



DINAR

DINAR (NPers. *dīnār*, Mid. Pers *dēnār* < Lat. *denarius aureus*), a gold coin.

i. In pre-Islamic Persia.

ii. In Islamic Persia.

i. IN PRE-ISLAMIC PERSIA

From the period of the Roman Republic the word *denarius* was used for coinage in the east, whereas in Rome and the west *aureus* was used. The dinar was a gold coin, struck mainly for purposes of prestige, especially harking back to the Achaemenid tradition embodied in the gold **daric**. Monetary bi-metalism did not really exist among the various pre-Islamic dynasties. The Achaemenid empire remained until the end of the 5th century B.C.E. “a country without a proper currency” (Curiel and Schlumberger, pp. 16, 26), that is, a currency having a nominal value. The gold daric, introduced by **Darius I** (522-486 B.C.E.) and minted as a royal prerogative, was valued only as bullion, and the silver siglos circulated only in Greek cultural areas of Asia Minor. With the arrival of **Alexander the Great**, however, the situation changed; Alexander withdrew the older issues, in order to expand the use of silver coins, which until then had not been attested in any part of the Persian empire except Asia Minor.

There are no surviving gold pieces from the Parthian period. Dinars began to be issued only under the Sasanians. From the reign of **Ardašīr I** (224-40 C.E.) to



that of Šāpūr III (383-88) their weight varied from 7 to 7.4 g. Like the silver derhams (q.v.), they bore on the obverse a bust of the crowned king facing right and on the reverse the fire altar flanked by two figures. Probably because it was primarily a ceremonial coin, the dinar is hardly attested in Iranian literary sources; nevertheless, in the trilingual inscription of Šāpūr I (240-70; ŠKZ, Parth. l. 4) it is mentioned that after the victory of the Sasanians at Misikhe (Pērōz-Šābuhr) the Romans had to pay the sum of 500,000 dinars (*dynr*, Gk. *dinaríon*) as ransom for the life of the emperor Philip the Arab and his family, a sum that Ernest Honigmann and André Maricq (p. 122) considered modest. Šāpūr struck dinars at Marv, including the mint name, which was unusual on gold coins. Under Šāpūr II (309-79), who often resided at Marv, the great proportion of dinars was minted in the Persian east, in order to pay for the costs of war (Gignoux, pp. 196-200).

Double dinars, introduced by Ardašīr, were struck only through the reign of Hormozd II (302-09). One-sixth dinars are attested from the reign of Bahrām II (274-93) through that of Kavād I (488-531). Already under Bahrām IV (388-99) the dinar of 7 g was no longer issued. Under Pērōz (459-84) it fell to 3.5 g, but it rose to 4.2 g under his successors. Bahrām IV introduced the minting of gold pieces of 4.54 g, corresponding to the Roman solidus and issued a 1.5-dinar piece. He and two of his successors, Yazdegerd I (399-420) and Yazdegerd II (438-57), also struck one-third dinars of 1.5 g. The dinar thus served as a trade commodity, sold by weight and fineness. The majority of kings minted dinars; a few did not, though the reasons are unknown. Legends on the dinars of Kavād I and Kōsrow I (531-79) provide evidence that such issues marked accession to the throne.

Šāpūr I is supposed to have restruck Roman double dinars as drachmas, perhaps, as Robert Göbl has suggested (pp. 334), after the capture of Antioch, the principal mint city for the eastern Romans; such restriking would explain the generally poor quality of these coins. The dinars of the usurper [Bahrām Čōbīn](#) (r. 590-91) are of fine workmanship, though reflecting close dependence on Byzantine models.

Under Pērōz most dinars were struck at the mint at Balk, though some were also issued at Weh-Ardašīr. The abundance of dinars issued in eastern Persia can no doubt be explained by the preference of the great Kushans of Bactria for this gold coinage; in fact, they did not mint silver. Probably in the late 1st or early 2nd century C.E. Vima Kadphises, son of the first king, Kujula Kadphises, issued four series of gold coins to a weight standard based on the



aureus of Augustus, and this monetary type persisted throughout the entire history of Kushan coinage. The inscriptions were in Greek and Indian (in kharoshthi script), then, beginning in the reign of the third king, in Bactrian (written in an alphabet derived from the Greek alphabet). Kushan numismatics is an independent field of study, largely dominated by the work of Göbl, D.W. MacDowall, and Helmut Humbach, as well as of a number of scholars in the former Soviet Union. The primary original feature of these coins is the image of a divinity on the reverse, as had already occurred among the Greco-Bactrian kings. Although only Shiva is represented on the coins of Vima Kadphises, those of third king, Kanishka, included a varied pantheon of about thirty gods of diverse origins. Under Vasudeva, however, Shiva alone was represented once again. After the conquest of Bactria by Šāpūr I in 265-69 (?) the Sasanian Kūšānšāhs carried on the regional tradition, issuing gold dinars imitating those of the last Kushan kings but with representations of fire altars and inscriptions that emphasized adherence to the Mazdean faith.

A large number of false dinars have been produced by modern forgers with images of the first Sasanian kings up to Bahrām IV.

See also [COINS AND COINAGE](#).

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(PHILIPPE GIGNOUX)

ii. IN ISLAMIC PERSIA

In Arabic of the classical period, the word *dīnār* had the double sense of a gold coin and of a monetary unit which might not be precisely embodied by actual coins. The word occurs once in the Koran (3:75). In the time of the Prophet, gold coins were issued by the Byzantine empire; the Sasanian empire also minted gold coins, but these are extremely rare today and were probably little used in commerce. Gold coins were not issued by Muslims until 72/692. The earliest of them deliberately resembled Byzantine gold issues (*solidus*) and had the same weight (ca. 4.55g; [Plate XXVII.a](#)). Starting in 77/696, new Islamic dinars were minted in Damascus, the Omayyad capital, with Koranic inscriptions in Arabic and a new weight of 4.25 grams ([Plate XXVII.b](#)). Although they may have circulated to a limited extent in Persia, the main currency there was the silver dirham, as it was in Sasanian times.

In 132/750, when the Omayyad caliphate was overthrown by the 'Abbasids, the caliphal mint for gold was removed to Iraq, the former territory of the Sasanian empire, where the 'Abbasids established their capital. About 146/763-64 the capital and the mint were settled in Madīnat-al-Salām (i.e., [Baghdad](#)). This is known only indirectly, because early 'Abbasid dinars, like those of the Omayyads, had no mint name on the coin ([Plate XXVII.c](#)). Presumably there was no need to specify the mint, as was done on silver dirhams, since there was only one mint for gold coins. These coins were without the name of the caliph. Their inscriptions were purely Koranic, except for a date written in words.



A second 'Abbasid dinar mint was established in Egypt in 170/786. Dinars were occasionally issued at other places in the western caliphate, but no dinars were issued in Persia until, apparently, the year 220/835 in Marv. Other eastern cities soon began issuing dinars as well. Among the most important mints in the 9th and early 10th centuries were Ahvāz and nearby mints (Sūq-al-Ahvāz, Tostar, etc.), Moḥammadiya (i.e., Ray), Samarqand, and Marv. George Miles (*Cambr. Hist. Iran*, pp. 370-71) enumerated thirteen 'Abbasid gold mints in Persia, in addition to others in Iraq, Azarbaijan, and the Caucasus. All these mints also issued silver dirhams.

These 'Abbasid dinars of Persia were all struck after the coinage standardization carried out in the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn (198-201/813-17). They carried uniform inscriptions which were continued by all dynasties that recognized the 'Abbasid caliphate until the 13th century (Plate XXVII.d). Most of these inscriptions were the same as those originally introduced by the Omayyad 'Abd-al-Malek in 78/697. The obverse had three or more horizontal lines in the center beginning with *lā elāh ellā Allāh waḥdaho, lā šarīk laho* (There is no god but God alone, none is associated with him). If there was a subordinate ruler named on the coin, such as the heir to the caliphate or a local dynast, his name most often appeared below these lines, while the caliph and the de-facto ruler were named on the reverse; but this rule was not always followed. Two circular inscriptions surrounded the central field. The inner inscriptions had the mint and date in the formula *besm Allāh zoreba hāda'l-dīnār be-(mint) sana* (year in words), "In the name of God this dinar was struck in...year..." The outer circular inscription was *le'llāh al-amr men qabl wa men ba'd wa-yawma'eden yafraḥo al-mo'menūn be-naṣr Allāh*, "the command is God's, in the past and in the future, and on that day the believers shall rejoice in God's victorious help" (Koran 30. 4-5), which was first used in 198/814 when al-Ma'mūn's forces took Baghdad.

On the reverse, at the top of the inner field, nearly all dinars had the word *le'llāh*, meaning "to God," "for God," or "belonging to God," with a significance still not fully understood. The main central inscription, in three or more horizontal lines, began with *Moḥammad rasūl Allāh*, "Moḥammad [is] the messenger of God," which was often followed (when space allowed) by the formula *ṣallā Allāh 'alayhe wa sallam*, "God bless him and grant him salvation." This was followed by the caliph's title, using only his honorific such as al-Motawakkel 'alā Allāh and, when appropriate, by the secular ruler's name and titles. The field was surrounded by a circular inscription:



Moḥammad rasūl Allāh arsalaho be'l-hodā wa dīn al-ḥaqq le-yozheraho 'alā al-dīn kollehe wa law kareha al-mošrekūn, “Moḥammad is the messenger of God, who sent him with guidance and the religion of truth to make it supreme over all other religions even though the polytheists may detest it” (Koran 9. 33).

This was the standard type for the Samanids, Buyids, Ghaznavids, Saljuqs, and their contemporaries from the 10th to 13th centuries (Plate XXVII.e). The prolix titulature and multiple sovereignties of the 10th and 11th century made the central field inscriptions often very crowded (Plate XXVII.f). As a solution, the engravers put names or parts of names and titles in smaller letters above, below, or, vertically, to the right or left of the main inscriptions. Further variation within the standard format was achieved by the use of different scripts, small floral or abstract ornaments, and variant proportions of the different elements of the design (Plate XXVII.g). Especially in the east, in Khorasan under the late Samanids and their successors, the engraving became a highly developed art; sometimes engravers even signed their dies in tiny script that can scarcely be read without magnification. Very rarely the accepted canons of coin design were abandoned completely or in part; again, this was primarily an eastern development (Plate XXVII.h). In the 10th century, while most of the mints mentioned above continued to be important, Nišāpūr became by far the most productive mint for dinars and continued to be important until the Mongol invasion. Isfahan, Moḥammadiya/Ray, and Ahvāz were also important centers, but some forty cities issued dinars under the Saljuqs at one time or another.

In the early 11th century minting of silver dirhams ceased in Persia. Copper *folūs* had stopped in the early 9th century. The gold dinar was left as the only currency under the Saljuqs and their contemporaries. Since the dinar was a valuable coin, it is not clear how smaller transactions were made. Perhaps older silver coins continued to circulate. After the early 12th century even gold coinage almost disappeared in Persia. Toward the end of the century minting of dinars as well as other coins revived somewhat in furthest eastern Persia under the Ghurids and K̲v̲ārazmšāhs. There are even a very few dinars and debased silver coins with the name of Jengiz Khan, but under his Mongol successors there was virtually no Persian coinage for most of the 13th century, except in Azarbaijan, where the Il-khans made their capital, and in Shiraz under the Salghurid vassal state (Plate XXVII.i).

Another development of the 11th century was the abandonment of fixed weight standard for coined dinars. Dinars of the 11th and 12th centuries vary



randomly from less than one dinar's weight to as much as five or six times the standard weight (Nègre). This meant that the value of any individual gold coin had to be determined by weighing it, while conversely the payment of a specified number of dinars was accomplished by weighing coins in bulk with a balance against the correct number of standard dinar weights. This was probably the result of very low minting charges for dinars, which made the monetary value of a dinar coin very close to the commercial value of the gold in it, leaving little margin for the variation in weight which was unavoidable when coins were made by hand. It seems to have been easier for all concerned to weigh all payments than to weigh coins one by one. Transactions by bulk weighing rather than by counting were in any case a common feature of all monetary systems before the advent of machine minting; the abandonment of standard weights for individual gold coins was merely a practical response to economic realities. Gold coins from Egypt to Central Asia continued to be irregular in weight until the 15th century.

In 695/1296 the Il-khan Ġāzān and his minister Rašīd-al-Dīn initiated a new system intended to standardize the coinage of all their realm (Smith and Plunkett). The dinar was the basic monetary unit, defined as the equivalent of six silver dirhams, each of 4.30 grams. It was a unit of account, not an actual coin. Gold coins were also part of the new system, but they were called *metqāls*, not dinars, and their value in relation to dirhams and dinars was not fixed. As Il-khanid rule collapsed and was replaced by competing warlord states, the weight of the dirham was frequently reduced, and the value of the dinar, as an accounting multiple of the dirham, declined in proportion. By the end of the 14th century the dinar was a very small amount of money. The toman, 10,000 dinars, became an everyday unit of account. In 1310 Š./1931 the dinar was re-defined as a hundredth of the rial. Its value today is miniscule.

See also [COIN AND COINAGE](#).

There are scarcely any studies or catalogues on dinars alone; see the general bibliography under COINS AND COINAGE. Nor are there any general catalogues or studies of the coinage of any of the Persian dynasties until the Il-khanids. For the Omayyad dinar, see M. L. Bates, "History, Geography, and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage," *Revue suisse de numismatique* 65, 1986, pp. 231-62.



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[Plate XXVII.a.](#) Dinar, probably issued in Damascus 692-94, ANS 1002.1.107.

[Plate XXVII.b.](#) Dinar, probably issued in Damascus, dated 77/697, ANS 1002.1.406.

[Plate XXVII.c.](#) Dinar, probably issued in Baghdad, dated 156/772-73, ANS 1917.215.134.

[Plate XXVII.d.](#) Dinar, Madīnat al-Salām (Bagh-dad) mint, with the name of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mo'taṣem, dated 222/836-37, ANS 1917.215.340.

[Plate XXVII.e.](#) Dinar, Nīšāpūr mint, with names of the Samanid Amīr Naṣr b. Aḥmad and the 'Abbasid caliph al-Rāzī, dated 328/939-40, ANS 1922.211.52.

[Plate XXVII.f.](#) Dinar, Sūq al-Ahvāz mint, with names of the Buyid Mo'ezz-al-Dawla and the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qāder, dated 398/1007-08, ANS 1968.216.9.

[Plate XXVII.g.](#) Dinar, Herat mint, with names of the Ghaznavid Sultan Maḥmūd and the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qāder, dated 404/1013-14, ANS 1972.288.20.



Plate XXVII.h. Dinar, Balk mint (?), with names of the Saljuq Sultan Sanjar and the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mostaršed, dated 515/1121-22, ANS 1979.213.1.

Plate XXVII.i. Dinar, Shiraz mint, with names of the Salghurid queen Ābeš Kātūn and the il-khan Abaqa, dated 675/1276-77, ANS 1970.81.2. Collection of American Numismatic Society. Scale 1:1.