



COINS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD: EXPLORING PRIMARY SOURCES

Education Department

Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia



Objective: This educational resource aims to enable students to understand the meaning and importance of primary sources

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

- Educators can introduce students to the definition of a primary source and then use the examples provided for a group or class discussion
- To fully utilise this resource, educators are strongly encouraged to present this document in full screen on presentation mode
- The questions are mostly designed as open-ended to encourage short discussions among students, although an answer guide can be provided by our education department upon request. Email us at education@iamm.org.my

Suitable For:

- ***Lower Secondary Students***

WHAT IS A PRIMARY SOURCE?

- A primary source is an original source, an object that was written or created during a specific period in history.
- Primary sources help historians by providing certain information about specific events that have happened in the past.
- These sources of information allow scholars and historians to hypothesize, construct and understand and appreciate artefacts in its diverse forms

WHAT IS A PRIMARY SOURCE?

Examples of Primary Sources

Traveller's
Accounts

Illustrated
manuscripts

Coins

Treaties

Registers

These sources are complemented by artefacts, monuments and other tangible remnants of what were once great dynasties.

QUIZ

Multiple Choice

Look at the following questions.
Click on the correct answers.

QUESTION 1

State True or False for the following statement.

A necklace from the Qajar dynasty on display at a museum is an example of primary source.

TRUE

FALSE

QUESTION 2

State True or False for the following statement.

Primary source encompasses literary documents such as treaties, illustrated and illuminated manuscripts, and textbooks.

TRUE

FALSE

QUESTION 3

State True or False for the following statement.

A primary source was created or written in the historical period studied

TRUE

FALSE

QUESTION 4

Which of the following items is a primary source?

- A A documentary about the Ottoman Empire on TV.
- B A biography about a Mamluk Sultan
- C An Ummayyad silver dirham
- D A review about a calligraphy book published online

Well done!

Now that you understand what a primary source is,
we can move on to look closer at coins of the
Islamic World.

Coins are in fact a great example of a primary source!



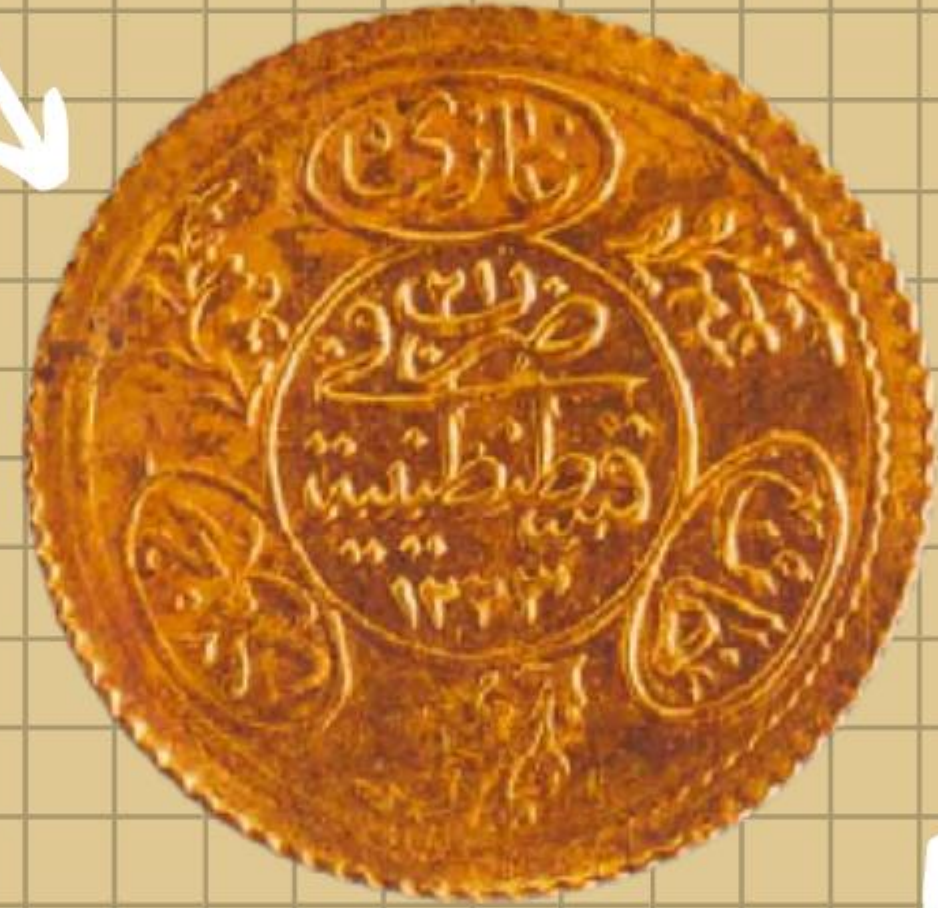
Islamic Coins: A Brief Introduction

Coins were of special significance in the Islamic world as a required means of declaring a ruler's status.

Coins were often issued to mark an important ceremony or state event.

Almost each ruler would have inscriptions, signs and symbols designed on coins which were then minted, regulated, and spread throughout commercial trails.

It was also formulated as a marker of identification for a particular ruler, instead of the use of realistic images, like portraits.



An Ottoman Coin

Through coins, a wide range of motifs, iconography, and calligraphy were produced.



Islamic Coins: A Brief Introduction

The history of Islamic coinage goes back to the caliphate of Umar bin al-Khattab (634 - 644 AD), when Muslims began to strike specifically Islamic inscriptions over Sassanian silver dirhams.



The early coins of Islamic empires were issued as a response to Byzantine or Sassanian coinage.

A coin issued in response to Byzantine coinage



It was only during the reign of the fifth Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (685 - 705), that coins of entirely Islamic design were introduced.

A coin from the Umayyad dynasty

Islamic Coins: Features

Originally one of the early innovations in Islamic coinage, religious inscriptions on coins slowly disappeared.

Religious inscriptions used to appear alongside the name of the ruler until the end of the Abbasid dynasty and the late Fatimid dynasty. After this time, the religious content became less prominent.



An Umayyad coin with religious inscription



Coins were inscribed with the Shahadah and verses from the Qur'an on both sides.



An Umayyad coin with religious inscription



Islamic Coins: Features

Until the modern era, Islamic coins tended to share many characteristics with one another, regardless of their date and place of minting.

Among the early Muslim dynasties, there was a tendency to write the date as well.



An obverse and reverse of a Mughal Coin



An obverse and reverse of a from Jaipur



An obverse and reverse of a Fatimid Coin

The most important similarity is that almost every Islamic dynasty used the Arabic alphabet to write inscriptions in different languages.



Islamic Coins: Features

Another shared feature is a preference for the same shape; most Islamic coins were round, although some dynasties opted for other shapes.

Some depicted human and animal subjects, including figures from the zodiac, but it was calligraphic and floral decoration that predominated.



A Safavid Coin



A Malay Kupang



An Ayyubid Coin



A Coin from Yemen



A Chinese Coin

Some Islamic coins were shaped in squares, irregular rectangles and an assortment of polygons.



Islamic Coins: Features

Certain Ottoman coins featured a Tughra. A tughra is a calligraphic seal or signature used by Ottoman rulers made unique for each sultan. It was used as a seal to authorize official documents.

The use of tughra on documents and coins served to guarantee the authenticity of their value and content.

During the reign of Sultan Sulaiman the Magnificent (r.1494 - 1566 AD), his tughra was incorporated as a style motif across many items, including illuminated manuscripts, coins, and woodworks.

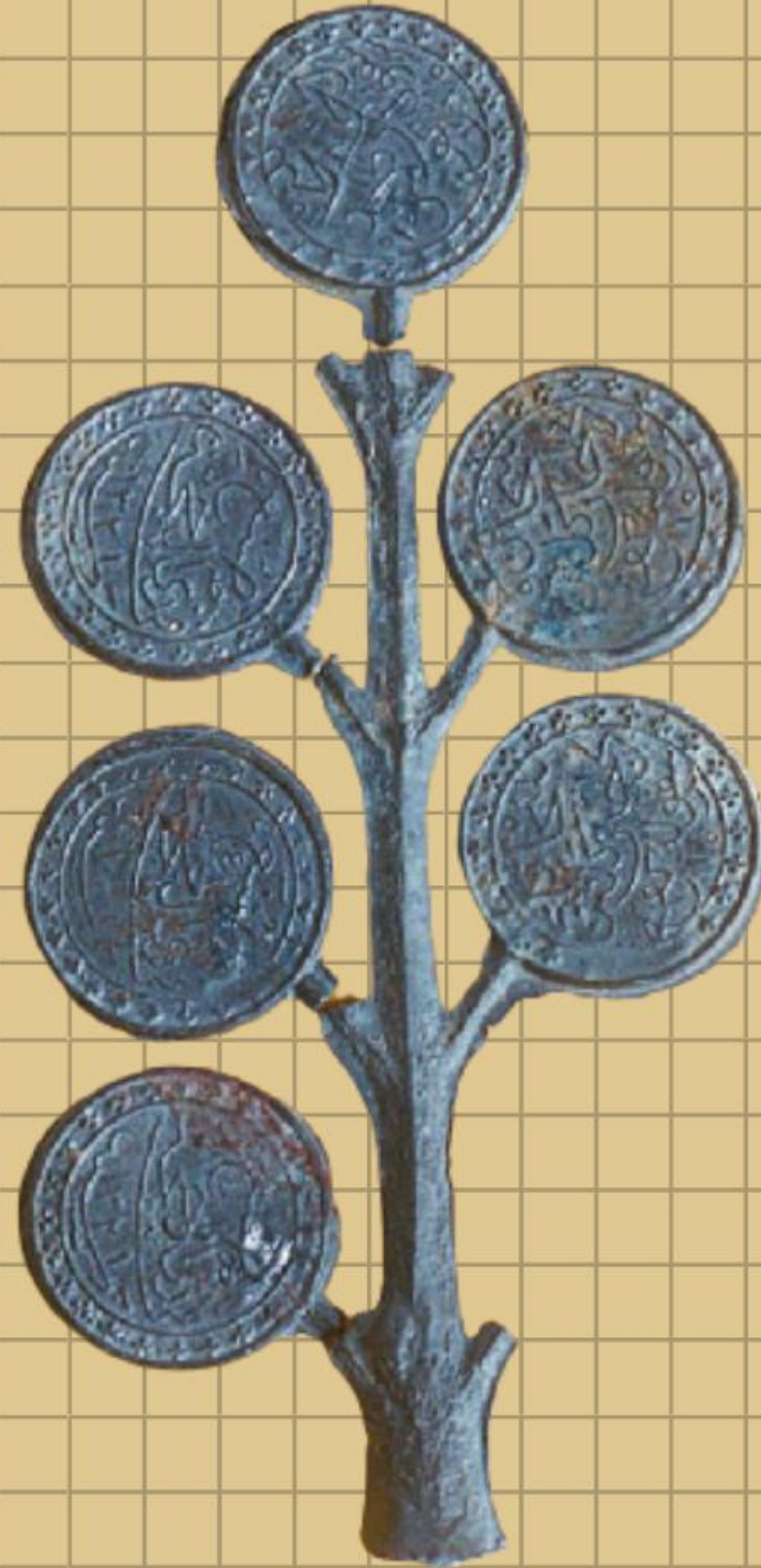


An Ottoman Coin and Ottoman manuscript with a tughra featured

Islamic Coins: Features

In the Malay World, trade with Arab merchants who introduced their dinar and dirham had influenced Malay rulers to mint their own currencies in various forms.

As a hub for maritime trading, Malay World currency is influenced by vibrant cultures, beliefs and religions.



A unique example is seen here with the Kelantan *pohon pitis* (money tree).

Coin pieces attached to a branch would be broken off the tree for a purchase. The branch would then be melted down for reuse.

A Kelantan Money tree

Discussion Time!

- Imagine you are a historian researching about Islamic dynasties.
- Explore the following coins using the questions provided to see what primary sources can tell you about the different Islamic dynasties.

Source 1

A Byzantine Coin



Figure 1 A Byzantine coin where the M refers to a Greek numeral letter indicating the value of 40 nummi (a term for a large bronze coin during the Byzantine period)

An Ummayyad coin



Figure 2 An Ummayyad silver dirham during the reign of Abd Malik ibn Marwan in 698 AD / 79 AH minted in Damascus. The shahada is written on the obverse in kufic script.

Observe the two coins above. On the left is a Byzantine coin and on the right is a coin from the Ummayyad dynasty.

1. What are the differences between the coins?
2. Why would a ruler issue new coins during his rule?

Source 2

An Abbasid Coin



Figure 3 A reverse and obverse of an Abbasid coin

Here are coins found from the Abbasid dynasty. Compare these to the previous coin from the Umayyad dynasty.

1. What type of script is featured on the coin?
2. What do you think could be the reasons for similarities and differences with the coins from the Umayyad dynasty?

Source 3

An Ottoman Medal



Figure 4 An Ottoman medal arranged as a red star with the tughra of Sultan Abd Al Hamid II

Ottoman Coin



Figure 5 An Ottoman coin minted during the reign of Abd Al Hamid II ibn Abd al Majid in 1293 AH

1. Observe the coin and the medal from the Ottoman empire. Can you find the 'Tughra' inscribed on both? What can a Tughra indicate or tell us?

Source 4

A Mughal Coin



Figure 6 A square coin under Akbar's rule during the Mughal's dynasty

A Mughal Coin



Figure 7 A coin from Jahangir's rule during the Mughal dynasty

The coin in Figure 6 was issued under the rule of Akbar during the Mughal dynasty.

The coin in Figure 7 was issued under the rule of his son, Jahangir.

1. Why would a coin from the same dynasty look different?
2. Can you find any motifs (decoration or pattern) on the coins? What do you think could be their significance?

Source 5

A Qajar Necklace

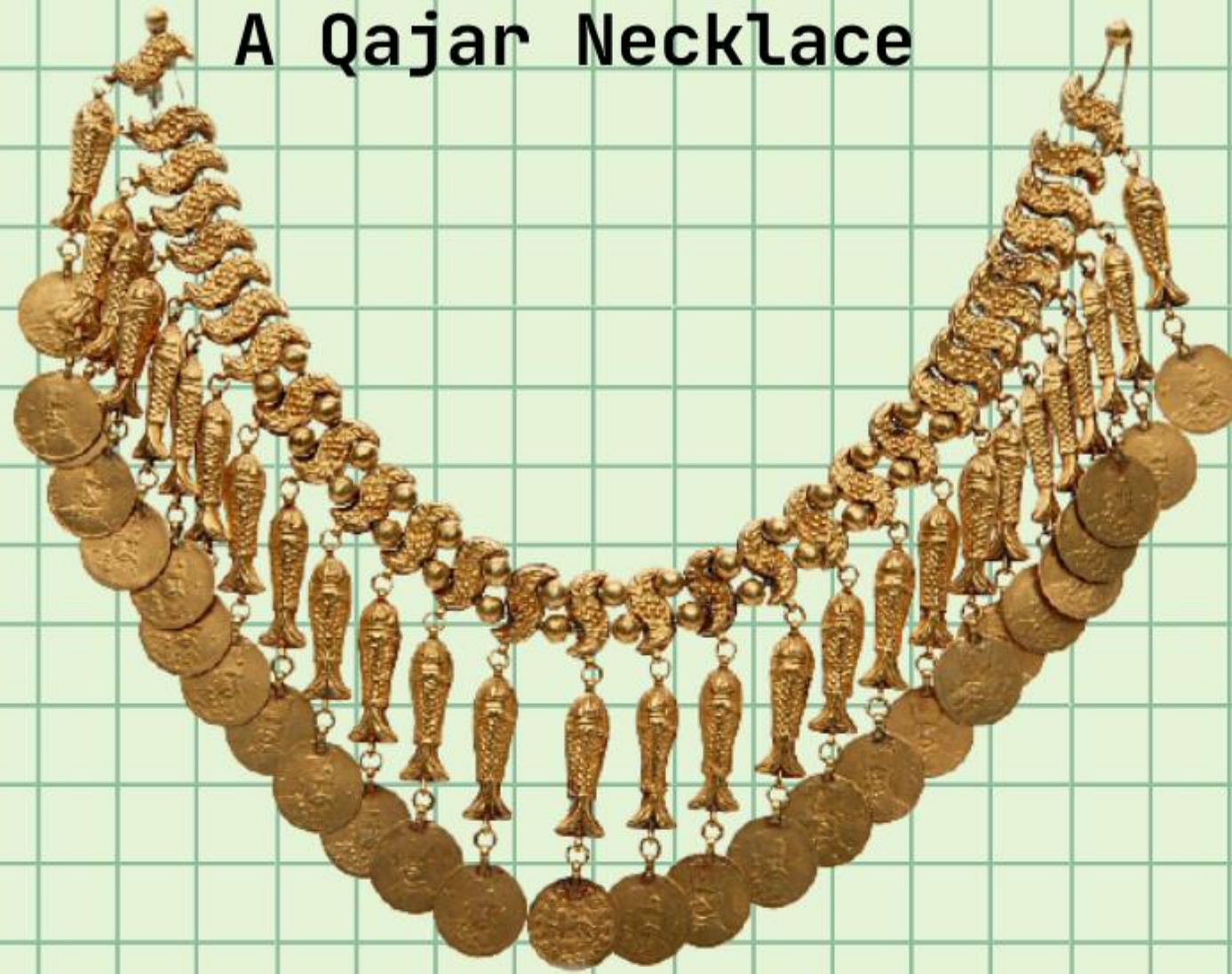


Figure 8 A necklace with coins during the Qajar dynasty.

A Qajar Coin



Figure 9 A Qajar coin with the lion and sun motif.

Here are two artefacts, a coin and a necklace, from the Qajar dynasty.

1. How does the coin here differ from the previous coins we have looked at?
2. What would be the purpose of coins in Figure 8? What does this source tell you about the value of coins?
3. Would you wear coins as jewellery today? Why?

The End!

Thank you for using our online resource! Do share with us how you have benefited from it or if there are any improvements we can work on. It will help us tremendously as we continue to work on providing more educational resources in the future.

Email us at education@iamm.org.my



Appendix

Oh no! Try again!

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Well done!

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Oh no! Try again!

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