



RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS ON ĪL-KHĀNID COINS

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ABSTRACT

Coins of Islamic period are primary sources that have been referred frequently by researchers. Designers of the coins along with rituals and titles always tried to decorate the circular space on the coins. One of these decorations is geometrical decoration, which was common prior to Īl-Khānids (658–735 AH/1260-1335 AD)[1]. In Īl-Khānids era, coins widely had geometric designs, especially during Abū Saīd period which architectural elements and architectural scripts were largely used. Base lines that previously had been used only in the building patron name, for the first time were used on coins in Īl-Khānid era. In addition, Hexagram which had been previously used in Islamic architecture more as a symbol of Astronomy was also applied on Īl-Khānid Coins. Mihrāb that is the most sacred Islamic architecture and some signs were use in coins before the Īl-Khānid, were considered by coins designers in Ghāzān era and in the form of mihrāb-like inscriptions was wildy used in coins and Architecture. Square Kufic is the last element studies in this paper which was used under the influence of religious monuments of its time in Abu coins. The reason of using these motifs on coins is not definitely clear yet but in some cases political and cultural mind set of the time played an important part in formation of such designs on coins in Īl-Khānid era. The aim of present study was to investigate the changes in coin designs which may were influenced by architecture and its religious elements till Abu Saīd era.

KEYWORDS: Islamic Coin, Inscription, Architecture, politic, Ilkhanid, Hexagram, square Kufic, Base lines, Mihrāb-like inscriptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Imitation of nature does not take an important place in Islamic culture so has not been widely used in Islamic coins. Instead, like other Islamic Medias, calligraphy and geometrical designs were used. The use of geometrical designs was restricted to circles or concentric circles in early Islamic coins and just in some limited cases; some geometrical layouts on coins were applied (e.g. Āl-e Būya coins).

The use of geometrical patterns gradually and limitedly increased and created shapes which were fitted into the circular and small space of the coins. The uses of architectural scripts on coins appeared since Umayyad (40-132 AH/661-750 AD) period and were in use limitedly in various eras. In Īl-Khānid era (658-735 AH/1260-1335 AD) following the Caliph depose, several fundamental reforms occurred on the coins from the regions under their rule, including the language and script as well as the images were used on them.

2. BASE LINES

In some Arġūn (r.683-90 AH/1284-91 AD),[2] Ġhāzān Maḥmūd (r. 694-703 AH/1295-1304 AD) and Abu Sa'id[r. 716-736/1316-1335] coins (Fig.1), there is no proportion between the legend, *Lā-ilāh ill allāh Mohammad Rasūl allāh*, and the name of the mint inscribed within a rectangular frame on the base line, with the circular shape of the coins Writing inscriptions on base lines was not previously known in Islamic period. This design only was applied on IKhānid cions.



Figure 1. Arġūn , Tabrīz, Christian Rasmussen Collection, Collection ID: #55, A-2146(var.), to-kakte.virtualave.net.



Figure 2. Tomb stone in Sandoq-Sāzha mosque in Yazd (453/1061). After Fātemeh Yazdī. (Yazdī, 2009)

Using base lines were common in architectural inscriptions of this era including tomb stones since 5th to Īl-Khānid period, in wood and stucco in mosques as well as painted inscriptions during Īl-Khānid period. But these two are different; the first is prior to Īl-Khānids and the second in Īl-Khānid era. There are various examples of tomb stones such as tomb stone in *Sandoq-Sāzha* mosque in Yazd (453/1061) (Fig. 2) in which the base lines are framed within a rectangular under a mihrāb design, at the top of the tomb stone. Buq'a-yi Sheikh Taghi al- Dīn Dādā Mohammad (700/1300), is the other example (Afshār, 1379).



Figure 3(a). left. Chalbi Oqlu Iwān inscription, Sulṭāniyya. Fig 3(b). Right. Masjid-i Jami of Varāmīn Iwān inscription.

Among some plaques recovered from a Buyids (334-447 AH/945-1055 AD) Buqa dating to (363/974), there is one measuring 53×30 cm which have been placed within a mihrāb shaped frame (Blair, 1992) and one of their legend has been written on the base line [4].

In western Kharaqān mausoleum dating to (486 AH/1093 AD) (Stern, 1966), base lines were used in patron's name inscription. Using base lines increased during Īl-Khānid period in architecture since 700 century AH. Sheikh Mohammad Bakrān tomb stone wall, attributed to (703 AH/1303 AD), in Lenjān Isfahan, the patron's name inscription in the both side of mihrāb ivān of the *Masjid-i Jami* of Varāmīn in (722 AH/1322 AD) and the Chalbi Oqlu tomb inscription, (733 AH/1333 AD) (Wilber, 1969) (Wilber, 1969) all bear base lines (Fig. 3a, 3b). As previously mentioned, these lines had been used before Īl-Khānids in various monuments but the widespread use of base lines occurred in architecture and on tomb stones in Īl-Khānid era following their applications on Arġūn coins, this could be inferred as a kind of mutual relation between architectural and coinage designing elements.

3. HEXAGRAM (STAR OF DAVID)

The Hexagram (Star of David) for the first time appeared on the ruler Artuqid Nāser-al- Dīn Mahmūd (r. 597-619 AH/1200-1222 AD) copper coins in early seventh century AH (617 AH/ 1220 AD), bearing the phrase "*Al-Mulk Al-Kāmel*" (meaning the whole land) (Poole, 1877) (Fig. 4). a Tamghā to the shape of a hexagram on the revers side of the coin can be seen On Mangū (r. 646-654/1248-1256) coins struck in Georgia (Fig. 5) (Nyamaa, 2005). an acceptable reason of such designs on Īl-Khānid coins has not been mentioned but the reasons for using such signs could be a kind of tendency toward Judasim, As some researchers do not reject Jewish teachers for Genghis Khān (Amitai, 2004). the successive coins of Hulāgu Khān (r. 654-663 AH/1256-1265 ad) and Abāqā

Khān (r. 663-680 AH/1265-82 AD) which were minted in Tiflis and also the Abāqā Khān cions which were minted in Astarābād all include the hexagram sign (Diler, 2006). This sign on the coins designed during Arġūn reign minted in Dāmghān, it is while Jewish were in power by Sa'ad Al- Dawla the minister in Arġūn court (Hamedānī, 1984). The next suspension on the hexagram design as well as the two rotating squares (Fig. 6) and triangles could be the tendency to use astrological signs. The Mongol's interest in astronomy could be understood from their support from Khāja Naṣīr-al-dīn Tūsī (d. 672 AH/1274 AD) in construction of Marāgheh observatory during Holāgu Khān reign and as Rashīd-al-Dīn Fazlollāh (d. 718 AH/1318 AD), Ġhāzān Khān's famous minister affirms Ġhāzān Khān was familiar to astronomy (Hamedānī, 1984). More over their interest could be perceived by the constellation names on coins (Diler, 2006). There appear the phrase *Tāli-e sāl aqrab Sane 713* (Scorpio Horoscope year 713) on a Fals [5] from *Sulṭāniyya* in 713 AH/1313 AD (Nastich, 2010) which is demonstrating using astrological phrases on copper coins in this era.

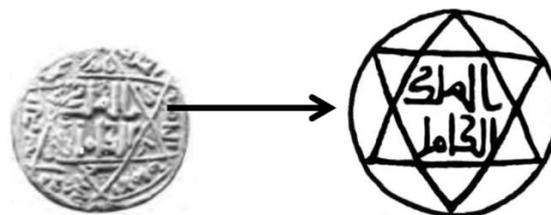


Figure 4. Nāser-al- Dīn Mahmūd coin. Number 351. After poole

This design previously was used in architecture such as the two rotating triangles and squares depicted on sunburst medallions painted on the interior walls of eastern tomb tower at Kharaqān in (460/1067), Abbas Daneshvari interpreted the combination of these two symbols along with the peacock images as astrological features. This comment was expressed by interpretation from two books, "*al-Āṭār al-bāqia*" and "*Ketāb al-tafhīm le-awā'el ṣenā'at al-tanjīm*" by *Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī* (d. 440 AH/1048 AD)[6]. In Islamic medieval art two rotating

triangles and squares in domes and arches are representative of asexual bodies, such as the parallel images depicted on Heraqleh city gates dating to ca. 10th century AD (Daneshvari, 1986). This figure is also seen in Īl-Khānid architecture, Buq'a-yi Sayyid Rukn al- Dīn in Yazd, dated to (725 AH/ 1325 AD] (Wilber, 1969). This monument has frescos on its walls and dome, and the center of dome and wall has taken the shape of a hexagram (Fig. 7).

Yuka Kadoi associates the twelve tear-drop-shaped medallions around the dome with the twelve constellations surrounding the hexagram which is an astrological symbol in the center of dome (Kadoi, 2005). This design repeatedly was used on the *Sulṭāniyya* dome and also in *Masjid-i Jami* of Varāmīn, the only difference is that in Varāmīn carries the name of "Allāh" at its center as could be seen in coins (Fig. 8). The Holy Names were arranged to the shape of a hexagram in *Sulṭāniyya* dome which has a different designing.



Figure 5. Mangū coin, Georgia, after Nayamaa

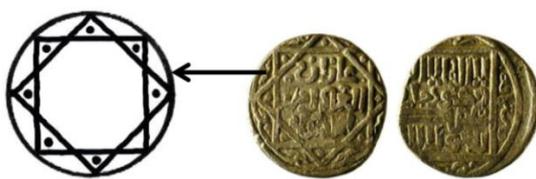


Figure 6. Ghāzān Maḥmūd, Kabudjameh (Tabriz), Christian Rasmussen Collection, Collection ID: #26, A-2168B, tokakte.virtualave.net.

4. MIHRĀB-LIKE INSCRIPTIONS

Discussing the development of early mihrābs involves various debates. As the whole mosque plane is oriented to the qibla and does not require any sign pointing to that, the reason of mihrāb's emergence in mosques comes to importance. Islamic middle age scholars believe that mihrābs for the first time appeared in Walid's mosque in Madinah and that was to sym-

bolize the place where the Prophet said his prayers. Since then mihrābs were spread to other mosques all over the world. Although mihrābs were used to imply Walid's reign and caliph, this was its religious concept that caused its adoption in Islamic architecture (Ettinghausen & Grabar, 1987).

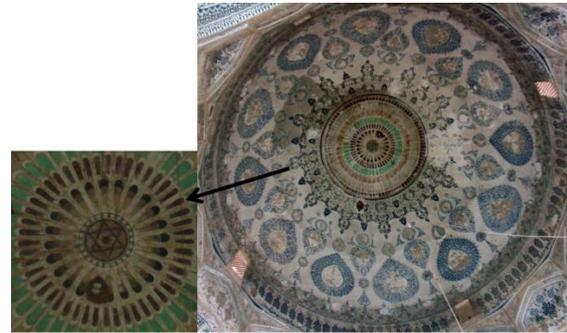


Figure 7. Rukniyya, domed chamber detail in Yazd. Capture by Tāhereh Shīsheh borī



Figure 8. Wall of the dome in Masjid-i Jami of Varāmīn

In fact mihrāb could be considered as the symbol of God in the context of mosques rather than a mere functional object (Khoury, 1992). The first depiction of mihrābs on Islamic coins appeared on silver coins, struck within the years of (72-77 AH/691- 697 AD) during Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65-86 AH/685-705 AD) reign in Syria (Fig. 9). On the observe a figure resembling Sassanid king is seen but not certainly him due to some differences in his head gear and his breast ornamentation. On the reverse side the image of the Prophet's "anaza" or short spear within a mihrāb is seen and carries the phrases of *Amīr al-momenīn* phrases (Miles, 2007). Based on Miles' theory mihrāb depictions on coins should be introduced after the full-size mihrāb had been established as an architectural element in Islamic architecture. Since the numismatic image would

only have been understandable to a coin user who was already familiar with it. He also suggested that these two dimensional designs were intended to show a three-dimension space of a niched mihrāb (*mih-rāb mujawwaf*). The theory of assigning these figures as mihrābs was doubted by some scholars such as Gaube. He reexamined it in numismatic context and by comparing to contemporary Byzantine coins (Fig. 10), he interpreted this figure was influenced by that coins rather than attempt to depict mihrābs on them (Treadwell, 2005).



Figure 8. the coin of Abd al-Malik b. Marwān possibility syria. After Treadwell



Figure 9. Axumite silver coins. Afer Treadwell

Although Grabar considered the spear as the authorized symbol of the prophetic and the caliphal power, he expressed his doubt on the identification of the figures as mihrābs. In contrast scholars such as Fehervari and Melikian-Chirvani admitted opinion (Treadwell, 2005). If these images are believed to be mihrābs, then reusing this motif refers only to the Īl-Khānid period. On a Ġhāzān's silver coin struck in Nishāpur, there appear an arch bearing the name of Mohammad (Fig 11) although it was not prevalent during Ġhāzān reign.



Figure 10. Ġhāzān Maḥmūd, Nishāpur, Christian Rasmussen Collection, Collection ID: #31, A-2168B, tokakte.virtualave tokakte.virtualave



Figure 11. Abū Saīd, Qūniya, Anatolian Coins, Collection ID :UM-086, mehmeteti.150m.com

The abundant use of mihrāb motifs on Abū Saīd Bahādor Khān coins is included of Quranic verse, designed in to the shape of a mihrāb, this legend contains the message "فسيكفيهم الله و هو السميع العليم" God is sufficient for you against them (your enemies). He is all-hearing, all-knowing, in which the phrase "فسيكفيهم" as a frame, was taken the shape of a mihrāb, henceforth, in brief will be called mihrāb-like inscription (Fig 12). Abū Saīd used this motif on the reverse side of his coins during the years following 717AH/ 1317 AD?and especially during 719-720. Within these two years about 90 mints from Qūniya and Antaliyā to kermān and Esfarāyen struck coins bearing the same design (Diler, 2006), this was when Abū Saīd was involved with the war against his army general, Amir Chupan. The reverse includes a looped octagon in which the phrase "نصر من الله" "Fills the loops bearing the message Victory comes from God. Choosing both phrases on coins and its shapes in this time period may indicate war between Abū Saīd and his general Amīr Chupān as well as his political views on these coins (Blair, 1983). It is important to know that the phrase of "نصر الله" is seen in Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān coins with the mihrāb image, thus, using it in ilkhānid coins could be an indication of copying it (Treadwell, 2005).

Regarding its extent application, it can be concluded that their dies were prepared in central workshops of the government and

then sent to all mints in cities. Application of this Quranic phrase on coins was unusual (Poole, 1881) but there could be find various examples of mihrāb-like inscriptions prior to Īl-Khānids, The first on a piece of Tarāz from Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170-93 AH/786-809 AD) and the next on a cobalt ware from Samara excavations (Miles, 1939). There are a lot of examples of using this motif in architecture. The next example is a mihrāb from Kāshān (623 AH/ 1226 AD), now in Berlin Museum possession (Miles, 1939) and on a stone in Antic Auction in London [3] with unclear application, it bears the date (628 AH/1231 AD), and the name of last *khwārazmshāhī* Ruler (Ghouchani, 1369) and with some attention a mihrāb-like inscription could be identified on it. Etinghawzen mentions some cases as the primary examples of Īl-Khānid tomb stones and coins carrying mihrāb-like inscriptions such as the mihrāb of a mausoleum from Qom attributed to (663 AH/ 1265 AD), now belonging to Berlin Museum, and the mihrāb from Varāmin, now in Philadelphia Museum possession, contemporary to the Qom mihrāb, The later example is a tile panel probably dating to the first half of the fourteenth century after Christian from Kāshān (Miles, 1939). In Buq'a-yi Sayyid Rukn al- Dīn in Yazd, the mihrāb-like inscriptions, which was painted as afresco decoration, occupy the corners (Sekonj) of the transitional zone of the dome, arranged doubly together (Fig .13).

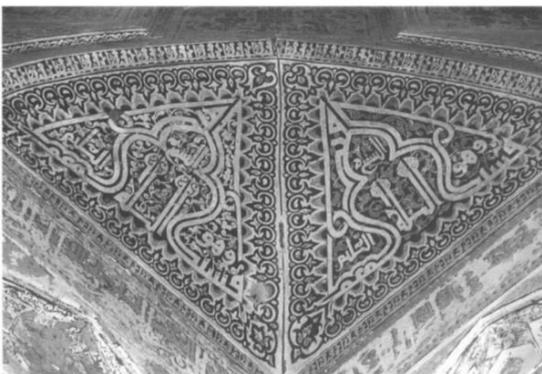


Figure 12. Rukniyya: squinch (detail). After Kadoi

Using this motif in both fresco and the transitional zone of the dome is a new phenomenon since before that time it only had

been used on mihrābs or on tomb stones. It is correspond to the widespread use of this design on coins which could be representative of a mutual relation between architectural and coin images.

5. SQUARE KUFIC

bannāi script on Iran is called in other names such as angular script, architecture Kufic and *Monhaser*. The oldest Kufic script known in Iran was written on a wooden window attributed to 362 AH/973 AD belonging to Buyids now in Takht Jamshid Museum in Iran (Ghouchani, 1380).

Architectural scripts on the coins first appeared in the first century AH. This was the first exchange of architectural and coinage calligraphically and script elements. In Īl-Khānid era, the relation between the architectural scripts and legend script on coins was the widest than any periods in Islamic lands due to the diverse use of these scripts on coins of this era. In the Umayyad period, following the construction of *Qubbat Al-Sakhra* in which a beautiful angular Kufic script was used, during the more than fifty years, the scripts on coins gradually changed to the monumental inscriptions and Quranic manuscript (Heidemann, 2010). The first appearance of square Kufic was on Ghaznavid (366-582 AH/ 977-1186 AD) coins (Majeed, 2006).



Figure 13. Abu-Sa'id, Tābriz, Christian Rasmussen Collection, Collection ID: #3, A-T2223, tokakte.virtualave.net.

Calligraphy in monumental architecture had a influence on seventh century AH coins, as in a dirham design attributed to *khwārazmshāhī* era (r. 470-624 AH/1077-1231 AD) struck in 610 AH/ 973 AD, an angular Kufic script was used which at the same time was applied in brick inscription

decorations in mosques, minarets and mausoleums. In eighth century on Abu-Sa'id coins, the thriving time of using architectural elements, the cut brick Kufic on coins can be seen (Heidemann, 2010). Within eleventh and twelve centuries AD while calligraphy was in its flourishing in eastern Islamic lands, a specific kind of Kufic script was created, which survived for a long period of time due to its effectiveness, is known as square kofic.

Herzfeld introduced it as a derivative of the Naskh so he called it "square naskh", Myron Bement Schmidt also following him called it "rectangular naskh". In Iran, that was called Maqili (Mo'ageli) or bannāi (Blair, 1998: 82). Application of square or geometric Kufic was current on Abu-Sa'id coins (Fig 14) in more than 90 mint houses belonging to Abu-Sa'id (Diler, 2006).

This design was used in inscribing legends such as "فسيكفيهم الله و هو السميع العليم" in Abu-Sa'id time that is representative of its popularity and the preparation of its die in central workshops and sending them to mints in other cities.

There are two theories on the emergence of square Kufic inscription: The first theory considers square (geometric) Kufic script derived from architectural adaption in the places where square Kufic had long been in use in architecture prior to occurrence of square Kufic adapted into the Chinese seal or Sung coins inscriptions as the result of Chinese *Phagspā* inscriptions on seals (Blair, 1998), while the second theory considers square Kufic adapted into the Chinese seal or Sung coins inscriptions as the result of contact between Islamic and Chinese artists (Kadoi, 2009).



Figure 14. Minaret of Masjid-i Jami of Mardin. After Tehnyat Majeed, 2006.

Although the scholars don't reject the probability of the first one; they suppose that the second theory is more acceptable (Kadoi, 2009). The earliest evidence of square Kufic happened on the minaret in Ghazna by Masūd III (r. 492-508 AH/1099-1115 AD) dating to 5th century AH. This inscription included non-religious information about the building patron name, genealogy and title (Blair, 1998). The next is in the Square Kufic inscription on the Mardin minaret (Fig. 15) in Turkey, dated to (572 AH/1176-77 AD) (Majeed, 2006). The other one is the minaret of congregational mosque of Sāva bearing the inscription "*Lā Nabī bad Muhammad*" meaninging "no prophet after Muhammad". One example from the seventh century AH is Nushābād Minaret in which square Kufic letters made of bricks glazed (Blair, 1998). Although both Bahrī Mamlūks and Ilkhānids use square Kufic in their architecture, (Majeed, 2006) Ilkhanids used it more. In Pīr-i Bakrān, belonging to Saljuqs and Īl-Khānids periods, there are inscriptions including Muhammad and *chārda maṣūmīn* names and the other has some 60 of the 99, the *asmā al-ḥusnā* within a frame attributed to (713 AH/1312 AD) (Majeed, 2008) as well as other Īl-Khānid monuments such as Bāyazīd Bestāmī complex, Abd-o Samad complex in Natanz and *Masjid-i Jami* of Varāmīn (Thoss, 1968). All of these examples are representative of existence of square Kufic inscriptions in architecture in various periods in eastern Islamic lands. while the invention of *Phagspā* inscript and its similarities with square Kufic resulted in this idea that square Kufic derived from *Phagspā*.

A square inscription written in *Phagspā* script in 1269 AD by the great ruler of Yuān, Kublai Khān, was used for writing Mongols. The importance of new script specially was on seals. The use of *Phagspā* seals widely spread in Iran, as there are many commands in national museum of Iran sealed with those seals (Blair, 1998).

Some scholars consider the occurrence of square Kufic under the influences of Chi-

nese seals which were existed on Chinese paintings prior to Īl-Khānids and Iranian familiarity with them was as the result of the similarities between Iranian paintings in Manāfi-i al-Hayavān by ibn-Bakhtshiyu with Chinese paintings in one hand and on the other hand the Chinese coin influences during Sung period, during which there were an increase in their foreign trade with other countries as the next reason of this familiarity (Kadoi, 2009).

The Chinese coins in Sung era which were prevalent due to the foreign trade with other countries, is considered as a factor to create the square Kufic.

These seals were inscribed similarly with the style of Chinese seals in Iran in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the rulers ordered similar seals with Qur'ānic and religious legends which was written in square Kufic.

In fact there are many similarities between these two scripts which square Kufic is sometimes called seal script and consider it derived from Chinese seals (wrongly) while it was obviously used in architecture and prior to their appearance on Phagspā seals (Blair, 1998) The reason of using geometric Kufic on coins was the great attention to use a common religious motifs in

other art medias especially architectural religious decorations.

6. CONCLUSION

Using architectural elements on Īl-Khānid coins occurred as a variety of reasons, which made them different from their predecessor's. Hexagram design in architecture and on coins of this era was used due to Īl-Khānids interest to astrology or Jewish beliefs among some of their ministers or *vazīrs*. Moreover, using base line in designing Arḡūn and Ġhāzān coins prior their occurrence in Īl-Khānid architecture is the representative of mutual application of elements between architecture and coinage. A similar situation could be seen in first application of mihrāb-like inscriptions in Buq'a-yi Sayyid Rukn al-Dīn dome (in a place other than mihrāb or on tomb stone), which was exactly after their occurrences on Abu-Sa'id coins. The political environment and context during Abu-Sa'id period caused to emergence of new motifs in designing coins. So that, architectural motifs which had been previously used, this time was accompanied by religious architectural figures such as mihrāb-like inscriptions, square Kufic and brick Kufic.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Give dates with all medieval names at the first time of mentioning. Also use abbreviation of AD=Anno Domini, for referring to the year of Christ's birth, also use abbreviation of AH=Anno Hegirae, for Latin for "Year of the Hegira" (or *Hijrah*). The Muslim calendar dates from the *Hijrah*;

[2] use abbreviation of (r) for Reign dates

[3] use abbreviation of (d) for Death dates

[4] The description of same decorations and designs on mihrabs and tomb stones

[5] Bronze coins

[6] Important Islamic, Indian and south manuscript miniature works of art Christie's great rooms 11 April 1989, p.177

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