

# A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CEYLON COINS AND CURRENCY: ANCIENT, MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN

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## Preface

“Of all antiquities coins are the smallest, yet, as a class, the most authoritative in record, and the widest in range. No history is so unbroken as that which they tell; no geography so complete; no art so continuous in sequence, nor so broad in extent; no mythology so ample and so various. Unknown kings and lost towns, forgotten divinities and new schools of art have here their authentic record. Individual character is illustrated and the tendencies of races defined”.

—R.S. Poole *Coins and Medals*, ed. by S. Lane-Poole. 3rd ed. (1894).

The science of numismatics, which deals with the significance of ancient coins and currency, and the light they throw on the past, has become increasingly recognised as an important source of historical information. In Ceylon, numismatics has a positive contribution to make towards historical research by supplementing the indigenous inscriptional and literary records. In 1907, R.S. Churchill could afford to say “I suppose there is no country with a more complete history, rising from the cloudlands of Eos, coloured with romance, and peopled by warriors or monks; and with it all that history yet to be written, lest we forget; and permitting oblivion to curtain it, Ceylon’s history, like its ancient coins, becomes almost as mum as a nummulite”\* (*Numismatic Circular*, Vol. 15, May, 1907). Since then, however, giant strides have been taken in Ceylon historical studies, and soon after, H.W. Codrington rendered the tale of Ceylon’s ancient coins, in particular, very much less mute. He was among the first to stress the importance of numismatic records for the study of the history of Ceylon. His *Ceylon Coins and Currency* (1924) is a work of patient scholarship and a lasting monument to his memory. There have been others too who have made important contributions in discussing the significance of the various classes of coins found in Ceylon. But numismatic science being progressive, there is still very much to be done †. The historical importance of the study of the coins and currency of Ceylon cannot therefore be overstressed.

From the silver *eddings* or *purāṇas* of the pre-Christian era to the nickel coins of the 20th century, Ceylon’s numismatic story is both an alluring and variegated one, to the student no less than to the collector. This little island

\*A nummulite is a large coin-shaped fossil.

†It will interest readers to know that in the projected series of *Corpus of Indian coins*, to be published by the Numismatic Society of India, Vol. 5 will be devoted to the coinage of the Deccan, South India and Ceylon.

has been subjected to cultural, political and economic influences from many foreign lands, beginning with India from the pre-Christian era and ending with the British occupation which lasted till 1948. Besides the coins struck either within or outside the country for use as media of exchange, coins of various Indian dynasties, besides Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and British coins among others, have been found in Ceylon. The only native coins bearing the name of the ruler who struck them, are a small group in gold, silver, and copper which were issued by the kings and queens of Ceylon in the Połonnaruva period during the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries A.D.

Before Vijayabāhu I, who was the first Sinhalese king to have his name inscribed on a coin, the numismatic stage is occupied by various classes of coins : they range from the earliest silver eddlings impressed with various punch marks, the single-die coins bearing different emblems, the rectangular cast copper coins, the "Buddhist Cakram", the "Elephant & *Svastika*" and the "Maneless lion" types, etc., the oblong Lakṣmī plaques and the earliest gold Sinhalese coins known as *Kahavanu* and its fractional pieces. South Indian commercial intercourse with the Roman world led to the large-scale introduction of Roman coins especially of the 4th and 5th centuries, which incidentally, are the earliest coins the dates of which can be accurately fixed. In later mediæval times, coins of Arabic and Persian origin — particularly the curious *larin* — Venetian sequins, and South Indian pagodas and fanams, besides the popular local *Dambadeni kāsi* or *salli*, were current in the island when the Portuguese arrived in the 16th century. The Portuguese, Dutch and British in succession introduced currency systems of their own using various classes of gold, silver, copper and base metal coins, some minted within and some outside the country. The Dutch were the first to issue paper money. Shortly after the British occupation, the use of pounds, shillings and pence was introduced in 1825, culminating in the legalisation of the rupee in 1869. This was followed by the decimalization of the coinage in 1872, which has lasted up to the present day.

This bibliography seeks to bring together the material in print relating to the coins and currency of Ceylon from the earliest times to the close of the British period. It includes books and pamphlets, parts of books, government publications, catalogues and articles in periodicals, but newspaper articles and incidental minor references scattered in historical and other writings have been excluded. It must be said at the outset that the bibliography does not profess to be exhaustive, and many references may have been omitted. It was not possible during the period of preparation for the compiler to have access to complete files of important periodicals in the field, like the *Numismatic Circular* and the *Numismatic Chronicle*. Likewise many books were out of reach, not being available in Ceylon libraries. In view of these handicaps, the compiler will be grateful if any significant omissions are brought to his notice.

The task of classification presented problems. The arrangement in Codrington's *magnum opus* proved of great value in establishing some systematic disposal of the material and designing helpful divisions and sub-divisions

with a view to convenient consultation. The organisation is thus provisional, but it is hoped that the real purpose of the bibliography in presenting a conspectus of the literature on the subject has been achieved. At best it may be considered as a starting point for something better.

Every effort has been made to check the accuracy of the references and all particulars necessary for their identification have been given. Each work has been entered, described and numbered in only one place in the bibliography, but where information might be missed because an entry deals with two or more aspects, the whole item or relevant portion as the case may be has been repeated in its appropriate place. These unnumbered cross-references have however been restricted to the absolutely necessary minimum, in order to save space and reduce unwieldiness. In recognition of its great importance as a standard work of reference, Codrington's extensive and scholarly treatise has been dissected and subsumed under the appropriate sections. References to the coinage and currency of the island in early travel writings, especially in Portuguese and Dutch times, have not been individually noticed, as they are well presented in the appendices in Codrington's work, but they are mentioned in the relevant sections. In each of the sections the arrangement is alphabetically by author's names, and there is an index of authors, personal and corporate, at the end. In the majority of cases annotation is supplied in the main bibliography. These notes are purely descriptive and informative, and are intended to reflect as faithfully as possible the opinions of the respective authors. Lack of specialised knowledge inevitable in a mere bibliographer prevented evaluatory notices, as well as more consistent annotation.

As the coinage of Ceylon right down to the British period, particularly from the earliest times to the 15th century, was considerably influenced by the Indian numismatic tradition and closely connected with the currency system of South India, a small selection of representative and significant contributions on the subject of Indian coins has been included as auxiliary background material, in the form of an Appendix, divided into three sections: General, Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern.

It is hoped that this bibliography will be of some assistance to students of the subject, in providing sign-posts through the maze of writings on the numismatic history of Ceylon, and in stimulating others to further research in this interesting field.

## PLAN OF THE CLASSIFICATION

1. General.
2. Ancient and Mediaeval Ceylon.
  - (a) Eldlings, purāṇas or kahāpanas.
  - (b) Early copper and other coins  
(incl. Single-die coins, "Buddhist Cakram" type, various obverse types and railed svastika reverse, "Maneless lion", "Lakshmi" plaques and other types).
  - (c) Roman coins (incl. Indo-Roman and Byzantine).
  - (d) Greek coins.
  - (e) Indian coins.
  - (f) Kahavaṇuva and fractional pieces.
  - (g) Coins of Ceylon rulers bearing names and titles  
(incl. coins of the Tamil kings of Jaffna).
  - (h) Larins or fish-hook money.
  - (i) Miscellaneous.
3. Portuguese coins and currency (1506-1658).
4. Dutch coins and currency (1602-1796).
5. British coins and currency (incl. Tokens) (1796-1948).
6. Miscellaneous (Mediaeval and Modern).
  - (a) Kandyan period.
  - (b) Mohammadan coins.
  - (c) Chinese coins.
  - (d) Maldivé Islands coins.
  - (e) Pagodas and fanams (excluding those in Portuguese period).
  - (f) Venetian coins.
  - (g) Spanish (incl. Spanish Netherlands) coins.
  - (h) Other European coins.

### Appendix

#### COINS OF INDIA

1. General
2. Ancient
3. Mediaeval and Modern.