**N21359 Coins (9), Australia, N. E. Arnhemland. Comprising 5 ex Kilwa Sultanate, (AD 1294-1493) and 4 European low countries (AD 1690-1784). (CI).**

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This group of minor copper coins was discovered over a period of time by Mr M Isenberg, during the Second World War, in the same immediate beach area on Marchinbar Island which lies about 75 miles to the north of Arnhemland and is part of the Wessell Group.

These coins cannot be classed as a hoard as they are involuntary losses, probably by wreck, falling into two unrelated sub-groups whose only connection is the accident of locality.  
The first of these sub-groups contains five coins from the Kilwa Sultanate in East Africa in the vicinity of Tanzania. These coins cannot be dated exactly as they do not bear dates. The chronology and dating of the Kilwa Sultans is still a matter for debate and dates suggested here are at best tentative.  
These Sultans are represented: Sulaiman ibn al-Hasan (2); Ali ibn al-Hasan (2); al-Hasan ibn Sulaiman (1). The date span suggested by current research is from about AD 1150 to about AD 1333.

It is possible that these coins represent a Kilwa trading expedition as they were renowned as sailors. It is more likely however, that they are connected with Portuguese explorations in the 16th Century, east of the Grand Meridian (129 E), which divided the world into spheres of Spanish and Portuguese influence.

The Portuguese sacked Kilwa in AD 1505 and probably conscripted these experienced sailors for service in their ships. By **AD 1519/20 the Portuguese** had established a major trading post and fort in Ambon, to the near north of Australia (1200kms – 600 to Jamdena in Moluccas Islands). Theoretically, any move east of this line would have been an invasion of the Spanish sphere of influence inviting dire consequences back in Europe. Any explorations would thus be conducted in the greatest secrecy, so that we can only guess the extent of Portuguese explorations of Australia. It is believed that they were extensive and may have covered the whole east coast of the continent.

An eye witness to the sack of Kilwa in AD 1505, a German named Hans Mayr, noted that Â?Kilwas had copper coins like our ceptis, four being equally to one real: Portuguese coins have the same value there as at home. Â? This is evidence that Portuguese and Kilwa coins, in the low values at least, circulated at parity. Islamic copper coins have an extremely long circulating life and there is nothing unusual about coin up to 400 years old still being in circulation in mediaeval times.

It is likely then that these Kilwa coins are relics of an early Portuguese exploration around the coast of Northern Australia. They are certainly the oldest coins yet found in an Australian context.

The second sub-group appears to have no connection with the Kilwa group other than sharing the same locality at a probable remove of some 250 years. It comprises four doits struck in the Low Countries for use by the Dutch East India Company ranging from AD 1690 to 1784. Coins of these types are found from time to time on the coasts of Western and Northern Australia. They provide evidence of a possible Dutch wreck in this area, or of some Dutch contact.

- From Sydney Mint Museum label written by curator, Major HP (Pat) Boland, c1982

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**Description**

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[[http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/images/icons/i_icon.gif](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=305381&search=kilwa+coins&images=&c=&s=#_10)The](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=305381&search=kilwa+coins&images=&c=&s=" \l "_10) **[Registration Number](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=305381&search=kilwa+coins&images=&c=&s=" \l "_10)** [of an object is a unique identifying number applied by the museum at the point of acquisition. Current numbering format comprises the year of acquisition, followed by a sequential number. For example, '2007/45' is the Registration Number that represents the 45th acquisition in the year 2007.](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=305381&search=kilwa+coins&images=&c=&s=" \l "_10) **Registration number**

N21359

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**Acquisition credit line**

Gift of M. Isenberg, 1985

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The Portuguese Fort on Kilwa Kisiwani, dating from the 17th century later used by the Omanis from Zanzibar during the 19th century. (Photo by Bill Jeffery 2011)



The Kilwa coin



820 CE: A map by Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi of the Sea of Java includes the Cape York Pensinsula, a "V" shaped Gulf of Carpentaria, and a curved Arnhem Land.

(A later map, by Abu Isak Al-Farisi Istakhari in 934 CE, also includes an outline of the northern coast of Australia.)

The Islamic Council of Victoria, <http://www.icv.org.au/history2.shtml>, citing Eric B.Whitehouse, Australia in Old Maps 820-1770, Boolarong Press, Queensland, 1995 p.65-66.

1944 Australian Radar Unit

N21359-6 Coin, Netherlands, Dutch East India Co., Doit, Gelderland Mint, 1690, copper alloy.  
  
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