovered. He assumes these coins were buried in ground, probably contained in a bag.

Only one aureus reported, belong to Nero from Mankada, Palakkad (Turner, 1989; Gupta, 1990 & ARIE, 1963-64). One coin of Claudius reported from Idamakuduru near Poonjar, Kottayam district but metal is not specified (Shashibhooshan, 1987). Niranam Hoard was discovered near Tiruvalla, Pathanamthitta district but details were not known. Nedumkandam Hoard is located in Nedumkandam, Udubancholatalik of Idukki district and reported in February, 1992. Information from eyewitness of the hoard, is that more than fifty silver coins were kept in the pot. Satyamurthy recovered seventeen coins from a collector and his study reveals its uniformity in the contents as eight Roman Republican and eleven belonged to Augustus (Satyamurthy, 1996).

Chinese Coins

Thousands of Chinese coins have been recovered from the coastal areas of Kollam port as a result of dredging in 2014. The evolution of Chinese currency was fundamentally different from the evolution of western coin systems including that of India. Gold, silver, copper, tin, bronze, lead, iron, and tutelage were the various metals which were employed in China as mediums of exchange. Unlike the western coins that were usually die struck; Chinese coins were produced by casting.

From Thangassery 44 Chinese coins were obtained as a result of exploration. Coins were classified into three categories on the basis of their chronology. They are coins belonging to Tang Dynasty, coins of Southern Song Dynasty and coins of Northern Song Dynasty. Tang dynasty coins are the earliest; it is dated between 618 CE to 907 CE. The Northern Song Dynasty coins belong to the second category; it is dated between 960 CE to 1127 CE. 36 coins are reported from this section. The last category is Northern Song Dynasty coins. They are dated between 1127 CE to 1279 CE. Only two coins were reported from this section. Most of the coins are lightweight in nature. Among the total collection 13 coins weigh in between 3-4 gm. 11 coins are in the range of 2-3 gm and 7 coins are in the range of 5-6 gm. Only 3 coins have reported to weigh more than 7 gm.

Out of the 44 coins 3 coins have eroded reverse side, 41 coins have no features on the reverse side. Only one coin is reported to have three dot marks on the reverse side which indicates San 3rd Year, which is an indication of the regnal year of the King. 14 coins belong to the category of Regular script another 14 coins belong to the category of Seal script. Other identified scripts were running script, Li script and Grass script. Only one coin has Grass script inscribed on it. Out of the 44 coins 36 of them belong to the Northern Song Dynasty. Only two coins belong to the Southern Song dynasty and five coins belong to Tang dynasty. Out of 44 coins 10 coins belong to the emperor Shen Zong, Nine coins were issued by Ren Zong and five coins are issued by Tai Zong (Vinuraj et al 2017).

About 36 coins belong to the Northern Song dynasty; other dynasties were Tang dynasty and Southern Song dynasty. These dynasties belong to different time periods. This clearly indicates that Kollam had long trade relation with china. Earliest Chinese coins reported from the site belong to Tang Dynasty, this dynasty ruled china between 618CE to 907CE. This clearly indicated that trade between china and Kollam must have started during this period. But there are no unanimous viewpoints between the scholars about whether these coins had any circulation value in the local scenario, considering the fact that Chinese were one of the major stakeholders of trade in Kollam, it should be recognized that these coins had no materialistic value and it might not have used in large volume of trade, there would have been alternative measures used in the trade exchange (Vinuraj et al 2017).

Persian Coins

The Persians were another important group of traders who came to Kerala in ancient times for trade along the western coast. They traveled to many parts of Kerala for trade. We have also got their coins in some parts of Kerala. It is such a place is the Puthina village in Kasaragod, North Kerala. In 1993 A hoard was found from the compound of Mr. Thomas Dissosa of Kattathadukke House in Puthina Village, KumbalaTaaluk, Kasargodu District in Kerala. The hoard kept in a copper box, contained 19 silver coins, gold rings, broken parts of gold ornaments, copper bangles etc. The coins in this hoard belong to *II- Khan* (or *-Khanid*) dynasty in Persia 14th century. The 19 silver coins from this hoard are found to be issues of king Abu- Said Bahadur ibn Uljaitu. He os the 9th ruler of *II- Khan* dynasty came to power in AD 1317 and reigned upto AD 1335. There are 19 in total. It has *Kalima* (*Lailaha Illallah Muhammad Rasul illah*) and Kalifas name (*Aboobakar, Umar, Usamn and Ali*) on the obverse side and *Al-Sulthanul A-ZamAboo Sayeed, Khalladallahu Mulakathu* and Year 724 on the reverse side. It is written in combination of *Kuffic* script, written in a square and cursivescript. Average weight of the coins 3.50gm and average diameter is 2.2cm. There are three type of coins, a) Looped square type, b) Pentagon type and, c) Octagon type (Sarojini 2002).

Colonial Coins from Bekkal Fort

Bekal fort is situated in Kasargodu District, Northern part of Kerala on the Shore of Arabain Sea. An excavation was held at this place in 1997 under Archaeological Survey of India. From there came a lot of evidence related to Numismatics, like different type of coins, Klin for minting coins, damaged and defaced copper pieces, coin moulds and lead slag etc. Fifteen British East India Company coins with balance and the company's Bale mark motifs of 18th Century and two silver *panams* of French East India Company from Puducherry mint of 18th Century this are the foreign coins found the time of excavation (Nambirajan et al. 2009).

Conclusion

Roman coins have been found in ten sites. Most Roman coins have been found in Velluvalli in Ernamkulam District and Eyyal in Thrissur District. Chinese coins have been found Thangassery. Persian coin has been found Kasargodu. (Table No 1 and Figure No 1) Foreign coins have been found all over Kerala. This shows that Kerala has had relations with foreign countries since ancient times.

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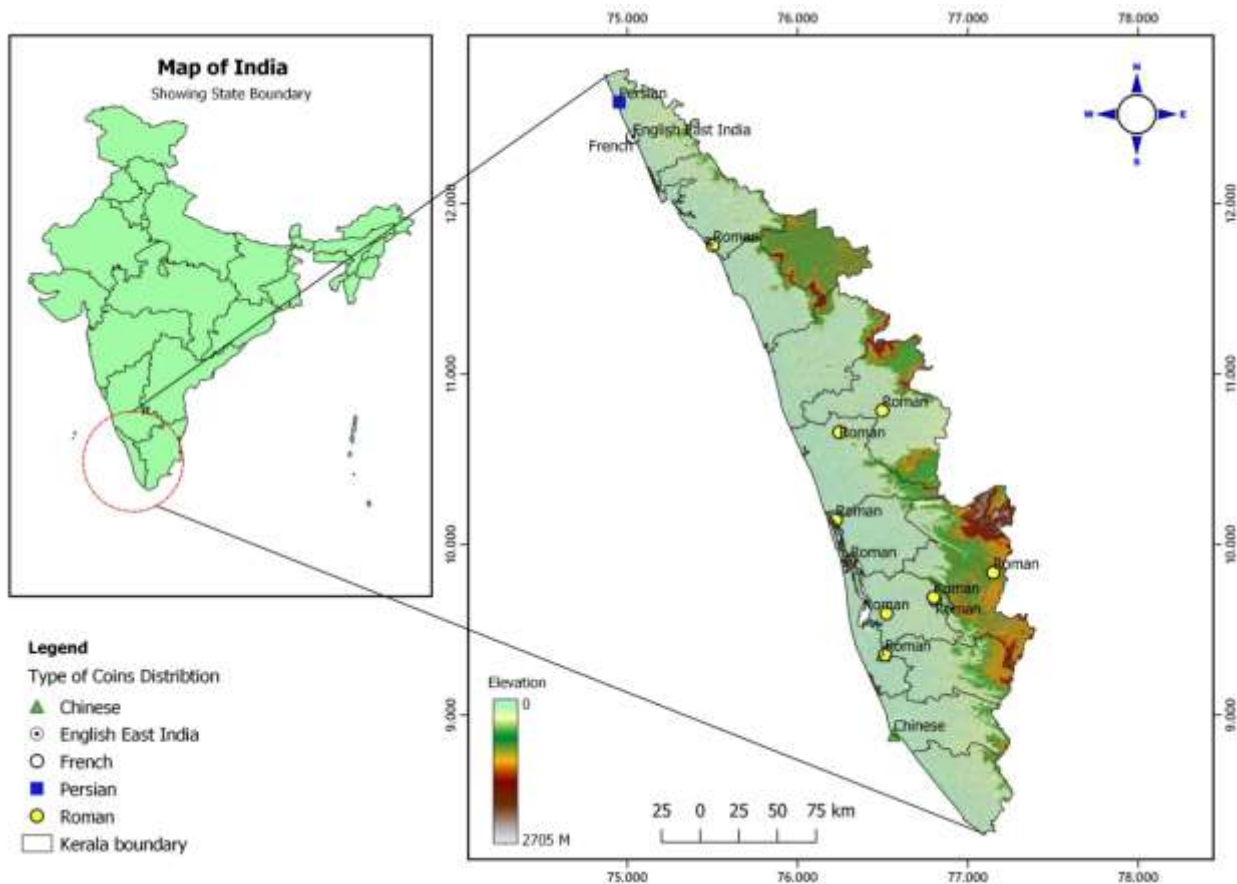


Figure 1:- Map showing location of the ancient coins found sites

SI No	Site Name	Taluk/ District	Type of the Coins	Reported Year
1	Eyyal	Thalappali/ Thrisur	Roman	1945
2	Kumbalam	Ernamkulam	Roman	1974
3	Poonjar	Kottayam	Roman	1945
4	Velluvalli North	North Paravur/ Ernamkulam	Roman	1983
5	Kottayam	Kottayam	Roman	1847
6	Kizhoor	Thalassery	Roman	1851
7	Mankada	Palakkad	Roman	1989
8	Idamakuduru	Kottayam	Roman	1987
9	Niranam	Pathanamthitta	Roman	*
10	Nedumkandam	Udumbanchola/ Idukki	Roman	1992
11	Thangassery	Kollam	Chinese	2013
12	Puthina	Kumbala/ Kasargod	Persian	1993
13	Bakal Fort	Kasarkodu	French	1997
14	Bakal Fort	Kasarkodu	English East India	1997

*Unknown year

Table 1:- Table showing location of the ancient coins found sites

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