



AŠRAFI

AŠRAFI, term used from the mid-15th century for a gold coin first minted in Mamluk Egypt in 810/1407-08; the name probably refers to the Mamluk sultan Ašraf Barsbay (r. 825-41/1422-38). The original coin weighed about 3.45 gm and corresponded in standard and fineness to the Venetian ducat (*zecchino*) or Florentine *fiorino*. The Italian coins had gained favor because of their constant weight and fineness, and so equivalent issues came to be struck in the Islamic world. The Egyptian *ašrafī* was clearly distinguishable from the usual gold coin, the dinar, and was disseminated to the Islamic east along with the ducat; the new coin quickly penetrated the small Turkmen states of eastern Anatolia, northern Syria, and northern Mesopotamia, which had close relations with the Mamluks. Farther east the *ašrafī* had to compete with the gold *tanga-ye ṭelā* (or *tangača-ye ṭelā*), based on an Indian standard, which was widely circulated under the Timurids. The Timurid gold *tanga* weighed 4.6 to 4.7 gm, and it served as the dominant standard for gold issues of the eastern Turkmen princes. However, early *ašrafī* issues may be discerned in a 3.9 gm coin of Jahānšāh Qara Qoyunlū (841-72/1438-67) and the 3.4 gm gold coins of the Āq Qoyunlūs.

Under the Safavid Shah Esmāʿīl I (907-30/1501-24) *ašrafī* coins of 3.52 gm were minted, and quarter-*ašrafīs* on the same standard. Safavid gold issues of the 10th/16th century still somewhat reflect the standard of the *tangača-ye ṭelā*, but by ca. 1600 the *ašrafī* had completely replaced the gold *tanga*. (The Timurid coin survived in the Transoxanian khanates, however, without significant change, until the end of the 19th century.) From ca. 1600 to 1737 the



ašrafī provided the dominant standard for Iranian gold coins, the *‘abbāsī* issues were of less importance. The ducat and the *fiorino* were known to be the prototypes of the *ašrafī* as late as ca. 1700; the Italian coins were called *ašrafī-e dobotī* (lit. *ašrafī* with two idols) into the post-Safavid period (*Taḍkerat al-molūk*, p. 59). The weight of the *ašrafī* remained constant; the coin of 1718 (3.498 gm, 54 grains) scarcely differs from that of Shah Esmā‘īl. But the nominal value of the coin in terms of silver dinars changed greatly, due to the devaluation of the latter, in 1552 an *ašrafī* was worth about 200 dinars; in 1718, 1,800 dinars.

Nāder Shah Afšār (1148-60/1736-47) introduced into Iran in 1737 the *mohr-e ašrafī*, following exactly the standard of the Mughal gold *mohr* minted in India since 970/1562-63 at 11.016 gm (171 grains). Half and quarter denominations of the *mohr-e ašrafī* also were issued. Nāder Shah and his successors, notably Karīm Khan Zand (1163-93/1750-79), struck the older *ašrafī* of 3.498 gm only sparingly, and it stood in a ratio of about 1:3 to the *mohr-e ašrafī*. In the second half of the 18th century the abundant quarter *mohr-e ašrafī* (2.768 gm, 42.75 grains) was called in popular usage *ašrafī-e Karīm-kānī*, *Karīm-kānī*, or simply *ašrafī*.

In 1768 the *mohr ašrafī* of 11.016 gm was valued at 10,000 silver dinars and thus was made equivalent to a *tūmān*. But the dinar suffered further devaluation, and from 1786 a shift is found to an issue of 2.915 gm (45 grains) valued at 3,000 dinars; this coin reflected a standard of 9.72 gm (150 grains) for a gold *tūmān*. In effect, the *mohr-e ašrafī* and its fractions were superseded, and thereafter they were rarely minted. In place of the traditional *ašrafī* and of the *mohr-e ašrafī* were issued gold *tūmāns* (and fractional denominations) whose weights decreased over time in proportion to the devaluation of the dinar. The term *ašrafī* continued, however, to be popularly applied to gold coins.

In 1830-34, late in the reign of the Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah Qājār, the standard of the old 54-grain *ašrafī* reappeared, valued at 10,000 dinars and thus identical with the *tūmān*. But the continued decline of the dinar caused a lightening of the *tūmān* coins, and the *ašrafī* issue was abandoned for good. The name *ašrafī* was applied to gold coins worth one *tūmān* from 1834 into the 20th century. But in 1926-27 the traditional *tūmān* was replaced by a new gold coin one-third lighter, the *pahlavī* of 1.92 gm. The *pahlavī* soon was transformed into an 8.134 gm issue, and the designation *ašrafī* finally became obsolete.



In the 16th century *ašrafī*s corresponding to the ducat were also issued by the Portuguese in control of Hormoz. This *ašrafī* (called *xerafim* by the Portuguese) was valued at 2,000 local dinars in the first quarter of the century. The local gold *hazār* (i.e., worth 1,000 dinars) therefore was called also *nīm-ašrafī* (half-*ašrafī*). But by the mid-16th century, the *hazār* had been converted to silver because of the dinar's devaluation. Two *hazārs* were equivalent to a gold *pardão* worth 2,000 dinars, but the latter had only two-thirds the weight of the traditional *ašrafī*. The contemporary Hormoz *ašrafī* (or *xerafim*, *sarafino*) then weighed 71 percent of a ducat, and in 1580 the coin was reduced to 62.6 of the ducat's weight. This special issue ended with the Safavid annexation of Hormoz in 1622.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also J. L. Bacharach, "The Dinar Versus the Ducat," *IJMES* 4, 1973, pp. 77-96.

A. Dīānat, "Ašrafī," *Āyanda* 9/3-4, 1362 Š./1983, pp. 177-83.

B. Fragner, "Social and Internal Economic Affairs," *Camb. Hist. Iran* VI, pp. 491-567.

W. Hinz, "Die spätmittelalterlichen Währungen im Bereich des Persischen Golfes," in *Iran and Islam*, ed. C. E. Bosworth, Edinburgh, 1971, pp. 303-14.

Idem, "The Value of the Toman in the Middle Ages," in *Yād-nāma-ye Īrānī-e Minorsky*, ed. M. Mīnovī and Ī. Āfšār, Tehran, 1348 Š./ 1969, pp. 90-95.

‘A. Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī-e man yātārīk-eejtemā’i o edārī-e dawra-ye qājārīya* I, Tehran, 1321 Š./1942, p. 28.

F. H. Rabino di Borgomale, *Coins, Medals, and Seals of the Shāhs of Irān 1500-1941*, Hertford, 1945.

Idem, "Coins of the Jalā’ir, Kara Koyūnlū, Musha’sha’, and Āk Koyūnlū Dynasties," *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 6th series, 10, 1950, pp. 94-139.



Idem, "Coins of the Shahs of Persia," *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 4th series, 8, 1908, pp. 357-73; 11, 1911, pp. 176-96; 15, 1915, pp. 243-48, 351-56.

F. von Schroetter, *Wörterbuch der Münzkunde*, Leipzig, 1930 (s.v. 'Abbāsī, Ashrafī, Muhr, Muhr-Ashrāfī, Tillā, Tōmān).

R. Vasmer, "Zur Münzkunde der persischen Schahe," *Islamica* 6, 1933-34, pp. 137-81.

Search terms:

اشرفی ashrafi ashrafy