

SOME INVESTIGATIONS ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE PRE-BANGKOK COINAGE.

by

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The following investigations are based on the studies of *le May*, published in the book *The Coinage of Siam* (issued in 1932 by the Thailand Research Society). The purpose of the new researches on the evolution of the Pre-Bangkok Baht-Coinage is to attempt a definition of the approximate age of each coin, or at least its respective place in the line of all known coins. Since *le May* wrote his book, additional old coins have been discovered and new assumptions or even facts can be deduced from these discoveries. I believe that by systematically and repeatedly approaching the problem from different angles, it will be possible to come nearer to a solution of that capital question: *to which reign or at least to which period each coin should be ascribed*. If no documentary evidence about the coins used in past reigns comes to light, — and I feel that the hope is a forlorn one — it will at least be possible to limit the circle of possibilities, and so, step by step, we may come nearer to our goal. But unless such studies, even if they produce only partial results, are published, they will remain unknown and all future research work will have to start from scratch again.

Let us at first recapitulate some results of *le May's* investigations:

1) Most of the old bullet coins of Pre-Bangkok periods have cuts on either shoulder. Some of them, but only a few, have cuts *and* in addition one small elliptical nick, called in Thai *Met Kau San*. All the rest have no cuts but very often a nick.

The bullet coins of the Bangkok Dynasty have neither cuts nor nicks.

2) I agree to the explanations given by le May for the cuts and nicks, *i.e.* the *cuts* were made by authority in Thailand, probably to "lay the body bare to a suspicious world", namely to prove the good quality of the silver. But the reason why cuts were made might perhaps also be a different one. Is it possible that the cuts were applied at a special ceremony after minting? I have heard that the stamping of coins during the pre-Bangkok period took place in the presence of priests. However this may be, the main point to keep in mind is, that *the cuts were made in Thailand*.

The *nicks*, on the other hand, were almost certainly made in China at a time when the trade between Thailand and China began to develop, *viz.* at the close of the XV century. The nicks were likewise made to test the quality of the silver.

3) We therefore can reasonably conclude that

- a) those coins, which have *only cuts*, were struck before the end of the XV century.
- b) those with *cuts and nicks* at the end of the XV and the beginning of the XVI century.
- c) those with *nicks only* from that time until the fall of Ayuthia (1767).

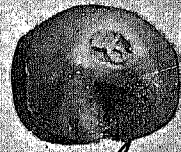
The above sums up the results of le May's investigations, with which I entirely agree.

I now propose to carry the investigation still further, in order to arrive at certain new conclusions. For this purpose I have made several Plates (*Plates I to V*) which illustrate *the evolution of the Ayuthian Coinage*. Le May has already reproduced on *Plate V* of his book eight Baht-coins to illustrate this evolution, but I believe that a greater number is necessary, to make the transition of shape clear. I have therefore described nineteen coins of the period before the beginning of the XV century, whereof twelve are photographed from 3 different sides, on *Plates I and II, 1-12, a, b, c*. For each coin *a* represents the front, *b* the reverse and *c* the coin seen from the

Plate I.



a



b



c



a



b



c



a



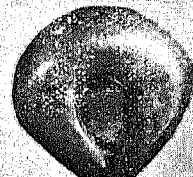
b



c



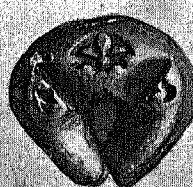
a



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a



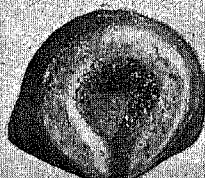
b



c



a



b



c

Scale: approx 1:1

Plate II.

7



a



b



c

8



a



b



c

9



a

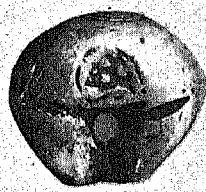


b



c

10



a



b

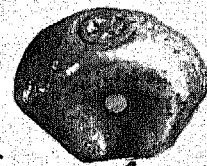


c

11



a

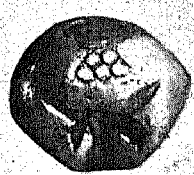


b

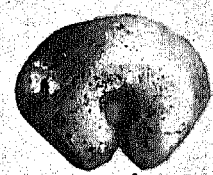


c

12



a



b



c

Plate II. 1

Plate III

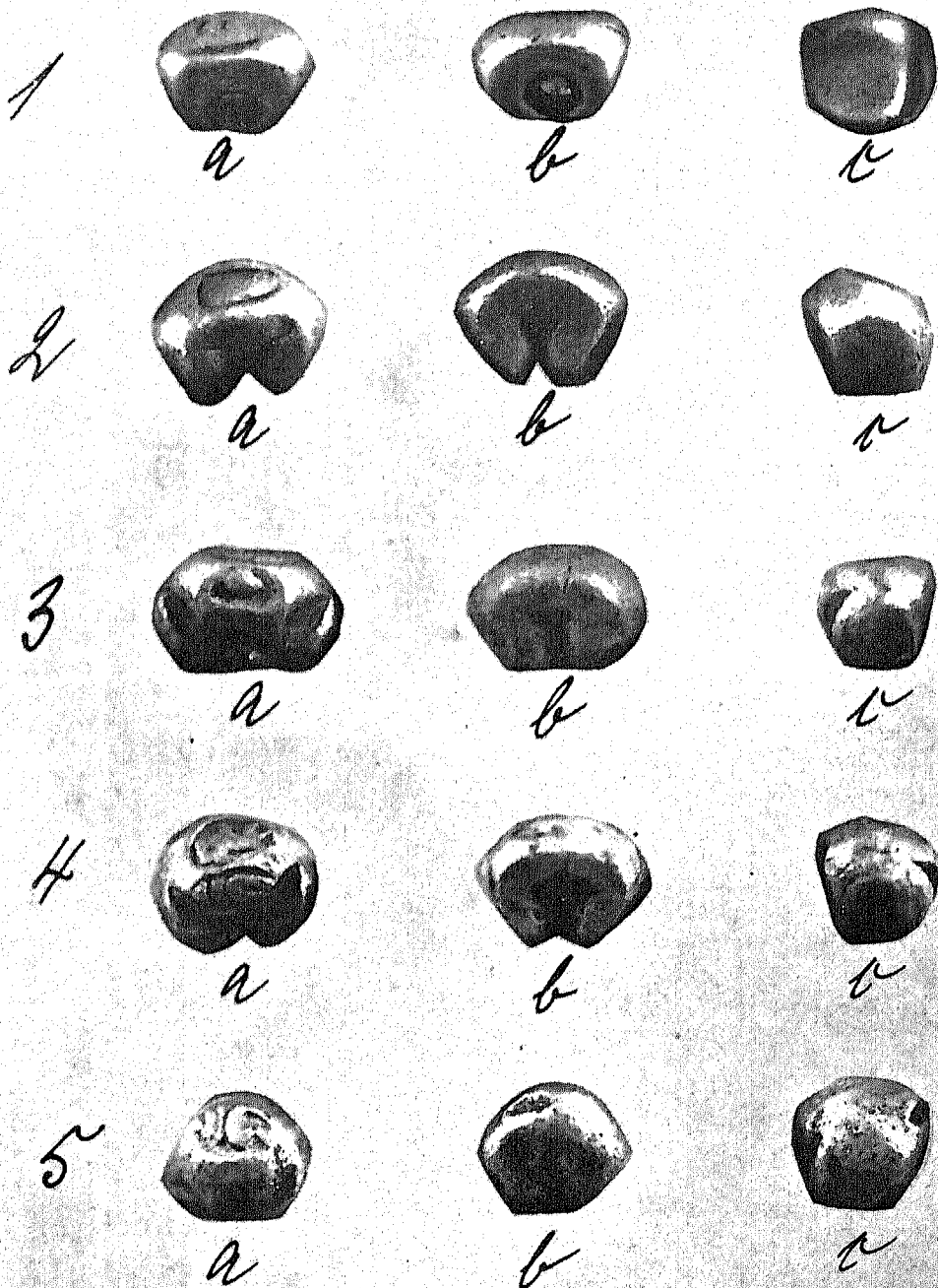
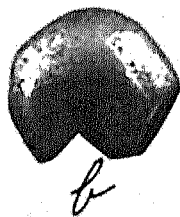


Plate. Apr. 4: 1

Plate IV

6



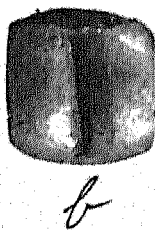
7



8



9



10



Scale: approx H: 1

Plate V.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



13

Scale: approx. 2:1



side. On *Plates III-IV* ten additional coins of the lesser values are reproduced, likewise from three different sides. *Plate V* shows twelve coins of the *Som Dokmai*-mark and of the Bunch of Lotus-flowers, le May *Blocks 31/18*. Further one coin of the Standard Ayuthian type. These tables include all the old coins newly discovered by me and will therefore make the evolution more comprehensible.

For the order in which each coin follows the other, the following characteristics have been considered: the shape in general, the weight, the hammermarks, the distance of the ends, the holes, the cuts and the nicks.

If we accept the hypothesis, that the Lotus-bunch (le May *Blocks 17/18*.) commonly called *Som Dokmai*, was minted during the reign of Ramatibodi II (1491 - 1529), the time at the beginning of the XVI century may be considered as a fairly reliable base, from which to proceed backwards and forwards. There are many reasons which justify le May's assumption and they will be stated later. We therefore can divide all coins into three periods.

I) Coins probably older than *Som Dokmai*,

II) The period of *Som Dokmai* or the period of transition.

III) Coins later than *Som Dokmai*, or the period of the standard shape.

I) Coins probably older than *Som Dokmai*.

Twelve Baht coins of this period are illustrated on *Plates I and II*, seen from three different sides. I have reproduced only coins from my collection. To give a complete list of all coins of this period, known so far, six coins illustrated by le May should be added, *i. e.* *Plate V/1 and 2, Plate VII/1, 3, 4 and 5* and one coin of Mr. Noirot's collection. But as they are all very rare and not in my collection, I have to do without them. I have however included them in the following list in order to show their respective place during the evolution. All the coins, except No. 17, have been fully described previously with photos either in le May's book or in my

article *Further Studies of Old Thai Coins* published in the Journal of the Thailand Research Society volume XXXV part 2. Now follows the list of nineteen coins :

1) *Rachasi in centre and 2 Conch Shells*

(*Le May Block 1, "Studies" Plate I/6a-d*)

This is what I consider the oldest known coin. The shape is rough, no hole, no cuts, weight only 9 gm. (*Plate I/1*).

2) *Le May Plate V/1*

Rounded shoulders, large hole, ends meet, no cuts, weight 12.6 gm.

3) *Conch Shell and Wheel of Law*

("Studies" *Plate II/1*)

Broad with rounded shoulders, large hole, ends meet, no cuts, weight 13 gm. (*Plate I/2*)

4) *Conch Shell and Elephant*

(*Le May Plate XVIII/1*). See "Studies" *Plate II/2*

Rounded shoulders, ends meet, hole, large cuts, hammer-marks at the ends, weight 14.8 gm. (*Plate I/3*)

5) *Le May Plate V/2*

Rounded shoulders, high ridge, large hole, two deep and two small cuts, ends meet, weight 12.1 gm.

6) *Cho Dok Rak and 7 dots*

(*Le May Blocks 2/3, Plate VII/1*)

Broad with rounded sides, ends meet, two small cuts, large hole, weight 14.1 gm,

7) *Inverted Anchor + 7 dots*

(*Le May Blocks 9/3*) see *Plate I/4*

Broad with rounded sides, ends meet, large hole, two small cuts, weight 13.1 gm.

N.B. Le May has never seen this coin. There is no specimen in the National Museum. I have only seen the specimen which is in my

collection and the photo in Gerini's Album. An extremely rare coin! A picture of this coin is published here for the first time.

8) *Bunch of Lotus-Flower and Wheel with 8 spokes*

(Le May Blocks 4/5, Plate VII/3)

Broad with rounded sides, ends meet, two deep cuts, medium size hole, weight 14.56 gm.

9) *Lotus-Flower and Wheel with 8 spokes*

(Le May Blocks 6/5, Plate VII/4)

Broad with short narrow hammer-marks, ends meet, two small cuts, medium size hole, weight 15.8 gm.

10) *Bunch of Flowers and Ox*

(Le May Blocks 13/14, Plate VIII/3)

Broad with long hammer-marks, ends almost meet, two medium size cuts, medium size hole, weight 14.8 gm.
(Plate I/5)

11) *Lotus-Flower and Wheel with spokes and dots*

(Mr. Noirot's coin). ("Studies" Plate II/3)

A high coin with round shoulders and long ends which meet, two medium size cuts, round hole, long oval hammer-marks, weight 14 gm.

12) *Lotus-Flower and Conch Shell*

("Studies" Block 11/12, Plate I/1)

Broad with rounded sides, long oval hammer-marks, ends meet, two very deep cuts, large hole, weight 14.55 gm. (Plate I/6)

13) *Bunch of Lotus and Elephant*

("Studies" Plate I/3)

Broad with rounded sides, with long narrow hammer-marks, ends meet, two small cuts, large hole, weight 14.5 gm. (Plate II/7)

14) *Bunch of Lotus and Wheel with 6 spokes*("Studies" *Plate I/2*)

Broad with rounded shoulders, long oval hammer-marks, ends meet, two deep cuts, longish hole, weight 14.5 gm. (*Plate II/8*)

15) *Bunch of Flowers and Wheel with 6 spokes*(Le May *Blocks 7/8, Plate VII/5*)

Broad with long narrow hammer-marks, ends meet, two deep cuts, large hole, weight 14.43 gm.

16) *Bunch of Lotus-Flowers and Wheel with 6 spokes*("Studies" *Block 1, Plate I/4*)

Broad with rounded sides, long oval hammer-marks, ends almost meet, two cuts medium size, one nick (11), small hole, weight 14.4 gm. (*Plate II/9*)

N.B. The existence of a nick on this presumably rather old coin has puzzled me considerably. According to its shape the coin should be placed where I have placed it. If we however place it tentatively at the end of the nineteen coins, it would link up with *Som Dokmai*, which has a nick for the first time. And curiously enough this coin (16) has a Bunch of Lotus-Flowers as side-mark, very similar to *Som Dokmai*, but quite a different shape. This coin (16) may be identical with le May *Blocks 6/8, Plate VII/6*, but the matter must remain open until we obtain additional specimens.

17) *2 Baht-coin with 3 marks*

This is a newly discovered coin. The marks are worn out. The top mark seems to represent a flower in a circle. Broad with rounded shoulders, two hammer-

marks, ends almost meet, small hole. There are two cuts on each side (1'), in front two medium size cuts, behind two small ones, weight 24 gm. (*Plate II/10*)

- 18) 3 marks-coin, *Rachasi* on top, *Wheel of Law* and *Rachawat* on sides.

(*Le May Block 10/11/12, Plate VIII/1*)

Broad with long narrow hammer-marks, ends almost meet, two small cuts, small hole, weight 14.24 gm. (*Plate II/11*)

N.B. This coin exists also *without hole* (1)

- 19) *Rachawat* below, *Elephant* above.

(*Le May Blocks 15/16, Plate VIII/4*)

Broad with long hammer-marks, ends part, two pairs of cuts on the same side, small hole, weight 14.95 gr. (*Plate II/12*)

N.B. This coin exists likewise *without hole* (1)

This list comprises all coins of this period known until to-day. They are arranged in the order, in which according to my opinion each coin follows the other, at least approximately. That means that I consider No. 1) as the oldest, No. 19) as the latest of all Thai Bullet coins before the minting of Som Dokmai. The order given differs from that of le May. If we would ascribe each coin to one King, these nineteen coins would carry us back from King Ramatibodi II. well into the Sukothai Period and even beyond that. On Plates III and IV I have arranged ten coins of the lesser values of Pre-Bangkok coins in order to show a development in shape similar to that of the Baht-coins. They only show the development and are selected to serve as examples of the great number of other coins of lesser value of this period.

KEY TO PLATES III AND IV.

- 1) Small coin with flat top and Elephant mark on top, rounded shoulders, ends bent inwards and meet,

round hole, no cuts. Weight 2.85 gm. ("Studies" Block 18). I consider this coin as older than the May Plate XIII/1

- 2) A similarly shaped coin but obviously of much later date. The top-mark is an *Elephant* again. Small cuts appear. The ends do not meet any more, no hole, distinct hammer-marks. Weight 3.55 gm.

- 3) *Elephant in a circle as top-mark, Rachawat (?) as sidemark.*

The ridge is higher, shoulders are rounded, two deep cuts, ends almost meet, hammer-marks. Weight 3.35 gm.

- 4) *Elephant on top, Conch shell as side-mark*

Shoulders less rounded, hammer-marks more pronounced, ends almost meet, very small hole, two pairs of cuts, viz. two small cuts below two large cuts, weight 3.5 gm. ("Studies" Plate VI/3)

- 5) *Conch Shell as only mark*

Ridge still higher, ends almost meet, two cuts, clear hammer-marks, weight 1.85 gm. ("Studies" Plate VI/5)

- 6) *Conch Shell*

High and rounded ridge, long oval hammer-marks, ends part, weight 1.75 gm.

- 7) *Conch Shell*

High ridge, round hammer-marks, ends part, weight 1.75 gm.

- 8) *Lotus Flowers as side-mark, Wheel of Law on top*

Standard shape of Ayuthia, no cuts, clear hammer-marks, ends part, weight 3.65 gm.

The two following coins do not fit into the line of development.

I do not know where to place them, but they surely belong to Period I, *i.e.* they are older than the *Som Dokmai*, because both have cuts.

9) *Rachasi in circle*

Flat round shape, clear hammer-marks, 2 small cuts, weight 3.4 grammes. (See Le May *Plate XIII/4*)

10) *Conch-Shell on base on top, Rachawat as side-mark*

Flat round shape, clear hammer-marks, 2 small cuts, weight 3.2 grammes. ("Studies" No. 42, *Plate VI/2*)

I repeat, that the coins 1-8 on this plate are only examples and are tentatively arranged in this order to illustrate the transition of shape. The study of the lesser values of Pre-Bangkok coins is still more complex than that of the Baht-values.

If we examine the 19 Baht-coins of the first period we note the following tendencies in the development of the shape:

a) *General shape:*

From the low and rounded coin the shape develops into a higher coin with shoulders more clearly marked by the appearance of hammer-marks. The latter first oblong and narrow tend to becoming round in the later specimens.

b) The *ends* which at first closely meet tend to part during the evolution.

c) The *hole* becomes smaller.

d) The *cuts*. There are no cuts with the earliest coins. Then small cuts appear. Afterwards the cuts vary in size without a marked tendency. I consider the *size* or *number* not the existence of cuts as irrelevant for the evolution, because the same coins often show large, medium or small cuts.

II) The period of *Som Dokmai* or the period of transition.

I have examined about 100 specimens of the *Som Dokmai* mark, and this examination has resulted in new and interesting facts.

Le May states, that there are two types of this mark (le May *Blocks 17/18*) in existence, which are illustrated on his *Plate VIII/5 and 6*. This is correct. But in addition I believe that *the coin with a Bunch of Lotus Flowers as shown by le May Blocks 31/18, Plate X/5 and 6 belongs to the same period* and has probably been minted during the same reign. To prove this, on *Plate V* the photographs of 8 different specimens of the two types of *Som Dokmai* and of 4 specimens of the Lotus-Flower Bunch as per le May's *Block 31/18* are reproduced.

For the sake of greater clarity I would like to introduce here as technical terms.

Som Dokmai major for le May *Plate VIII/5*.
and *Som Dokmai minor* for le May *Plate VIII/6*.

To make the matter still more clear I shall call le May's Bunch of Lotus Flowers (*Blocks 31/18*) *Pum Khao Bin*.

All three terms are taken from Gerini's Album in the National Museum.

Firstly: there is to record the existence of one specimen of *Som Dokmai major with a hole (Plate V/1)*

Secondly: *Som Dokmai major* is found with medium large, medium and small cuts (*Plate V/2-4*)

Thirdly: *Som Dokmai minor* exists with medium-size, small, very small cuts and without cuts (*Plate V/5-8*)

Fourthly: *Phum Khao Bin* shows likewise medium-size, small and very small cuts and exists also without cuts (*Plate V/9-12*)

ALL COINS ON PLATE IV HAVE NICKS.

Le May states on page 47: "Those (coins) on *Plates IX, X, XI and XII* very often show the padi-seed nick but never a cut". and below the line on the same page: "In one case only I have come across a coin (*Plate X/5*) with *minute cuts*" Contrary to this I have proven by the photographs on *Plate V/9-12* that Le May's *Plate X/5*, which I call *Pum Khao Bin* exists with *three different kinds of cuts*. I have seen many more specimens with cuts.

I believe that with reasonable certainty the following conclusions can be drawn from this investigation:

1) *Som Dokmai major*, *Som Dokmai minor* and *Pum Khao Bin* belong together. They either follow each other or belong to the same reign or are minted during the same period. The investigation seems to confirm le May's assumption.

2) that *Som Dokmai* was minted during the reign of Ramatibodi II (1491-1529) because:

- a) The reign was a long one of 38 years.
- b) The first European Treaty between Thailand and Portugal was signed during this reign and in consequence more money was required for the enlargement of trade connections also with other countries.
- c) A sea-borne trade between Thailand and China sprang up at the close of the XV century and the coins, having been provided with cuts by the Thai authorities, received additional nicks in China to test the quality once more and to detect forgeries.
- d) Also Nai Kulab, who generally is not very reliable, places the *Som Dokmai* at the end of the XV century.

This II Period of transition connects well with the first Period and the third Period.

We notice that the last two coins of the first period are found with and without holes. So *Som Dokmai major* exists with and without a hole. After *Pum Khao Bin* the cuts disappear almost entirely, whereas the nick remains on all coins during the Ayuthia dynasty. It may well be possible that the custom of applying cuts to the coins was abandoned, when the Thai authorities perceived, that the Chinese would not even trust coins with cuts, but would still test them in their own fashion by applying nicks. I wish to add, that I have found some very minute single and double cuts on coins of le May Blocks 27/28 and 33/34, 35, 36 which may indicate that the old coins with these marks followed the edition of *Pum Khao Bin*. Obviously the custom of applying cuts was not abruptly

abandoned, but continued for some time. And the appearance of cuts on other coins with nicks, than *Som Dokmai*, may give us an indication of their age.

III) Coins later than *Som Dokmai* or the period of standard-shape.

To complete the illustration of evolution a standardised pure Ayuthian Baht (le May *Blocks 42/28*) is shown on *Plate V/13*. All the remaining coins of this period, *which le May has seen*, correspond to this type. I wish however to point out, that the coins on le May's *Plate IX* are reproduced from photographs. When looking at *Plate IX* in le May's book, it will strike the careful and trained observer, that these five coins seem to correspond very little to the standard-shape. As a matter of fact, their shapes are irregular. In the meantime I have collected one specimen of *Plate IX/3-4* which *does* correspond to the standard-shape. But all genuine specimens of the Anchor-mark (*Plate IX/1-2*) and Elephant-mark (*Plate IX/5-6*) which I have seen, are very irregularly shaped. So are several coins of those newly discovered and described by me ("Studies"). It may be, that all these coins, which are not shaped according to standard, and which are all very rare, have been minted on special occasions during the time of the Ayuthia dynasty, or that they all belong to a period of minting during which the standard-shape was temporarily abandoned.

I believe that the irregular shape of a coin is not sufficient reason to reject it as forgery straight away. The coins on le May's *Plate IX* are very irregular in shape, but still le May considers them as genuine. Even double-hammer marks occur fairly often, on the lesser values of the Ayuthia-period. These coins are so small, that obviously by technical reasons the workman had to apply two strokes to bend the ends properly.

I have made an interesting discovery on coins of le May *Blocks 43/18 (Rachawat)*. Some had *two hammer-marks on one side*. This may link up to Bangkok period, so that it may be possible, that the *Rachawat*, of which, by the way, many varieties exist, is

the last coin of the Ayuthia dynasty. Curiously enough, Nai Kulab also places this coin in the reign of King Ekatat (1758-1767),

In this connection I would like to make a few remarks about Nai Kulab.

During my studies I have again and again examined the reliability of Nai Kulab's statements made in his article *Guide to General Knowledge* (Bangkok 1908) about the coins of the Ayuthia period. Although le May writes that "Nai Kulab is now generally discredited among collectors", and although His late Royal Highness Prince Damrong in the book distributed at His cremation proves that this gentleman committed certain acts which are not to his credit, I am unable to disregard his article entirely and reject his statements in the wholesale fashion of le May. As I said in the "Studies" I am not prepared to accept his assertions at their face value. On the other hand, there are so many points in his favour, that I believe there is some truth here and there in what he has written.

The main point in his favour is of course the recent discovery of at least 4 coins, which he has drawn in his book, so that there remain only 7 or 8, the existence of which has not yet been proven.

Then Le May says on page 36 of his book: "After due consideration I have eliminated the fourteen following Kings...." Now it is strange that le May although discrediting Nai Kulab *should with two exceptions only eliminate exactly the same Kings of Ayuthia from the list of Kings likely to have issued new coinage as Nai Kulab had done already in 1908.* This is certainly not a testimony of distrust.

I am rather inclined to presume that Nai Kulab actually *had* some old papers, as he asserts, and from which he copied his drawings, and that at least he included in his article all the popular tradition available at his time. I do not rely very much on such tradition and hearsay, but believe that we may use it with proper reserve now and then, especially when all other evidence is lacking.

The result of these investigations are:

1) I believe we have sufficient reasons to arrange nine Ayuthia coins before, during and after the transition to standard-type in the following order:

- a) *Rachawat below, Rachasi in centre, Wheel of Law on other side.*

(1e May Blocks 10. 11, 12, Plate VIII/1)

Reasons: There are many varieties of this coin (see Gerini's book of photographs), The coin exists with and without hole.

- b) *Rachawat below, Elephant above.*

(1e May Blocks 15/16. Plate VIII/4)

Reasons: There are many varieties of this coin, with and without hole, with large and small cuts, with 4 and 2 cuts.

- c) *Bunch of Lotus below and Wheel of Law above (Som Dokmai Major).*

(1e May Blocks 17/18, Plate VIII/5.)

Reasons: With and without hole, all sorts of cuts and nick.

- d) *II edition of c) (Som Dokmai Minor)*

(1e May Plate VIII/6)

Reasons: Various kinds of cuts and nick.

- e) *Bunch of Lotus below and Wheel of Law above (Pum Khao Bin).*

(1e May Blocks 31/18, Plate X/5-6)

Reasons: Cuts and nicks.

- f) *Bunch of Lotus below and 8+1 dot above*

(1e May Blocks 27/28, Plate X/1-2)

Reasons: Cuts and nicks.

- g, h, i) *Krut below 3 different marks above.*

(1e May Blocks 33-34/35/36, Plate XI/1-4)

Reasons: These coins are also found with cuts and nicks.

In the sea of uncertainty I think we have now found a fairly large island from where to start further research. I believe that

the above nine coins follow each other in the order stated. The remainder of older coins, *i.e.*, the remaining seventeen coins known so far would have to be arranged backwards, presumably and approximately in the order indicated before. The remainder of later coins would follow in an yet uncertain order after the coin with the Krut-mark. The only other island, where we can reach *terra firma* is King Narai's coin.

I suggest, however, to ascribe the *Rachawat mark* (le May *Blocks 43/18, Plate XII/6-7*) to the last reign of the Ayuthia dynasty.

The *Bua Yan* (le May *Blocks 39/41*) probably belong to a long reign, as there is a great number of various editions. Gerini shows eight different types of this coin in his collection of photographs.

More I cannot say. Again I shall not try to ascribe certain coins to certain reigns.

To collectors I suggest for practical purposes to divide their Pre-Bangkok coins into the following groups;

- 1) *Coins considerably below the Baht-weight (say 9-11 grammes)*
- 2) *Coins of approximately 1 Baht weight (say 12-15.25 grammes)*
 - a) with holes and cuts, without nick.
 - b) without holes, with cuts, without nick.
 - c) with holes, with cuts, with nick.
 - d) without holes, with cuts, with nick.
 - e) without holes, without cuts, with nick.
 - f) without holes, without cuts and without nick.

All Pre-Bangkok coins known so far can be placed in one of these groups,

Bangkok, 4th, December 1944.

