

PALEMBANG COINS

By Frank S. Robinson

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Palembang is one of the oldest cities in Indonesia, located on the island of Sumatra, by the Musi River. An independent sultanate, it underwent encroachment by the Dutch East India Company, cornering the lucrative spice trade. In 1821, the Dutch consummated their control of Palembang -- ending the local sultanate coinage.

The coins, starting in the 1400s, denominated “pitis,” were cast, in tin alloyed with lead (except for one bronze issue), uniface, and generally inscribed in Arabic script. (Palembang’s language is a version of Malay.) None has a ruler’s name. Dating is by the Islamic calendar, which began in 622 AD with Mohammad’s Hijra (thus “AH” [“After Hijra”] dates); the year is shorter than in the Western calendar. (To convert, subtract 3% from the AH date and add 622.)

Palembang coins are discussed in an 1871 book by H.C. Millies, in French, *Recherches sur Les Monnaies des Indigenes de L’Archipel Indien et de la Peninsule Malaie*, on pages 110-17; Plate XIX illustrates 28 varieties. A very similar array of 29 Palembang coins appears on Plate XXIII in *Munten van Nederlandsch Indie*, by Netscher and van der Chijs, published in 1863, in Dutch. Krause’s *Standard Catalog of World Coins* lists precisely *one* type (KM1, the AH 1219 issue; there is also a “KM2” whose description appears identical, but a prior edition shows it as the same coin in a smaller size). Mitchiner listed a few; Craig also listed a few, none illustrated.

Coins were cast in “trees,” then broken off the trunks. It is common to find a remnant of the stem that attached the coin to the trunk. Many of the coins are well-made, even elegant; others, not so much. It seems the degree of care employed was variable. (There are often “wood-grain”-like striations, probably due to deteriorated molds; also incomplete flans). Many coins, too, were “unofficial,” with quality even more problematic. Millies talks of coins being produced privately with the permission of the sultan, but also of hands cut off for unauthorized enterprise.

Millies says the coins with central holes were called “pitis teboh,” and unholed ones “pitis bountou.” The value was very small, the holed coins probably trading in strings (as were Chinese cash), the unholed ones in standardized boxes, of 250 or 500 coins each, with (again according to Millies) 16 boxes equal to one Spanish Eight Real coin. This explains the crudeness of some unofficial coins (and even ones actually made featureless) – small low value coins within strings or boxes would not have been examined too carefully. (Analogously, America’s smallest coin, the silver three cent piece, was likewise much counterfeited, with stylistic discrepancies not being apparent to a casual glance.)

Until now at least, none of these coins could really be considered common, inasmuch as (based on my experience collecting world coins for half a century, and as an active dealer for most of that time) they very rarely turned up in normal numismatic commerce, especially outside the region of

origin. Although they must have been produced in significant quantities, the tin coins, once they ceased to have commercial value, and lacking much scrap value, were probably mostly just dumped. And in fact, the hoards that provided the basis for this catalog (totaling about 35,000 pieces) were reportedly recovered from the Musi River by local divers. As such recent finds are dispersed by numismatic dealers, the scarcity should diminish.

Study of the mentioned hoards turned up many more variations than are catalogued in the nineteenth century books, which is what prompted this work. I will not always try to distinguish official from non-official issues – while many coins are clearly barbarous (and surely unofficial), many fall into a grey area, and whether a coin was “counterfeit” is largely a moot point. All will be catalogued here, excepting only idiosyncratic clearly barbarous varieties with individually minuscule populations. However, note that collectively, such pieces are common.

Which still leaves the question of what, exactly, constitutes a *variety* meriting consideration. “Die varieties” and stylistic differences that are minor will not be included; seasoned and sagacious judgment will be employed to list those exhibiting material differences of which a numismatist might wish to take note.

The main, basic types will be given integer numbers (1, 2, 3 etc.); variations will be numbered using decimals (1.1, 1.2 etc.). These should be cited as Robinson numbers, to confer some immortality on the author. The photos are of actual coins, enlarged for clarity, so be mindful of the true diameters given in millimeters (“mm”). Note that coins so well preserved are not the norm; naturally the best examples were chosen for illustration. Also, it's not always obvious (to Western eyes) “which end is up;” I will orient the coins as seems fitting to me, arbitrary though it may be.

Rarity ratings, from **R1** (lowest) to **R10** (highest), will be assigned based on numbers found in the hoards; R10 means three or fewer. These ratings should not be considered precise, but only as a general guide. Naturally, many barbarous varieties, considered individually, are “rare,” but this says little about values. No valuations will be hazarded. It may be noted that a group of three of the commonest types, graded VF, realized \$213 (including buyer fee) in CNG’s October 2012 electronic auction. A six-piece group of the small 1193 coins (miscatalogued as “1163”), graded “F-VF,” brought \$299, in Teutoburger’s 2/14 auction. Such prices may seem excessive, but perhaps reflective of how infrequently these coins have heretofore been seen in numismatic commerce.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Joseph Lang, John Madlon and Franklin Schroeck, and my wife Therese L. Broderick, whose idea of straightening the hoard’s bent coins by driving our car over them I did not adopt, but who helped by translating portions of the Millies book. (Bent Palembang coins can be straightened by tapping with a blunt instrument.)

Here is a chart of Arabic numerals. Note, however, that the zero appears on these coins as a small “O” rather than a dot; and the 6 can be written like a Western “7” (or reversed Arabic 2).

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
•	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩

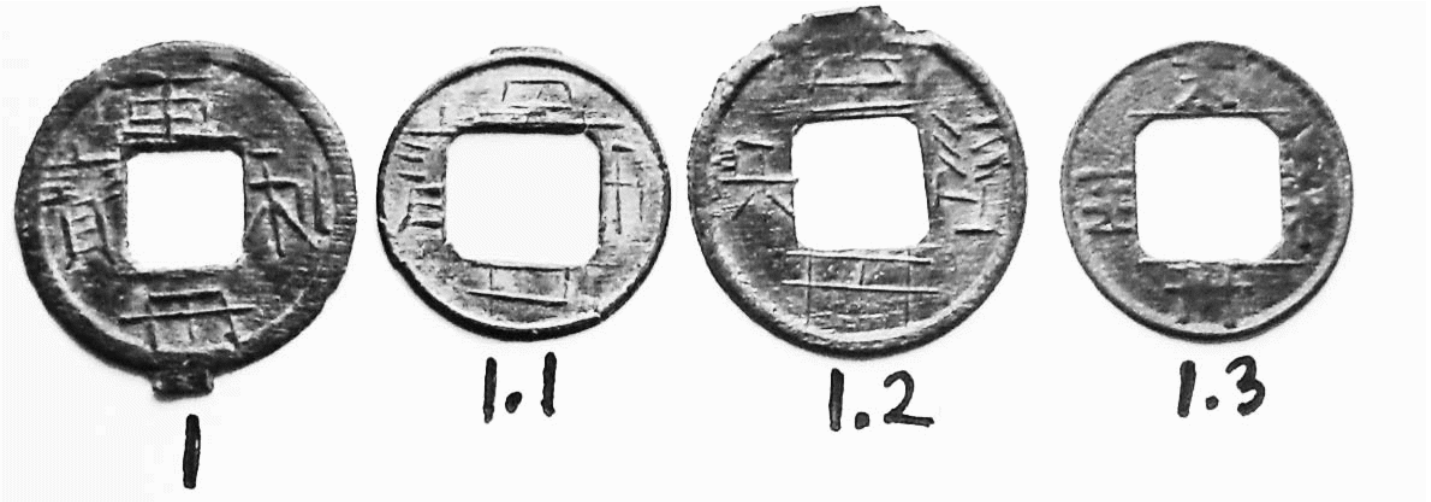
THE CATALOG:

1 Li Poh, 1450-70, inscribed "Shi Dan Li Bao," 18-19 mm, R8

1.1 15-16 mm, R10

1.2 Right and left characters reversed, 17-18 mm, R9

1.3 Very different, neater style, "Shi Dan Tong Bao," 16 mm, R10. One source calls this a Chinese merchant token, c.18th cent.



2 Copying Chinese coin? Xian-Yuan? 16 mm, Netscher 216? R9 (Lead-tin Indonesian imitations of Chinese coins, particularly Northern Song, are fairly common. However, the style of this piece is unusual and distinctive, with several pieces appearing in the hoards.)



3 Mahmud Baharuddin I, dated AH 1162 = 1749, "Sultan [or falus] fi bilad Palembang dar [al] Islam 1162," Millies 184, 22 mm, R5 but almost always found very poor. Note, the date is at the top.

- 3.1 21 mm, R10 3.2 20 mm, large center hole, R8
 3.3 22 mm, a strange barbarous version of this type? R10



- 4 Undated (though some sources say AH 1163 = 1750), "Alamat bilad Palembang," Millies 200, 21 mm, R1
 4.1 Smaller and a little barbarous, 19-20 mm, R7
 4.2 A distinctive barbarous version, 20 mm, R8
 4.3 As #4 but retrograde (mirror-image), 21 mm, R4
 4.4 As #4.2 but retrograde, 20 mm, R10

5 Muhammad Bahudin (1776-1804), AH 1193 = 1779, "Al-Sultan fi beled Palembang sanat 1193," Millies 187, R1.

All varieties of this type, below, are 13-15 mm unless noted. Various different dates have been reported, e.g., 1183 in Millies. However, all seem to be the same issue; while many do appear as "1183," the 8 is really just an ill-written 9 with an overgrown top, as evidenced by many "in-between" ones seen. Also, because of its small size, barbarous versions of this type proliferate.

- 5.1 Large date with clear well-formed 9, R6
 5.2 Distinctive rough/crude fabric, always with central casting "button," R1
 5.3 Distinctive style with thin characters touching top rim, R5
 5.4 Small o before date, R3 5.5 Small size, 13 mm, R1

Date variants:

5.6 1111-, R2 5.7 1183, R2 5.8 193, R4
 5.9 113, R2 5.10 13, R6 5.11 93, R8



4.4



5



5.1



5.2



5.3



5.4



5.5



5.6



5.7



5.8



5.9



5.10



5.11

5.12 1183 retrograde, 13 mm, R10
 5.13 1193 retrograde, R10 5.14 1123 (9 reversed), R10
 5.15 "3P11," R9 5.16 11113, R8 5.17 6111, R7
 5.18 "66U," R10 5.19 "1J11," R8 5.20 "1J3," R9
 5.21 113 retrograde, R10 5.22 Date area blank, R8
 Additional varieties, consult photos:
 5.23,24 R3 5.25 R7 5.26,27 R9 5.28 12 mm, R7

5.40-43 R10 5.44 R8 5.45 R7 5.46 R9 5.47,48 R10
5.49 R9 5.50 R8 5.51,52 R10 5.54 R8 5.55-58 R10



5.27



5.28



5.29



5.30



5.31



5.32



5.33



5.34



5.35



5.36



5.37



5.38



5.39



5.40



5.41



5.59 Small central hole appears as made, R10

5.60 R10 5.61 Many variants *generally* similar, R8

5.62 R10 5.63 R8

6 AH1198=1784, **COPPER** coin, 21 mm, "Haza fulus fi bilad Palembang sanat" ("piece of copper of the city of Palembang, Year 1198"), Millies 188, Craig 112 ("Duit"), R10. (Note, none found in the river hoards.)

7 AH1200=1786, "Al-sultan fi beled Palembang sanat 1200," date retrograde (backwards), 18 mm, Millies 189, R2 but always in shallow relief hence nice ones are much rarer. Noting the many corrupted dates on the 1193 and 1203 issues, one might suppose this is just one more variant of the latter. However, its commonness and close uniformity of distinctive style suggest this was a separate issue.

Note, the coin pictured as 7.1 has been deleted. The coin labelled "7.2" is actually now 7.1; the one labelled "7.3" is 7.2

7.1 Barbarous style, large calligraphy, 18 mm, R10

7.2 Date as 12100, R10



8 AH1202=1788, 18-19 mm, "Al-sultan fi beled Palembang sanat 1202," Millies 191, R4. Again one might think these mere variants of the 1203s. Some probably are, but some seem to be a distinct issue intentionally dated 1202

8.1,2 18 mm, R10 8.3 Date "202," 19 mm, R8

8.4 Date "202," different style, 19 mm, R9

8.5 Date small and weak, 17 mm, R9 8.6 17-18 mm, R9

8.7 Date with large round O, 19 mm, R5



9 AH1203=1789, "Al-sultan fi beled Palembang sanat 1203," 18-19 mm, Millies 192, R1. Stylistic variations:

9.1 R1 **9.2** R2 **9.3** R10 **9.4** small date, R9

9.5 Usual character at top omitted, R9 **9.6** R9

9.7 R10 **9.8** R3

9.9 2 in date backwards, always very shallow relief, R3

Retrograde (mirror-image) varieties:

9.10 R5 **9.11** R7 **9.12** R8 **9.13** R10

Error dates, in more or less numerical order:

9.14 03, R10 9.15 10, R7 9.16 12, R8 9.17 21, R8

9.18 23, R10 9.19 63, R10 9.20 093, R10

9.21 101 (probably actually 202 with 2s ill-formed), R7

9.22 103, R10 9.23 111, R10 9.24 112, R10 9.25 120, R9

9.26 123, R3 9.27 203, R9 9.28 203, different style, R9



9.29 302, R9 9.30 302, different style, small date, R10
9.31 306? entirely retrograde (mirror-image), very crude, R4
9.32 604? R10 9.33 1023, R2 9.34 1063, R9 9.35 1102, R10
9.36 2013, R9 9.37 2203, R8 9.38 10083, R10



9.39 11003, R9 9.40 11103, R7 9.41 "P9P3" R10
9.42 Strange date, R9 9.43 Date area clearly blank, R10
Further varieties, see photos:
9.44 R8 9.45 R9 9.46 R10 9.47 R8
9.48 R4 9.49 R9 9.50 R9



10 Mahmud Badaruddin II (1804-21), AH1219=1804, "Masruf fi bilad Palembang 1219,"

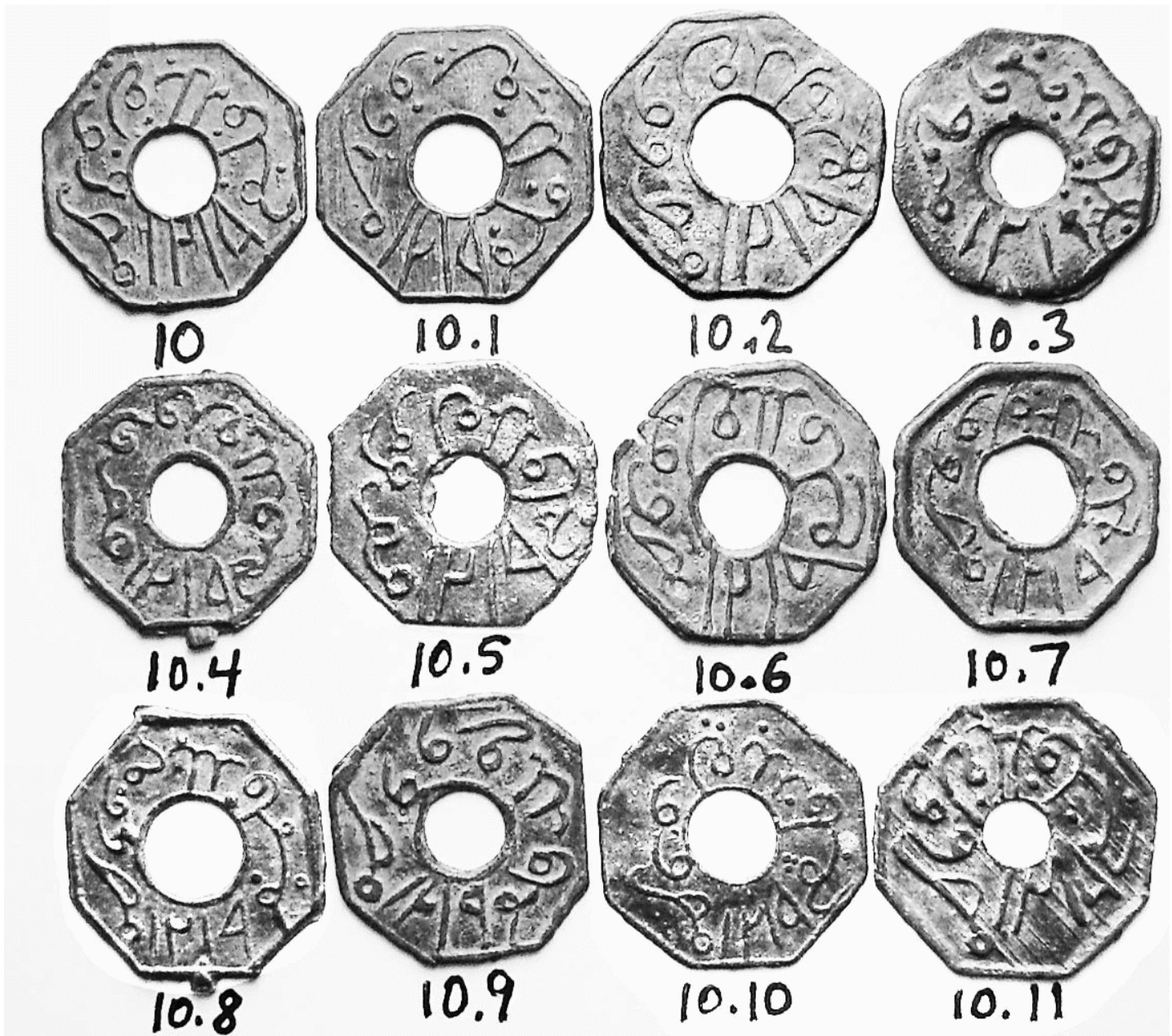
Octagonal with round central hole, Millies 195-97, 17-18 mm, R1

Stylistic varieties:

10.1 R5 10.2 R6 10.3 R4 10.4 R6 10.5 R9

10.6 & 10.7 R8 10.8-12 & 12A all R10





Retrograde (mirror-image) varieties:

10.13 R4 **10.14** R8 **10.15** R10

10.16 2 reversed, R10 **10.17** relatively crude, R2

Bungled dates, in numerical order:

10.18 2, R10 **10.19** 11, R9 **10.20** 19, R10

10.21 121, very crude issue, most very weak, R6

10.22 121 retrograde, R10 **10.23** 129 retrograde, R8

10.24 219, R9 **10.25** 219, 9 backwards, R9
10.26 219 retrograde, R10 **10.27** 1011, R10 **10.28** 1091, R9
10.29 1111, R7 **10.30** 1211, R9 **10.31** 1216, R10
10.32 1218, R9 **10.33** 1291, R9 **10.34** 1619, R8
10.35 1911 retrograde, R10 **10.36** 2191, R10 **10.37** 11219, R10



Additional barbarous varieties:

10.38,39 R10 **10.40** R7 **10.41** R9

Smaller size:

10.42 15-16 mm, Millies 198, R5 **10.43** 15-16 mm, R10

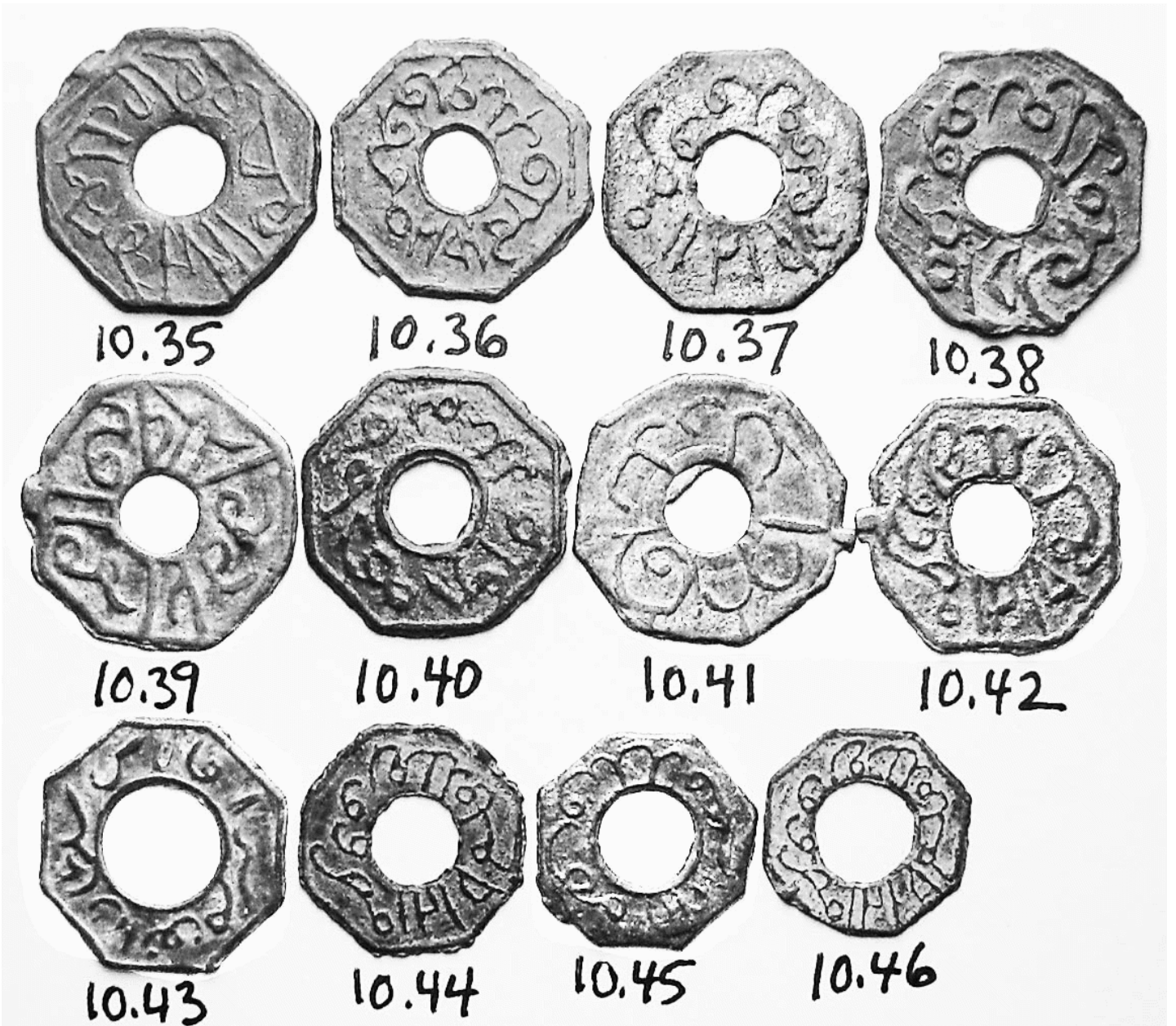
10.44 14 mm, R3 **10.45** 14 mm, R10

10.46 13 mm, Millies 199, R1 **10.47** 13 mm, date 221, R9 **10.48** 12 mm, date 12, R10 **10.49** 10 mm, R8



11 Undated, "Zarb fi bilad Palembang dar al-Islam," Millies 202-203, 19-20 mm, R1 (Hint: for identification of varieties, focus first on the part of the inscription at bottom.)

11.1 R1 11.2 18 mm, R6 11.3 R3 11.4 R5 11.5 R7



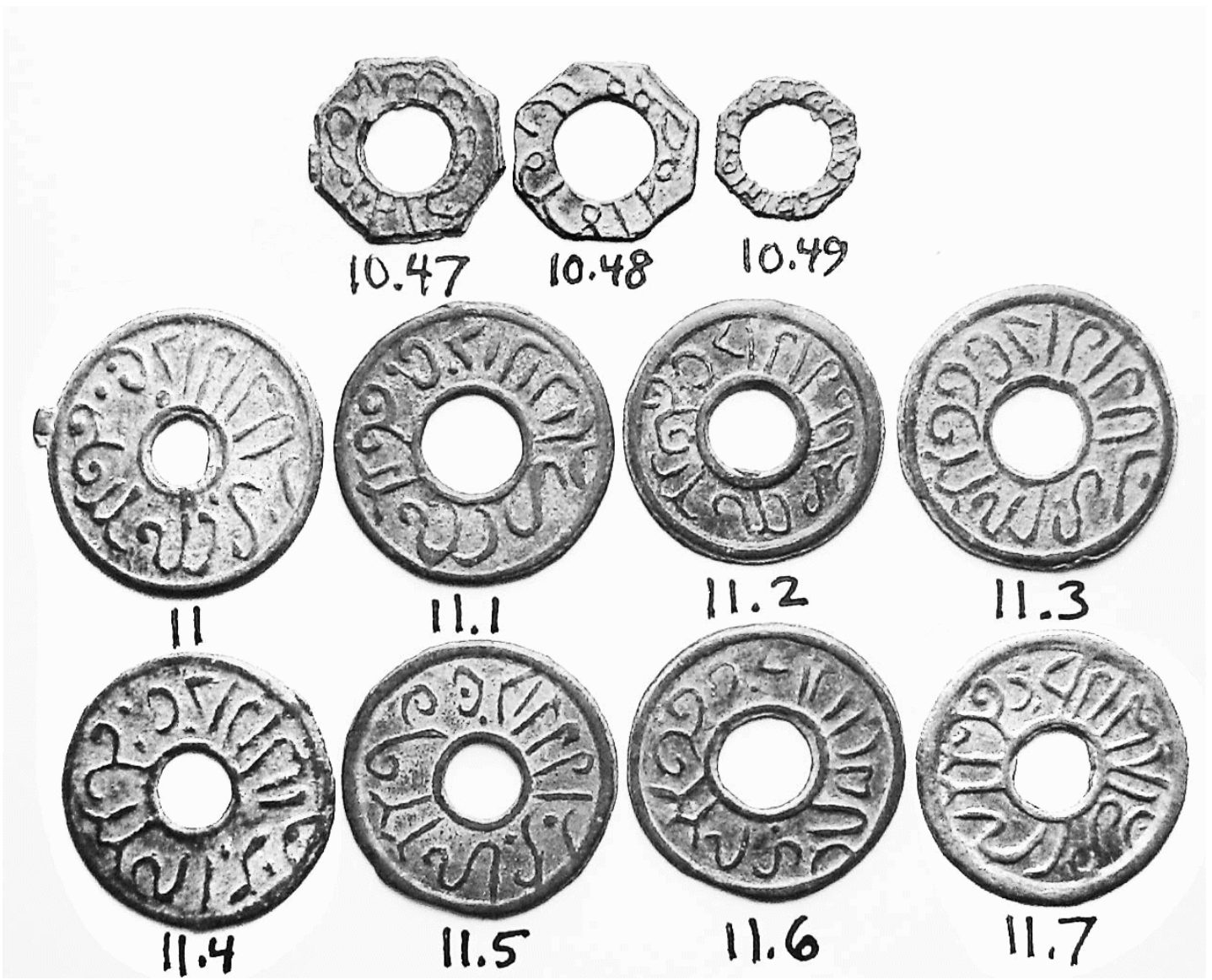
11.6 R7 11.7 R7 11.8 R8 11.9 R10 11.10 R9

11.11 R3 11.12 R1 11.13 R8 11.14 R10

Retrograde (mirror-image):

11.15 R5 11.16 R6 11.17 R7

11.18 R8 11.19 R9 11.20 R10

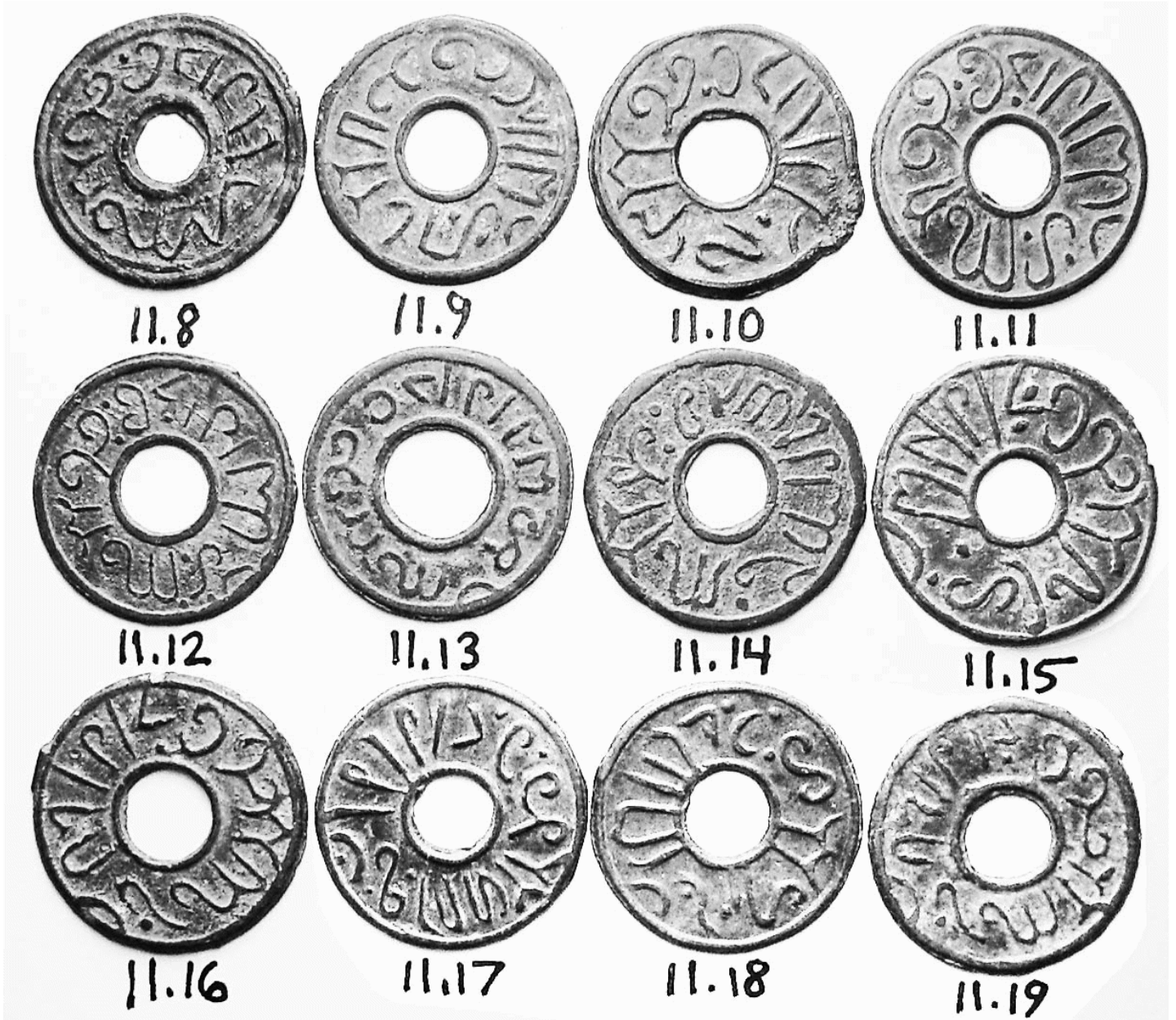


Additional varieties:

11.21 R3 11.22 R4 11.23 R9

11.24 (Note ">" at top instead of "<") R6 11.25 R8

11.26 R10 11.27 R8 11.28 R9 11.29 & 29A R10



11.30,31 R8 11.31A R10 11.32 R8 11.33 R10
11.34,35 R9 11.36 R7 11.37 R8 11.38-44 R10



11.20



11.21



11.22



11.23



11.24



11.25



11.26



11.27



11.28



11.29



11.29A



11.30

11.45,46 R9 11.47 R10 11.48 R8 11.49 R10
11.50-52 R9 11.53 R10



11.31



11.31A



11.32



11.33



11.34



11.35



11.36



11.37



11.38



11.39



11.40



11.41

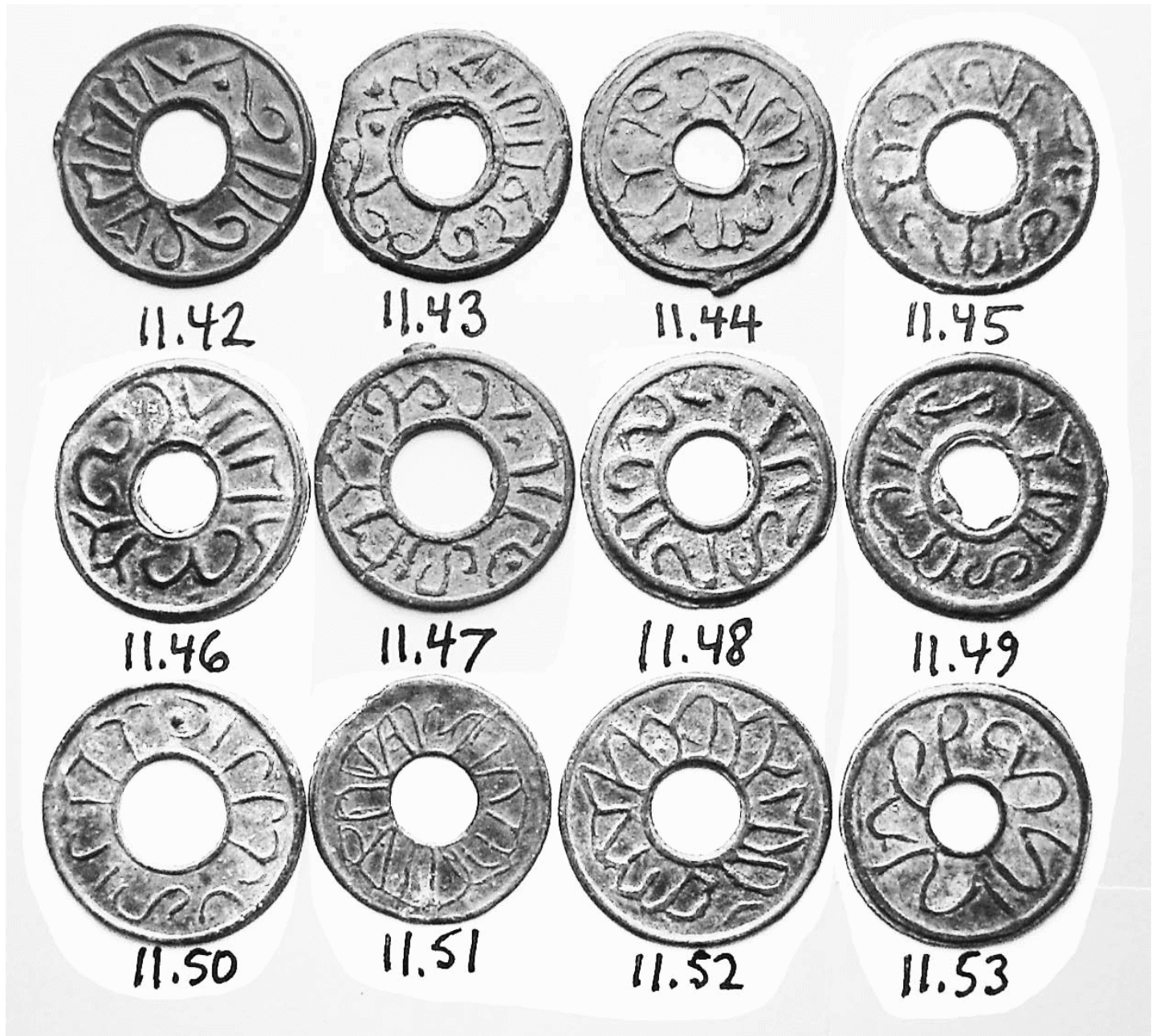
12 Similar but legend differs, Millies 204, 19 mm, R5
12.1 R7

13 Barbarous variant of Type 11? Very different, 19 mm, R7

14 Another undated type similar to previous, readily disting-uished by the character like a "2," 19-20 mm, Millies 201, R1

14.1 R6 14.2 R4 14.3 R9 14.4 R5 14.5 R9

Retrograde: 14.6 R10 14.7 R9



15 Similar to last but lacking the "2" shaped character; also similar to Type 12 but with double loop formation at left; 19-20 mm, R5

15.1 R10 **15.2** lacks "YY" character, R10

15.3,4 Double loops on right, R8

16 Small size, 15 mm, R1, but nice ones much scarcer.

16.1 Retrograde, R6 **16.2** R5 **16.3** R10 **16.4** R6

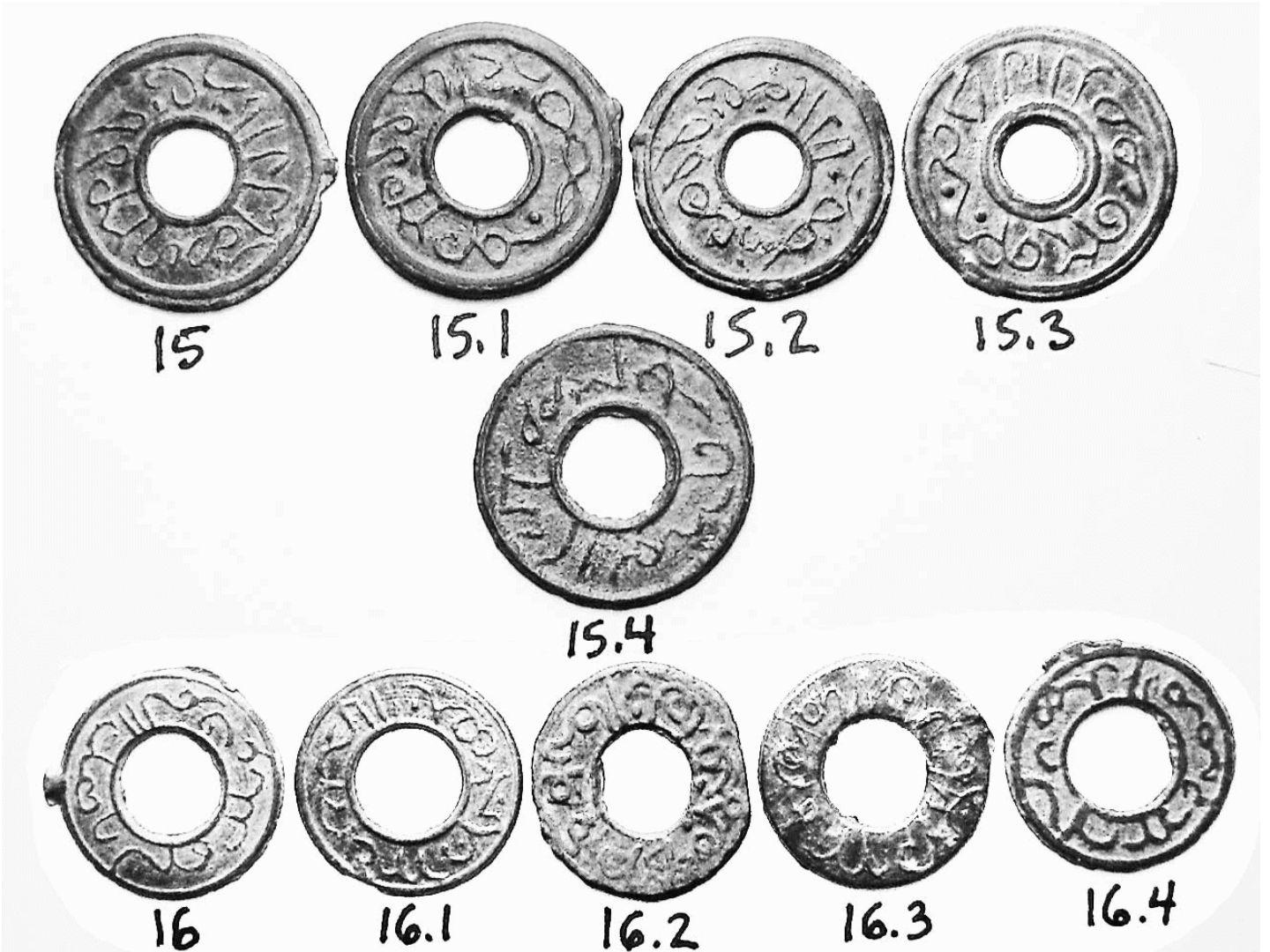


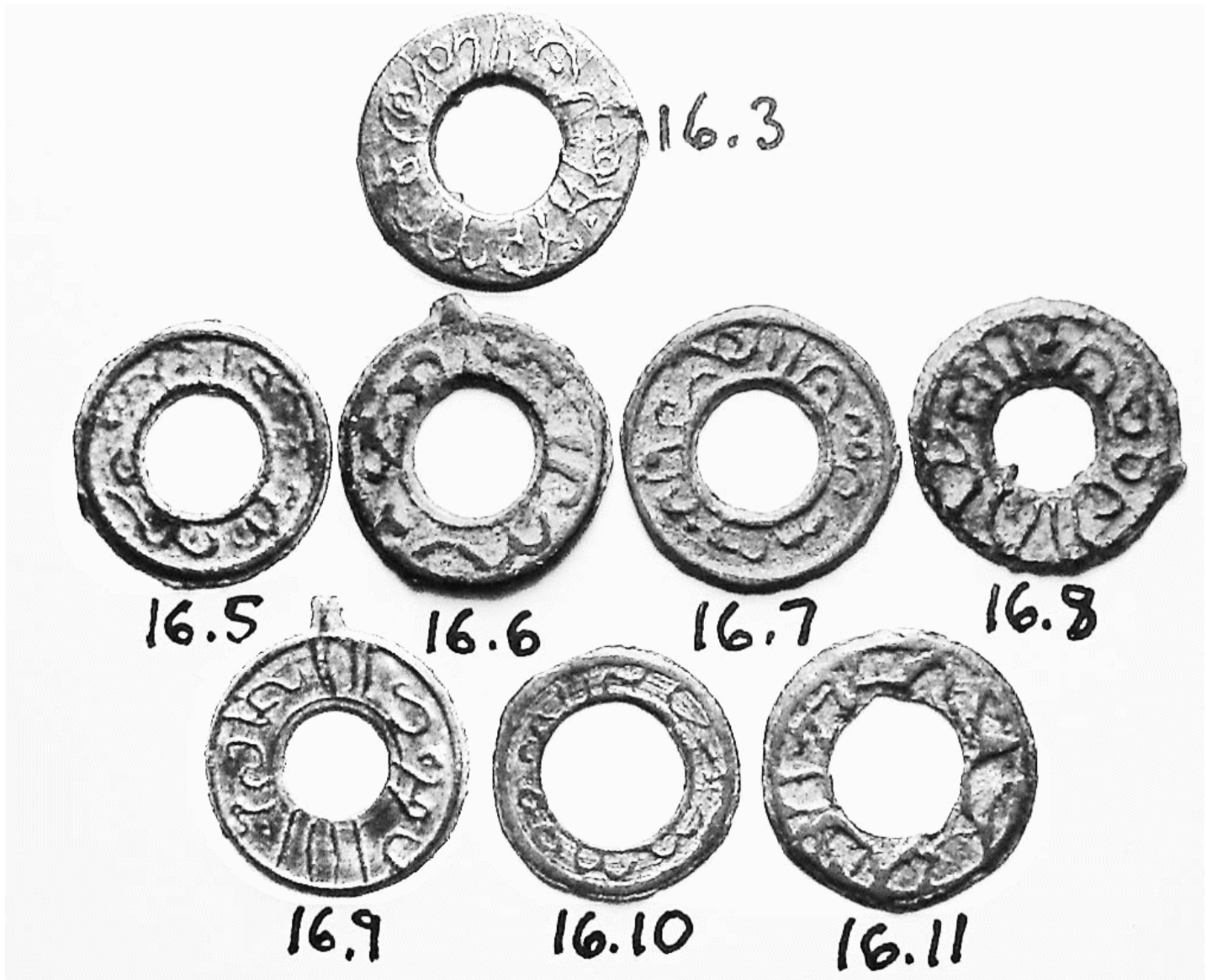
16.5 14 mm, R5 16.6 R8 16.7 R10 16.8 R9

16.9 Many variants with S-like characters at right & left and some parallel lines at top and/or bottom, R6

16.10 13-14 mm with large central hole, R6

16.11 Extremely crude pseudo-legends; many permutations; enough like this found to warrant a listing, R6





17 Four characters around square hole, "Alaa min sultan," 18 mm, Millies 206; often with incomplete flans. Dating uncertain; some sources say Eighteenth Century. (Note, a F+ was reported sold at \$75 by "Anything Anywhere," 7/14) R2

17.1 16-17 mm, Millies 207, R2

17.2 15 mm, large central hole, R6

17.3 Retrograde (mirror image), Millies 208, 17-18 mm, R8

17.4 Characters at sides inverted; bottom character not retrograde, 17 mm, R7

17.5 Same but right character not inverted, 17 mm, R10

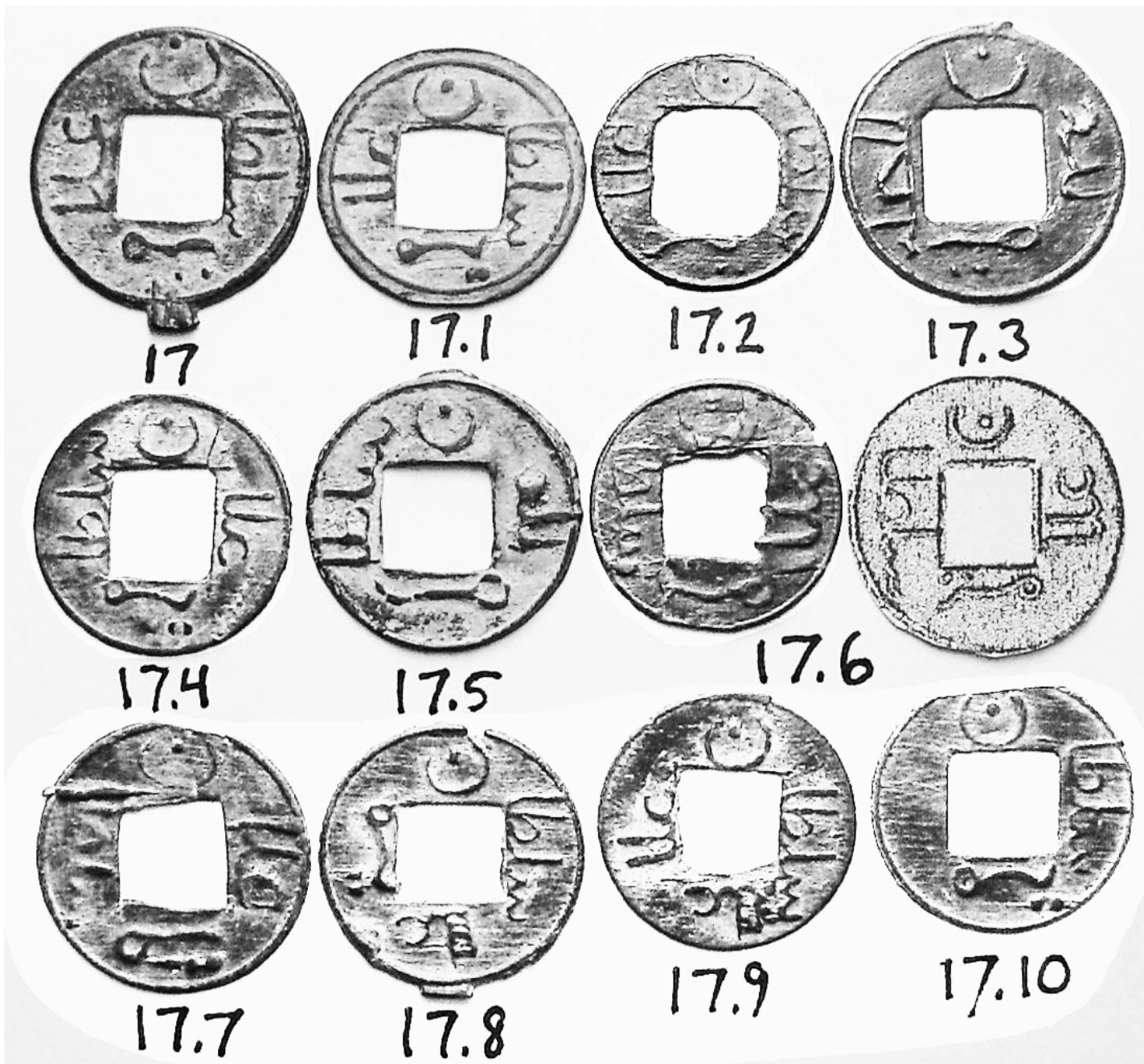
17.6 Characters at right & left face the other way, Millies 209, 16 mm, R10 (only one low grade example found; hence the Millies picture is being shown here as well)

17.7 Same but only left character faces the other way, R10

17.8 Characters at left & bottom switched, 16 mm, R10

17.9 Left character repeated at bottom, 16 mm, R10

17.10 Left character omitted, 16 mm, R10



18 As Type 17 but round central hole, 19-20 mm, R4, but much rarer in passable condition.

18.1 17-18 mm with large central hole, characters very shallow and weak, R9

18.2 Right and left characters switched & inverted, 20 mm, R9

19 This is not actually a Palembang coin, but is being included because it has sometimes been wrongly so attributed and also, indeed, a fair number of these did turn up in the Palembang river hoards. The coin is from the Demak Sultanate, on Java, of Pangeran al-Patah, 1475-1518; 19 mm



18



18.1



18.2



19