



Stefan Heidemann
Calligraphy on Islamic Coins.
In: Jürgen Wasim Frembgen (ed.):
The Aura of Alif. The Art of Writing in Islam
Munich et al.: Prestel, 2010, pp. 161-171.



Contents

Claudius Müller	7	<i>Foreword</i>
Jürgen Wasim Frembgen	12	<i>Introduction</i>
Claus-Peter Haase	31	<i>Arabic Calligraphy</i>
Jürgen Wasim Frembgen	79	<i>Harmony of Lines. Islamic Calligraphy from Ottoman Dervish Lodges</i>
Karl Schlamming	91	<i>The Fine Scratching of the Reed Pen and the Mason's Script. On Calligraphy and Islamic Architecture</i>
Lorenz Korn	103	<i>Religious Inscriptions in Islamic Architecture</i>
Avinoam Shalem	127	<i>If Objects Could Speak</i>
Mohamed Rahim	149	<i>Arabic Epitaphs from the Near East</i>
Stefan Heidemann	161	<i>Calligraphy on Islamic Coins</i>
Doris Behrens-Abouseif	173	<i>A Late Mamluk Lidded Tray with Poetic Inscriptions</i>
Maryam Ekhtiar	187	<i>An Inscriptional Carpet from Anatolia</i>
Venetia Porter & Jürgen Wasim Frembgen	193	<i>Silver Amulets with Inscriptions from Iran and Afghanistan</i>
Jamal J. Elias	211	<i>Truck Calligraphy in Pakistan</i>
Jürgen Wasim Frembgen	225	<i>Calligraphy in the World of Sufi Shrines in Pakistan</i>
	237	<i>References and Notes</i>
	247	<i>Catalogue</i>
	254	<i>Acknowledgements</i>
	255	<i>Authors</i>
	256	<i>Photo Credits</i>

Calligraphy on Islamic Coins

Stefan Heidemann

Introduction

Western coinages in the Hellenistic tradition are praised for the beauty of their images complementing perfectly the circular space. The art of the portrait flowered in particular in the Hellenistic world, the early Roman Empire, and then again a millennium later in the Renaissance. Since the Renaissance, Greek and Roman coins have been understood in the antiquarian mind as objects of art comparable to sculpture or painting. The Italian sculptor Pisanello (c. 1395–1455) invented the art of the medal, imitating Roman coins. Western numismatics developed in the Renaissance and numismatics became part of art history. In the tradition of Johann Winckelmann (1717–68) it focuses on portraits, human depictions, and architecture. While art historians trained in the classical Western tradition rarely appreciated the almost aniconic aesthetics of Islamic art in general and that of coins in particular, the beauty of written and embellished documents made of metal has become more accessible to modern viewers, who have learned to appreciate aesthetic concepts others than those measured by Greek and Roman ideals.

Islamic and Chinese cultures developed different aesthetics in the design of coins than western Europe. Both cultures created outstanding numismatic artefacts. In the late seventh century, Islamic authorities initially created coins as text documents. Early coins are anonymous, containing parts of the Qur'an, the divine revelation, and the necessary administrative information. Later, names of caliphs, sultans, kings, governors and even the names of the die-engravers were added. The art of the coin in the Chinese and in the Islamic world focused on the beauty of the designed characters and a proportionate distribution of text on the available limited, mostly circular space. The roots of coin design in the Islamic world lay nevertheless in the Hellenistic tradition, whereas Chinese coinage drew on a different past. The early Islamic Empire covered the old Hellenistic world from western North Africa to Central Asia.

What sets Islamic coins apart from their Western counterparts? Early Islamic coins can be described above all as bearers of texts of up to 150 words. The texts on coins during the first six and a half centuries of Islam reflect the entire hierarchy of power



FIGS. 82-83

D I N A R (*Umayyads, Damascus/Syria; dated 93 H/711-12 CE*)

D I R H A M (*Umayyads, Kufa/Iraq; dated 79 H/698-99 CE*)

The style of the calligraphy on these coins is closer to the common curvilinear script of the Persian Pahlavi writing or the earlier private and official letters than to the elegant angular Kufic of monumental inscriptions such as are found at the same time on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

FIG. 84

D I R H A M

Umayyads, Darband/Caucasus; dated 119 H/737 CE

In the course of later decades of Umayyad rule, the style of writing on coins shifted to elegant, angular Kufic such as that also used for Qur'an manuscripts and monumental inscriptions.

FIG. 85

D I N A R

Abbasids, near Baghdad/Iraq; dated 167 H/783-84 CE

Even after the Abbasid coup, calligraphy on gold coins retained certain features of Umayyad gold: less emphasis on the vertical and rectangular letters, and the word's base line moulded into the round of the coins.

at the time and indicate where the coins were minted. Usually they name the town, sometimes the urban quarter, and occasionally even the palace where the coin was minted. Coins typically indicate the year, sometimes the month and occasionally the day of striking. Religious legends provide clues to the political orientation of the authorities who commissioned their production. The inclusion of the name in the coin protocol (*sikka*) and the Friday sermon (*khutba*) served to prove to subjects who the actual ruler was. Both the coin protocol and the Friday sermon had the same political value. The Friday sermon, however, was purely verbal and therefore transient, whereas on coins the protocol is permanently stored on a metal object which was reproduced in great numbers, like a published 'bulletin of state'. Images – although never a dominant trait – were almost always present in Islamic art in general and on Islamic coins in particular, although they never played a major role. With few exceptions, images were almost all confined to copper coins. In contrast to other artistic objects or written documents, coins were industrially manufactured mass products. Due to the

division of labour the engraving of the die (*naqqāsh*) is sometimes highly artistic, whereas the preparation of the flan (the unstruck metal disc) and striking were done rather superficially in order to produce as many coins as possible as rapidly and as economically as possible, at times almost mocking the mastery of the engraver.

The Written Word of God as Representation of Islam and Its Empire

The Zubayrid and Kharijite challenges of the early Umayyad Caliphate between 681 and 697 CE – the years of the Second *Fitna* – created the political context for the definitive creation of epigraphic coin design. The activities of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705 CE) that followed the Second *Fitna* can be seen as embracing the defeated moderate Zubayrid and the more extremist Kharijite propaganda as far as possible in order to reunite the Islamic elite. It was at this point in history at the latest that the idea of an Islamic universal empire in its own ideological right emerged. In 72 H/691-92 CE 'Abd al-Malik built the present Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem as



the stage of the imperial religious cult. Between the years 72/691-92 and 77/696-97 the Umayyad government experimented with new symbols of religion and imperial power, not all of which are well understood today. However, the recurrent theme of all experiments in coin design was the inclusion of the name of the Messenger of God as the putative founder of the empire (*Muhammad rasūl Allāh*), and sometimes also the profession of faith, the *shahāda*. Finally, the definitive iconic representation of Islam and the Islamic Empire on coinage was launched. In 77/696 new *dīnārs* (FIG. 82) – probably minted in Damascus – bear the new religious symbol of Islam: the *shahāda*, encircled by the *risāla*, the prophetic mission of Muhammad (variety of Qur'an 9:33) and on the opposite side, as a symbol of the ultimate sovereignty of the empire of the Word of God, a variation of the *sūra ikhlās* (variety of Qur'an 112), and the date of minting. Late in 78/697-98, the governor of the East ordered the reform of the *dirham* design in his realm, almost similar to the new *dīnārs*, but adding the mint name. These coins are among the oldest surviving text carriers of the Qur'an. Until the time of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (r. 754-75 CE) precious metal coinage remained anonymous. The reform of 'Abd al-Malik constituted a historically unprecedented breach with Hellenistic coin imagery going back about a millennium in the Roman west and the Iranian east. The aniconism, the non-use of images, of the precious metal coins is the result of the character of the 'iconic' new symbols: the Qur'anic Word of God as an expression of sovereignty and the empire and the profession of faith as an expression of the religion. Anonymity on coins did not mean modesty, because the new Islamic universal emperor claimed to be nothing less than *khalīfat Allāh*, "deputy of God". This presupposes an entirely new understanding of the role of the Islamic Empire and its religion, and led to coins becoming objects of calligraphy.

Kufic Script in the Early Islamic Period

The models for the calligraphic art on coins later always vacillated between the styles of the chanceries, the art of Qur'anic calligraphy and epigraphic inscriptions on monumental architecture. Although the Umayyad Empire was far from being a centralized state, Umayyad and early Abbasid coinage shows a high degree of uniformity owing to its Sasanian heritage. The style of script used on early reformed gold and silver coinage maintained a curvilinear appearance, probably a legacy of early die-engravers trained to engrave the much rounder Pahlavi script (FIGS. 82-83). At the same

time – in contrast – the calligraphy of the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock shows a highly artistic elegant rectangular Kufic of a quite different – although currently unknown – tradition. During the more than fifty years following the introduction of the epigraphic coins, the style of script gradually changed, from an ordinary scribe's script to the style of monumental inscriptions and Qur'anic vellum manuscripts (FIG. 84). Like the calligraphers of early Qur'an editions, engravers exploited the inherent tendencies of the Arabic script. The letters became more rectangular shaped and elongated, the Kufic style. They exaggerated the vertical characters and the horizontal lines between the letters. Rectangular letters were also horizontally elongated. Letters consisting of one or more short vertical lines or which were rounder or had an oblique component were reduced in size to highlight the exaggerated components. The end-*nūn* or the tail of the end-*ʿayn* could result in accentuated crescents, dipping sometimes far below the line. Although the script had to be placed in the circle, on *dirhams* the elongated base line of each word remains stiff and straight and does not bend to the circular shape of the coin (FIGS. 85, 86). The peak of these exaggerated elongations of vertical and horizontal lines was reached in the period from Harun al-Rashid (r. 786-809) until the style reform of al-Ma'mun (r. 810-33). The more text had to be crammed into the limited space, the more untidy it looks (FIG. 87).

There were differences in the calligraphic treatment of gold and silver. The tendency to exaggerate vertical and horizontal lines applied to both. But until the reform of al-Ma'mun the style on gold coins remained closer to the more archaic curvilinear early Umayyad coins. This is evident in those mints which produced gold and silver at the same time, such as Madinat al-Salam (the palace city of Baghdad), and al-Rafīqa (the garrison and palace city of Harun al-Rashid on the Euphrates). The reasons for this preference for an old, almost archaic style for the gold are not known. The old style probably symbolizes trusted values. Coin hoards from Iran show that Early Abbasid *dīnārs* remained in circulation at least for hoarding purposes until the first half of the tenth century.

The devastating war of succession between the caliphs al-Amin (r. 809-13) and al-Ma'mun marked a turning point. After his decisive victory, the latter initiated a coinage reform which went along with a re-organization of the system of mints. In 201/816-17, the reform started by adding more text to the coin design (FIG. 87) and achieved its definitive form in 206/821-22 (FIG. 88). The new style was adopted over the next few years in almost all mints. The



words of two marginal inscriptions now bend to the circular shape of the coin, becoming neat curvilinear and enhancing legibility. The new style of coinage of al-Ma'mun reverted to anonymity. The return to simple curvilinear script, the anonymity of coinage and the innovation of the added Qur'anic phrase on the outer margin was an attempt by al-Ma'mun to regain political credibility by pointing to traditional values and design.

In 219/834, al-Mu'tasim billah (r. 833–42) abolished anonymity again and added his name to the coin reverse. In the last third of the third/ninth century occasionally new embellishments were added in coin design: on some coin issues the tops of the vertical letters became slightly split (FIG. 89). This feature soon spread all over the empire until it became almost a common feature. At the same time whipping floral arabesques with split endings for *nūn*, *yā'* or *rā'* appeared as the Samarra style spread. About the 290s/900s swirling arabesques were a regular feature on Samanid *dirhams* in eastern Iran and Transoxiana. Pointed tops of circular letters such as *qāf*, *fā'*, *mīm*, and *wāw* were added early in the fourth/tenth century

(FIG. 90). In the central lands of the caliphate, namely in western Iran, Kufic calligraphy on coins reached its artistic zenith between the 350s/960s and 370s/980s when Buyid die-engravers marked their products with their names in a minuscule script.

New Developments from the East

The success of *naskhī*, the copyist's script, would not have been possible without the new medium of the chanceries, paper, and the attendant spread of literacy. The art of Chinese papermaking entered the Islamic world before 700 CE and was first mentioned for Samarkand in Transoxiana. During the eighth century, the use and manufacture of paper spread to Iran and Iraq. The availability of paper as an affordable writing material was the basis of the extraordinary success of Islamic civilization in the ninth and tenth centuries, the blossoming of theology and law, of historical writing and literary production, of translation and natural sciences. It served as a driving force for the remarkable centralization and bureaucracy of the state. Paper changed the style of writing.

FIGS. 86-87

DIRHAM (*Abbasids, Rayy/Iran; dated 146 H/763-64 CE*)

DIRHAM (*Abbasids, Isfahan/Iran; dated 204 H/819-20 CE*)

On Abbasid *dirhams* the tendency toward extreme emphasis of the vertical, horizontal and rectangular letters was continued. The more text had to be accommodated into the circular field of the coin with words set on a stiff and straight base line, the more disorderly and thus unsatisfactory the design of the coin appears.

FIG. 88

DIRHAM

Abbasids, Madinat al-Salam; dated 208 H/823-24 CE

Due to al-Ma'mun's coinage reform, a curvilinear script was used for *dirhams* and a second verse from the Qur'an added to the margin. The legends on the coins became anonymous again.

FIG. 89

QUARTER DIRHAM

Abbasids, Baghdad/Iraq; dated 282 H/895-96 CE

Special coins were minted for occasions at court as multiples or fractions of the standard *dirham*. Compared with customary coins these coins stylistically and in terms of the quality of minting were always outstanding. The quarter *dirham* is one of the smallest silver denominations. It shows the name of the caliph with split tops of vertical letters and a swirling arabesque for the final round letters.

In the early Islamic period, the copyist's handwriting of the chanceries does not seem to be refined enough for Qur'anic manuscripts and representative epigraphic inscriptions including texts on coins. In about the 290s/900s, *naskhī* was first applied on coins in the remote but prosperous east of the empire in Samanid Transoxiana. The coins continued the style of 'Abbasid *dirhams* in the tradition of al-Ma'mun's reforms; inscriptions and protocol remained written in angular Kufic script, but the Samanids and some of their vassals used *naskhī* for the first time to emphasize the name of the actual issuing local ruler (FIG. 91). It took more than a century until a refined version of the *naskhī* became used for ceremonial and sacred functions. The famous calligrapher Ibn Bawwab (d. probably 423/1031) in Baghdad is much revered for his refinement of *naskhī*. The earliest surviving Qur'an manuscript in *naskhī* by his hand is dated to 391/1000-01.

The ascendancy of *naskhī* in the decades around 400/1000 marks the final apogee of Kufic calligraphy on coinage in the east, probably because the rise of *naskhī* allowed for more artistic play-

ful variations. Surprisingly, the most outstanding results were not achieved in the old central lands of Islam but in Central Asia, the realm of the Turkic Qarakhanids (first period 991-1040), especially in regions which had recently come under the sway of Islam; cities such as Balasaghun (present-day Burana near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan), Uzkand (present-day Özkend, Uzbekistan), and others produced extraordinary calligraphic art. At the same time, to the south in eastern Iran, in the realm of the Ghaznavids, calligraphic art on coins also reached a high level, using different-sized letters, swirling arabesque tails and triangular fins at the tip of the vertical characters (FIG. 92).

The production of dies was nevertheless subject to the division of labour and the rationalization of workflow. The rulers demanded more elaborate titles; and more religious inscriptions had to be squeezed onto the limited space available on the dies. Prefabricated punches came into use, mostly ringlets for circular letters (FIG. 93), but sometimes whole words were just punched with a single tool onto the die.

FIG. 90**‘ADL DIRHAM***Buyids, Shiraz/Iran; dated 400 H/1009–10 CE*

At the end of the 10th and 11th centuries, the monetary system of the Islamic empire deteriorated. Nevertheless, from time to time some rulers attempted to reform the system of coinage in their regions, but without permanent success. The Buyids in the province of Fars in south-western Iran introduced a new ‘*adl* (just) coinage based on the model of the popular coins from the period before al-Ma’mun’s reforms. They only used a single inscription on the margin of the obverse side of the coins and decorated the coins with excellent calligraphy.

FIG. 91**DIRHAM***Banijurids, Balkh/North Afghanistan; dated 292 H/904–05 CE*

This *dirham* is one of the earliest examples for the use of *naskhi* script. On the obverse side is the name of the Banijurid ruler in *naskhi*. The Kufic script in this composition is highly artistic, for example the ligature of three letters *rā’*, *yā’* and *kāf* in the third line on the obverse side is designed as an abstract flower.

FIG. 92**DINAR***Ghaznavids, Ghazna/Afghanistan; dated 406 H/1015–16 CE*

The playful element in calligraphic art on coins is continued under the Ghaznavids in eastern Iran with the importance of the inscriptions emphasised by differently sized letters. The name of the caliph, who resided far away in Baghdad without real power, is always acknowledged in a very small script on the obverse side as suzerain. The arabesques, swooping finals and three triangular fins on the ends of the verticals find their counterparts for example in contemporary metalwork in eastern Iran.

FIG. 93**DINAR***Eastern Saljuqs, north Afghanistan; dated 493 H/1099 CE*

Although the floral Kufic script does not appear especially fine, this coin shows how much text can be accommodated in minuscule script: the hierarchy of three rulers with their detailed titles, the location of the mint and the month of minting, and finally parts of three different verses from the Qur’an, and a sword as *tamghā* with heraldic character. The die-engraver used punches for specific letter forms such as a ringlet punch for circular letters to ensure efficient production.





FIG. 94

SIKANDARI DIRHAM

Khwarazm Shahs, Samarkand/Uzbekistan; dated 610 H/1213–14 CE

A strangely formed Kufic often appears on large, strongly alloyed *dirhams* from Central Asia in the 7th–13th centuries: it is angular and instead of playing with elongated verticals or with balanced proportions of breadth and density, the inscriptions make the impression of a broad frieze on a wall with some rounded letters. Models for a script of this type can be found in the bands of inscription on brick architecture of the period.

FIG. 95-96

DIRHAM (Zangids, Aleppo/Syria; dated 572 H/1177 CE)

HALF DIRHAM (Zangids, possibly Aleppo; undated, possibly 1175–80 CE)

Successful introduction of a weight regulated *dirham* coinage in Syria in 571/1175 under the rule of the Zangids led to two different patterns, one for the *dirham* (fig. 95) and another for the half *dirham* (fig. 96). The first was struck in an attractive Kufic style with suggestions of floral Kufic. On the second, all inscriptions – for the first time in a regular coin series – were written in *naskhī* with vocalization marks such as *fatha*, *damma*, *sukūn* and *shadda*.

Calligraphy on monumental architecture also influenced coin design. In eastern Iran beginning with the seventh/thirteenth century we find an odd rectangular Kufic on broad thin, debased fiduciary *dirhams* in Central Asia (FIG. 94). The broad band of script has its nearest parallel in contemporary decoration and inscriptions set in bricks on mosques, minarets and mausoleums.

The Era of the Scribe's Script – *Naskhī*

Although Kufic remained the predominant style until the seventh/twelfth century on coinages in the Islamic world, *naskhī* had occasionally been used on coins from the end of the third/beginning of the tenth century. In the West it probably occurred for the first time in 490/1096–97 on a unique issue of a Fatimid *dīnār* in Egypt. After 558/1162–63 Nur al-Din Mahmud (r. 1127–46) introduced *naskhī* or better a hybrid *kūfī-naskhī* style as an almost regular feature of his copper coins in Damascus. A change occurred with the introduction of the first silver coinage with a regulated weight in 571/1175–76. The *dirham* itself remained in a pleasing Kufic (FIG. 95),

while the half *dirham* was entirely in *naskhī* without distinguishing dots but including diacritical vocalization (*ashkāl*) (FIG. 96). The parallel and succeeding Ayyubid coinage in Syria also changed from Kufic to *naskhī* during Saladin's reign (r. 564–89/1169–93) (FIG. 97). Distinguishing dots and vocalization were sometimes applied. On Mamluk coins scribal ligatures even appeared which combined those letters which should be set apart (FIG. 98). The play between Kufic and *naskhī* style is a recurrent theme in coin design in the middle period of Islam. In the Rum-Saljuq realm in Asia Minor, a third form of chancery script (*dīvānī*) was added to coins, providing administrative information about mints and dates (FIG. 99). The Almohads in the west applied a distinct *maghribī* variant of *naskhī* on their coins (FIG. 100).

From the Mongols to the Gunpowder Empires

In 1258, with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad and the final downfall of the Islamic Empire, the canon of standard inscription for coinage changed in Mongol Iran and Central Asia. Political authority was



FIG. 97

DIRHAM NASIRI

Ayyubids, Damascus/Syria; dated 616 H/1219–20 CE

Also on Ayyubid coins which were reformed in the same year, Kufic alternated with well-proportioned *naskhi*. Sometimes diacritical dots are found on Ayyubid coins, for example here in the date *sitta 'ashara* (sixteen) in the margin.

FIG. 98

DINAR

Bahri Mamluks, Hamah/Syria; dated 698–708 H/1299–1309 CE

The fine pen of the scribes in the Mamluk chanceries even led to the use of ligatures in *naskhi* on coins, which was not otherwise permitted, for example here the letters *dāl* and *alif maqsūra* in the word *bil-hudā* on the obverse side.

FIG. 99 A-B

DIRHAM

Rum-Saljuqs, Konya/Turkey; dated 641 H/1243–44 CE

Three different types of script are used on this coin: on the obverse side a Kufic inscription frames a lion and the sun, and the middle of the reverse side shows *naskhi* script. The administrative information on the edge, the mint and date, are written in *divānī*, another cursive of the chancery.

now derived from the family of Genghis Khan which governed an empire from the borders of Silesia to Korea. New scripts and languages, such as Uighur, Phagspa, and Chinese entered Islamic coin design to address the new authorities (FIGS. 101, 103). Uighur script developed from Aramaic-Syriac script and Phagspa developed from Tibetan at the court of the Great Khan Qubilai in Beijing in 1268–69. It was used on coins in the Mongol Ilkhanid and Chaghatay realms.

The weight-regulated, almost pure silver coinage, which was already established in Syria and in Asia Minor and other territories, was now firmly adopted in the Mongol realm. An almost regular devaluation of the money was achieved by slightly reducing the weight of the standard denomination. Different designs had to be created in order to distinguish one coin issue from the other (figs. 101–103). Some designs were taken from architectural elements, such as the prayer niche (FIG. 102), the square-*kūfi* (FIG. 103, OBVERSE), and the 'brick' -*kūfi* (FIG. 103, REVERSE). The inscriptions – frequently the easily recognisable *shahāda* – is spirally scrolled, mostly from the outside inward.

Later, after c. 1500 CE, in Iran, calligraphy became more refined on coins even in provincial mints where the dies were probably supplied by central workshops. The style of the script on the coins became dependent on the now dominant ceremonial style, the 'hanging' or *ta'liq* script, for official documents and poetry. Epigraphic friezes in monumental architecture of that time achieve a kind of transparency by using glazed tiles or *opus sectile* (mosaic from segmented tiles); the inscription is laid upon differently coloured scrolling foliage often on a dark or blue background. A similar effect is achieved on coins by exploring for the first time the coin's potential as a three-dimensional relief. This aspect of the coin as a sculptural object was never previously exploited for calligraphy and marked a major step forward in the coin's artistic appearance. A *ta'liq* inscription sometimes suggesting the rhythm of the pen's movement in different heights of the relief is set on spirally scrolling foliage in the background. Safavid coinage often not only gives the name of the ruler, his titles, religious inscriptions, and administrative information but frames the ruler's name in cou-



FIG. 100

DINAR

Almohads, Madinat Bijaya/Algeria; undated

A form of *naskhī* was also used in the *maghribī* script in the West. Elegant whipping tails of the final letter in each word are characteristic of this style.

FIG. 101

DOUBLE DIRHAM

Ilkhanids, Baghdad/Iraq; dated 699 H/1299–1300 CE

This coin shows the name of the Ilkhan and the standard profession of faith in a simple floral Kufic script, whereas the blessing wishes for the messenger of God at the edge and the administrative inscriptions are in *naskhī*.

FIG. 102

DOUBLE DIRHAM

Ilkhanids, Gulistan/Azerbaijan; dated 720 H/1320–21 CE

This coin bears another verse from the Qur'an which does not appear otherwise on coins, namely the verse *fa-sayakfihumu Allāhu wa-huwa l-samī'u l-'alīm* – “God will protect you from them. He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing” (2:137). The first very long word of this verse about God's protection is formed like an arch suggesting of a prayer niche.

plet: “Throughout the world imperial coinage came, struck by God's grace in Tahmasp Thani's name; mint of Tabriz 1135” is written on the reverse of the coins of one of the last Safavid rulers Tahmasp II (r. 1722–32) (FIG. 104). This style of double-layered calligraphy was continued by the following Iranian dynasties (FIG. 105). Similar in calligraphy are coins of the Mughal Empire from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century where we find *tā'liq*, but usually without scrolling foliage in the background (FIG. 106). The third ‘Gunpowder Empire’, the Ottoman, applied a conventional proportionate *naskhī* on its coins. In contrast to the other two post-1500 empires of the Islamic world, the Ottomans used a calligraphic *tughrā* as imperial symbol, sometimes as the only symbol of state on the coins. The *tughrā* is a heraldic device and a calligraphic version of the sultan's name, with his titulature and blessing for him (FIG. 107).

Conclusion

The brief survey of calligraphy on coins explores a field of Islamic art which is hardly known although often admired, and commentary

is sometimes given on the calligraphy of single issues. The art of writing on coins established itself at the moment when the Qur'anic message became an iconic symbol for Islam and its empire. The small form set certain limits; coins as documents required certain formulae, and their production as an absolute medium of exchange, meaning money, required techniques of mass production. As miniature official inscriptions of the Islamic Empire and its successor states, calligraphy on coins is always orientated towards the current forms of representation of these states, be it the art of Qur'anic calligraphy, the style of monumental architecture, or the fine art of courtly poetry rendered in calligraphy or finally the sultan's name in calligraphy.



106



FIG. 103

DOUBLE DIRHAM

Ilkhanids, Barda'/Azerbaijan; dated 734 H/1333-34 CE

This type of coin was only minted for two years under Ilkhan Abu Sa'id. Its design is derived from building decoration – geometric Kufic with the profession of faith on the obverse side and 'cut-brick' Kufic on the reverse side (cf. fig. 94).

FIG. 104

TEN SHAHI

Safavids, Tabriz/Iran; dated 1135 H/1722-23 CE

In 1135/1722 upon his accession to the throne, Shah Tahmasp had large coins minted in several cities of his evanescent empire, including in Tabriz, the ceremonial capital of Iran. The name of the ruler is contained in a rhyming poem on the reverse side which is written in a script similar to *ta'liq*. The obverse side shows the profession of faith and the names of the twelve Shi'ite imams.

FIG. 105

TUMAN

Qajars, Khuy/Iran; dated 1239 H/1823-24 CE

This inscription in *ta'liq* lies on a background ornamented with tendrils. The broad empty edge contrasts with the dense calligraphy in the middle.

FIG. 106

200 RUPEES

Mughals, Shahjahanabad (Delhi)/India; dated 1083 H/1672-73 CE

The coin is partly struck and partly engraved. This is noticeable particularly at the end on those places on which the pressure of striking failed to produce a satisfactory result. On special occasions at the court, the Mughal rulers presented dignitaries with such huge coins of gold and silver. The calligraphy is in the attractive *ta'liq* script. The central panels on the front and back sides contain Awrangzeb's name and titles together with the mint and the date. On the edge are written verses praising this money and the mild and glorious rule of Padishah Awrangzeb.

FIG. 107

QUARTER ALTIN

Ottomans, Istanbul/Turkey; dated 1203 H/1791-92 CE

The calligraphic *tughrā* with the name of Selim III and his titulature serves as a unique imperial symbol on the obverse side. The coin's beauty is achieved by the balance between free space and dense calligraphy.

