

THE COINS OF NORTH SIAM

by

W. HARDING KNEEDLER.

The ancient coins and tokens which one sees in the northern part of Siam are of such a large number of varieties that the study of them is an interesting one. On the other hand, it is very difficult to get reliable information concerning them. Mr. le May, in his book on the coinage of Siam,⁽¹⁾ shows pictures of some of the northern coins, and refers to them briefly. I hope that this article may serve to supplement the careful and elaborate information on Siamese coinage contained in his book. The plates which illustrate this article show the coins at roughly $\frac{1}{6}$ of their actual size. The text describes the different types of coins as nearly as possible in the order in which they occur in the plates, the text therefore serving as key to the plates.

FLOWER MONEY.

Plate I illustrates different types of what is commonly known as flower money on account of the fancied resemblance of the surface to flowers. As will be seen later much of the old coinage has undoubtedly been made to resemble forms of sea shells. As Mr. le May points out, cowrie shells were accepted as currency until comparatively recent times. In plate I, Nos. 1 to 4 and 7 to 10 have some concavity on their under surface, suggesting a resemblance to shells. No. 3 illustrates the reverse side of a coin such as No. 1, 2, or 4. The quality of silver in all coins of this type is very good, and all are made of silver. The weight varies much. No. 10 weighs about six ounces, whereas No. 11 is exceedingly thin and light. No. 12

⁽¹⁾ Reginald le May, *The Coinage of Siam*, Bangkok, 1932.

resembles Siamese niello work. It is difficult to say anything regarding the origin or age of these coins, but it is safe to say that some of them originated north of the present Siamese border.

LEAF OR LINE MONEY.

This type of money is illustrated in Plate II. It is known as "leaf money" on account of the fact that the convex surface has raised lines which frequently resemble the veining of leaves, or as "line money" because a line always crosses the center of the convex surface. It is always perforated. No. 4 represents the concave surface of these coins, which is always similar. The coins are never of silver, but are of a light colored alloy of somewhat varying composition, often with silvered surface. They are dug up from time to time all through north Siam, and probably represent baser coinage of the ancient kingdom of Lannat'āi, of which more will be said later. The resemblance of these coins to shells can readily be noticed. They are of fairly uniform size and weight. I have run across one or two bronze pieces which seem to be related to this type of money.

TOK MONEY.

This is money which in its form bears more or less resemblance to shells, and which includes several types of coinage. It is never of very fine silver, though its value is determined by its silver content. As Luang Boribal pointed out in his newspaper article in the T'āi Māi, there was a law of the time of King Mengrai, first king of Lannat'āi, A. D. 1296, which referred to tok money. It is conceivable that this may have been the leaf money to which I referred above. Tok money was officially used in C'ieng Māi until the time of Prince Int'ārāwīc'īyanōn, A. D. 1871, according to Luang Boribal.

TOK MONEY OF NAN.

The type of coinage shown in Plate III is generally referred to the principality of Nan. These coins are thick, heavy discs, the backs of which (not illustrated) are smoothly convex. The reverse side of that pictured, like the other forms of tok money to be described, shows some yellow and brown, or red; the silver or alloy having been poured onto egg yolk or chicken blood in the process of manufacture. The coins illustrated show varying contents of silver,

from No. 1, which seems to be mostly silver, to No. 10, which is copper or bronze with a little dab of silver on the surface around the circle shown in the picture at the upper part of the coin. No. 11 has no silver at all. The coins are of approximately uniform size and weight, differing only in their percentage of silver. They are usually perforated, though the perforation may be exceedingly small, only enough to permit of their being kept together strung on a thin wire. I have been told that some of these coins are still in actual use in Mu'ang Song, a small town in the P'rê district.

TOK MONEY OF C'IENG MÄI.

This type of coinage is illustrated in Plate IV. The coins usually found, Nos. 2 to 8, are black on the surface shown, yellow and brown on the other side from egg yolk, and hollow, with a moderate-sized opening on the reverse side from that pictured. The surface is easily dented, and the apparent fragility of the coins accounts for the fact that the coins which one finds do not appear to have been used very much. They have apparently been carefully put away in the homes of the people, and used for buying land and for the pledge of fidelity from the groom to the bride's family, and for other purposes. Where the custom of the pledge of fidelity still persists, rupees are now used. These coins are often chopped up, and the pieces used as offerings to the temples, so that this type of coinage, while not rare, is becoming less common. It was minted, so I am told, in C'ieng Mäi, close to the Great Pagoda, the Čedi Luang, and ceased to be made about 65 years ago. It is always of silver, of uniform but not very high degree of fineness. The standard size commonly met with is represented by Nos. 2 and 3, which are of the same weight. The coins of this size always have marks, and those of half this size, represented by No. 4, sometimes do. The marks are typically represented by drawing 25 and 26 or a variation of these, though drawing 27 also occurs, as well as a representation of a four-legged animal, possibly a deer. The marks are raised. The coins are marked in either two or three places. The mark on one side is the mirror image of the mark on the other side. The standard weight, represented by Nos. 2 and 3, is about two ounces. No. 1 weighs twice this, is concave on the other surface, has no marks, and is not fragile. This type is quite rare. Nos. 10 and 11 represent a sort of transition type between the so-called tok money of Nan and that of C'ieng

Măi. They are not hollow. No. 9 is solid, and has the same weight as No. 8, which is slightly hollow.

HORSE-HOOF Tok MONEY.

This money, known in Siamese as "wöng tin ma" money, is very closely related to the tok money of C'ieng Măi just described, both in size and composition, and the mark of drawing No. 26 occurs in both, though drawing No. 28, or a variation of it, pressed into the surface of the coin is more common. This type of coin was probably made in C'ieng Măi also. It is rather rare. It is shown in Plate V, Nos. 1 to 4. Of these all are of the same grade of silver as the ordinary C'ieng Măi tok except No 2, which is copper or bronze. These are also hollow, but the space inside is very small.

PIG-MOUTH MONEY.

This money, pictured in Plate V, Nos. 5 to 7, really belongs in the same group as the tok money of other varieties. Its composition, though of better quality silver, is not of the best. It is dome-shaped, and is hollow, usually with a large opening, which bears a fancied resemblance to a pig's mouth. The resemblance of this type to the shape and appearance of a shell is, like other tok money, easily recognized. This type has no marks of any kind. Like the ordinary C'ieng Măi tok money, this type is sometimes chopped up and the pieces given as offerings to the temples. It is rather rare.

BAR MONEY.

This type of money, shown in Plates 6 and 7, was made in olden times by people of Siamese race living in the valley of the Mêkong River in the region known a few hundred years ago as Lan C'ang. I have occasionally seen rather new looking pieces somewhat similar to Plate VII, Nos. 1 and 2, and have been informed that this type of money is still in use to some extent among people of Khamu race in this region, by whom it may still be manufactured, though rather crudely and only to a small extent. The coins pictured in Plate 6, Nos. 9 to 13, show a definite resemblance to dugout canoes such as are used on the Mêkong River, and the coins may have originated with this imitation of shape. This type is ordinarily without marks of any kind, though No. 2 plainly shows a star, and No. 12 shows

indistinct stars at each end though it is so old and worn that it is hard to distinguish. These unmarked bars are of various shades and compositions, but contain little if any silver. The bar money is known in North Siam as leech money, and in Plate VI, Nos. 1 to 5, the resemblance to the form of leech commonly found in Siam is easily noted. Coins like these five always have the figure of an elephant stamped in the centre, and may have a total of from two to four marks stamped on their concave surface, usually three. In addition to the elephant there is always either the wheel or the star mark, and I have one specimen which has two stars on the convex surface also. The medium-sized coins of this type are not uncommon, but the large and small are rare. Of the medium-sized ones, those which have a fat elephant with a big eye on them are broader and flatter than those which have a thin elephant stamped on them. The coins may be made of copper, or of copper surfaced with silver, or of an impure silver, surfaced with a better silver. Mr. le May attributes them to the principality of Wieng Cān,⁽¹⁾ but no one whom I have asked, Siamese or foreign, can give me the slightest suggestion or opinion about the place of their origin, except that it must definitely have been in the Mèkhong Valley.

The coins shown in Plate VI, Nos. 6 to No. 8, and all of Plate VII, are sometimes made of pure silver, but more often are of good silver only on the surface, while inside is impure silver or bronze or copper. As shown in the pictures, they are of two standard sizes. The two commonest marks are shown in Plate VI, Nos. 7 and 8. The latter I have not seen on the large size coins. The former, looking like a snake, appears on coins of other types also, as may be noted, and has been interpreted to me as being "Na" a somewhat sacred symbol. I should like to call attention to the circular depressions sometimes seen on large coins of this type, which in some cases have a hole in the center of them which goes through the coin. The mark of an elephant, though not pictured, also occurs on this type of bar coin.

C'IENG MONEY.

This type of coinage, shown in Plates VIII, IX, and X, was apparently the standard coinage of the ancient kingdom of Lannat'āi, which was founded with its capital at C'ieng Māi in the year 1296,

⁽¹⁾ Reginald le May, *op. laud.*, p. 13.

and fell before the Burmese and Peguans in 1558. The people were of T'ăi race, and though the region was under the rule of Burma with small intervals of Siamese rulership until comparatively recent times, it never regained individual power or importance. The word "c'ieng", which prefixes the names of many of the cities of the region, means "city", and this accounts for the derivation of the common name of this type of money. Typically this money is a silver bar, the ends of which were curved; then a cut was made part way through the center, and the cut made to gape by bending the bar from the center. In the coins made of silver, the coins could be made in this way, but with coins made of other metals or alloys, the coins had to be cast in shape, or partly cast and partly cut, as in Plate VIII, Nos. 9 to 15. Speculation has been made as to why this shape was used. Through the courtesy of Nai Leng Musikpokot, I have had three entirely unique coins or tokens photographed from his collections, which appear on Plate IX, Nos. 4, 5, and 6. These were dug up twenty years ago in the old town at the foot of Mt. Süt'ep, where the King of C'ieng Măi had his summer palace. This place has been deserted for four hundred years. No. 4 is really two separate pieces, one of which can be moved freely inside the other. They cannot, however, be taken apart. Nai Leng told me that when he acquired them twenty years ago, he showed them to a lady more than ninety years old, who told him that she had seen in her early youth pieces of this sort given at marriage, probably by the groom to the bride's parents as the tok money was later used. No. 7 was dug up at Mu'ang Prao, fifty miles north of C'ieng Măi, while No. 8 came from a place south of C'ieng Măi, being likewise dug up. The coins are of pure zinc, having been analyzed by the Siamese government laboratory. They are of a dull greenish hue, and when I first saw No. 7 I thought it was stone rather than metal. It is interesting to note that I purchased a coin of the lump or bullet type in Bangkok which is similar to Plate XI, No. 6, which appears to be of zinc. One may speculate where the zinc came from, since in early times north Siam was somewhat isolated, and no deposits of zinc in that region are known at present time. The marking on these zinc c'ieng coins is most peculiar, being apparently a sort of hieroglyphics. I have carefully drawn the markings of Plate IX, No. 8 in drawing No. 23. This is the only one I have found which is clear enough to copy accurately. It is identical with the marking on one of Nai Leng's pieces which I

borrowed and pictured here. I have found the same marking as Plate IX, No. 7 on another coin from another part of the C'ieng Măi region. The zinc pieces are rare.

Plate VIII shows various types of old c'ieng money. Nos. 1 to 3 were probably the standard of the old kingdom of Lannat'ăi, and of these much more will be said. Nos. 4 to 8 and 19 to 21 represent smaller silver coinage of the same type. Nos. 9 to 11 are of baser alloy with silvered surface, and Nos. 13 to 15 are likewise of alloy. No. 12, which is from the collection of Rev. H. G. Knox, is a handsome, shiny coin of hard gray metal. Nos. 16 to 18 are of soft lead. The largest of these is from the collection of Mr. H. A. Garrett.

Plate VIII, Nos. 1 to 3, which I have considered as the standard coins of Lannat'ăi, weigh about 1 tămlă'ng, or a little over 4 bat. The weight varies slightly. They always contain three marks; near the centre is the figure "4" (the smaller marked coins of this type weigh $\frac{1}{2}$ the larger, or 1 bat); near the tips of the coin is the stamp which I shall call the royal mark; in the centre is the name of the principality of Lannat'ăi in which the coin was issued. There were a number of these principalities, all owing allegiance to C'ieng Măi, but each practically independent and issuing its own money. The writing is in archaic Siamese, which writing was introduced in 1296, the year that Lannat'ăi was founded, and, according to Mr. W. A. R. Wood, was in use through Lannat'ăi within four years later. It seems likely that these coins date between then and the fall of C'ieng Măi in 1558. The Burmese occupation continued until 1773, when the city was destroyed by the Siamese, to be rebuilt twenty years later.

Careful drawings have been made from coins in my collection, to show the place-names. I am sorry that I could not get hold of a C'ieng Rai coin to copy. It is known, but it is rare. On the other hand, some are pictured which have not been known before, and future collectors may discover still more. Nos. 1 to 7 of the drawings are C'ieng Măi. I have pictured a number of these in order to show variations and gradations. In the past, authorities have sometimes considered Nos. 6 and 7 to be a *p'* for P'ăyao, but Prof. Cœdès, the supreme authority on old Siamese inscriptions, definitely attributes them to C'ieng Măi. No. 8 may be a *p'* for P'ăyao, or may likewise be a C'ieng Măi coin. I have seen this both on the one bat and the standard 4 bat size. No. 12 also may possibly be

C'ieng Măi, otherwise it is unintelligible, even to Prof. Cœdès. Drawings Nos. 9 to 11 represent C'ieng Sēn; The last letter in No. 11 shows a more modern type of "n" than the other two. The C'ieng Măi and C'ieng Sēn coins are the ones usually seen. Those with other marks are all quite rare. No. 13 represents Mu'ang Hang or Hang Luang, where the greatest Siamese king, Năresuen, died while on campaign against Burma. Nos. 14 and 15 read "Fang" and "Söpfang" respectively, and refer to the ancient city of Mu'ang Fang, the first capital of the T'ai or Siamese within the present boundaries of Siam. It was laid waste finally in 1717, and has never been rebuilt. The prefix "söp" is still used for place names and means that the city was at the mouth of the Fang River. No. 16 is Nan. Nos. 17 and 18 are Lăk'ôn or Năk'ôn, now known as Lămpang. No. 19 is P'rê. No. 20 reads "Săk", which means "Teak". Teak forests have always been important in North Siam, and at the present time there are several villages by this name. Nothing is known of any ancient city by this name, however. It remains completely buried in the mists of antiquity except for this one coin. The coin from which No. 21 is copied is not very clear. As copied, the first letter looks like a "W", but it could really be an "S". The last letter is not quite clear either, but it is certainly not the same as the last letter of the "Săk" coin. It could read "Wăng", referring to Mu'ang Wăng, north of Lăk'ôn. No. 22 can not be read, though the first letter is definitely an "S".

I have also drawn as carefully as possible the various royal marks which I have found, including those in the National Museum, and have noted on which coins these different marks appear. This is necessarily a very incomplete list. The C'ieng Măi coins, drawings 1 to 7, having the marks A to L, and P; with the exception of H, which appears on a coin with the mark of drawing 8. C'ieng Sēn is represented by M to O and Q to T. The W was found on the *inside* of a standard C'ieng Măi coin, and on the outside of a 1 bat coin in the National Museum which was marked C'ieng Sēn. Mu'ang Hang is marked with drawing U; the Fang coin with drawing T; and the Söpfang coins with drawings C and V. Nan is represented by S and T; Lăk'ôn by A and R; P'rê by R; and Săk by C. Drawing No. 21 is linked with drawing A, while drawing No. 22 is linked with drawing R. The marks represented by drawings AA and BB appear on 1 bat coins. Drawings X and Y are the figure

"4" appearing on all the standard size coins. I have one coin which instead of this has a mark like drawing Z.

Old coins of the c'ieng type which are heavier than the standard size occur. I saw one large one which weighed 23 bat, and was marked similarly to the piece of bar money on Plate VI, No. 8. The owner later broke it, intending to use the silver, but found the silver was only on the surface, with lead inside. The coins shown on Plate X are all larger and heavier than the standard c'ieng coins, No. 2 weighing more than 25 bat. These all, however, with the possible exception of No. 3, I believe to be modern imitations of the c'ieng type coins, dressed up to look old.

Mr. le May, in his book, speaks of "bracelet" type coinage, and pictures what he puts in this type.⁽¹⁾ All that which he pictures, however, appears to me to be merely widely open c'ieng money, and is so called by the people of North Siam. I have pictured on Plate IX, Nos. 1 and 2, two coins of this type which I purchased in P'rê together. They are of the same weight, but with slightly different marking, and are of good silver. As these represent widely open c'ieng coins, No. 3 on the same plate shows just the opposite. Two views of it are shown. A particular point of interest about this narrow c'ieng coin is the fact that, while the c'ieng coinage is the typical one of Lannat'äi, and the bar coinage the typical one of Lan C'ang, here is a c'ieng coin which has marks identical with the second mark from the left on Plate VI, No. 4.

Referring back to the subject of bracelet coinage, Mr. le May⁽²⁾ cites an old reference to the effect that bracelet money was used in the north of Siam at a very remote date. Luang Boribal speaks of original lump silver being used for currency, this developing among the Chinese into bar money and curved bar or bracelet money. At present, the hill tribes of Siam wear their silver around their necks, or as bracelets, often of very simple design and heavy weight. However, I have not heard of any actual bracelet coins, nor has the National Museum.

FISH MONEY.

Plate XI, Nos. 12 and 13 illustrate a very rare type of old money known as fish money. It is occasionally dug up. It is particularly interesting that No. 12, which really looks like a fish, appeared

⁽¹⁾ Reginald le May, *op. laud.*, Pl. III. ⁽²⁾ *ibid.*, p. 11.

together with some pieces of leaf money, and is made of the same slightly yellowish, light silver-like alloy. No. 13 is of silver; its resemblance to a fish requires a good deal of imagination to see, as is the case with a bronze specimen in my collection. The three pieces show a slight resemblance to each other in the tails. The two very old fish coins pictured by Mr. le May seem to be somewhat different.

LUMP OR BULLET MONEY.

Mr. le May believes that this type of coinage, long the official and common type of Siam, originated in the north of the country. He cites a letter dated 1615, in which the C'ieng Măi bat is said to weigh 85% of the Siamese, and to be baser in value. He pictures bullet coins which he considers to be of C'ieng Măi, but also says that the earliest Siamese coins were of this weight too. The letter above quoted did not definitely mention the shape of the northern coins, but it is a fair presumption that they were of the same shape. However, C'ieng Măi was under the rule of Burma then, and it seems likely that what the writer of the letter referred to was the standard coinage of Burma, whatever that may have been, if indeed there was any. In the north of Siam, I have found no old coinage of this type except that which Luang Boribal of the National Museum refers to the ancient Siamese kingdom of Sūkhōt'āi, and he says that he knows of no other type referable to C'ieng Măi or Lannat'āi. I have pictured some of these obtained in North Siam in Plate XI, Nos. 1, 3, 5, and 6, two views being shown of 1 and 3. No. 5 is from the collection of Rev. W. Harris. No. 1, of which there are a number of specimens in the National Museum, weighs two and a half ounces. These coins are of various compositions.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Plate XI, Nos. 2 and 4, Luang Boribal identifies as from P'răh Păthōm, and dates at the sixth century. The deer was the earliest symbol of Buddhism. Both sides of these coins are shown. The National Museum has a number of coins (silver) like No. 4, together with other coins of the same type and period. No. 4 is of bronze, with silvered surface. Though these coins were obtained in the north of Siam, they are, strictly speaking, outside the scope of this article,

Nos. 7 and 8 on this plate, are discs of unknown alloy, acquired together. One had evidently been cut to "make change".

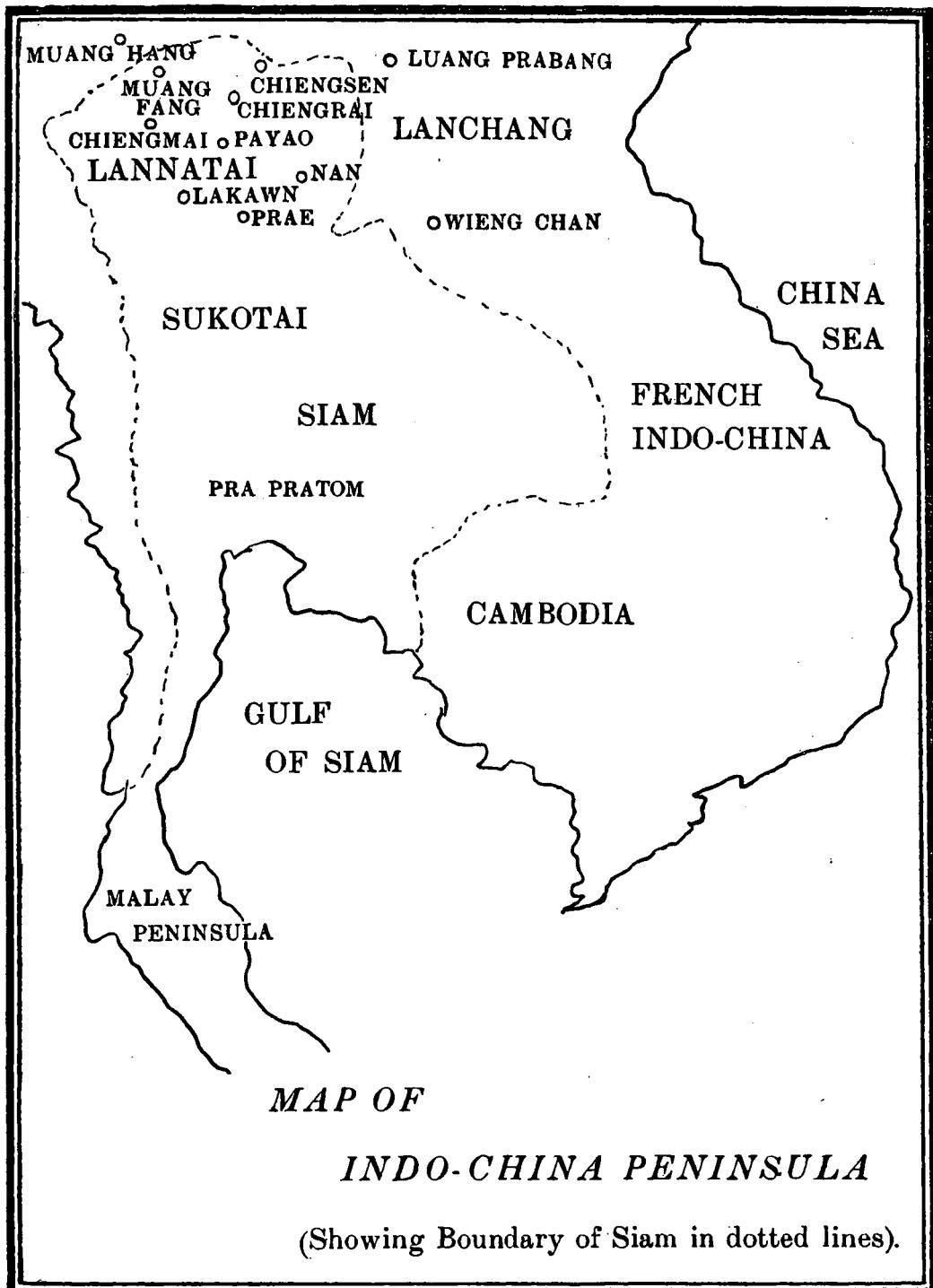
No. 9 is a new-looking disc of silver, gray on the surface shown, with a beautiful red metallic spot. The other surface is chicken blood or egg yolk. Certain odd pieces, of which this is one, are referred to as *polep* money.

No. 10 is a cubical lead piece which appears once to have had official marks, but which has worn until they are no longer recognizable. No. 11 is merely a bronze weight, included only because of the "na" mark on it, (see similar marks on bar, cieng, and tok money.)

SYCEE MONEY.

Plate XII shows lumps of silver which one occasionally finds in north Siam, and which I believe have filtered in by caravan from Yunnan. Nos. 1 to 6 may once have been manufactured in Siam as well as in China; they are conical or dome shaped lumps of solid silver without markings. No. 3 shows one of these which has been cut to make change. Nos. 9 and 10 are of slightly different shape, and show Chinese characters on their under surfaces. The convex surface is without markings, and the pieces are quite heavy. Nos. 7 and 8 are specimens of what is known as saddle money or turtle money, on account of its shape. Other forms of it occur also, being variations of these two kinds. These pieces are always of the very best silver. No. 7 has no marking at all on the convex surface. The under surface of No. 8 is rather flat, and without marking.

I wish to express appreciation to those who have helped me in preparing this article, some of whose names have already been mentioned. I particularly appreciate the interest and help of Luang Boribal Buripant of the Siamese National Museum, Prof. G. Cœdès of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient at Hanoï, and of Monsieur J. Burnay at whose request I prepared this article and who has helped me with it in many ways. I also appreciate the care and interest shown by Mr. M. Tanaka of Cieng Mai in the preparation of the photographs.



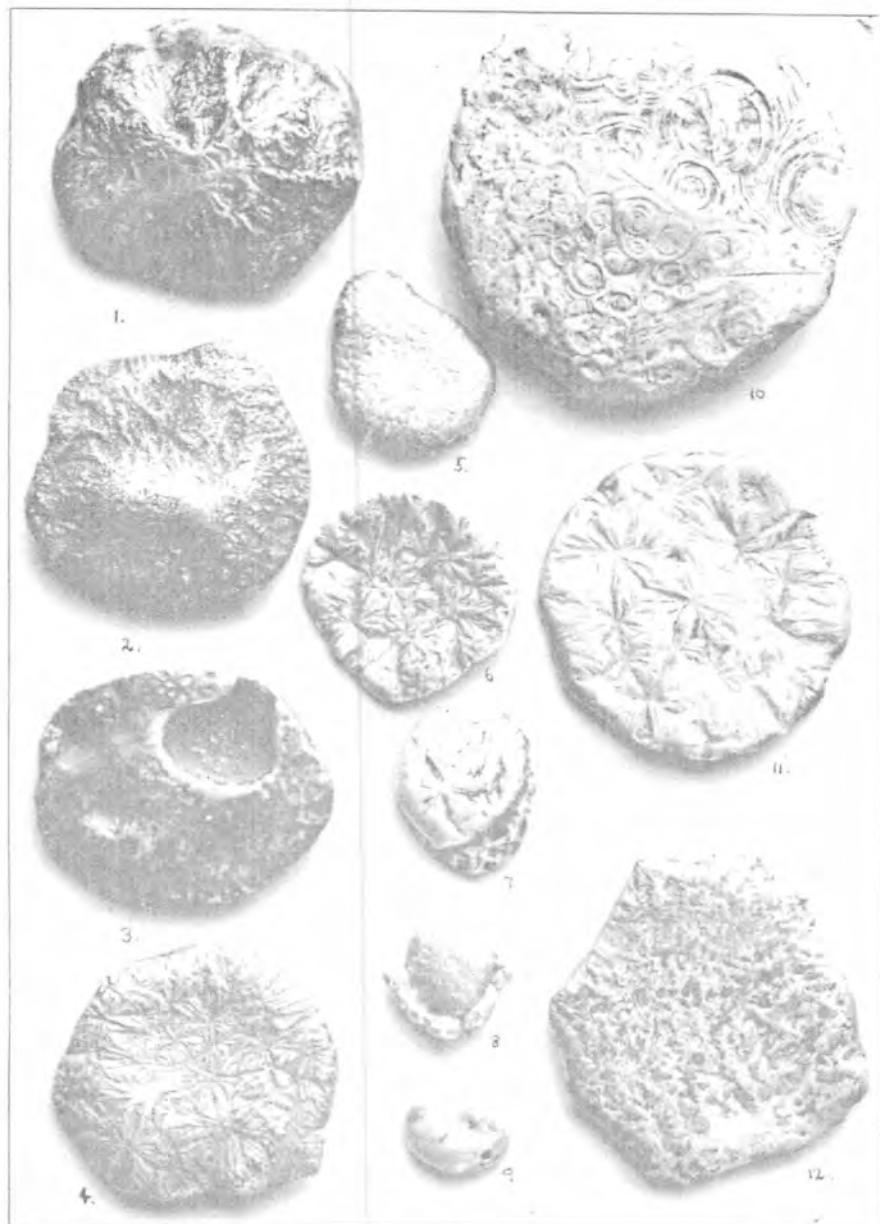


PLATE I

(Needles)

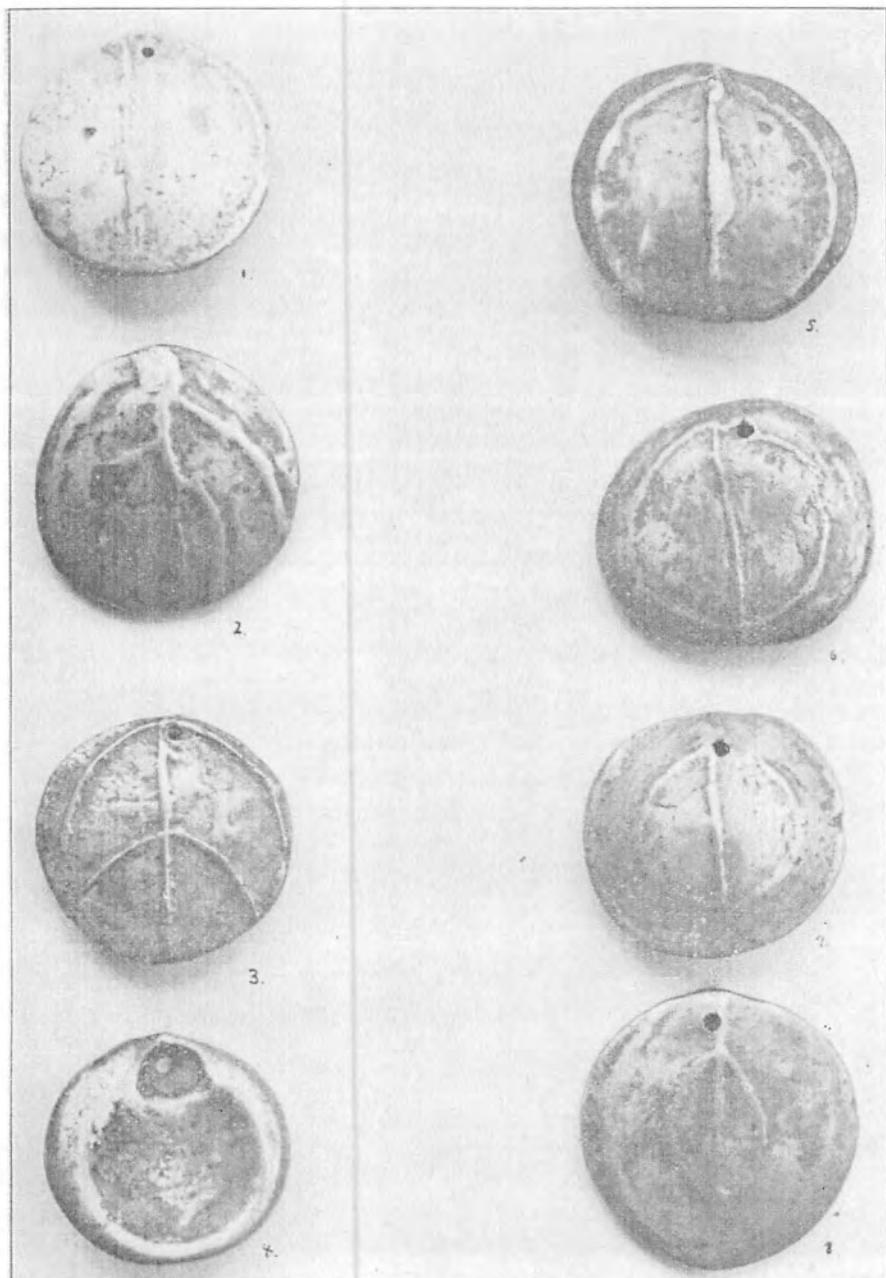


PLATE II

(Kneedler)

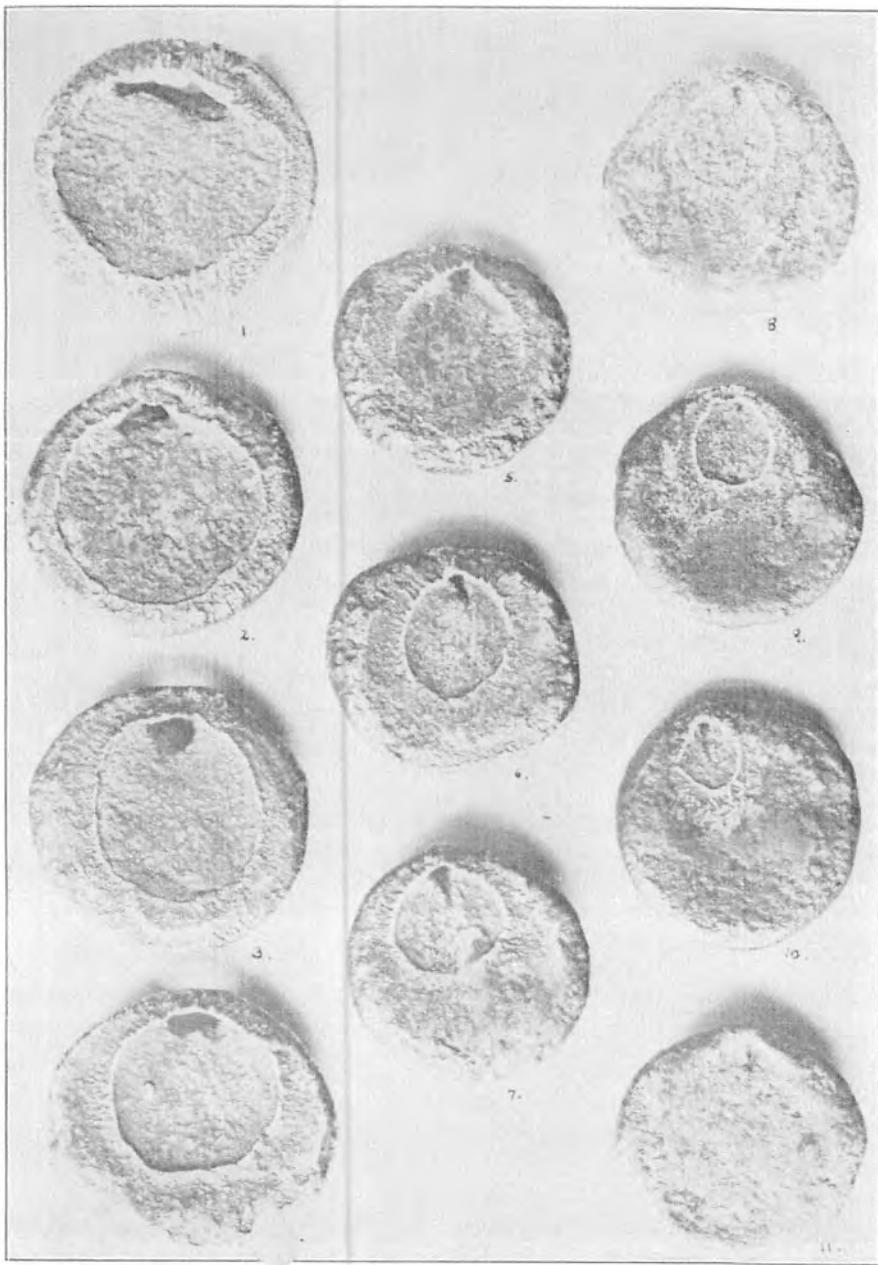


PLATE III

(Kneedler)

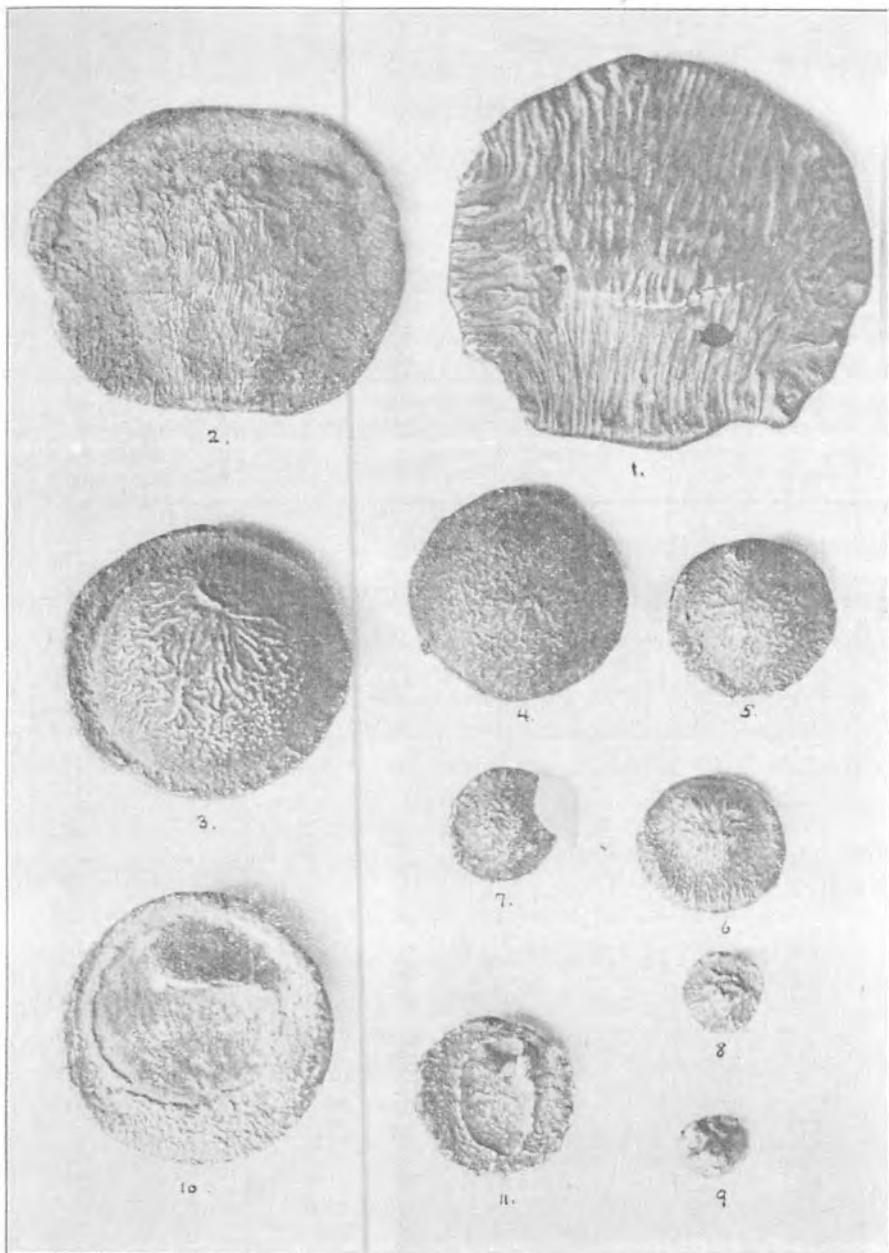


PLATE IV

(Kneedler)

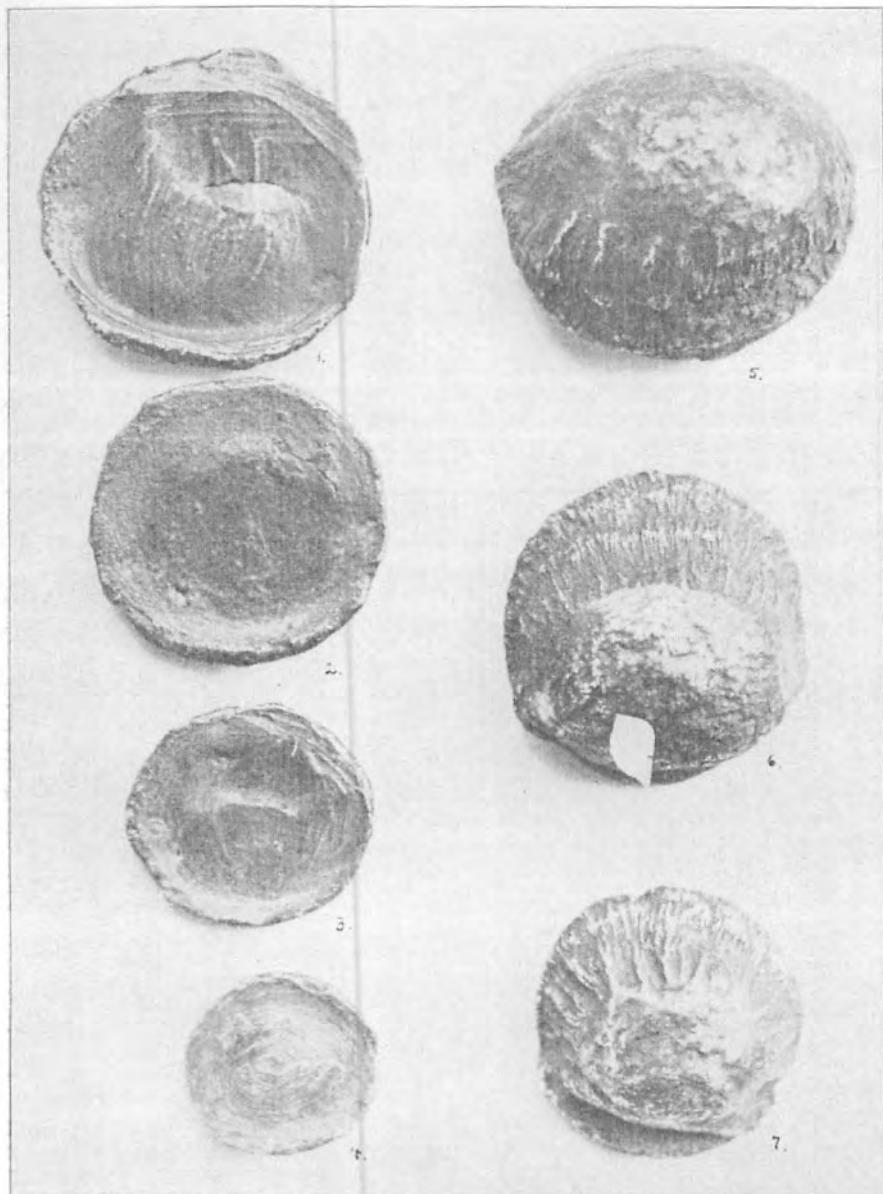


PLATE V

(Kneedler)

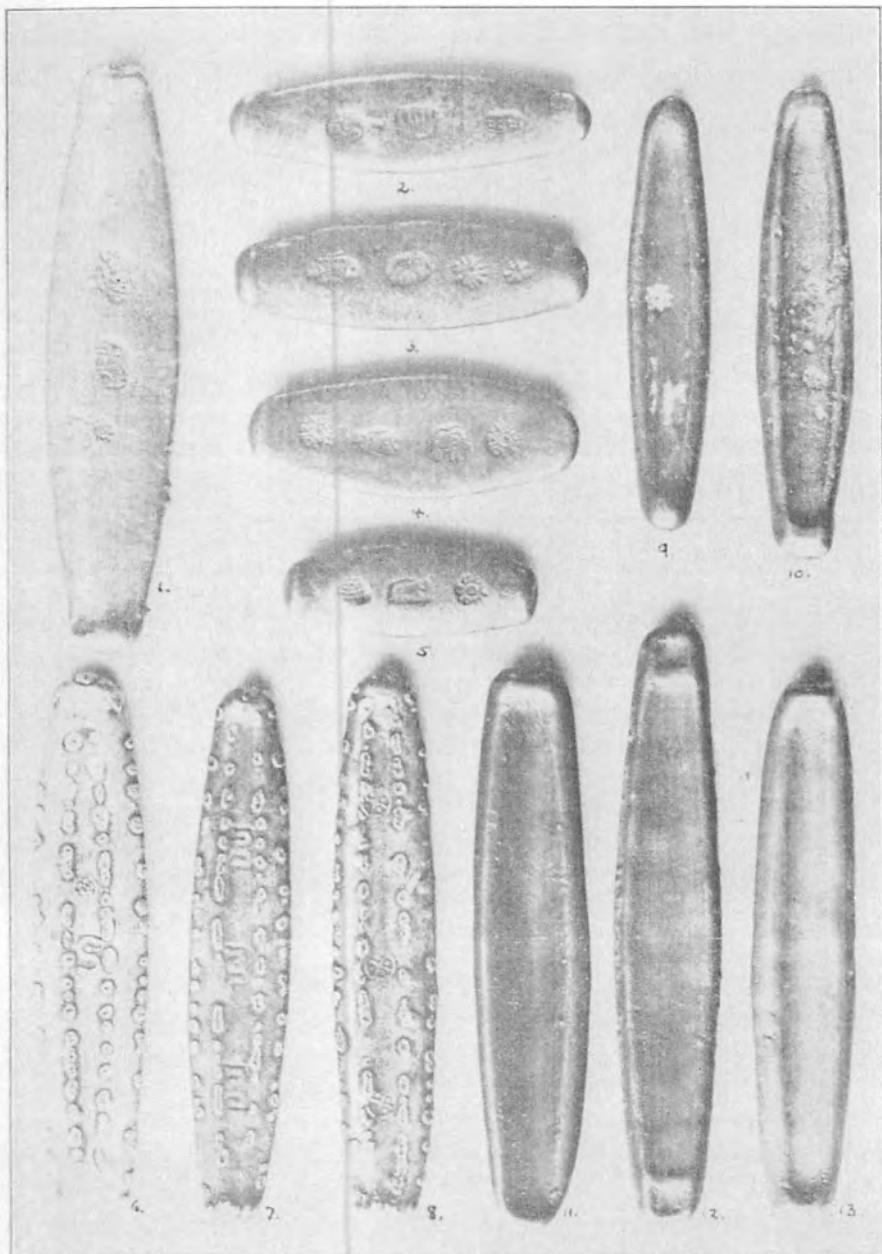


PLATE VI

(Kneedler)

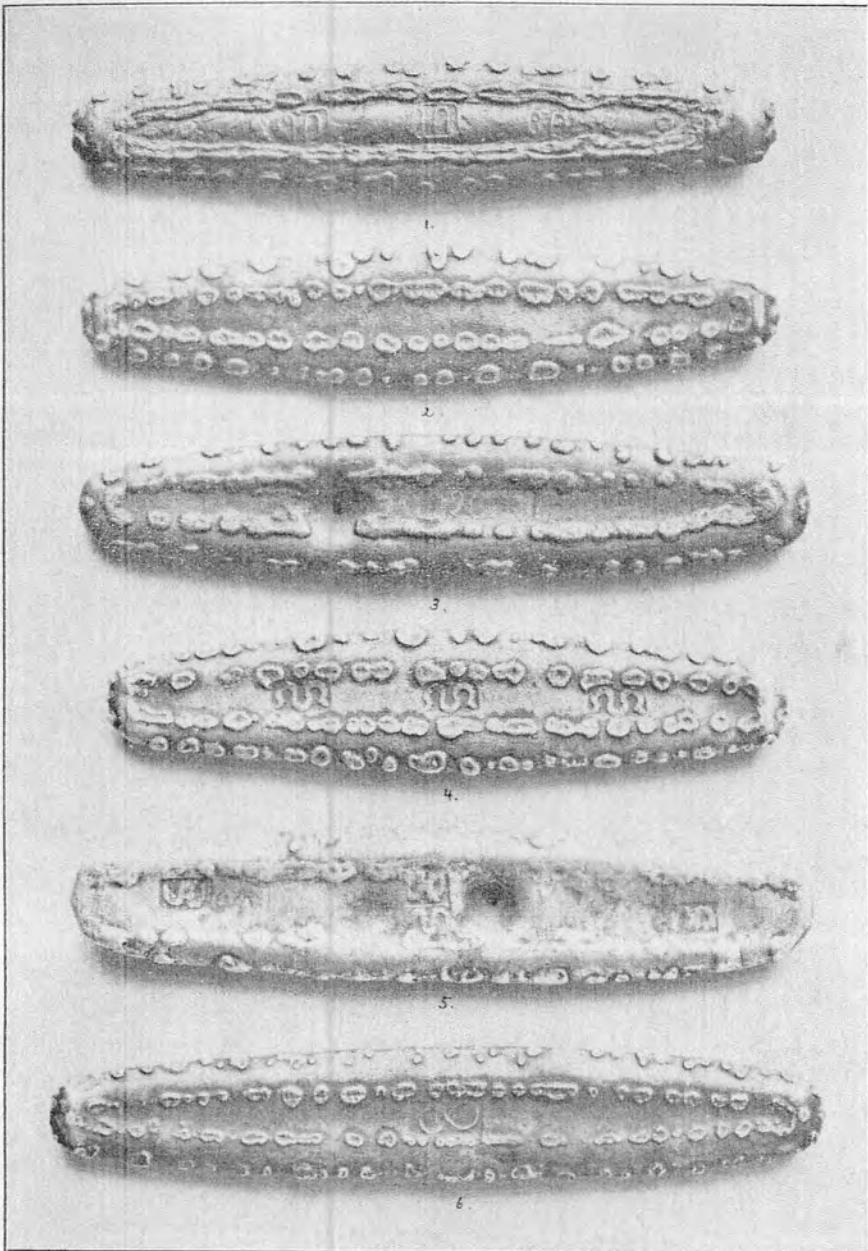


PLATE VII

(Kneedler)

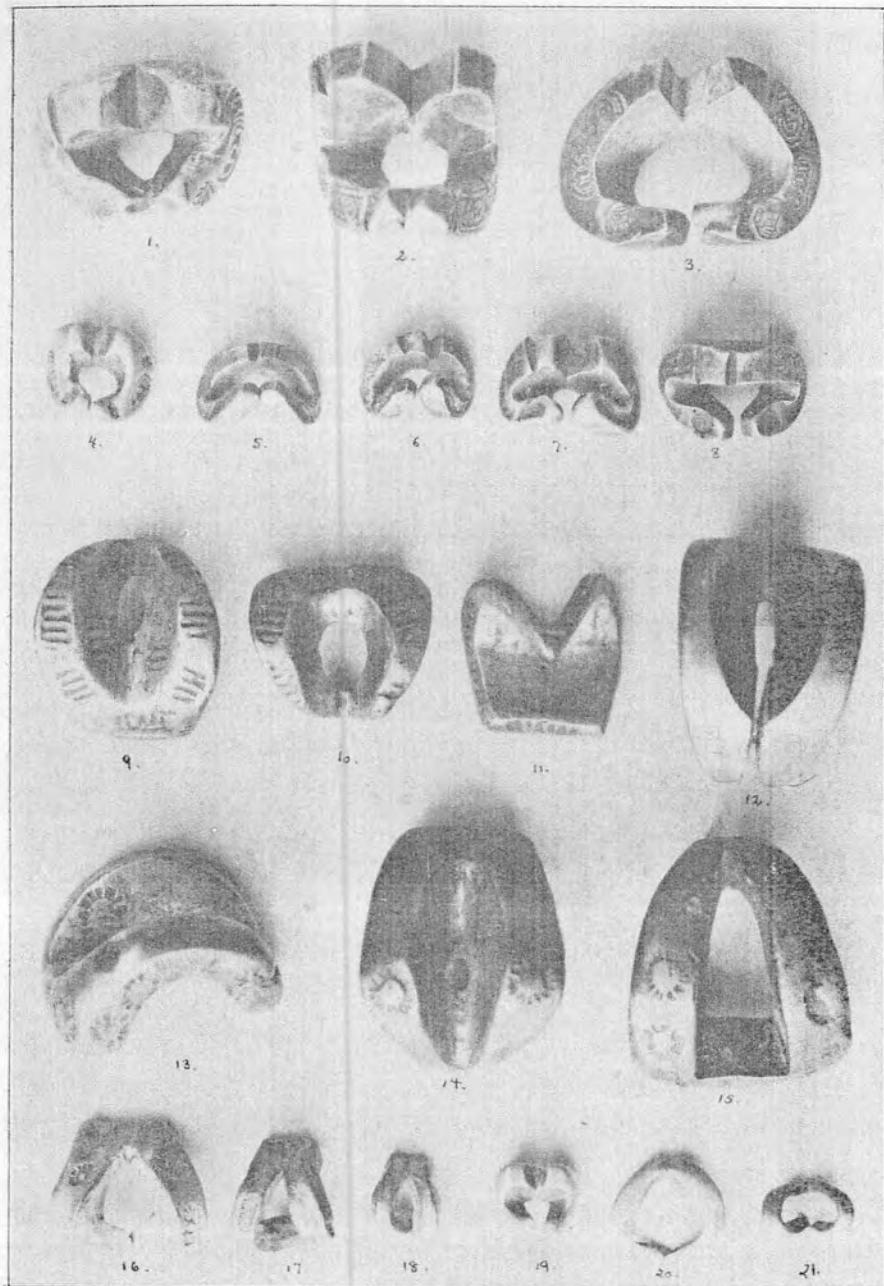


PLATE VIII

(Kneedler)

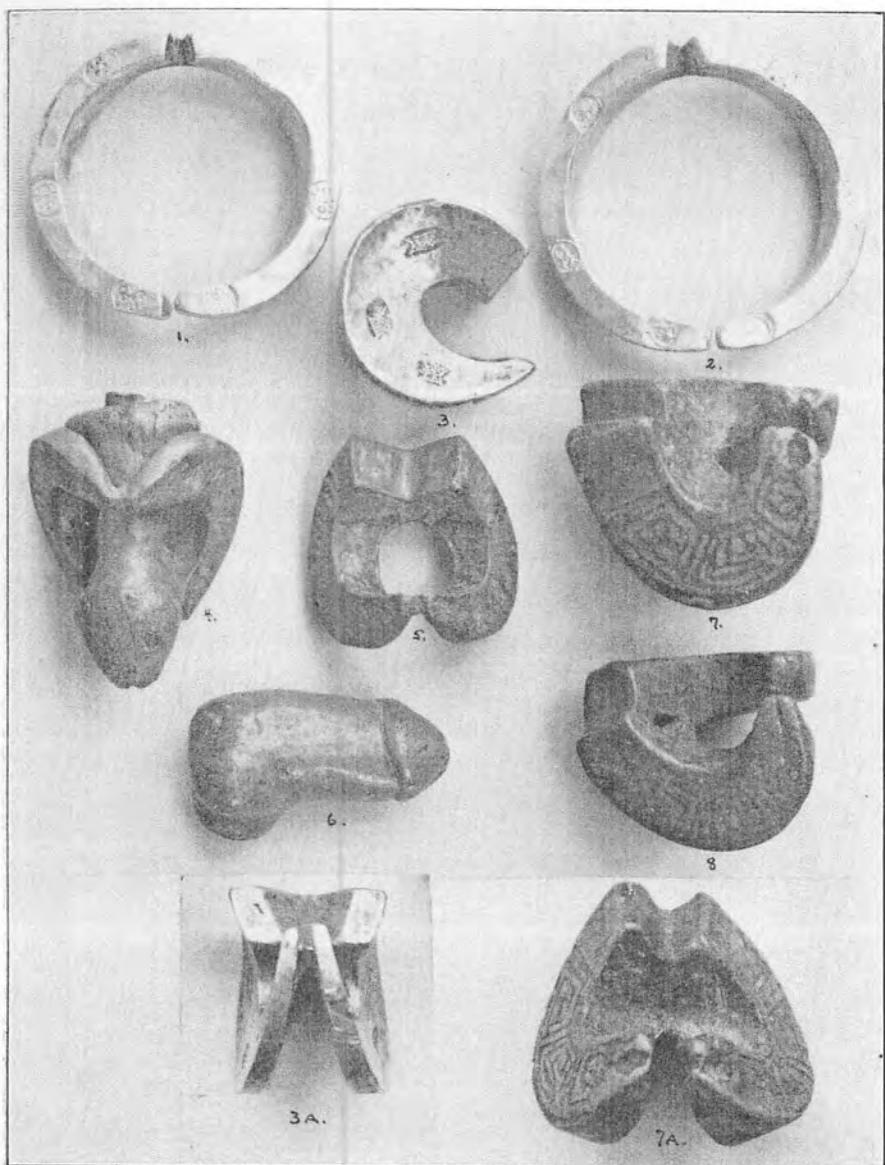


PLATE IX

(Kneedler)

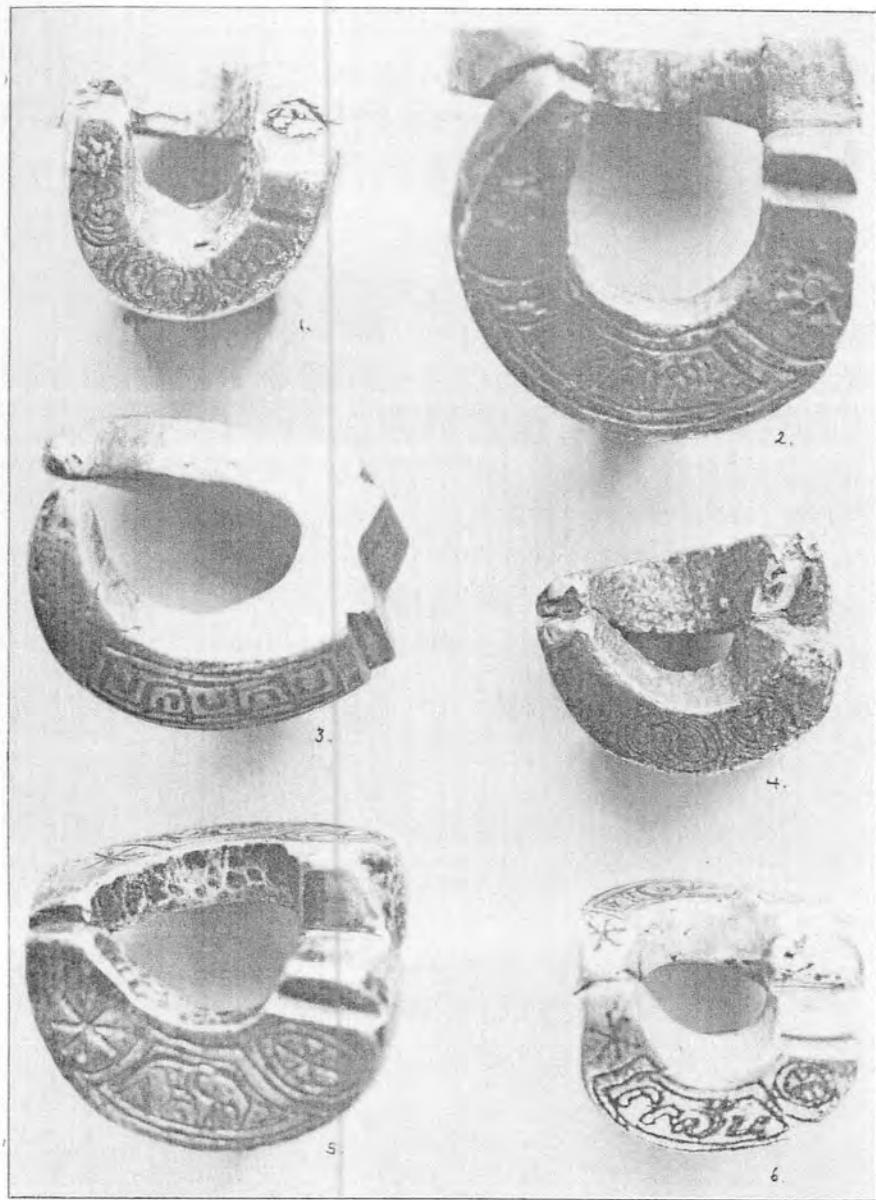


PLATE X

(Kneedler)

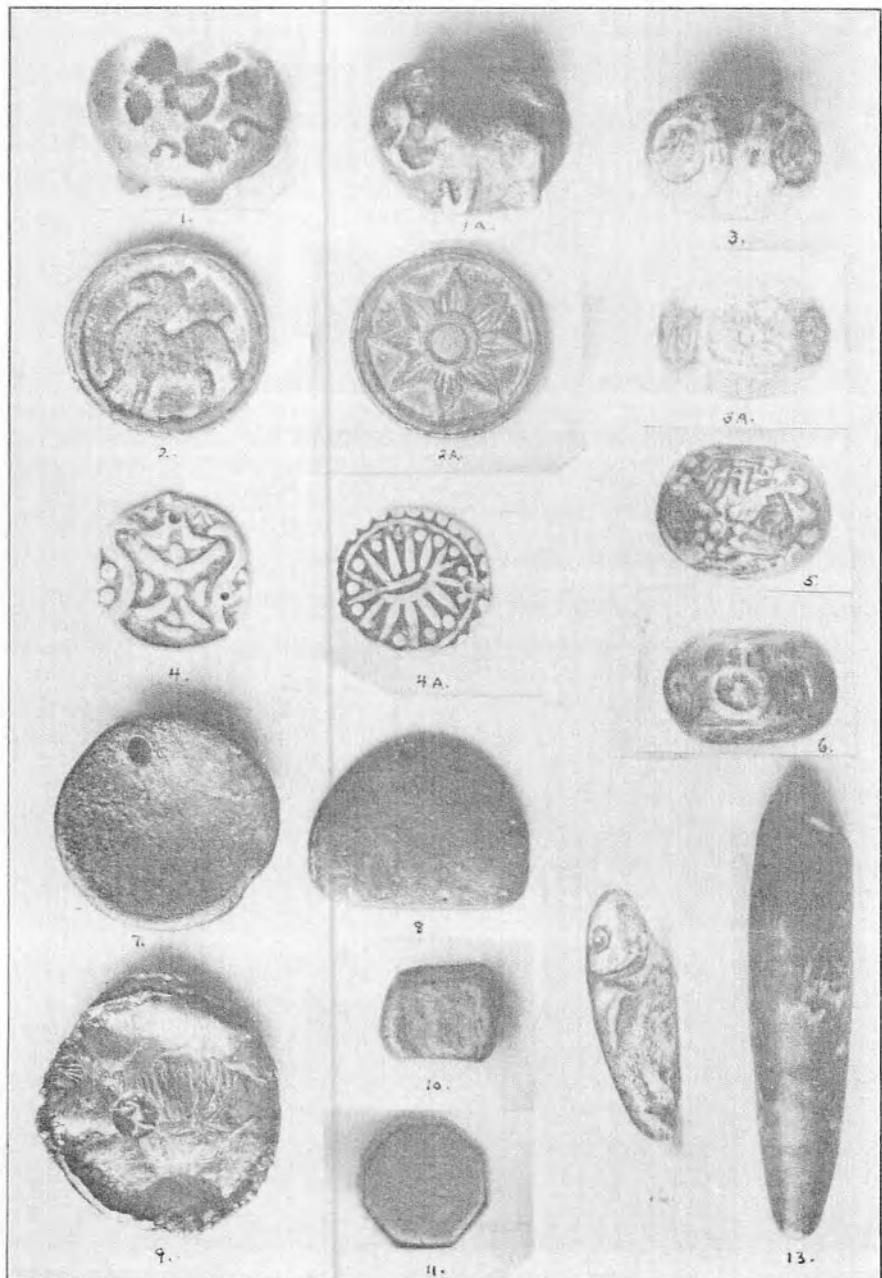


PLATE XI

(Kneedler)

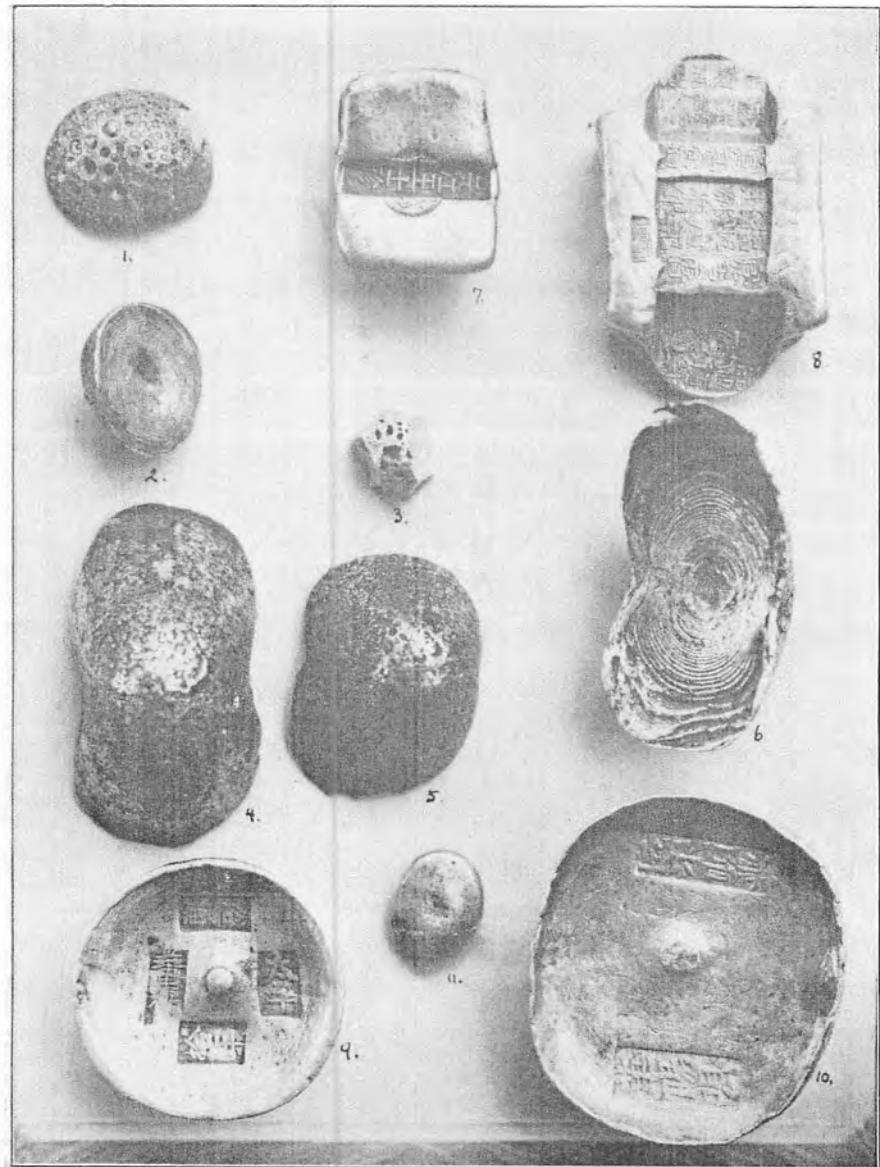


PLATE XII

(Kneedler)

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28.

PLATE XIII

(Kneedler)

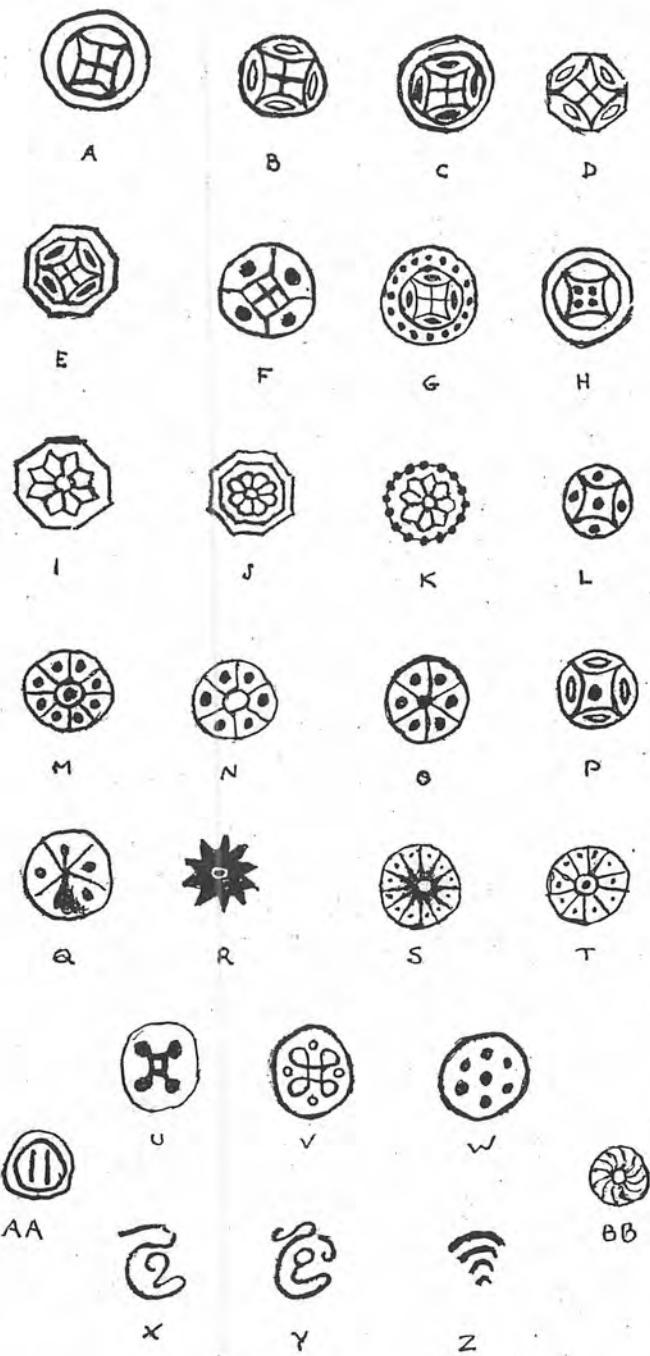


PLATE XIV

(Kneedler)