

## Study and Analysis of Symbolic Motifs of Elymais Bronze Coins (Based on Parthian Coins in Sari Museum)

Type of Study: Original Research

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### Abstract

Understanding the elements and motifs is very essential in archaeology. The motifs on the coins play an important role in the knowledge of ancient religions, sects, and myths and illuminate the history of many religious events. Coins have a significant impact on the knowledge of art and, studying it can help, how art progresses and degenerates in different eras and ethnicities. The study of coins is of great importance in archaeology, especially in historical times. By reason of the usage of the motif elements of coins, we can discover government, ideology and economic systems in the past societies. The primary purpose of this study is to identify the symbolic motifs of 405 Parthian Bronze coins in the Kolbadi museum of Sari, which were discovered in 2011 in Babol. The main point is the unique motifs of these coins, mainly geometric and symbolic motifs, discovered in several Parthian coins. Most motifs on Parthian coins have been symbolic and human motifs and, religion had a significant impact in creating symbolic motifs of these coins. This research has used analytical – experimental method also, expert observation of these coins in the Sari Museum. The result shows that the prominent motifs of these coins are symbolic; especially the moon, star, anchor, royal ring and wheat, which these motifs are related to the religion of the Parthian period. The symbolic crescent moon is one of the elements of light and fire, and these motifs relate to the religion of the royal ring which are one of the sun symbols.

**Key Words:** Coin, Parthian, Symbolic motifs, Elimaeid

### Introduction

Before the introduction of coins' ancient civilizations lived commercially by exchanging goods for goods. Still, with the beginning of the metal ages, a considerable transformation in the evolution of human societies began. The economic system and commerce were established (Bayani, 13-14). In this way, from various metals such as Copper, Silver, Gold, and Bronze alloy, ingot and ring objects were prepared and became an instrument for exchange and trade in the commercial transaction. In Iran, for the first time, Darius Achaemenid minted coins in 514-517 BC (Ibid, 10-20). This research aims to study the symbolic motifs of 405 Elymais Bronze coins in the Kolbadi museum in Sari.

### The influence of religion in the motifs of Elymais coins

The first Elymais coins were in a Greek style, and Greek symbols, such as Apolon, are often seen on the minted Elymais coins. The coins of this period have a motif such as the crescent moon, star, and anchor as Seleucid coins. Anchor was a symbol of the gods for the success of Seleucus in advancing his goals and winning over his rivals, which was also in Alexander's coins. Also, the anchor motif is to one of the gods of Susa (Hill, 1938: 404). The moon and the star motifs are considered a symbol for the Parthian. A related use of the royal ring sign to

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the Mehr ritual in the early Elymais Age (Zare, 2010: 879). In the late Elymais Age, the image of the Greek gods such as Apollo, Zeus, and Artemis are on the back of the coins with signs similar to the Persian gods, especially Nanaya. Some of the symbols engraved on Elymais coins are related to the Artemis goddess in ancient Greek mythology or Anahita in Iran, who was a symbol of fresh water, one of the signs of which was water drops on the Elymais coins (Hall, 2008: 218 & 223).

### **Research findings**

Based on investigations of the 405 Bronze coins of the Sari museum, most of them have a lot of damage. Most of these coins have no inscription, and a few have inscriptions. All these coins have an incomplete mint, and their weight is different. Most of the weight is between 1/3 – 3/6 grams, and the diameter of these coins is between 1/1 – 1/5 mm.

### **Patterns on coins**

The prominent motifs on these coins are the bust of the Parthian king or local ruler, whose profile is to the left, and the top of the king motif, and around it are the symbolic motifs of the moon, star, and anchor. Other motifs of these coins are the king or royal ruler's image in full face. The full-faced motif of the king on the Elymais Bronze coins became popular in late this period.

### **Patterns on the back of coins**

The most common motif on the back of these coins is a full-length portrait of a person with a bow in his left hand and an arrow on his right shoulder (Bayani, 2002: 12-20). In these coins, some motifs similar to the crescent moon and water drapes, which was probably a symbol of blessing. The most exciting motifs in these Bronze coins relate to a person's figure at full length with a stick in his left hand and an unknown object in his right. One of the unique motifs is two nested circles with ribbons hanging on top of them.

### **Discussion**

The studies on the Bronze coins can tell us the prominent motifs such as the moon, star, sun, crescent moon, plant motifs, and water drops. Also, other symbolic motifs of these coins are anchor, bow, ring, and royal scepter. The image of the anchor is these coins, which were probably a symbol of gods in this Age. The anchor symbol could be related to the water. Because water always was a sacred symbol among ancient Iranian. The crescent moon symbolizes fertility, immortality, and rebirth (Bahmani and Saffaran, 2010: 5-6). The moon and the star were the most symbolic motifs of these coins. These coins symbolized the two famous ancient Iranian goddesses, Nahid and Mehr. The moon and the star were the most symbolic motifs of these coins. These coins symbolized the two famous ancient Iranian goddesses, Nahid and Mehr. Nahid is the goddess of victory, and Mehr is the goddess of war, the product of kings from the enemy. One of the plants on the Bronze coins was a wheat cluster meaning blessing. The most human motifs in these coins are the king's profile to the left. Between 405 coins in this museum, only 50 coins have the king's image in full-face, and in 10 of these coins, the image of the king is the beardless face and a Greek-style hat. Fifty of these coins have the motif of water drops, one has the motif of a flower, and another has the motif of a wheat cluster.

### **Conclusion**

Investigations on these coins, I be said all of them are Bronze and have an incomplete minting. In most coins is the bust of the Parthian king or local ruler, which the king's profile in full face. These Bronze coins belong to the Elimayids Age, which minted coins in

Southwestern Iran in Susa as an independent king of the Parthian period. On the back of these coins are symbolic motifs such as flowers, plants, and wheat clusters, which were common during the Elymaid period. Another of these motifs is the king with a beardless face and wearing a Greek-style hat. Therefore, these coins are related to the Elimayids Age, which ruled Southwestern Iran in the Parthian period.

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