THE HISTORY OF TABORA 15-RUPEE PIECE

by D. D. Yonge

If I may be forgiven for writing once more on this subject I would like to record the information which I have now collected. There is surrounding this coin a considerable accretion of romantic but unfounded stories which should be discarded. The true story itself is fascinating enough and can, I think, be established with certainty.

There is little published information in English. But, as I might have suspected, German sources are by no means as silent. Indeed, in the course of tracing references to the Tabora mint published in Germany during and just after the 1914—18 war I was delighted to discover that Professor Schumacher, who was directly in charge of the gold minting, it still alive and well. He has proved a stimulating correspondent and, of course, a most authoritative source of information.

At the beginning of 1916 the German authorities found themselves hampered by a shortage of metallic currency caused by hoarding. It was accordingly decided to relieve the Deutsch Ost Afrika Bank of the obligation to issue coins in exchange for currency notes until six months after the cessation of hostilities. It may be logically assumed that this decision also released, for disposal afresh, the bar gold which had hitherto been held as backing for the locally printed Interim bank notes.

This gold comprised 250 kilograms or more (1), most if not all produced by the Sekenke mines after the allied naval blockade had made its export impossible. The amount is consistent with pre-war production figures. It was decided to mint it into 15 rupee pieces as a reinforcement for the Interim notes which by their unprepossessing appearance could not have inspired great confidence. (2) At the same time it was decided to strike large quantities of brass and copper 20 and 5 Heller pieces. (3)

A mint was accordingly set up in the railway workshops at Tabora. Schumacher, who was then 32 years old, had charge of striking the gold and Krenkel, working in all probability under Schumacher, the brass and copper. The staff consisted—as regards the gold—of two Indians and six Africans working under the supervision of a European, together with seven Sinhalese goldsmiths recruited in Dar es Salaam.

Special security measures were of course required for the striking of gold, and a shed made of corrugated iron was erected in the workshops area. Within it the necessary equipment was assembled. It was quite simple and no use appears to have been made of machinery from maritime wrecks. There were blacksmiths' forges for

NOTES

(1) The precise quantity is difficult to establish. The Sekenke bullion contained as much as a fifth in weight of silver, and it is not clear whether the expressions used — "Sekenke gold" "raw gold" and "bullion" — are meant to include this extra weight. Schumacher used 87.077 kilos of fine gold and says he left "200 kilos" uncoined. Governor Schnee speaks of enough gold to strike one million marks' worth of coins, while his wife and Krenkel refer to enough bullion to strike half a million (sc. rupees') worth of coins. The Tanganyika Handbook 1930, quoting a return submitted on 6.6.1916 by the Bank, gives "250 kilos approx, worth Rs. 521,400". At the tariff and fineness fixed, this was in fact enough for only 868,000 marks worth of coins.

(2) Five paper rupees were being given for one of silver (Krenkel).

(3) The minting of hellers got under way first, commencing in February. During the whole period of its operation, up to mid-September, the Tabora mint turned out 1,634,700 twenty-heller, 302,000 five-heller and 16,198 fifteen rupee coins, making a grand total of 585,010. rupees in face value. (Schumacher)

melting the metal, and crucibles from Sekenke mine; a mill for rolling rubber sheets was brought from Dar es Salaam (4) and adapted for rolling ingots into strips of metal; a small hand press was used to punch out blanks from the hot strip; lastly, a hydraulic pipe-bending machine, operated by hand, was modified for the actual striking process.

It would have been preferred to have placed a portrait of the Emperor on the gold pieces, but the skill and the implements needed for doing so were lacking .(5) A competition for the best obverse design, a charging elephant with Kilimanjaro (6) as background, was won by a railways employee, R. Voght, and his drawing executed by Vattheare, (7) who also engraved the reverse die of the imperial eagle, with its surrounding legend.

Schumacher records with justifiable pride the consistency of weight (8) he achieved for his pieces with this heterogeneous equipment. His roller was quite incapable of producing strips of such accurate thickness that all blanks punched from them would weigh the same. He accordingly rolled to something more than the minimum thickness and punched overweight blanks which were then filed and emery papered down to the requisite weight by hand.

This work was entrusted to the seven goldsmiths, who were soon each turning out up to thirty adjusted blanks a day. It was also their task to scrub the pieces, after they had been struck, (9) with brass brushes and to polish them with soap tree oil.

The pipe bending machine, after $2\frac{1}{2}$ months of continuous use, broke down. It had been a simple piece of mechanism consisting, briefly, of an upper, fixed platform in which the obverse die was mounted, and a lower movable platform carrying the reverse die which was forced up against the obverse die by hydraulic pressure. The blank was placed on the lower platform within a spacing ring which prevented the two dies coming too close together and squashing the blank out into more than the set diameter. (10) There were guides to control the movement of the lower platform which must however have allowed a certain amount of play. Although the dies were rotated 120° between strikes, this would have caused considerable wear, particularly on the moving die. After the breakdown of this machine the work of striking the coins (I am not certain whether that of preparing the blanks was included) was transferred to Lulanguru, 25 km. west of Tabora. Here a press for extracting oil from groundnuts (11) was adapted for use; it was steam driven and a great deal more efficient than the hand press, as production figures confirm.

The coin when encountered today varies in colour from a reddish to a light gold. This is accounted for by the varying amounts of copper it contains. The bullion produced by the Sekenke mine contained from 15 to 20% of silver; it was not refined

(4) Where it had been one of the exhibits at a trade show held in 1914 (Schumacher). Frau Schnee derives the crucibles, too, from this exhibition, but it is more probable they came from Sekenke. They were a source of trouble (Tanganyika Handbook) but more probably in connexion with melting brass, not gold.

(5) Frau Schnee.

(6) Schumacher. The likeness is hard to discern however. Frankly I think none was attempted any more than is the case with the British East African silver the reverse of which it so strikingly resembles.

(7) Freeman Grenville.

(8) The permissible error set by proclamation was plus or minus one hundredth. Schumacher achieved an overall average weight of 7.1689 gr. compared with the standard laid down which was 7.168 gr.

(9) To remove, and salvage, any loose fragments of gold thrown up by striking which would otherwise have been lost at once.

(10) No attempt was made to give the coin a "milled" edge by striking into a serrated collar. The edge was plain.

(11) It was still there in 1939 and described by B. L. Savory as "an old German steam engine..... for driving ..... one rusty machine for crushing groundnuts".

further before being exported. The German authorities had, for reasons of which this may well have been one, decided to produce a coin containing only 75% pure gold. It was accordingly necessary to add from 5% to 10% of copper to the alloy. The resulting piece weighed 7.168 gr. which is the same as the pure gold content of the 20—mark gold piece, to which it was tariffed as equivalent in value. Ignoring the silver content, it was therefore intrinsically worth 25% less than the regular gold pieces in circulation which it supplemented.

This variation in colour is found in coins of both reverse dies. The existence of two reverse dies is well-known; the second die can be readily identified by the two arabesques on either side of the eagle's head, that on the right extending beneath both the T. and the A of OSTAFRIKA in the legend whereas the first die it extends only beneath the A. Examined under high magnification the difference between the two is even more remarkable, the engraving of the second die seeming to be far cruder throughout the design, although underlying this crudity there is a precise correspondence in the relationship between one another of the trivial details of the design in each case. The explanation of this might be that the second die never in fact had a separate existence. It was simply the same die as before, heavily re-engraved. (12) After its intial engraving the die was tempered; the successive blows it struck when in use would have hardened it further. This would account for the apparently under engraving of the second die; the metal was harder to cut. But Schumacher, to whom I suggested this theory, will not accept it. It is within his recollection that he prudently had a second die made and used it at Lulanguru.

The story has gained wide currency in East Africa that coins from the second die are forgeries. It is quite untrue. Schumacher himself remembers the variety of the reverse clearly and in 1960 published a contradiction of the story. (13) It was first given publicity by Krenkel in 1925 (14,) but he must have been swayed by reports received after the fact from East Africa; the coin was fetching a high price and purchasers would naturally use the story as a means of depressing the price they had to offer. Krenkel in any case only gave grudging recognition to the story and, as we have seen, had no intimate knowledge of the gold minting operations. Coins with the second reverse are rather more common than those with the first (15), leading me to suspect that the new die was brought into use on the occasion of the move from Tabora to Lulanguru. Production figures given by Schumacher are as follows:—

April 15th (16) to 30th, 1916	548 pieces struck
May	2020
June	3827
July	4885
August	4918
Total	16,198

The transfer to Lulanguru took place at the end of June. Following my suggestion, therefore, some 6,395 may have been struck with the first die, and 9,803 with the second.

(12) I am grateful to Dr. Kraay of the Ashmolean Museum for this suggestion.

(13) The first description of the coin to be published outside Tanganyika appeared in Spink's Numismatic Circular in London in March 1917. It carries an illustration of the coin which is beyond doubt taken from the second version.

(14) Krenkel's report was incorporated by Kurt Jaeger in the earlier editions of his work. Schumacher then pointed out that Krenkel had erred, and in the 4th (1959) edition the mistake was corrected.

(15) This is the experience of a leading coin dealer in England. The first reverse is certainly not more frequent than the second.

(16) The proclamation authorizing the coin was signed by the Governor at Tabora on the same date. It was published in the official Gazette issued in Morogoro on 28.4.16.

What happened at the end? The British forces had broken through to the central railway line to the east of Tabora, capturing Dodoma on July 29th, and the Belgians were advancing from the west. After fighting had occurred at Urambo, Tabora fell on September 19th. Schumacher himself brought the last 1,500 pieces struck from Lulanguru and delivered them to the D.O.A. Bank at Tabora. They were immediately issued across the counter. The balance of uncoined gold , some 200 kg. (17) by Schumacher's reckoning, was "sold to a rich Arab", than which, we may agree, no better means of keeping it out of the hands of the Allies coud have been devised. Schumacher buried the dies the night before being captured by the Belgians. (18)

The coin rapidly acquired value as a collector's item and souvenir. Schumacher himself was closely questioned as to the whereabouts of the gold by the Belgians but contrived to carry 40 of the coins away with him. Of these, 39 weretaken off him, he says, at New Scotland Yard where he was further interrogated prior to repatriation as a non-combattant. The wife of the German Governor, Frau Schnee, was less fortunate. She writes that 200 francs were soon being paid for the coin, and she was not permitted to carry any away with her.

The Tabora 15 rupee piece cannot be considered a great numismatic rarity, but that does not mean it is easy to acquire. I doubt whether it circulated a great deal; it is far more likely that during the period of its currency it was hoarded as often as were the coins it was designed to supplement. Thereafter, as a curio, it was sought by many people besides coin collectors. With its rough fabric and low gold content bullion merchants would have hesitated to pay well or readily for it as gold; this would tend to save it from the melting pot. But it is a most historical coin. Ignoring commemorative, presentation and prestige pieces, Tanganyika can, I think, claim that at Tabora gold coins were minted for general circulation for the last time in history.

(17) See footnote (1)

(18) The possibility of the dies being dug up and used to produce unofficial pieces can be disregarded. The second reverse is not that much commoner than the first, nor would the mere possession of dies, and gold to strike, convey the ability to produce pieces indistinguishable in fabric from genuine ones. There is no evidence of an unofficially struck sub-variety of the piece bearing the second reverse.



OBVERSE



REVERSE: FIRST DIE



REVERSE SECOND DIE

CORRESPONDENCE

TABORA 15 RUPEE PIECE

Dear Sir,

I fear that my article on the Tabora 15 Rupee Piece, which you published in T.N.R. no. 62, may in places be difficult to understand without reference to the bibliography I appended to the article, but which was unfortunately omitted in the journal. Could it perhaps be printed in your next number?

May I also be allowed to point out a couple of misprints? On page 51, line 19, "under engraving" should read "cruder engraving", while the captions for the two reverse dies have been transposed.

Yours faithfully,

D. D. Yonge.

Dutch Cottage,
Compton,
Winchester. 8.x.64.

We apologise for this unfortunate omission. Mr. Yonge's bibliography is printed here for reference. Ed.

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