



Sung-Dynasty silver ingot

Silver was widely used during the Sung Dynasty. Government revenue, such as commercial, salt, tea, mining, cultivation and personal taxes, and Government expenditure, such as salaries of civil servants and military personnel, civil-disaster aid and other miscellaneous expenditure, were all paid in silver. In the early years of the Southern Sung Dynasty, paper currencies (jiaozi and huizi) had depreciated so much, because of over-supply, that transactions were conducted with silver ingots and copper coins only.

The photo shows a 25-tael (about 935 grams) Sung-Dynasty silver ingot. The ingot is shaped like a kidney, or one of the weights commonly used at the time. This was a popular shape for silver ingots in the Sung, Tang, Yuan and Ming Dynasties.

The marking on the ingot reads "travel tax" (a type of business tax, or tax imposed on merchants for entering and leaving the capital). It also includes the words "outside the Rosefinch Gate, Zhang Yi-lang of the north", which are the location of the mint and the name of the silversmith.

Emperors of the Yuan Dynasty liked to make silver ingots for giving out as rewards to subjects who had made significant contributions to the empire. They called these ingots "yuan chao zhi bao" (treasure of the Yuan Dynasty) and have the marking "yuan bao" pressed on the ingots. Because of this, ingots are also called "yuan bao".



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