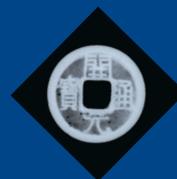


François Louis



Chinese Coins

François Louis

Chinese Coins

¹ For an extensive discussion of this type of coin see Peng Xinwei 1994, vol. 1, 246–260. See also Thierry 1986, 14f.

² Peng Xinwei 1994, 250–255, discusses the crescent marks exhaustively and refutes the connection to Yang Guifei.

³ *Ibid.*, 249; Thierry 1986, 16.

About 2.5 kg of Chinese coins have been recovered from the Belitung wreck. Heavy corrosion caused most of the coins to stick together and form clumps (fig. 1). The coins that so far could be isolated were X-rayed in order to read their inscriptions (fig. 2). They consist of two types. The greater part of them are so-called ‘Inaugural Circulating Treasures’, *kaiyuan tongbao*, the most important and widespread type of coin during the Tang period, which began being minted in small quantities in 621 and which was produced in large amounts since the eighth century.¹

The other type of coin found on the ship was the ‘Heavy Treasure of the *Qianyuan* Reign’, *qianyuan zhongbao*, which was minted in the first year *qianyuan*, in 758.

Common to all these coins is the raised left end of the second vertical line of the character *yuan*, a feature which numismatists call ‘left-shouldered’. On *kaiyuan tongbao* coins, this characteristic suggests a minting during the mid-Tang period, i.e. during the eighth and first half of the ninth century.

The few *kaiyuan tongbao* coins examined so far all have a reverse that is either plain or marked with a small crescent, which in numismatic lore is associated to a finger nail mark left in the clay casting model by a Tang empress or the famous concubine Yang Guifei.² None of the *kaiyuan tongbao* coins has an additional character on the reverse, which makes it likely that these coins were minted before 845, the fifth year *huichang*. At that time officially minted *kaiyuan tongbao* coins were for the first time marked with an additional single character on the reverse, either the character *chang*, short for *huichang*, or the name of the individual prefectures which cast the coins.³



Fig. 1 Coin roll from the Belitung wreck



Fig. 2 Chinese coins (X-ray) from the Belitung wreck