



Reinhold Walburg. *Coins and Tokens from Ancient Ceylon: Ancient Ruhuna. Sri Lanka-German Archaeological Project in the Southern Province. Vol. 2.* Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2008. 412 S. \$140.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-89500-645-6.

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Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (January, 2010)

R. Walburg: Coins and Tokens from Ancient Ceylon

For more than a decade now, the German Commission for the Archaeology of Non-European Cultures (formerly the Commission for General and Comparative Archaeology) of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) has been exploring sites in the south of Sri Lanka, mainly in the areas around Mahagama and Godavaya. See Hans-Joachim Weisshaar et al. (eds.), *Ancient Ruhuna. Sri Lanka-German Archaeological Project in the Southern Province*, vol. 1, Mainz 2001. In order to contextualize their work, they have cooperated with a wide range of scholars who took up the task of identifying and interpreting the various findings, explain their significance and assess their historical value. Reinhold Walburg, an acknowledged expert of Roman coinage Reinhold Walburg, *Antike Münzen aus Ceylon. Die Bedeutung römischer Münzen und ihrer Nachahmungen für den Geldumlauf auf Ceylon*, in: *Studien zu Fundmünzen der Antike*, 3 (1985), pp. 27-260. , has been put in charge of the coins that have come to light in recent years. Drawing on his own substantial researches in this field, Walburg has compared the recent findings from the South of the island with those found in the rest of the island, and thus combined the cataloguing of the ancient coins with an analysis of their wider implications.

The volume is divided in three major parts. The first part (chapters 1-3, pp. 1-112) presents a history of Lankan numismatic research, together with an overview of the coin types known from ancient Lanka. The second part, which is the biggest of the whole volume, contains a

fully illustrated and annotated catalogue of coins and tokens (that means printed and cast metal plaques), together with a few Chinese and late medieval coins. In the third part, Walburg then analyses the material he has presented on the previous pages. In effect, what is presented in these three chapters comes to a political and economic history of the ancient world from eastern rim of the Roman Empire on the Red Sea coast to Persia, India, Lanka and even China, whose coins were also found on the island.

Coins, no matter whether true ones, imitations, forgeries or bullion metal, are crucial and yet often neglected sources for economic history, and Walburg is able to put several contested issues of Lankan history straight. For instance, he can show that imitations of Roman copper coins (naimatas) were solely produced in Sri Lanka after the mid-5th century CE (p. 83). Similarly, he argues convincingly that the northern port of Mantai never played an important role in the maritime trade of Sri Lanka, as the site has hardly yielded any coins (let alone hoards), and again he contends that the earliest coins of Lanka, the nameless lion tokens, could not have been used as currency because of their broad variety of form, weight, and alloy (p. 99). Indeed, if he is correct in attributing their emergence and usage to the reign of king Mahasena (early 4th century CE), these tokens shed new light on the king's attempt to control the flow of material resources to the monasteries at the capital, most notably the Mahavihara which the king wanted to dissolve.

In the concluding chapters, Walburg attempts further interpretations of his own. While the findings from the South coast indicate the economic strength of that region, they also give a hint towards the political status of the province vis-à-vis the core area of the Sinhalese state in the North. Putting numismatic evidence against the record of the Sinhalese chronicles, Walburg can also make suggestions concerning the course of events of the kingdom (pp. 311-313). Finally, Walburg suggests that there was hardly any direct trade between the Roman ports in the Red Sea and Sri Lanka. Goods and coins rather travelled in stages, with Sasanian Persia and various emporia of South India (especially in the domain of the Pallavas on the south-east coast of India) forming the most important places of exchange and transaction.

The importance of Walburg's work can hardly be un-

derestimated. His catalogue of coins will be a first-hand reference catalogue for the Roman coinage of South India and Sri Lanka, serving scholars and collectors alike. His findings contribute much to our understanding of the history of trade and transaction across the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, and his suggestions contain crucial questions regarding the political, economic and religious history of early Sri Lanka. Last not least Walburg outlines an agenda for future research, pointing for instance to the gap between the circulation of Roman coins in the 6-7th centuries and the beginning of indigenous Lankan coinage (the kahapanas) in the 10th century. That said, it is clear that *Coins and Tokens from Ancient Ceylon* is a substantial and indispensable contribution to Sri Lankan history and to the study of the global dimension of late antiquity and the early middle ages.

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Citation: Tilman Frasch. Review of Walburg, Reinhold, *Coins and Tokens from Ancient Ceylon: Ancient Ruhuna. Sri Lanka-German Archaeological Project in the Southern Province. Vol. 2.* H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. January, 2010.

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