

The Evolution of Thai Money From its Origins in Ancient Kingdoms / Wiwatthanakan kasap thai chak anachak boran, by Ronachai Krisadaolarn. Bangkok: River Books, 2012. ISBN 978 6167339 73 3. 2,495 Baht.



This book promises to be the standard archival work on Thai coinage for some time to come. It is an expansion of the book published in 2012 by Ronachai Krisadaolarn (Ronald Jay Cristal) with his partner Vasilijs Mihailovs, who passed away in 2015.

The book is principally a visual record. Most of the 270 pages carry colour photographs of coinage, averaging around twenty items per page, meaning that something like 5,500 items are shown in total. For each item, the annotation describes the weight, alloy used, and symbols or marks. All the text is given in both English and Thai. The book is divided into six sections: Funan, Dvaravati and other early Southeast Asian kingdoms; Lan Na and Lan Chang; Sukhothai and Ayutthaya; cowries, tokens and southern tin coins; Thonburi and Rattanakosin; and the transition to flat coins. Each section is

preceded with an introduction of around one page of historical background, but there is virtually no historical analysis using the coins as evidence. The book is “show and tell.” However, this collection and beautiful presentation of so many items ought to stimulate the interest of historians, because it raises many questions.

The imprinted disks and other marked items from the early kingdoms may have been money, medals, or whatever. There is no way of knowing. But from Lan Na and Sukhothai in the 13th century onwards, the use of more standardised weights, designs, and methods of marking indicate that these items were being used as medium of exchange.

The Lan Na materials are especially fascinating, as there is an extraordinary number of different types. The most common is the *tok* hollow disc, but there is also pig-mouth money, snail money, leaf money, silver-flower money, horse-hoof money, buffalo-dropping money, and silver-wheel money. Many have marks that identify their city of origin. Ronachai claims that over eighty different places were issuing these various forms of money. What does this indicate about the economy and politics of the era?

At Sukhothai and early Ayutthaya, there is more convergence into the form of *pot duang*, the bent lumps known as bullet money, but there remains a huge variety of shapes and markings, which suggests a similarly dispersed pattern of issuing of this coinage. Some further rationalisation seems to take place in mid-Ayutthaya when an alloy of 95 percent silver becomes standard, more low-value denominations are issued, and a smaller range of markings becomes evident. Unfortunately, Ronachai does not discuss the mints established at Ayutthaya, about which a little is known from the 17th century records.

There was also clearly a lot of “near-money” in circulation. The fourth chapter display the vast range of gambling tokens made from porcelain, bronze, tin-lead, and pottery, often in designs more intricate than the silver coinage.

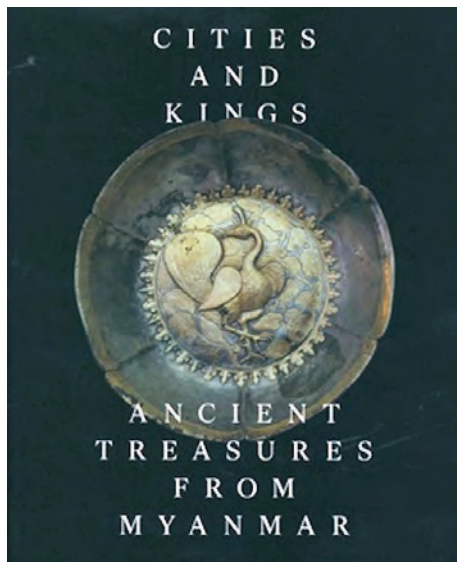
In the transition from the Narai to Phetracha reigns at the end of the 17th century, any trend towards standardisation seems to have gone into reverse. Again, there is a proliferation of different designs, and the usage of several different alloys. What were the economic forces, if any, underlying these changes?

The coinage in the early Rattanakosin period continued the forms of the late Ayutthaya era. The first flat coins were made in 1856, after the expansion of the economy had created a shortage of currency, leading to widespread use of Mexican dollars and other imported specie. The first coins were hammered by hand, but in 1857, Queen Victoria sent King Mongkut a hand-operated minting machine and some dies. The book ends with the transition to a decimal coinage in 1897.

Ronachai is an American, who arrived with the US armed forces in the 1960s, then practiced law, took Thai citizenship, and developed this unique interest. His book is a magnificent source for historians and collectors. By presenting this vast range of coinage in one place, in high-quality photography with good annotations, the book should stimulate historians to think more deeply about the changes evident from era to era.

Chris Baker

Cities and Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar, edited by Stephen A. Murphy. Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016. ISBN 978-981-11-1730-5. S\$40.



Long in the shadows, the art of Myanmar has finally come into the limelight, spawning no less than five major exhibitions within less than four years. This wave began with an overview of early Southeast Asian art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (2014), which included the Pyu, together with the three exhibitions devoted solely to Myanmar hosted by the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart (2014), the Five Continents Museum, Munich (2014) and the Asia Society, New York (2015). *Cities and Kings* is then a welcome addition to this burst of new interest.

Sixty objects are featured, ranging from the first millennium to modern times. Twenty were drawn from the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore, together with seven from private collections. Nearly a score of the most important were borrowed from Myanmar in 2015 by the Asia Society and therefore the Singapore exhibition mirrors the one in New York to that degree.

Six illustrated essays treat various facets of Myanmar art, introduced by a solid