

Case Studies Of Ancient Roman Coins In The Far East

The Roman Denarius becomes Dinar in Asia

- The Ancient Roman Empire was based around the Mediterranean Sea. However, it cultivated extensive trade and other links with the distant lands through the so called the Silk Road.
- The most important trade was Indo-Roman trade. This distant trade gave the Roman Empire about the third of its revenues .
- One of the most important exported Roman items were coins and the name of Roman denarius gave name dinar to many ancient coins in Asia. Both Roman original coins and their imitations were frequently used in the Far East.
- The main areas of the trade with the Far East were India, Sri Lanka, China and Southeast Asia and Roman coins came to different territories in different times.

Roman Coins In India

According to Periplus, Roman denarius commanded an exchange at some profit against the local Indian currency as Roman traders took advantage of the difference in the silver:gold ratio in Rome and in Barygaza in India before CE 64.

In Western India an exchange ratio between gold and silver in the 1st century CE was 1:10 while in Rome it was 1:12. Roman traders could make a good profit using silver rather than gold as a metal for trade in India. Until the reform of Nero, Roman traders used mostly denarii for their business in India as it was much more profitable.

The reforms of Nero and later Vespasian changed the gold:silver ratio first to 1:11 and then to 1:10, exactly the same as India. The old pre-CE 64 denarii were no longer attractive for transactions within the empire but it could be exported to India where they could still be appreciated for their intrinsic value, such as India.

Local Indian traders took the deal by accepting certain types of coins (i.e. Gaius et Lucius Caesares for Augustan denarii and Pontifex Maximus for Tiberian denarii are 80% of the total denarii in India.) as Indian traders realized they were good quality. Therefore, for example, there was the scarcity of Caius and Lucius and Pontifex Maximus types in Campania, Italy, and the overwhelming presence of such types in India. Indian and Roman traders kept using the same types of coins trustworthy by all the parties involved in the trade. Muziris papyrus (kept in Austrian National Library), from the mid 2nd century CE contains a contract of a maritime loan for a trading voyage from Alexandria (Egypt) to Muziris Pattanam in India) The trust bond between a businessman (in this case, the financier) and his partners (in this case, the network supporting the traders along their journey from Alexandria to the Egyptian ports on the Red Sea) was duplicated in Indian territory, creating a trusting bond between Roman and local Indian traders.

Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka is the main candidate for the land called Taprobane by the Greeks and the Romans. During the reign of the Emperor Claudius I (41-54), the Taprobane embassy came to Rome.
- Roman coins came to Sri Lanka in the early centuries AD but it was the later centuries that saw the influx of Roman coins. For example, the Roman coins of the 5th century travelled from Adulis, on the Red Sea, to the Malabar Coast of South India, around AD 430 (the latest coins in the block are of Theodosius II and Valentinian III) and then part of coins travelled from Madurai to the Kingdom of Ruhuna, in southern Sri Lanka, before AD 436. Once in Sri Lanka, the coins were used in Buddhist temple contexts as a “special purpose money”, and when the Roman coins began to run out, after AD 450, imitations of the Roman coins were made in Ruhuna.

Imitation of Roman coins from Kingdom of Ruhuna, 5th century AD

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Evidence for the Importation and Monetary Use of Blocks of Foreign and
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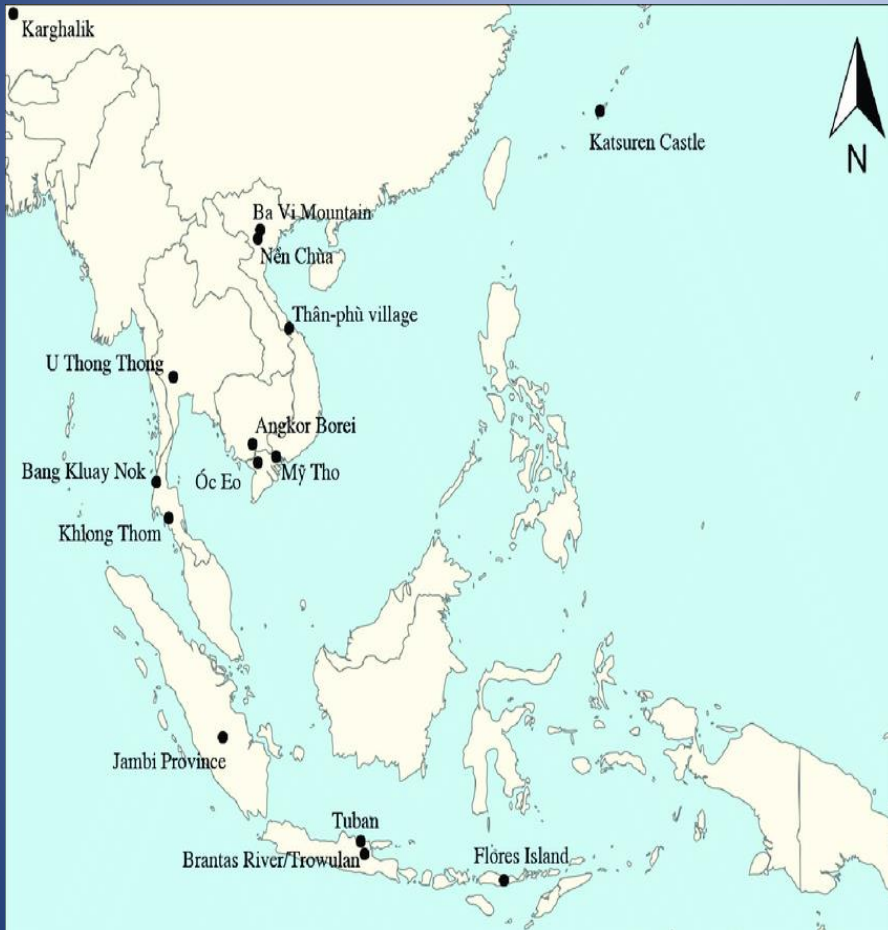
China

- Most of Roman coins came to China in the Eastern Roman time from the 5th century onwards.

Southeast Asia

- Various places in Southeast Asia were known to Romans such as Aurea Chersonesus (Malay Peninsula.), Baroussai (Barus in Sumatra), Chryse (Sumatra), Argyre and Iabadiou(Java), Kattigara (Vietnam or Borneo) etc .
- A gold coin of the emperor Domitianus was found in Thailand.
- Roman coin hoards were found in Vietnam, Cambodia and Java. For example in Java, 4th century coins minted in the Balkans have been found in two locations.

Roman coins in the Far East- map of coins and a coin of the 3d century emperor of Gallic Empire Victorinus from Thailand

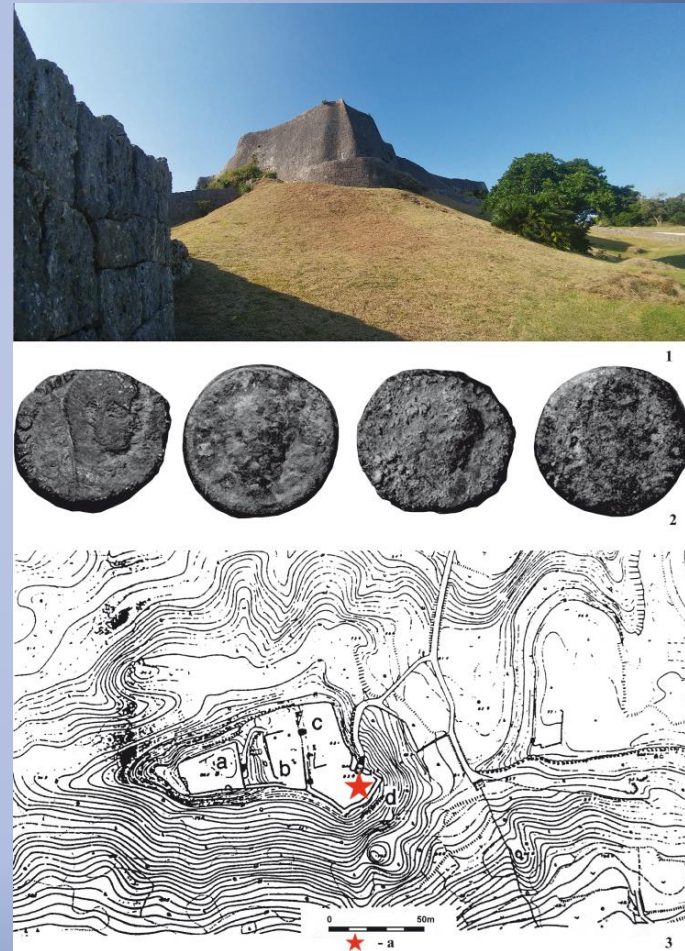


Roman coins from the Brantas river, Java, Indonesia



Japan

- In Okinawa, 4 Roman coins were found .
- The most well-preserved coin has been ascribed to Constantius II (337-361 A.D) while the other coins are related to the edition from the time between 320-370 A.D.



Thank you!



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