

## The Conceptual Evolution of Numismatic Research in Sri Lanka: A Retrospect

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The history of numismatic research in Sri Lanka can be described under four developmental phases. 1. Phase of antiquarian interest; 2. Early classificatory phase; 3. Histogramical and classificatory phase and 4. Scientific and classificatory phase. The interfaces of those phases are not implicit, but some of their characteristics could be explicitly elaborated.

British colonial scholars of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century were the pioneers who initiated the study of ancient coins in Sri Lanka. Their interest of collecting and recording ancient coins was not more than the curiosity and enthusiasm fed by so-called orientalist ideology. Their activities mark the phase 1 of the development of the numismatic studies in Sri Lanka and it was a remarkable beginning.

The work that can be ascribed to the early classificatory phase appeared in the 1920s. The objectives of the work conducted during this phase were somewhat different from the previously held antiquarianism. Systematic classification based on historical phases and visible physical features on the coins was carried out. The insights developed through the basic classifications in phase 2 were incorporated to historical interpretations in phase 3. The significance of studying coins in historical analysis was emphasized and the importance of them was evaluated as supplementary to the historical texts. The work of this historical and classificatory phase appeared during 1950s.

More rigorous scientific approach towards studying ancient coins in Sri Lanka emerged in the 1980s. The previous nomenclature of classificatory scheme of coins has been challenged and alternative approaches have been suggested. Orientation towards scientific analysis of materials of coins and the socio-political analysis of their cultural context was encountered. This paper seeks to analyse the conceptual and methodological development of numismatic studies in Sri Lanka with reference to its wider social context.

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