

Decorative Use of Writing on Iraqi Currency (Royal Era as a Model)

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Received: 03/01/2024

Accepted : 24/02/2024

Abstract:

The Iraqi currency, in addition to its functional role as a medium of exchange, bears artistic elements that give its surfaces aesthetic value. The Arabic script, with its calligraphic forms, contributes to the creation of a readable message that can be considered an effective communication to the recipient. In addition, the Arabic script possesses an aesthetic value. Therefore, the function of the Arabic script on currency is not limited to reading. Rather, its semantic and compositional roles extend beyond, due to its artistic and sculptural interventions through its use on the surface of the currency. This is achieved through an implementation technique that is similar in its organizational and technical aspects to bas-relief.

Keywords: employment; decoration; currency; sculpture; prominent.

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Introduction:

Besides its practical function as a medium of exchange, the Iraqi currency bears artistic elements that add aesthetic value to its surfaces. The Arabic script, with its various forms, contributes to the creation of a readable message that can be considered an effective communication tool for the recipient within the context of material exchange between individuals in the same society. In addition to the semantic message it conveys through its readability, the Arabic script also possesses an aesthetic value that stems from its unique form, making it one of the fine arts. Visual artists have drawn inspiration from the Arabic script, finding in it compositional relationships that give the visual surface a unique character through its combinations. As a result, letters and words have acquired a decorative value in their own right. There are many examples of this, such as the "tughra", which was designed during the Ottoman period. Therefore, the function of the Arabic script on currency is not limited to reading; it goes beyond its semantic and compositional functions due to its artistic interventions and the art of sculpture through its use on the surface of the currency, using a performative technique that is close in its execution systems to the technique of bas-relief sculpture.

I. THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Research Problem:

The current research problem deals with the design process of 'Hurufiyya'[†] and its typographic organization, and its role in enhancing the aesthetic value of currency. This can be summarized in the following question: What are the design criteria for decorative 'Hurufiyya' on Iraqi

[†] The use of Arabic words and/or letters in artworks

currency? And does the transition to different media and materials contribute to enriching the visual dimension of design on Iraqi currency?

Importance of Research:

Given the deep historical roots of Iraqi currency, which is linked to the economy and marketing of goods, as well as the intellectual values it carries that belong to its cultural heritage, it was necessary for designers to pay attention to this characteristic that coincides with the investment of writing and its inclusion in the decoration and design of currency, and to elevate it as high aesthetic values, whether at the level of the reference (ancient or Islamic cultural reference), with the effectiveness of the technique and in accordance with the mechanisms of visual and sculptural implementation. This vision specifically leads us to the importance of our current research, which sheds light on a dominant and influential element in social interaction. Currency and its writing play an effective role in the transition from one discourse to another, in the sense of the changing meaning it carries through the monetary value it represents, in addition to benefiting the relevant institutions and researchers in this field.

Research Objective:

To identify the decorative use of writing on Iraqi currency.

Scope of Research:

- **Temporal Scope:** The Royal Era (1921-1958)
- **Spatial Scope:** The Republic of Iraq
- **Thematic Scope:** The Mechanism of Employing 'Hurufiyya' on the Surface of the Coin

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

AXIS I: INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROYAL ERA IN IRAQ AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE IRAQI CURRENCY

The Royal Era, also known as the Iraqi Kingdom or the Hashemite Iraqi Kingdom, was the first Iraqi government in modern times. It began with the appointment of (King Faisal I) in 1921, although the country did not achieve independence until 1932, making Iraq the first Arab country to achieve independence from the British Mandate. From the first day that (Faisal I) was crowned a constitutional King, his duties were defined by a constitution voted on by a democratic parliamentary council elected by the people. Faisal relied on an elite group of young men, most of whom were officers in the Ottoman army, as well as some distinguished individuals. (Zaki,2020.p19).

The first diplomatic step achieved by the Royal Era was the signing of the 1922 Treaty with Great Britain, in which the great power, according to Article 1, pledged to establish a constitutional parliamentary democratic Arab monarchy in the name of the Iraqi Kingdom (Zaki.2020.p21). The royal era was ruled by King Faisal I (1921-1933), King Ghazi (1933-1939), and King Faisal II (1939-1958). Their rule affected the structure of the currency circulating in Iraq, which we will describe in our research. See (Figure-1):



Figure-1

Until the British occupation of Iraq, Iraq circulated Ottoman banknotes, which were in use during the period (1534-1920). With the British occupation, the Ottoman currency was replaced by the Indian currency known as the (anna) and the (metal rupee) issued in 1914, with the image of the British King (Emperor George V) on both the paper and metal types. (Abbas,2012.p6-7) See (Figure-2):



Figure-2

In 1924, the Basic Law (the Constitution) was issued, and Article 108 thereof stipulated that the state's coinage system should be determined accordingly (Hasani,1982,p348). In 1927, the British government agreed to update the Iraqi currency, and the Council of Ministers decided to initially assign the Ministry of Finance to carry out the necessary procedures to complete the project. The Iraqi Currency Law was referred in 1931 by the House of Representatives to the Economic and Financial Committee of the House. After the approval of the Committee, the House of Representatives, and the ratification of the King, the Iraqi Currency Law No. 44 of 1931 was enacted, and March 1, 1932 was set as the date for the issuance of the Iraqi currency by the (Iraqi Currency Committee). (Thuwaini,2010.p157) This committee is the first issuing authority in Iraq, headquartered in London, and is directly linked to the Currency Department of the Ministry of Finance. (Iraqi Currency,1973.p7)

This committee was formed to prepare the designs with British expertise, and it issued the first Iraqi currency in 1931. Article 5 of the law defined the

categories of metal coins (50 fils dirham, 20 fils, 10 fils). The amendment to this law authorized the committee to mint two additional coins: 100 fils and 200 fils – Riyal (meaning royal).(Sammarrai.p44) The British artist and sculptor Percy Metcalfe (1895-1970) designed British, Irish, Iraqi, Egyptian and other coins. The letters (P M) were added to the coin below the King's neck, which are the first two letters of his name. See (Figure-3):



Figure-3

He used the picture of the King taken by the Iraqi photographer (Arshak), who was the official photographer who photographed the three kings of Iraq, and the royal family. His photographs were used on the Iraqi paper and metal currency, as well as stamps. The Iraqi calligrapher, Ismail Al-Farsi (1906-1982), calligraphed the two paper and metal currencies.

It is a metal coin that represents the first currency put into circulation. The face of the coin shows a picture of the face of (King Faisal I) on the right side, and the writing (King of Iraq) on the left side. On the other side of the coin there was a small circle in the middle with the denomination of the coin and the word (fils) below it. Around the circle were the words "Kingdom of Iraq" so that the word "Kingdom" was at the top and "Iraq" at the bottom. The date of the Hijri calendar was separated on the right and the Gregorian date on the left. The edge of the coined coin was serrated for the silver categories, arched for the categories made of nickel metal, and flat and smooth for the bronze categories. (Shalji,2012.website) See (Figure-4):



Figure-4

In 1932, the Iraqi dinar was issued as the national currency of Iraq. It bore the name of the government and a portrait of (King Faisal I). This currency was convertible and could be circulated anywhere in the world. The numerical employment of one of its interfaces was in the year (1352) on the right and (1933) on the left. This mechanism was used to indicate the year of issue in both the Hijri and Gregorian calendars. Despite the successive design and printing of banknotes until 1934, a currency was minted bearing the image of (King Ghazi) who ruled during the period (1933-1939) as in the shapes of the currency that bore his image looking (Figure-5):



Figure-5

In late 1939, currencies were issued bearing the image of (King Faisal II), in multiple denominations (quarter dinar, half dinar, one dinar, five dinars, ten dinars, one hundred dinars), within the paper currency. (Hadi,2019.website)

Later, two metal coins were issued bearing on their faces the image of (King Faisal II) as a young child, the King's face facing the right, and the name (Faisal II) was written on the right side and (King of Iraq) on the left side, as is prevalent in the previous currency minting. On the other side of the coin (the back of the coin), there is a circle in the middle of the coin in which the denomination of the currency is fixed and its value is written below. (Hadi,2019.website) (Figure-6):



Figure-6

With the outbreak of (WWII) and the need to provide more currency for circulation, due to Britain's preoccupation with the war, paper currency was issued in 1944 bearing the image of (King Faisal II), who was a child. With the establishment of the National Bank of Iraq in 1947, its tasks included currency affairs in Iraq. The fifth issue of paper currency was issued in 1950, followed by the sixth and seventh issues of currency in 1953 and 1955 respectively. It was accompanied by the issuance of metal coins similar to the minting and specifications of the metal issues except for the image of the King which was older with a variety of materials. (Figure-7):



Figure-7

The denominations varied in value within various currencies, denomination and material, where their issues were embodied:

- Bronze coin of 1-fils denomination
- 2-fils coin
- 4-fils 'Aana' nickel coin
- 10-fils nickel coin
- 20-fils (Quran) silver coin
- 50-fils silver coin (bearing the word Dirham above the denomination)
- 100-fils silver coin (Abdul. Al-Qaisi.2002.p476).
- The name of the National Bank of Iraq was changed to the Central Bank in 1956, although the metal currencies continued in their various denominations as well as the paper currencies. (Abdul. Al-Qaisi,2002.p476).
- The royal metal currency continued to be used and circulated even after the coup d'état on July 14, 1958, which overthrew the Hashemite Iraqi monarchy, which was founded by (King Faisal I) under British auspices, and resulted in the killing of 23-year-old (King Faisal II). (Al-Hasani,1988.p182)
- On June 6, 1959, the Currency Law of the Republic of Iraq was issued, and the banknotes and coins issued during the monarchy were withdrawn and destroyed, with a decision to stop their circulation and the circulation of the new currency. (Ali Akbar,p5)

AXIS II: WRITING WITHIN SEMANTIC CONCEPT AND COMPOSITION AESTHETICS

Upon addressing the literal use of typography, we are captivated by the patterns of coins (currency) through their formal organization. This organization employs typography on both a semantic level (what the marketing message conveys) and an aesthetic level (the value conveyed by the letterform), achieving circulation in the cultural sphere by creating a kind of harmony between the collective taste of Iraqi society and the letter's connotations and its creative tendencies. **Until the British occupation, the circulating coins were based on the Ottoman currency.** After the British domination, it was replaced with the Indian rupee (1918) as part of the

occupation policy, preceded by the Indian anna (1914). (Abbas. 2012. p. 7) In this regard, we look at a model of one of the Ottoman coins that was minted in Baghdad (Figure 8):



Figure-8

The Indian rupee was a silver coin for most of the 19th century and was considered one of the strongest economies backed by gold during British rule and the first decade of independence. In the early and mid-20th century, the Indian rupee was the official currency in many areas under British rule. (Coinage-Pre-Colonial India,2018.website) The first new coins bore the face of (King Faisal I), forming a space within the decorative design of the coin. The term "King of Iraq" occupied the left side of the coin, meaning that the personal representation was integrated within the coin's perimeter with a linguistic formulation that achieved the significance of the character and its importance. See Figure 9:



Figure-9

On the other side of the coin, there is a central circle. The value of the coin's denomination is documented in number and writing, and the phrase "Kingdom of Iraq" surrounds its perimeter. The surface is divided into two side fields, and the date of the coin's minting is specified in both the Gregorian and Hijri calendars. **The typography was designed to form a decorative surface that is closest to the designs of Islamic currency.** If we compare it with Islamic currencies, we find these approaches that the Islamic sculptor exploited to strengthen his affiliation and identity. See Figures 10, 11, and 12:



Figure-10

We find that it is a continuation of the coins that were minted in the Islamic eras (which appeared in the Umayyad era at the hands of Caliph Abdul-Malik bin Marwan, who completely Arabized the coins in line with the general Arabization policy followed in the state's institutions, where he issued in 76 AH an Arab dinar free from Sassanid and

Byzantine images bearing Arabic writings in Kufic script. (Tamim. Marsa Youssef,2015.p95) See Figure 10: Umayyad dinar dating back to the era of Caliph Abdul-Malik bin Marwan, who was the first to order the minting of coins. The testimony is also written around his name in Kufic script. The same mechanism surrounds the image of the Kings (Faisal I, Ghazi, and Faisal II). If we make a formal comparison between the two models, we find that the typographic use took the same mechanism, the goal is to enhance the value of the letter within the composition to achieve aesthetic values. See Figure 11:



Figure-11

The characteristics were repeated in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. See Figures 12 and 13. We find its implications in the typographic use throughout the royal rule in Iraq, the aim of which is to achieve aesthetic values.



Figure-12



Figure-13

We find the same system in the 4-fils coin, which was colloquially called ‘Aana’[‡], circulated during the royal era. The same style was implemented, but with multiple values of the fixed currency, as well as the type of metal,

[‡] According to the Indian anna

where silver was used in the 20-fils denomination as well as in the 50-fils and riyal denominations.

The characteristic has taken on an aesthetic feature through the interweaving of letters to create a readable text that is circulated at the community level. With the multiplicity of the type of line for the letter, the writings came in the form of an abstract decoration that unite with each other to form a single unit. The lines correspond to the Arabic and foreign numbers in the same field and in an analogical form, the purpose of which is to achieve a purely aesthetic dimension (the compatibility between numbers and words).

It is an intimate relationship between the visual level and the mental level of the aesthetics of the line and its resulting psychological, aesthetic and intellectual effects. Its aesthetics (as an Arabic font and a fine art) is distinguished by a *distinctiveness* that is almost unique in its dimensions, nature, function and levels. A privacy that may not be available in any other fine art. These aesthetics have two levels: the first is the visual level and the aesthetics of the formation that the artistic form of the Arabic font possesses, and the second is the mental level derived from the aesthetics of the language. (Hanash, 1st edition, p.54) Thus, the Arabic letter acquired a contemporary vision as an Islamic symbol with its own existence and entity that is presented as a formal and aesthetic value. The use of the letter has become unbound by its historical uses, but has rather become a field for diverse artistic performance. This specifically enhances its uses in coinage specifically, as its fonts, through their relationships and harmony, harmonize with the structure of the general three-dimensional shape of the coin. Fonts varied in their shapes and within their evolutionary development, as is the case with the Kufic script in its various types (the old, the dotted, the square, the leafy, the flowery, the victorious), which came as a result of excessive use of decorative elements. (Al-Husseini,1989.p35).

There is also (the Thuluth script) which is considered one of the most difficult scripts, and it was named after the width of the Tumar pen (Al-Kurdi. without date.p68) that was used to write it. As for the (Naskh script), it was named

after its role in copying the Qur'ans and books, and (the Ruq'ah script) which is attributed to the Turkish school (Al-Husseini,1989.p38) and is considered one of the easiest scripts due to its short pen which suits the flexibility of the rapid hand movement in formation. And (the Diwani script) was named after its use in the Ottoman state departments. There are other scripts that were mastered by the Arabs in the Levant and the Maghreb, including the Rayhan script, the Muhaqqaq script and the Ash'ar script... The significance of these writings achieved their value through the disclosure of the kings by embodying the names of the kings next to their pictures, in addition to its symbolic geometric property that gives within its organization of the monetary category a familiar property in material circulation.

Coins in the royal era can be considered a means of documenting historical discourse within the sequence of events and kings. Through which we can observe the transition from one king to another through the currency that was minted during his reign.

III. ANALYTICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE READING OF MODELS OF CURRENCY COINS: TYPOGRAPHIC EMPLOYMENT

The beginning of this monetary project was before the establishment of the Iraqi monarchy and the coronation of (King Faisal I) of Iraq. The minting and circulation of currency was subject to previous references (the Ottoman currency, the Indian currency), which were imposed by the ruling authorities on the country, during the Ottoman hegemony and what followed it from the authority of the British military governor later, who ordered the cessation of the circulation of Ottoman currencies. In 1931, the first Iraqi paper currency was issued. This currency was the beginning of internal and external circulation, which caused the employment of the Arabic and English languages in the design of the currency. It bore the image of (King Faisal I) on the front side of the currency. See (Figure-9). In the middle of the other side of the currency is a circle defined by the value of the currency denomination, surrounded from above by the word (Kingdom) and from

below by the word (Iraq). The two words are separated by two fields in which the year of issue of the currency is documented according to the Hijri and Gregorian calendars.(Al-Shalji,2012.website)

The employment of the image of the King with the inscriptions is a clear metaphor for the currency with an Islamic reference, which was based on documenting the caliph or ruler on the face of the currency in a bas-relief manner. This currency, which was issued in 1931, was a metal coin that was considered the first Iraqi currency, issued for circulation. It was a variety of metal coins that came in multiple denominations (bronze coin 1 fils denomination, bronze coin 2 fils denomination, nickel coin 4 fils denomination "the public", nickel coin 10 fils denomination, silver coin 20 fils denomination "the Quran", silver coin 50 fils denomination "dirham", silver coin 100 fils denomination).(Khalil,2020.website) This formal system almost continues within the monarchy, and even in the republican rule that followed it. See (Figure-14):



Figure-14

Letters with numbers formed a formal system that was almost constant for this category within the royal era, as well as the currencies in the republican era. The inscriptions varied between fonts and their types, between Thuluth and Kufic scripts. They were repeated in the same system. It is a continuation of the Ottoman references, and what preceded it from eras, even though the same system had a wide presence in Byzantine and Arabized Islamic currency. But with the change of technologies and the ideal and perfect production in the Ottoman, royal and republican eras. For each of the models of (King Faisal II) in the royal era, and the model of the leader (Abdul-Karim Qasim) from the republican era, and specifically, the beginning of the era. The same writing style and the surrounding dominant entity in the currency were implemented in a bas-relief manner.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- The materials used to mint coins varied (copper, bronze, silver, iron).
- The edges and ends of the coin vary depending on the type of metal used in the outputs of the coin shape.
- The minting of coins reflects the nature of the metal used, as we see the color contrast between bronze and silver metals, for example.
- The designs used on the surface of coins (currency) are based on images of kings during their reigns, as well as their names, which represent an important aspect of the currency and at the same time document the era of the King during his reign.
- The letters and numbers executed on the surface of the coins achieved their readable meaning that conveys the value of the currency, as revealed by the currency during the royal era (from its inception to its demise).
- The other side of the coin represents its monetary value, and its categories vary according to the central circle in the middle of the coin, which is surrounded by its value in writing and symmetrically around its circumference, with a field to document the era in which it was minted in both Arabic and English.
- The letters used on the surface achieved decorative values resulting from the interlacing and overlapping of fonts, occupying the entire surface of the coin.

V. CONCLUSION

- Coins are a trading pattern invested in the marketing exchange in daily life.
- Coins belong to applied arts, as they are a social art like other arts.

- The realistic images of the kings carry a documentation of the royal era, which is consistent with the font and the surroundings of the King and its Islamic extension.
- The diversity of the writings, their extension, and their civilizational roots were in themselves a formal value of the letter that achieved its beauty through its compositional derivation based on geometry and balance. This achieves the purpose for which it was created, and thus we find that the Thuluth script and the Kufic script are among the most used scripts in coins.
- The design and meaning of coins are close to those of paper currency prevalent in the same era, in terms of the type of Kufic script and the Thuluth script, which are the most common, as well as other decorations executed on the surface.

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التوظيف التزييني للكتابات على العملة العراقية (العهد الملكي أمودجا)

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الملخص:

تحمل العملة العراقية فضلا عن وظيفتها التطبيقية كفاعلية تداولية، على عناصر فنية تضفي على سطوحها قيم جمالية، ويسهم الحرف العربي بتشكيلاته الكتابية الى الوصول لخطاب مقروء، يمكن عده رسالة فاعلة للمتلقي ضمن حيز التبادل المادي بين افراد المجتمع الواحد. وهو فضلا عن ما يبثه من خطاب دلالي ضمن خصوصيته المقروءة. الا انه يمتلك قيمة جمالية تفرضها خصوصيته التشكيلية لعهده احد الفنون الجميلة، يستحضره الفنانين التشكيليين بعد ان وجدوا فيه من علاقات تكوينية تكسب السطح البصري تميزا من خلال توليفاته حتى اصبحت الحروف والكلمات تكتسب قيمة تشكيلية تزيينية بحد ذاتها وهناك امثلة عديدة فيما مثله الحرف كما هو الحال مع (الطغراء) الذي تم تصميمه مع عهد السلاطين العثمانيين. وعليه فأن مهمته لا تقتصر على القراءة، بل تتعدى مهامه الدلالية التكوينية، نتيجة مداخلاته التشكيلية. وفن النحت من خلال توظيفه على سطح العملة، عبر تقنية ادائية تقترب في نظمها التنفيذية وتقنية النحت البارز (الريليف).

الكلمات المفتاحية: توظيف، تزيين، عملة، نحت، بارز.