

Evolution of Sassanids Coins at the Beginning of Islam

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ABSTRACT

Coins are considered the most important human memorials. They reflect the cultural elements of different countries. In addition to cultural issues, they can reveal the historical anecdote of the past conquerors and the defeated people. Having an ancient background, Iran territory had not been excepted from the historical adventure of the coins. Iranian coins had various icons and reflected the event from the Achaemenid era to Sassanids times. They were undoubtedly valid all around the territory during glorious Sassanids times. They also had their validity as well as their cultural role and importance for a long time after Sassanids decadence. Accordingly, they played an important role in Muslim trading from the beginning of Islam to A'bd-ul-Mālik Marvān time. This article aimed to study the changes in Iranian coins from the Sassanids times to the Umayyad dynasty.

Keywords: Coin, Iranian coins, Sassanids, Sassanid Arab, Umayyad

INTRODUCTION

One of the research branches relating to history and archeology is numismatics. Coins are valid documents considered as an illustrated history of mythology, customs, and governing method of civilizations and empires of the world. These very important documents are more resistant than other ancient and historical materials. They maintain their structure well, unlike perishable elements such as wood, cloth, bone, skin, and even adobe. Due to this issue, their importance will increase more than others. Nowadays, we know well that all human trades and bargaining had been performed by exchanging goods and materials before the advent of coins. However, with the start of the metal era (6000 BC), the human economics system was changed immensely; the explorations of the archeologists presented many interesting points worldwide before adverting the coins. The older men of that time prepared ingot, ring, and bar-shaped objects from different metals such as copper, silver, and gold. They also used them in their bargains. Some examples include the rings explored in Demergān exploration in Armenia in (1889), the *Outen* Egyptian rings, and copper rods explored in Mohenjo-dāro explorations in present Pakistan. Such rings also have been obtained in Šūša exploration in 2000 BC. In addition, there are some explored silver rings of Noushijan Tappe that scientists believe belonged to the Medes times (Bivar, 1971: 97–11). The Greek historian Herodotus believed that Lydians were the first to mint gold and silver coins (First book, 94th paragraph).¹ However, the coins with certain names and carats were created during the time of Dāryuš, the great Achaemenid in Iran, in 515 BC (Schmitt, 1985: 422). At that time, two kinds of coins, golden coins called Daric and silver coins called Shekel, were used.

The picture of the king standing with a jagged crown on his head and an arc and spear in hand were carved on the coins. Since it showed an Archer's characteristics, Greece called these Achaemenid Iranian coins *Sāzītārī*, which means an Archer (Rezāie Bāghbidi, 2012: 5). Also, there was a quiver full of arrows on the coins, whereas, on the Shekel coins, the king held a dagger instead of a spear.

Achaemenid Darics had special credit at that time. In other words, they were considered the most valuable economic devices. In addition, some Achaemenid governors minted coins in their territory. The Achaemenid coins at the time of Ardašir II and III had been changed a little



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¹ Herodotus, Translate. A.D. Godley, 4 vols, Cambridge, 1920.

so that the picture of the Archer holding an arc in one hand and a spear on the other hand had been changed into an Archer who was shooting arrows. There were many Achaemenid coins explored all around the world at that time. For example, 300 Daric coins belonging to Dāryuš and Xerxes' time were obtained from a region in Egypt around Suez Canal. After the Achaemenid Kingdom was overthrown in 330 BC, their coins had credit up to a century after them, and so some banks still minted the Achaemenid coins. This is very considerable from cultural and historical points of view these days (Ibid, 9–10).

After the Achaemenid Kingdom was overthrown by Macedonian Alexander in 323 BC, Iran's territory was in captivity of the Macedonian Conqueror and his successors for 100 years. Although the Achaemenid coins still had their values, the young conqueror ordered to mint a new coin with his picture. It is considered one of the artistic masterpieces of the ancient world. The Seleucid era, considered the successors of Alexander in Iran, also had left various coins. Although there was no writing on Achaemenid coins, the name of their governor was minted on the coins left by Seleucid in the old Greek writing (Āzami Sangsari, 1970: 10).

After a conflict among Macedonia, Parthians with Arašk's leadership could ruin Seleucid from any part of Iran. They gradually dominated Iran totally. Parthian Mehrdād I was a person who could give back the Achaemenid who lost glory to Iran in 138 BC. It is more interesting to know that 15 years after him, Mehrdād II reached Iran to a superior level again in 123 BC.

Although Parthian has left several ancient buildings, their coins are the most important documents to familiarize with this glorious ancient dynasty. Despite Macedonia and Achaemenid, an interesting point about Parthian's coins is that they were not gold. However, there was just one exception about Venen kingdom. It is said that Venen used Roman hireling in his army. These soldiers demanded their wages in golden coins. This article's writer believes that the reason was belief basis, since Parthians had high financial and economic power like Seleucid and Achaemenid. In addition, the title of their coins should be cited as the Greek word *Phil Helen*, the lover of Greece. In addition, many coins included Greek goddesses such as Apollo, Zeus, Nike, Athena, and Hercules.

Nevertheless, during Parthian Balāsh I time, this was not true. In a country, the governor's name in Parthian Pahlavi writing was minted on their coins, and instead of the Greek goddess, they minted a picture of a firework on their coins (Derakhshi, Shāhbazi; 2015: 311–336) while sometimes during Parthian, some governors such as *Fartedārān* (Alram, 1987) and *Elymais* (Alram, 1986) minted independent coins in some region of Iran like Fars and Khuzestān, and Sassanid coins became intensively common after Sassani Ardašir winning over Parthian Ardavān in 224 AD. At that time, Iran was totally under their dominion.

Accordingly, Sassanid coins are considered as the most valuable document of Iran's history and culture. Sassanid minted gold, silver, and bronze coins. The gold coins are called Dinar, and the silver ones are called Dirham. It can be seen in the picture of the Sassanid kings with their special crown and their names in Pahlavi writing on these coins. Fireplace was also an important issue on these coins (Bayāni, 2006). The importance of the Sassanid coins was so great that they significantly impacted the coinage at the beginning of Islam. What was mentioned previously in this article was a brief description of Iranian coins' changes before the advent of Islam. The following will be the study of Islamic coins and their minting process in Iran.

THE FIRST COINS AFTER SASSANID ERA

From Sassanid Government's defeat by Arabs to Zand Dynasty's time, Iranian coins along with these changes had undergone many evolutions. Each of them reflects the culture of Iran country by itself. Yazdgerd III, the last Sassanid king, was killed in Merv in 652 AD. However, the current of Sassanid coinage was still done in the north of Iran. In Gilān, *Gāvbarān* family was governing and called themselves the generation of the Sassanid Jāmāsb. They have left numerous beautiful coins as memorials which contained the picture of Khosrow Parviz, but the name of a leader of Tabarestān was on them rather than Khosrow Parviz's name. Fireplace also can be seen on them. Further, the name of the dynasty's governors included Gīl, Dābokeh, Farkhān, and Dāzmehr. The last of them was Spāhpat Khorshid, from whom also such coins as Sassanid coins had left (Āzami Sangsari, 1973: 171). Despite his severe resistance in front of Mansour Abbāsi, Spāhpat Khorshid inevitably accepted defeat in 144 AH, still the mint of these coins constantly continued up to a few years after him (Figure 1).

TABARESTĀNI ARAB COINS

After Abbasid had dominated on Tabarestān, they governed this region of Iran for about 52 years. As mentioned above, Abbasid governors still minted the coins of Tabarestān's rulers, which was an imitation of its Sassani origin. The difference was that the new governors minted the name of Abbasid Caliphate in Pahlavi or sometimes Kufi writing on the coins, Omar-ibn-Ā'la and Khāled were from these governors.

However, there were many changes to these coins during the governing time of Fadil-ibn-Sahl who is considered the last governor of Tabarestān by the way (Sarfarūz, 2000: 131), because the picture of Khosrow Parviz had been cleared on the coins and the icon of fireplace had been ruined from them. In addition, his name was seen on one side of the coins, and on the other side, a phrase of Muslims, *lā 'ilāha 'illā llāhu Muḥammadun rasūlu llāhi* means there is no God except Allāh Mohammad is the prophet of Allāh was seen (Figure 2). It is obvious that Tabarestān's people



Figure 1.
The Coin of Tabarestān Governor, Spāhpat Khorshid, Reflects Sassanid Tradition at the Beginning of Islam (<https://wikipedia.org/wiki>).

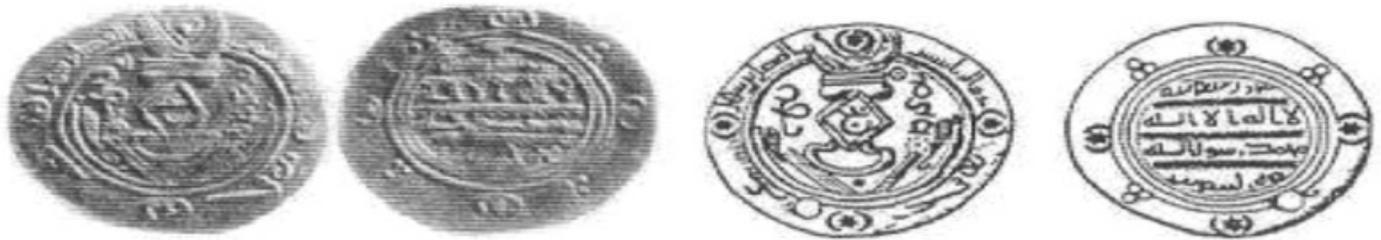


Figure 2.
The Coin of the Arab-Tabarestān Governors at the Beginning of Islam (Fazeli, 2012: 112).

had adhered to the Sassanid rituals. Moreover, these coins reflect the above claim.

UMAYYAD COINS

It is said that the current money of the Islamic era had been the Sassanid Dirhams and Dinars from the eve of Islam to Umayyad time. Some coins were also minted, which were well-known as Arab-Sassani then. Further, they were minted mostly from the coins which belonged to the end domination of Yazdgerd III. After 31 AH, mottos such as *Bismillāh*, *Barekat*, and *Rabbi Allāh* had been written on the Sassani coins. In addition, they almost had been without the name of governor or Calipha for 10 years. It was in the Muawiah time that the name of Khosrow, Sassani governor, was left out of the coins (Figure 3), and the name of Muawiah was minted in Sassani-Pahlavi writing on those coins (Belzari, 1975: 466–470).

Other Umayyad rulers continued their method of coinage after Muawiah. Further, an interesting coin was minted in Istakhr during Bashar-ibn-Marvān, A'bd-al-Malik Marvān's brother. In addition, the ruler's name in Pahlavi's writing was on this coin. However, the phrase of witness to Allāh as God and Mohammad as God's prophet was written around it. Also, the ruler or

Calipha's picture as he was making prayers rather than the picture of a fireplace was minted on the back of the coin (Figure 4).

According to historians, it is during A'bd-al-Malik Marvān's era that the first Islamic coins were minted. There were no human pictures or Pahlavi writing on this coin. Further, the Quran verses called *Ikhlas* was seen on one side of the coin, and on the other side, an Islamic sentence *lā 'ilāha 'illā*



Figure 3.
Muawiah's Coin on Which His Name Was Minted in Pahlavi Writing, The Picture of Khosrow II (https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Muawiya_II).



Figure 4.
Bashar-ibn-Marvān's Coin: Elimination of the Sassanid Fireplace From the Coin and the Picture of the Ruler Making Prayers (<https://publicinsta.com/dKJEK-jzLX>).



Figure 5.
A *bd-al-Malik Marvān's* Coin and Passing From Sassanid Tradition (<http://malekmuseum.org/artifact/5001.06.01689/>).

llāhu waḥdahu lā šarīka lahu means there is no God except Allāh and the God is just one was seen (Figure 5).

After that time, the previous method of coinage such as Sassanid method was left out. Meanwhile, the Caliphas dominated Iran and the other Islamic territories and minted a coin on which was minted Arabic and Kufi writing, almost since 79 AH. Arab-Sassani coins were replaced by other coins anymore (Bates, 1987: 225).

CONCLUSION

The above-mentioned issues were a brief overview of the evolution of Iranian coins from the eve of Islam to the end of Umayyad caliphate. As mentioned above, Sassanid coins not only stayed in history, culture, and economy of Iran even after Sassanid decadence but also maintained their culture and role in Iran and Islam territory for years. This resulted from the profound civilization of the Sassanid dynasty, which had governed Iran country about five centuries. However, Sassanid coins change into Islamic form and have made context for other historical times of Iran up to the present time.

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