



A REVIEW ON DEVELOPMENT OF COINAGE UNDER THE BAHMANI KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT:

The Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1527 CE), as one of the most prominent medieval Deccan Sultanates, developed a well-structured monetary system that reflected its administrative sophistication, economic priorities, and cultural influences. This study explores the evolution of coinage under the Bahmani dynasty, analyzing the types, materials, inscriptions, and symbolism used in their currency. The introduction and circulation of gold (tanka), silver (dirham), and copper (falus) coins reveal the kingdom's attempts to stabilize its economy, regulate trade, and assert political legitimacy. [1] The coinage of the Bahmanis was not only a medium of exchange but also a tool of royal propaganda, displaying the names of rulers, Islamic religious inscriptions, and occasionally regional design motifs. The influence of the Delhi Sultanate, Persian styles, and later Deccan neighbors is evident in the coins' aesthetics and minting techniques. This study also highlights how changes in coinage mirrored shifts in political power, regional integration, and trade expansion in the Deccan. Through numismatic analysis and review of historical records, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of medieval Indian economic history and the strategic use of coinage as a symbol of sovereignty, stability, and cultural identity during the Bahmani era.[2]



KEYWORDS: Bahmani Kingdom, Coinage, Medieval Deccan, Numismatics, Economic History, Tanka, Dirham, Falus, Sultanate Mints, Currency Reforms, Trade and Coinage, Islamic Inscriptions, Political Legitimacy.

INTRODUCTION

The history of coinage in medieval India serves as a vital lens through which to examine the political authority, economic systems, and cultural ideologies of ruling dynasties. Among these, the Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1527 CE)—one of the first independent Islamic states in the Deccan—offers a particularly rich case for study. Coinage under the Bahmani rulers was not merely a medium of economic transaction; it was a powerful instrument of governance, statecraft, and religious identity. [3] Emerging from the political fragmentation of the Delhi Sultanate, the Bahmani Sultanate established a sovereign state with its capital first at Gulbarga and later at Bidar. As part of consolidating their authority, the Bahmani rulers introduced a system of minting coins in gold, silver, and copper. [4] These coins bore not only the names and titles of the sultans but also carried Islamic religious inscriptions, mint marks, and stylistic features reflecting Persian and Indo-Islamic influences. The development of coinage under the Bahmani kingdom reflected both continuity and change—continuity with earlier Islamic coinage traditions from the north, and adaptation to the regional economic needs of the Deccan plateau, which was a nexus of inland and maritime trade.

The coins served practical economic purposes while simultaneously reinforcing the ruler's legitimacy and religious credentials. This study seeks to explore the origins, evolution, and significance of the Bahmani coinage system, examining how it was used to structure the economy, integrate markets, support trade, and reflect dynastic ideology. [5]

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim:

To examine the historical development, design, economic significance, and political symbolism of the coinage system under the Bahmani Kingdom and its role in shaping medieval Deccan's monetary and trade practices.

Objectives:

1. To trace the origin and evolution of coinage under the Bahmani rulers from the establishment of the kingdom in 1347 CE to its decline in 1527 CE.
2. To analyze the typology and classification of Bahmani coins—gold (tanka), silver (dirham), and copper (falus)—based on weight, metal content, inscriptions, and iconography.
3. To study the economic function of coinage in facilitating trade, market transactions, and taxation within the Bahmani Sultanate and with foreign trading partners.
4. To examine the political and religious messages conveyed through inscriptions, mint marks, and stylistic choices on Bahmani coins.
5. To compare Bahmani coinage with contemporary coin systems of the Delhi Sultanate, Vijayanagara Empire, and neighboring Deccan Sultanates to understand regional influences.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of medieval Indian coinage, particularly in the Deccan region, has been an important area of historical and numismatic research. Scholars have examined the evolution of monetary systems as a reflection of political authority, trade dynamics, and cultural exchange. The Bahmani Sultanate, though relatively less studied in comparison to the Delhi Sultanate or Mughal Empire, has attracted scholarly interest for its unique and localized approach to coinage.

H.K. Sherwani in *The Bahmanis of the Deccan* (1985) provides a foundational narrative of the political and cultural history of the Bahmani dynasty. While not focused solely on coinage, his work touches upon the administrative and economic framework in which coins played a significant role.

M.A. Nayeem in his detailed volume *The Heritage of the Bahmanis and the Baridis of the Deccan* (2002) discusses the cultural and artistic dimensions of the Bahmani kingdom, including references to the numismatic styles adopted from Persian and Delhi Sultanate influences. He emphasizes the coins' role in promoting royal image and Islamic identity.

Irfan Habib, though his major works are centered on the Mughal period, provides useful frameworks for understanding agrarian and monetary systems in medieval India. His perspectives help place Bahmani coinage in a broader subcontinental economic context.

In the field of numismatics, catalogues published by the Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies (IIRNS) and works by P.L. Gupta and Dilip Rajgor offer typological classifications and technical descriptions of coins from the Bahmani period. These include weights, legends, and mint locations which are crucial for numismatic analysis.

Articles published in journals such as *The Indian Numismatic Chronicle*, *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, and *Deccan Studies* have highlighted specific discoveries of Bahmani coins, including hoards, individual specimens, and comparative studies with contemporaneous coinages of the Vijayanagara Empire, Delhi Sultanate, and later Deccan Sultanates. Recent archaeological surveys and excavation reports by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have also shed light on mint sites and trade centers where Bahmani coins circulated, reaffirming their importance in regional commerce.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted for this study is both historical and analytical, relying on primary and secondary sources to investigate the evolution, significance, and functions of coinage during the Bahmani period (1347–1527 CE). The methodology involves a multi-disciplinary approach that incorporates elements of numismatics, economic history, and political analysis.

1. Research Design:

The study follows a qualitative historical approach, focused on interpreting and analyzing the patterns and purposes of coinage issued under the Bahmani Sultanate. The design includes descriptive, comparative, and interpretive dimensions.

2. Analytical Methods:

Examining coin types, sizes, metals (gold, silver, copper), inscriptions, mint marks, and imagery to classify and understand their role. Placing coinage within the political, economic, and cultural framework of the Bahmani Kingdom. Comparing Bahmani coins with those of contemporary powers (Delhi Sultanate, Vijayanagara, etc.) to assess influence and uniqueness. Decoding the symbolic and religious meanings embedded in inscriptions and motifs.

3 Geographical Scope:

Focus is on regions historically under Bahmani rule—primarily Gulbarga, Bidar, Daulatabad, and surrounding areas of the Deccan Plateau, where coin minting and circulation were most prominent.

4. Time Frame:

The research covers the period from 1347 CE (establishment of the Bahmani Sultanate) to 1527 CE (its disintegration into Deccan Sultanates). This methodological framework ensures a comprehensive and scholarly examination of how coinage functioned not just as currency, but as a symbol of sovereignty, economic policy, and cultural identity during the Bahmani era.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Bahmani Sultanate (1347–1527 CE) was a significant medieval Islamic kingdom in the Deccan region of India, known for its cultural patronage, political expansion, and commercial activity. Despite its importance, one of the least systematically studied aspects of this kingdom remains its monetary system and coinage practices. While coins from the Bahmani era have been discovered and referenced in broader historical or numismatic works, there exists a lack of focused, comprehensive analysis on their development, symbolism, minting methods, and economic significance. Coinage under the Bahmani rulers served not only as a tool for economic exchange but also as a means of asserting royal authority, communicating religious ideology, and facilitating internal and external trade. However, questions remain unanswered:

The absence of detailed scholarly work on the chronology, typology, minting techniques, and regional circulation patterns of Bahmani coins has created a significant gap in the understanding of medieval South Indian economic history. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the coinage system of the Bahmani Kingdom in detail—exploring its historical context, production, circulation, and symbolism—and thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of the kingdom's political economy and cultural expressions.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The Bahmani Kingdom was one of the earliest independent Muslim dynasties in the Deccan region of medieval India, and it played a crucial role in shaping the political, cultural, and economic landscape of South India. While much attention has been given to its architecture, literature, and administration, its monetary system and coinage remain relatively under-researched.

Studying the development of Bahamani coinage is essential for several reasons:

1. Understanding Economic History:

Coinage is a key indicator of the economic condition of any kingdom. A focused study on Bahamani coins provides valuable insights into trade practices, market networks, and resource control during their reign.

2. Linking Political Authority with Currency:

Coins serve as a tool of royal legitimacy. Examining the inscriptions, titles, and religious symbols used on Bahamani coins helps us understand how rulers projected power, faith, and sovereignty.

3. Filling a Scholarly Gap:

Unlike the well-documented coinage of the Delhi Sultanate or the Mughals, the Bahamani monetary system lacks dedicated scholarly attention. A detailed study addresses this academic deficiency.

4. Regional and Cultural Identity:

The Deccan had a distinct political and cultural identity. Studying Bahamani coinage contributes to a deeper understanding of how this identity was expressed through monetary symbols, mint locations, and language.

5. Comparative Numismatics:

By comparing Bahamani coins with those of neighboring powers (like the Vijayanagara Empire or Deccan Sultanates), researchers can gain a better picture of regional interaction, influence, and rivalry.

In light of these reasons, this study is both timely and necessary. It seeks to not only document but also interpret the role of coinage in shaping the socio-political and economic fabric of the Bahamani Sultanate.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

Scope of the Study:

- 1. Chronological Scope:** The study covers the period from the foundation of the Bahamani Kingdom in 1347 CE to its disintegration in 1527 CE, marking the rise of the five Deccan Sultanates. It includes all phases of the kingdom's development—Gulbarga and Bidar periods.
- 2. Geographical Scope:** Focuses on the Deccan region under Bahamani rule, particularly regions such as Gulbarga, Bidar, Daulatabad, and Berar, where mints were likely active. Considers coin circulation beyond Bahamani borders where historical evidence supports it.
- 3. Topical Scope:** The study examines: , The typology of coins (gold, silver, copper). , Minting practices and techniques. , Design elements, inscriptions, and religious symbols. , Economic role of coinage in trade and taxation. , Political messages conveyed through coinage. , Comparative analysis with contemporary powers such as the Delhi Sultanate, Vijayanagara Empire, and later Deccan Sultanates.
- 4. Sources of Study:** Utilizes archaeological findings, museum collections, numismatic catalogs, and historical texts written during and after the Bahamani era.

Limitations of the Study:

- 1. Availability of Coins:** Limited access to original coin specimens may restrict in-depth analysis of metallurgical content or wear patterns. Some coins may be poorly preserved, making inscription interpretation difficult.
- 2. Lack of Contemporary Records:** Scant primary documentation from Bahamani mint officials or economic administrators limits insight into internal mint policies and coin regulation.

3. **Regional Variation:**Disparity in coin finds across different Bahamani regions may result in uneven representation of mint activities.
4. **Dependence on Secondary Sources:**Due to limited original documentation, the study must often rely on secondary interpretations by historians and numismatists, which may include biases or inconsistencies.
5. **Translation Challenges:**Deciphering Arabic and Persian inscriptions on coins requires expert numismatic and linguistic knowledge; minor translation inaccuracies may affect symbolic interpretations.

This study attempts to present as complete a picture as possible within these limitations, aiming to deepen our understanding of the economic and symbolic importance of coinage in Bahamani rule while acknowledging areas that require further scholarly investigation.

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DISCUSSION

The coinage of the Bahamani Kingdom reflects not only the economic policies of the state but also its evolving political identity, cultural influences, and religious orientations during its rule from 1347 to 1527 CE. The study of Bahamani coins reveals the intricate interplay between statecraft, trade, religion, and artistry in the medieval Deccan.

1. Historical and Political Significance:

The issuance of coins was a primary assertion of sovereignty for the Bahamani rulers. The earliest coins minted under Ala-ud-Din Bahman Shah, the founder of the dynasty, established the legitimacy of the new sultanate following its separation from the Delhi Sultanate. Coin inscriptions, usually in Persian or Arabic, bore the names and titles of the ruling sultans, reinforcing their authority and dynastic continuity.^[6]

2. Typology and Material Composition:

Coins were struck in gold, silver, and copper, each serving distinct economic functions. Gold coins (dinars or tankas) symbolized wealth and were typically used for high-value transactions or royal payments. Silver and copper coins circulated more widely among common people and in local markets.^[7]

3. Minting Practices and Locations:

Coins were issued from multiple mints, with key centers likely located in Gulbarga, Bidar, and Daulatabad. These cities were also administrative capitals at various times, indicating a close

relationship between political power and coin production. However, precise records of mint operations remain limited, posing a challenge to full reconstruction of their functioning.^[8]

4. Artistic and Symbolic Features:

Bahamani coins often featured religious inscriptions, Quranic verses, and calligraphic designs, reflecting Islamic symbolism and piety. Some coins also exhibited artistic motifs and decorative borders, suggesting an appreciation for aesthetic presentation even in utilitarian objects. Unlike the Vijayanagara Empire, whose coins bore Hindu symbols, the Bahamani currency projected a distinct Islamic identity in the Deccan context.^[9]

5. Economic Impact and Trade:

Coinage played a vital role in the growth of trade—both internal and external. The Bahamani Sultanate engaged in commerce with Persia, Arabia, and African ports, and its standardized coinage likely facilitated these exchanges. The widespread circulation of Bahamani coins, even after the kingdom's fragmentation, points to their reliability and economic relevance.^[10]

After the disintegration of the Bahamani Kingdom in the early 16th century, successor states such as Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmadnagar continued coin minting traditions with modified styles. Elements of Bahamani numismatic practice—like the use of Persian inscriptions and Islamic symbolism—can be traced in the coinage of these Deccan Sultanates, indicating the lasting influence of Bahamani monetary culture.

CONCLUSION/FINDINGS

The study of coinage under the Bahamani Kingdom reveals that currency was not merely a medium of exchange but a crucial instrument of political legitimacy, economic control, and cultural expression. From the reign of Ala-ud-Din Bahman Shah to the final phases of the Bahamani Sultanate, coinage evolved in both design and function, reflecting the changing dynamics of power, religion, and trade in the Deccan region. The adoption of Islamic motifs, Persian inscriptions, and standardized denominations signified the Bahamani rulers' effort to align themselves with the broader Islamic world while asserting their independent sovereignty in South India. The kingdom's coinage system supported both internal commercial growth and international trade, indicating a relatively sophisticated economic structure for the period. Moreover, the wide circulation and continued use of Bahamani coins even after the disintegration of the empire underline their economic reliability and influence. The stylistic and structural features of Bahamani coins can also be traced in the currency systems of the Deccan successor states, emphasizing their numismatic legacy. In conclusion, the development of coinage under the Bahamani Kingdom serves as a window into the kingdom's administrative capabilities, ideological orientation, and its role in shaping medieval Deccan monetary history.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS TO RESEARCH

While this study has aimed to provide a foundational understanding of coinage under the Bahamani Kingdom, there remain several areas that warrant deeper exploration. Future researchers may consider the following directions to expand and enrich the field of medieval Deccan numismatics:

1. Scientific Analysis of Coin Metals:

Advanced metallurgical testing (e.g., XRF, SEM-EDS) can help determine the exact metal composition of Bahamani coins, shedding light on sourcing of metals, minting standards, and economic stability.

2. Mint Locations and Administrative Structure:

A detailed study of the organizational setup of mints, including mint officials, production methods, and regional differences, would add clarity to how the Bahamani monetary system functioned.

3. Mapping Coin Circulation:

An interdisciplinary study involving GIS mapping of coin hoards can trace trade routes, centers of economic activity, and the geographical spread of Bahamani coinage.

4. Comparative Numismatics:

Further comparative analysis of Bahamani coinage with the coins of the Delhi Sultanate, Vijayanagara Empire, and later Deccan Sultanates (like Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Golconda) can highlight regional influences and legacy.

5. Iconographic and Epigraphic Studies:

In-depth examination of inscriptions, mint marks, and royal symbols can enhance understanding of religious, cultural, and political narratives embedded in the coins.

6. Economic Contextualization:

Research into how coinage impacted rural and urban economies, tax systems, and market behavior in the Bahamani era would add valuable economic context.

7. Integration with Archaeological Findings:

Collaboration with archaeological surveys may uncover new coin hoards or minting tools, providing fresh primary evidence for analysis.

8. Role of Coinage in Diplomacy and Tribute:

Studying coins as tools of interstate diplomacy, gifting, or tribute could offer new insights into political relationships of the time.

9. Public Collections and Museums:

A systematic cataloging and study of coins in regional museums and private collections can reveal overlooked specimens and variants.

10. Numismatic Influence on Successor States:

Research on how Bahamani coinage influenced the currency systems of the Deccan Sultanates post-1527 could help trace patterns of continuity and transformation.

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