

# The Malacca Coinage

by

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Muzium Negara

1. During the Malay Sultanate  
c. 1400 – 1511 A.D.

In the early days of Malacca, monetary transactions were carried out by the use of gold, silver and tin by weight and assay, with cowrie shells forming the unit of value for minor purchases. Only tin was minted into anything that remotely resembled a coinage. According to Ma Huan (Groeneveldt p 124), who in 1413 acted as an interpreter to the expedition of Admiral Cheng-ho, this tin was smelted locally and cast into standard and certified solid blocks that weighed either 1 kati and 8 tahils or 1 kati and 4 tahils. These currency blocks were the prototype of a series of token coins, called *tampang*, which circulated in Pahang until almost the end of the 19th century.

Foreign monetary systems were not unknown in Malacca at that time, for it is recorded in the History of the Ming Dynasty (Groeneveldt p 130) that when the first ruler, Parameswara, returned from China in 1412 he brought with him, as a gift from the Emperor Yung-lo, 2600 strings of copper cash and a large sum in paper money. The first Malacca coinage was not, however, patterned on the Chinese cash, but upon the *pitis* of Pasai. This north Sumatran state, which occupied a strategic position at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca, had long been a trading base for Arab and Muslim Indian merchants. Through their influence a commercial coinage of minted gold dinars and fractional tin cash had been established.

In 1414 Parameswara concluded an alliance with Pasai, married a daughter of its ruler, and together with his court was converted to Islam. This encouraged

many of the Muslim merchants to move across the straits to Malacca. There they found that the market lacked an adequate trade coinage and so introduced that of Pasai. The gold dinars continued to circulate long after the Malay Sultanate had been deposed, but by the middle of the 15th century the tin coins had been replaced by cash minted in Malacca. The earliest coin of this series so far recorded was ascribed by Dakers (1939) to the reign of Sultan Muzaffar Shah (1445 – 1459), but it is by no means certain that earlier issues were not made.



Obv.



Fig. 1

Rev.

Obverse: 'Muzaffar Shah al-Sultan'.

Reverse: 'Nasir al-Dunya Wa'l-Din' ie.  
The Helper of the World  
and of the Religion (of Islam).

These coins were minted in two stages. First, the plain tin discs were cast in clay or stone moulds; then the blanks were impressed with Arabic inscriptions on both sides simultaneously by striking them between obverse and reverse dies.

Tin coins have been recorded for the Sultans who followed Muzaffar Shah, except for Ala'u-din Riayat Shah (1477 – 1488). Perhaps the most interesting coins of the series, however, are those issued in 1510 to commemorate the brief reign of Sultan Ahmad.



Obv.



Rev.

Fig. 2

Obverse: 'Ahmad bin Mahmud Shah' ie. Ahmad son of Mahmud.

Reverse: 'Al-Sultan al-Adil' ie. The Just Ruler

This prince, who reigned for only a few months, was the eldest son of Sultan Mahmud, last Malay ruler of Malacca. In 1510 his father abdicated in his favour, but took back the throne that same year. Tengku Ahmad seems to have accepted his demotion philosophically, for in the following year he played a leading part in the unsuccessful defence of Malacca against the Portuguese. His misfortunes did not diminish with the fall of the Sultanate, for he was later murdered while in exile by order of his father.

Though in different periods the Malacca cash varied considerably in size and weight, they were nevertheless intended to represent one standard denomination. Their value was set at 100 to the calaim (an arbitrary measure of weight of tin not a coin) which became the unit of account in which all business was there after transacted. The Malay Sultanate produced no minted coin other than these tin cash, but the currency of other trading nations was given legal status and an exchange rate in calaim which depended upon the weight and fineness of the metal contained was recognised.

## 2. The Portuguese Occupation 1511 – 1641:

On August 24th, 1511, the seaborne forces of Afonso D'Albuquerque, Portuguese Captain General of the Indies, captured Malacca and deposed the Malay ruling house. The Portuguese soon turned their attention to commerce and

D'Albuquerque, at the urgent request of the merchants of all races, ordered the minting of a comprehensive local currency. Immediately this was ready for issue, the coinage of the former Malay Sultans was called in and melted down.

The new monetary system consisted of five denominations. The first was the gold Catholico, the equivalent in value of 1000 Portuguese reis or of 2 gold cruzados. No description of this coin is available, and as far as is known no specimen of it has survived. The second denomination, a silver piece called a Malaquese, bore the Arms of Portugal on the obverse and the Armillary Sphere, an armorial device of the Portuguese king Dem Manoel I (1495 – 1521), on the reverse. Its value in relation to the Catholico is not known. Finally, there were three denominations in pewter, the bastardo, the soldo and the dinheiro. All three were impressed on the obverse with the Armillary Sphere and on the reverse with the Cross of the Order of Christ. Their values, as far as can be computed from the writings of Tome Pires and other contemporary authors, were approximately 40 bastardos, 400 soldos or 4000 dinheiros to the Catholico.



Obv.



Fig. 3

Rev.

D'Albuquerque's bastardo of about 45 grammes weight.

Observe: The Armillary Sphere surrounded by the legend: – D(OM) M(NNOEL) P(RIMEIRO) R(EI) DE PU(RTUGAL) S(ENH) OR D(A) I(NDIA) E M(ALACCA)

Reverse: The Cross of the Order of Christ surrounded by: CRVX :XPI (ie. Christi): NOSTRE: SPES:VNICA:

Despite this new coinage, foreign currency of established weight and fineness of metal continued to circulate, for Tome Pires, who was a civil servant in Malacca from 1512 to 1515, stated that during that period the silver xerafins of Ormuz (a Portuguese possession in the Persian Gulf) and Cambay (north-west India), the silver tangas of Bengal, the gold cruzados of Portuguese Goa and the gold dramas (dinars) of Pasai, were in use.

Between 1516 and 1521 a tin coinage considerably lighter in weight than that of D'Albuquerque was current. Only pewter coins were issued, and again there were three denominations of these.



Obv. Fig. 4 Rev.

Obverse: The Arms of Portugal surrounded by the legend: EMANUEL R(EX) P(ORTUGALIA) ET A(LICARBIORUM) D(OMINUS) GVINE ie Guineae,

Reverse: The Armillary Sphere.

The coinage of the reign of Dom Joao III (1521 – 1557) continued to display the Armillary Sphere; but this was replaced by three crossed arrows when a new king, Dom Sebastiao (1557 – 1578,) came to the throne.



Obv. Fig. 5 Rev.

Obverse: The uncrowned Arms of Portugal without legend.

Reverse: The Armillary Sphere.

The currency of the last quarter of the 16th century is rather obscure. Writing of the 1580's Barrett (a contemporary author quoted by Temple p 24) recorded that the Portuguese at Malacca had a coin of silver called a Patacao, but this was almost certainly a unit of account and not a coin. Barrett described two other coins that circulated at the same period though neither of them was minted at Malacca; the cruzado valued at 6 tangas, and the Pardao de Reales of 7 tangas. Both were imported from Goa, where the tanga of account fluctuated at different times between 60 and 65 reis.

In 1629 a coin called a botella, after the name of the local commander, was struck at the Malacca mint for the purpose of paying troops sent to relieve the town from siege by the Achinese. According to Grogan this proved insufficient, for on March 31s, 1630, 75,000 tangas were sent from Goa to pay for the cost of the siege. By this time the tanga had been issued as a silver coin, and in the following year the dies of these undated Goa tangas were sent to Malacca, where coins were later minted from them. This issue was followed by a series of single, double and quadruple tanga coins dated for each year between 1631 and 1635.



Obv. Fig. 6 Rev.

Obverse: The crowned Arms of Portugal between the letters AM (on some specimens MA) which represent the Malacca mint-mark.

Reverse: The tanga monogram between D(E) M(ALACCA). Below this the date.

From 1635 until the fortress fell to the Dutch in 1641 all coinage for Malacca was minted in Goa, though some issues continued to display the Malacca mint-marks.

## 3. Dutch Occupation 1641 – 1795:

From the beginning of the 17th century the trade of Portuguese Malacca had steadily declined in the face of severe competition, and often armed hostility, from the Dutch who were based in Java. In June, 1640, Dutch forces completely invested Malacca and the Portugues, who had lost naval supremacy in the Straits, were unable to reinforce or relieve its garrison. The fortress held out until January, 1641, when disease and near starvation forced capitulation.

The Dutch, who were well established at Batavia, had little need of Malacca and had only acquired it in order to close down a business competitor. They produced no specific coinage for their latest conquest, and no further issues of any type were made from its mint.

During the 18th century official accounts within the settlement were kept in rix-dollars (ryksdaalders), schillings, stivers and doits, on the following scale:

4 doits	—	1 stiver
6 stivers	—	1 schilling
8 schillings	—	1 rix-dollar

The rix-dollar and the schilling were not coins but units of account. The real coinage consisted mainly of silver ducats, guilders and Java rupees, supported by fractional units in copper called doits.



Obv. (b)



Rev. (b)



Rev. (a)



Obv. (a)

Fig. 7

## (a) One guilder

Obverse: The standing figure of the Greek goddess Pallas Athene surrounded by the legend: HACE: TVE-MVR: HAC: NITIMVR:

Reverse: Within a crowned shield, a crowned lion rampant with a sword in its right paw and a sheaf of arrows in its left. Around this: MO(NETA): ARG(ENTEA): ORD(INUM): FOE(DERATARUM) :BEL (GU): WESTF(RISIAE)

## (b) Copper doit

Obverse: The Arms of the Dutch province of Zeeland i.e. a demi-lion rampant rising from waves within a shield surmounted by a crown

Reverse: The monogram of the United East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) and the date.

In 1795, during the course of the revolutionary wars, the British took possession of Malacca after the French had invaded and occupied Holland. At that time there was no intention to retain Malacca and so no attempt was made to substitute British or Indian currency for Dutch. During this period the following coins circulated in addition to those previously mentioned:

Bombay Rupee at the rate of 5 schillings

Madras Rupee at the rate of 4 schillings

Spanish Dollar at the rate of 10 schillings

English Crown at the rate of 10 schillings

Japanese Koban at the rate of 80 schillings

All of these coins were of silver except for the Japanese Koban, which was a stamped oval plaque of gold weighing about 17 grammes.

#### 4. Conclusion:



Obv. Fig. 8 Rev.

Spanish dollar (8 reales)

Obverse: Crown and hemi-spheres between the Pillars of Hercules. Around this the legend VTRAQUE VNUM, the mint-mark and the date.

Reverse: Crowned armorial shield. Around this the legend PHILIP: V: D:G: HISPAN: ET: IND: REX: ie Philip V by Grace of God king of Spain and the Indies.

In 1818 Malacca was returned to the Dutch who held it until 1824, the year in which they finally renounced all claim to any part of the Malay Peninsula. The Spanish dollar then became the standard unit of value, with Dutch silver and copper coins, together with the copper tokens issued by Singapore merchants, as fractional units. During the second half of the 19th century, these were gradually superseded by the currency of the Straits Settlements. After the Second World War Malacca became part of the Federation of Malaya, and in September, 1963, a state within Malaysia.

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