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**PREPRINT**

# CHECKS OF BANK MELLI IRAN (The National Bank of Iran)\*

*Seyed Omid Mohammadi*

**Abstract.** The banknotes of Iran have gained international recognition among philatelists and paper money collectors for their diverse range of designs. Nevertheless, while guaranteed and cash checks served as prevalent high-denomination paper currency in the country during the 2000s, scant documentation of these checks is available in existing references. This article aims to address this knowledge gap by examining checks issued by Bank Melli Iran (the National Bank) using observed specimens from private collections. Additionally, the study unveils more than 75 denominations, types, and subtypes of these notes, presenting them in a systematic typological classification for enhanced comprehensiveness and organization.

**Keywords:** cheques; guaranteed checks; Bank Melli; Iran banknotes

\* \* \*

# ЧЕКИ БАНК МЕЛЛИ ИРАН (Национального Банка Ирана)

*Сейед Омид Мохаммади*

**Аннотация.** Банкноты Ирана получили международное признание среди филателистов и коллекционеров бумажных денег благодаря многообразию их оформления. Хотя гарантированные и кассовые чеки в Иране 2000-х гг. по существу служили денежными знаками высоких номиналов, сведений о них в доступных источниках совсем немного. В статье рассмотрены виды чеков, выпущенных Национальным банком Ирана (Bank Melli Iran) с привлечением образцов из частных коллекций. Выявлены и обобщены данные о 75 различных номиналах, типах и вариантах этих знаков, предложена структурно-типологическая классификация, дающая наглядное представление о национальной системе чекового обращения.

**Ключевые слова:** чеки; гарантированные чеки; Национальный банк Ирана; банкноты Ирана

\* \* \*

## Introduction

The extraordinary variety in Iran's banknotes and paper currency is due to the dynamic historical shifts and changing leadership spanning approximately 130 years. This remarkable diversity in banknote designs can be attributed to at least four significant transitions within this period, encompassing the era of Qajar banknotes (1890–1932)<sup>1</sup>,

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\* Submitted to the Editorial Board on January 10, 2022.

<sup>1</sup> The given dates are years of banknote issues and not those of rulers' reign.

followed by Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign (1932–1938), succeeded by his son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1944–1977), and subsequently, the issuance of provisional and regular banknotes under the Islamic Republic up to the present day.

In fact, the local catalog of paper money, as documented by F. N. Farahbakhsh [Farahbakhsh 2020], lists more than 360 distinct types and subtypes. Furthermore, the proliferation of online databases like 'Colnect' [Colnect 2021] has expanded the count of reported subtypes to as high as 500, underscoring the extensive and diverse landscape of Iran's banknotes and paper currency.

However, despite the considerable local and international interest in this subject, it is noteworthy that circulating checks of Iran and their diverse variations are conspicuously absent from the majority of primary references. In the widely recognized Krause catalog of world paper money, for instance, only three examples are documented in its general volume [Schmidt 2016, p. 720], with an additional single example found in its modern issues volume [Schmidt 2019, p. 568]. Similarly, the local catalog of banknotes of Iran features the same examples, along with an additional three [Farahbakhsh 2020, pp. 214–217].

It is worth noting that apart from these limited references, only a few scattered examples can be found on online databases such as Colnect, while notable platforms like 'Numista' [Numista 2021] make no mention of these circulating checks. This conspicuous gap in documentation underscores the significance of this study in bringing forth a more comprehensive understanding of Iran's circulating checks and their various manifestations.

This study is dedicated to the comprehensive categorization of checks issued by Bank Melli in Iran. Although several of the checks depicted in this article enjoyed widespread circulation during the period of SH 1375–1387 (1996–2008 CE), their high denominations deterred many individuals from collecting these notes, leading to the majority being spent and subsequently canceled. Banks routinely perforated and later destroyed these notes without generating official documentation regarding their designs, variations, or the quantity issued.

Fortunately, a significant development has occurred, as some of these notes have recently resurfaced in private collections. This occurrence is particularly timely, as it transpires long after the conclusion of the legal retention period for such documents, which, at most, is 12 years for third-grade documents [CBI 2021]. It is essential to acknowledge that many of these rediscovered notes are in suboptimal condition. Beyond the presence of punches and tears, a substantial portion bears multiple stamps, writings, signatures, addresses, and even phone numbers. Despite these challenges, this presents an invaluable opportunity for in-depth research and systematic categorization of these checks.

Bank Melli has issued a diverse range of checks throughout its history. This study primarily centers on three main types: Guaranteed checks, Traveler's checks (inclusive of Hajj and Kish variants), and Melli checks. It is important to note that although Bank Melli also issued "Iran Checks" at a later point in time, these fall outside the purview of the current study and are not considered within its scope.

## Methodology and Details

A remarkable feature of the guaranteed checks under study is the presence of printed dates on a majority of them. Consequently, this study organizes these types in chronological order, with the aim of providing insights into the evolution of designs and typology over time. While this work offers a systematic grouping of these checks with a focus on design alterations, it is important to acknowledge that some discrepancies may arise. This is primarily due to the lack of rigorous oversight in the issuance of these notes, particularly concerning minor design details.

This research is sample-based, meaning that the information is derived from observed samples collected over the years. Therefore, the absence of a particular variety or date for these checks should not be interpreted as non-existence or rarity. It is important to emphasize that this paper does not aim to analyze the rarity of these notes, as this falls outside the scope of the study. Instead, the focus is on categorization and documentation of the observed samples.

This work meticulously provides observed dates for each item, ensuring the reliability of the reported years. However, it is important to acknowledge that future discoveries may reveal additional dates. Furthermore, a serial number is associated with each item, representing the highest observed number. This valuable information aids in forming a preliminary estimation of the quantity of notes printed for each design.

It is worth noting that items lacking a serial number (or marked with a question mark) are the result of the author's informed speculation, offering insights into potential variations that may require further investigation.

Indeed, the banknotes of Iran, particularly in more recent times, have demonstrated that serial numbers may not always accurately reflect the chronological order of note issuance and design changes. This issue arises because printing the serial number typically happens in the final step in the issuance of notes, and older-design notes are often mixed with newer ones during this process. Consequently, it is important to anticipate certain discrepancies, even when changes in design appear to transition smoothly.

## Watermarks

Most of the checks documented in this study feature watermarks, with variations in the type and number of watermarks present on different checks. Figure provides a comprehensive list of all the watermarks discussed in this article.

Watermark 1 (Wmk. 1) represents a general watermark, while the others are localized to specific areas on the checks. Wmk. 3 prominently displays "Bank Melli Iran," while watermarks 1 and 2 represent its Farsi version in the Nastaliq font. Wmk. 4 features the central motif from the former logo of Bank Melli during the Pahlavi era, inspired by the rock carvings of the palaces of Persepolis, depicting an Achaemenid king engaged in battle with a winged lion. Wmk. 5 showcases the same logo but with alterations reflecting the post-Islamic revolution era. Wmk. 6 is a simple windowed watermark typically positioned along the security thread, while Wmk. 7 depicts Ibn Sina, also known as Avicenna, the renowned scientist of the 4th century AH.

It is worth noting that textual watermarks (No. 1–3) may exhibit variations in orientation, including both horizontal and vertical orientations. However, for the sake of clarity and to avoid unnecessary complexity, this article does not provide separate listings for these orientation variations.

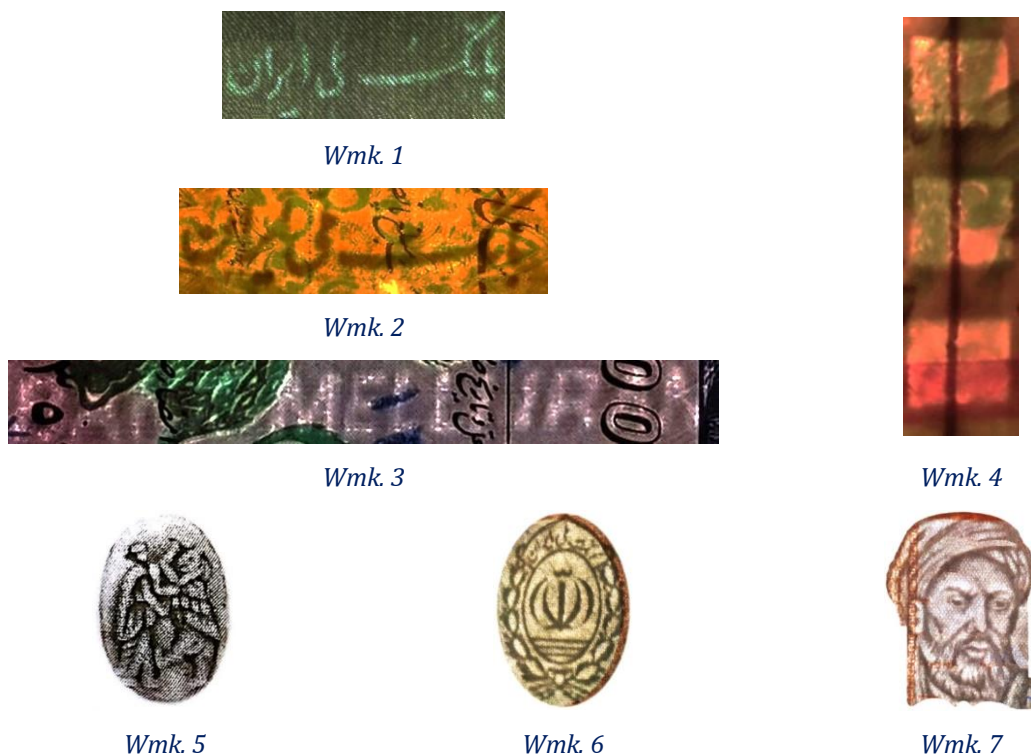


Figure 1. List of watermarks

### Security Threads

The inclusion of security threads is a feature found exclusively in the newer issues of checks. Figure provides an illustrative list of different security thread types discussed in this article.

Security thread 1 (Thrd. 1) is a silver-colored metalized diving (windowed) thread featuring the microtext “BMI” (representing Bank Melli Iran) written on it in two directions. This microtext appears twice in a larger font and twice in a smaller font. Thrd. 2 is a red diving thread that also incorporates the same microtext as Thrd. 1.

Subsequent generations utilize a wider version of the same thread, with the denomination expressed as microtext in both Farsi letters and English numbers (Thrd. 3). However, it is noteworthy that the quality of microtext printing can sometimes be subpar, particularly in lower denominations, leading to almost no visible text on the thread (Thrd. 4).

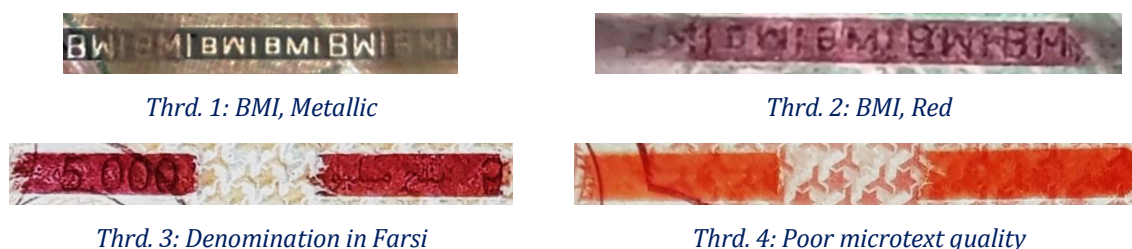


Figure 2: List of security threads

## Stamp duty

Stamp duty represents a form of government taxation levied on legal documents and checks. While physical stamps are no longer employed, nearly all of these checks feature a stamp duty mark as an integral part of their design. The shifting political landscape and inflation have contributed to alterations in the appearance and value of these marks over time. Various stamp duty designs are presented in Figure 3<sup>2</sup>, all of which share common elements: the Farsi equivalent of “Check” at the top and the specified taxation amount at the bottom.

Stamp duty 1 (Stamp. 1) and Stamp. 2 are Pahlavi-era stamps featuring an emblem of a crown above a lion grasping a sword, with the sun in the background and two floral motifs on either side. These stamps correspond to values of 10 and 20 Dinars, respectively, both expressed in written form. Stamp. 3, from the early post-revolution period, displays the temporary Islamic Republic seal alongside an 80 Dinar taxation amount, represented numerically. In subsequent stamps, the central design was replaced with the formal emblem of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Stamps 4 and 5 are associated with a taxation value of 2 Rials, with the denomination expressed in written form. Remarkably, Stamp. 6 is designated for 200 Rials, also conveyed in written form. This progression in taxation rates is intriguing, serving as a testament to the substantial increase in the taxation value within a relatively short timeframe.



Figure 3: List of stamp duty designs

## UV Fluorescent Designs

Notes exhibit various concealed designs and features that become visible exclusively under ultraviolet (UV) light. Figure 4 provides a list of these hidden designs:

- UV. 1 encompasses multi-colored security fibers (blue, red, green, and yellow) that fluoresce when exposed to UV light.
- UV. 2 reveals the denomination of each check, expressed both in written form and numerals when illuminated with UV light. Additionally, all text elements on

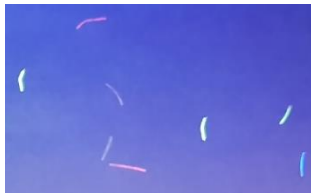
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<sup>2</sup> Colors may vary on different checks.

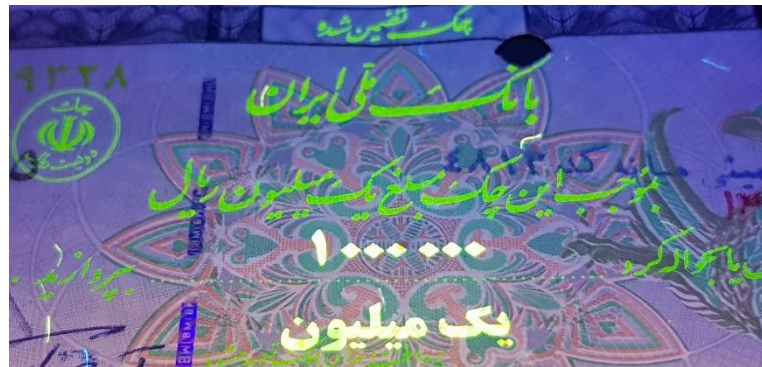
the note, including the stamp duty mark, denominations, and signatures, are printed using UV fluorescent ink.

- UV. 3 unveils the emblem of the Islamic Republic of Iran under UV light.
- UV. 4 is similar to UV. 2 but with slightly reduced fluorescent properties in the text elements.

These UV-activated features contribute to the intricate and secure design of these checks, enhancing their authenticity and deterrence against counterfeiting.



*UV. 1: Security fibers*



*UV. 2: Denomination in the center, all the texts*



*UV. 3: Emblem of Iran*



*UV. 4: Denomination in the center, very pale texts*

Figure 4: List of UV designs

## **GUARANTEED CHECKS**

The highest denomination banknote in Iran was 10,000 Rials in SH 1382 (2003 CE). Subsequently, 20,000 Rial banknotes were printed, and three years later, in SH 1385 (2006 CE), 50,000 Rial banknotes were issued. However, these banknotes were insufficient to meet the public's demand for cash, and electronic banking systems had not yet expanded. This led to a significant cash shortage, causing difficulties for the people.

To address this issue, banks introduced the practice of issuing bank checks. Banks needed a more convenient form of currency to satisfy their customers' withdrawal requirements, one that occupied less physical space, was easy to transport, and provided security for customers. Consequently, they introduced various types of legal checks with specific definitions. One such type is the guaranteed check, which is a check issued by a bank and can be redeemed at any of the bank's branches or through its agents and brokers.

Banks guaranteed the payment of these checks, and they could be readily exchanged for cash, hence the name “guaranteed check.” As a result, these checks gained widespread acceptance and use, and their high denominations made them excellent substitutes for conventional banknotes during times of inflation. Various banks issued these checks in high denominations during SH 1370s and SH 1380s, including 100,000, 200,000, 500,000, one million, two million, and five million rials. Some of these checks were practically used as regular cash in everyday transactions among individuals. The use of guaranteed checks dates as far back as SH 1337 (1958 CE) and continued until SH 1385 (2006 CE), although they may have remained in circulation for a few years beyond that. This article categorizes Bank Melli guaranteed checks into nine groups based on their different designs and variations. None of these issued checks were valid for use outside the country.

### I. First Generation

The first generation of guaranteed checks was introduced as emergency circulating checks during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. These notes were uniface, meaning they had printing on only one side, and they did not bear a date of issue at the time of printing. Instead, the date of issue, which this article reports, and the name of the branch would be later stamped onto each note.

These checks had several distinctive features. They featured Wmk. 1 and Stamp. 1, and did not include security threads. Additionally, the Farsi equivalent of “Bank Melli Iran” was printed all over each note as microtext. Some of these notes are signed by Ali Asghar Naser and Ebrahim Kashani (G.I.3a), and others bear Kashani and Ahmad Majidian’s signatures (G.I.3b).

Table 1. Group I checks

| Code   | Denomination | Details                     | SH Year   | CE Year   | Serial No.              |
|--------|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|
| G.I.1  | 1,000 Rials  | Yellow & green              | 1337–1341 | 1958–1962 | 2/455886                |
| G.I.2a | 5,000 Rials  | Red & blue, green border    | 1337      | 1958      | Proof<br>(Color Trial?) |
| G.I.2b | 5,000 Rials  | Red & blue, red border      | 1339-1340 | 1960-1961 | 1/748258                |
| G.I.3a | 10,000 Rials | Blue & purple, green border | 1337      | 1958      | Proof<br>(Color Trial?) |
| G.I.3b | 10,000 Rials | Blue & purple, blue border  | 1337–1347 | 1958–1968 | 4/169963                |



G.I.1



G.I.2a (Farahbakhsh, 2020, p. 219)



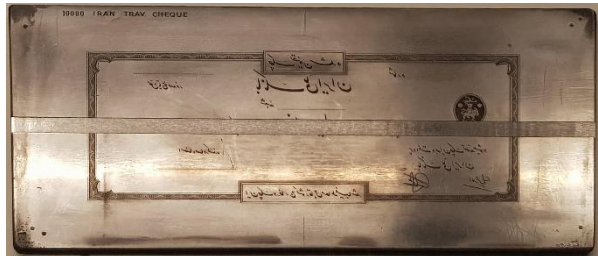
G.I.2b<sup>3</sup>



G.I.3a (Naser & Kashani)



G.I.3b (Kashani & Majidian)



Cancelled printing plate for 10,000 Rials checks (Bank Mellī museum)

Figure 5: Guaranteed checks of group I

## II. Islamic Republic Seal



Figure 6: Circular Republic seal

This check was issued shortly after the revolution, and as a result, it incorporated elements of the new republic's design. The republic's seal became an integral part of the check's and the stamp duty's design. The depiction of Bank Mellī's building is included on the note, and Stamp. 3 is visible on the left side. Furthermore, Wmk. 1 is repeated throughout the paper. It is worth noting that there are multiple varieties of this check with different orientations of the watermark and variations in the color tones of the seal.

Table 2. Group II guaranteed checks

| Code   | Denomination | Details                            | SH Year | CE Year | Serial No. |
|--------|--------------|------------------------------------|---------|---------|------------|
| G.II.1 | 10,000 Rials | Black and blue on green underprint | 1359    | 1980    | 6614817    |

<sup>3</sup> Auktionshaus Christoph Gärtner, Auction 38, Lot 1217.



G.II.1<sup>4</sup>

Figure 7: Guaranteed check of group II

### III. Griffin, Uniface, Big size, Order Check

This new generation of checks came into existence long after the previous generation and featured a completely fresh design. They were redeemable in all branches of Bank Melli throughout the country for a limited period. Based on the inscriptions on these notes, they were considered order checks, meaning they could only be redeemed by the person whose name was specified on the check.

These checks are uniface, and they measure 18 by 8 cm in size. Each note is dated in the bottom left corner, followed by a sample code indicating its denomination. The underprint on these checks is almost always cream-colored, with red serial numbers, and just the color of the border, text, stamp duty, and denominations varied between notes. Additionally, the two colors used in the griffin design were similar and nearly identical.

On these notes, there is no English text present. The text located at the bottom of these notes reads as follows: “This check is redeemable at any branch of Bank Melli within the country within six months, and thereafter, only at the issuing branch.” All griffin designs have UV. 1, while some have extra UV marks as well. Initially, Stamp. 5 was used on these notes, but it was subsequently replaced by Stamp. 6.

Furthermore, they all feature a metallic security thread (Thrd. 1) with Wmk. 6 on the left, Wmk. 4 across the security thread, and Wmk. 3 on the right. These security features collectively enhanced the authenticity and security of these checks, ensuring their integrity and reducing the risk of counterfeiting.

From this point onward, it is highly probable that the bank issued all denominations of guaranteed checks on an annual basis, with the exception of those at extremely high or low values. Each denomination is distinguished by a unique serial number, and the bank consistently maintains this numbering system across various designs.

For notes with denominations below 1,000,000 Rials, the serial number is composed of a fraction. In the numerator, there is a Farsi letter, while the denominator holds a number. For denominations exceeding 1,000,000 Rials, an additional digit is appended to the



Figure 8:  
Griffin design

<sup>4</sup> Heritage Auctions, Inc., Auction 4006, Lot 26710.

right side of the fraction. This added digit serves as a control code for the denomination, with '1' representing 1,000,000 Rials, '2' for 2,000,000 Rials, and '5' for 5,000,000 Rials.

The Farsi letter in the serial number also carries significance, serving as a code consistent across all issues of the same denomination. Specifically, the letter 'س' corresponds to 100,000 Rials, 'ك' for 200,000 Rials, 'پ' for 500,000 Rials, 'ی' for 1,000,000 Rials, 'د' for 2,000,000 Rials, and 'ع' for 5,000,000 Rials.

The signature featured on this type of check belongs to Asad-Allah Amir Aslani, corresponding to his tenure as the CEO of the bank during SH 1368–1378 (1989–1999 CE). This particular signature remained in use on the checks until SH 1379.

Table 3. Group III guaranteed checks

| Code    | Denomination    | Details                   | SH Year   | CE Year   | Serial No.   |
|---------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| G.III.0 | 100,000 Rials   | Light brown & cream       | 1375–1376 | 1996–1997 | س/1 200174   |
| G.III.1 | 200,000 Rials   | Light blue border         | 1375–1376 | 1996–1997 | ك/8 330130   |
| G.III.2 | 500,000 Rials   | Coral border              | 1375–1376 | 1996–1997 | پ/19 314227  |
| G.III.3 | 1,000,000 Rials | Dark blue (indigo) border | 1375–1376 | 1996–1997 | -            |
| G.III.4 | 2,000,000 Rials | Purple border             | 1375–1376 | 1996–1997 | -            |
| G.III.5 | 5,000,000 Rials | Green border              | 1375–1376 | 1996–1997 | ع/8 5/009600 |



G.III.0



G.III.1



G.III.2

Figure 9: Guaranteed checks of group III



Figure 10: An advertisement with actual images of G.III checks

#### IV. Griffin, Uniface, Big size, Bearer cash checks

In this specific issue, the Farsi equivalent of “payable to the drawee or bearer” was incorporated into the design. As a result, even though one had the option to inscribe the drawee’s name and use these as order checks, they were primarily intended as bearer or cash checks. It is essential to note that there is no English text visible on these issues either.

Table 4: Group IV guaranteed checks

| Code   | Denomination    | Details                   | SH Year    | CE Year    | Serial No.     |
|--------|-----------------|---------------------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| G.IV.0 | 100,000 Rials   | Light brown border        | 1377-1378? | 1998-1999? | س/1 535213     |
| G.IV.1 | 200,000 Rials   | Light blue border         | 1377-1378  | 1998-1999  | ك/20 664607    |
| G.IV.2 | 500,000 Rials   | Coral border              | 1377-1378  | 1998-1999  | -              |
| G.IV.3 | 1,000,000 Rials | Dark blue (indigo) border | 1377-1378  | 1998-1999  | -              |
| G.IV.4 | 2,000,000 Rials | Purple border             | 1377-1378  | 1998-1999  | د/20 2/ 363662 |
| G.IV.5 | 5,000,000 Rials | Green border              | 1377-1378  | 1998-1999  | ع/15 5/ 393143 |



G.IV.0



G.IV.4



G.IV.5

Figure 11: Guaranteed checks of group IV

#### V. Griffin, Uniface, Big size, Added English texts

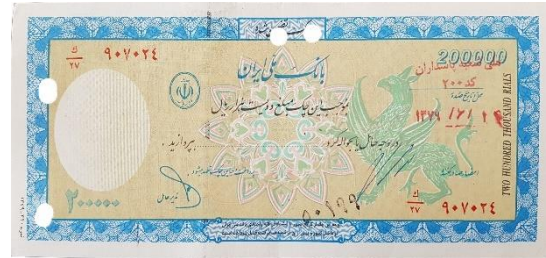
Starting from this series, the bank introduced a significant change by incorporating the denomination in English text and numbers on the right side of each check. Despite this alteration, the overall design remained consistent with the previous version. Notably, beginning in the year SH 1380, the redemption period mentioned on the checks was extended from six months to one year.

It is important to note that the year SH 1378 encompasses two distinct complete sets in Types IV and V, one featuring English texts and the other without. Valiollah Seif took over the signing of the checks from SH 1379 onward. While Figure 12 illustrates G.V.3

signed by Amir Aslani, the author has encountered an example dated SH 1379 bearing Seif's signature (Serial Number ۱/573233). This means that, for this particular denomination printed in SH 1379, there exist two signatures: some signed by Amir Aslani and others by Seif. This dual signature scenario could potentially extend to other denominations from the year SH 1379 in this series as well.



G.V.0



G.V.1



G.V.2



G.V.3



G.V.4



G.V.5

Figure 12: Guaranteed checks of group V

Table 5: Group V guaranteed checks

| Code  | Denomination    | Details                   | SH Year   | CE Year   | Serial No.     |
|-------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| G.V.0 | 100,000 Rials   | Light brown border        | 1378-1380 | 1999-2001 | س/21 512320    |
| G.V.1 | 200,000 Rials   | Light blue border         | 1378-1380 | 1999-2001 | ك/33 887077    |
| G.V.2 | 500,000 Rials   | Coral border              | 1378-1380 | 1999-2001 | پ/71 080789    |
| G.V.3 | 1,000,000 Rials | Dark blue (indigo) border | 1378-1380 | 1999-2001 | ی/60 1/ 789495 |
| G.V.4 | 2,000,000 Rials | Purple border             | 1378-1380 | 1999-2001 | د/33 2/ 766883 |
| G.V.5 | 5,000,000 Rials | Green border              | 1378-1380 | 1999-2001 | ع/32 5/ 927445 |

## VI. Griffin, Uniface, Small size, 2 Rials Stamp duty mark

In this issue, a significant change was implemented, as the size of the checks was reduced to 16 × 7.5 cm. Departing from the larger size issue, the underprint color in this series was adjusted to a lighter shade of the border's color, and this color was varied for each denomination.

Moreover, in this series and moving forward, the primary texts and the stamp duty sign (Stamp. 5) were uniformly printed in black, with no variation in color based on denomination. Similarly, the color of the serial numbers was also standardized to black. Additionally, the two colors featured in the griffin design were now rendered in more vibrant versions of light green and olive.



G.VI.1



G.VI.2



G.VI.3



G.VI.5

Figure 13: Guaranteed checks of group VI

Furthermore, another security thread (Thrd. 2) was introduced, positioned on the right side of each check, alongside two additional watermarks: Wmk. 3 and a second windowed Wmk. 4 along the new security thread. Additionally, a new UV design (UV. 3) was incorporated into the center of the checks. To summarize, these notes now feature two security threads, five watermarks, and two UV designs, significantly enhancing their security features.

Table 6: Group VI guaranteed checks

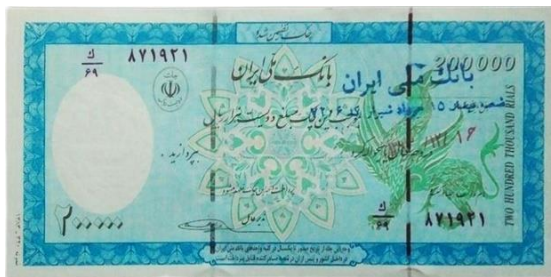
| Code   | Denomination    | Details            | SH Year | CE Year | Serial No.     |
|--------|-----------------|--------------------|---------|---------|----------------|
| G.VI.1 | 200,000 Rials   | Light blue         | 1380    | 2001    | ك/39 667370    |
| G.VI.2 | 500,000 Rials   | Coral              | 1380    | 2001    | ب/71 513891    |
| G.VI.3 | 1,000,000 Rials | Dark blue (indigo) | 1380    | 2001    | ی/68 1/208913  |
| G.VI.4 | 2,000,000 Rials | Purple             | 1380    | 2001    | د/39 2/ 887892 |
| G.VI.5 | 5,000,000 Rials | Green              | 1380    | 2001    | ع/34 5/ 232564 |

It is worth noting that the year SH 1380 includes two complete sets, one in Type V and the other in Type VI, further expanding the variety of designs within this series.

## VII. Griffin, Uniface, Small size, 200 Rials Stamp duty mark

This type retained the previous design with one notable change: the stamp duty marks were replaced by Stamp. 6, which displays “200 Rials.” In this type, the serial number was printed in purple, although it is worth noting that there are variations in shade, ranging from lighter to darker shades of blackish-purple.

Furthermore, it is confirmed that both UV. 2 and UV. 3 designs were featured on the year SH 1383 issues of this type. Unfortunately, the UV designs for other years remain unknown, leaving room for further exploration and documentation in this regard. For instance, certain 1,000,000 Rials issued in SH 1381 exhibit UV-reactive features in the griffin and central design.



G.VII.1



G.VII.2



G.VII.3



G.VII.4



G.VII.5

Figure 14: Guaranteed checks of group VII

Table 7: Group VII guaranteed checks

| Code    | Denomination    | Details               | SH Year | CE Year | Serial No.      |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| G.VII.1 | 200,000 Rials   | Light blue            | 1381    | 2002    | ك/46 494840     |
|         |                 |                       | 1382    | 2003    | ك/59 069075     |
|         |                 |                       | 1383    | 2004    | ك/69 781921     |
| G.VII.2 | 500,000 Rials   | Coral                 | 1381    | 2002    | پ/101 220265    |
|         |                 |                       | 1382    | 2003    | پ/133 809015    |
|         |                 |                       | 1383    | 2004    | پ/148 512016    |
| G.VII.3 | 1,000,000 Rials | Dark blue<br>(indigo) | 1381    | 2002    | ی/94 1/ 788383  |
|         |                 |                       | 1382    | 2003    | ی/142 1/ 996598 |
|         |                 |                       | 1383    | 2004    | ی/160 1/ 467273 |
| G.VII.4 | 2,000,000 Rials | Purple                | 1381    | 2002    | د/49 2/ 760365  |
|         |                 |                       | 1382    | 2003    | د/85 2/ 142702  |
|         |                 |                       | 1383    | 2004    | د/97 2/ 690784  |
| G.VII.5 | 5,000,000 Rials | Green                 | 1381    | 2002    | ع/45 5/ 162740  |
|         |                 |                       | 1382    | 2003    | ع/66 5/ 531111  |
|         |                 |                       | 1383    | 2004    | -               |

## VIII. Griffin, Two-sided



Figure 15: Reverse griffin design

The primary alteration in this type was the introduction of a reverse design on the check. This reverse design is rendered in a paler version of each note's color and features a griffin on the left side. It also incorporates the bank's name and the denomination in English, along with Farsi and English microtexts in the borders.

It is confirmed that UV. 4 was used in the year SH 1383 issues of this type. However, information about other varieties and years for UV designs remains elusive and requires further investigation and documentation.

Almost all denominations within group VIII have been reported with dates corresponding to SH 1382 and SH 1383. While no specimen dated SH 1384 has been identified by the author, the presence of several 500,000 Rials checks dated SH 1385 enhances the likelihood of discovering examples from SH1384 in the future. Likewise, the 500,000 Rials denomination is the sole denomination observed with a SH 1385 date; however, it remains uncertain whether this denomination represents the final surviving member of its category in the year or if other denominations were also issued during this year.

This work includes three specimens of the group VIII 500,000 Rials denomination with different signatures (subtypes a, b, and c), with the signatures on other denominations presumed to adhere to an almost similar pattern. Checks produced in SH 1382-1383 bear the signature of Valiollah Seif (G.VIII.2a), while those distributed in SH 1385 (G.VIII.2b) are signed by Abdul-Majid Ansari, who was CEO from SH1384/08/16 (2005/11/07) to SH 1385/09/12 (2006/12/03). There also exist examples from SH1385 that erroneously feature an inverted version of Abdul-Majid Ansari's signature (G.VIII.2c). There is no information regarding how many of these error notes made it into circulation.



G.VIII.1



G.VIII.2a (Valiollah Seif)



G.VIII.2b (Abdul-Majid Ansari)



G.VIII.2c (Abdul-Majid Ansari, inverted signature error)



G.VIII.3



G.VIII.4



G.VIII.5

Figure 16: Guaranteed checks of group VIII

Table 8: Group VIII guaranteed checks

| Code      | Denomination     | Details            | SH Year     | CE Year    | Serial No.            |
|-----------|------------------|--------------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------|
| G.VIII.1  | 200,000 Rials    | Light blue         | 1382        | 2003       | ك/66 760796           |
|           |                  |                    | 1383        | 2004       | ك/92 588653           |
|           |                  |                    | 1384-1385?  | 2005-2006? | -                     |
| G.VIII.2a | 500,000 Rials    | Coral              | 1382        | 2003       | پ/112 766028          |
|           |                  |                    | 1383        | 2004       | پ/164 126346          |
|           |                  |                    | 1384?       | 2005?      | -                     |
| G.VIII.2b | 500,000 Rials    | Coral              | 1384?       | 2005?      | -                     |
|           |                  |                    | 1385        | 2006       | پ/167 300873          |
| G.VIII.2c | 500,000 Rials    | Coral              | 1385        | 2006       | پ/182 126346          |
| G.VIII.3  | 1,000,000 Rials  | Dark blue (indigo) | 1382        | 2003       | -                     |
|           |                  |                    | 1383        | 2004       | ی/176 1/ 370971       |
|           |                  |                    | 1384-1385?  | 2005-2006? | -                     |
| G.VIII.4  | 2,000,000 Rials  | Purple             | 1382        | 2003       | د/68 2/ 824413        |
|           |                  |                    | 1383        | 2004       | د/121 2/ 798891       |
|           |                  |                    | 1384-1385?  | 2005-2006? | -                     |
| G.VIII.5  | 5,000,000 Rials  | Green              | 1382?       | 2003?      | -                     |
|           |                  |                    | 1383        | 2004       | ع/141 5/ 910730       |
|           |                  |                    | 1384-1385?  | 2005-2006? | -                     |
| G.VIII.6  | 10,000,000 Rials | Olive              | After 1383? | After 2004 | Specimen <sup>5</sup> |

Table 8 effectively illustrates the increasing proliferation of check issuances, highlighting that the situation was getting out of control. It is worth noting that during the years SH 1382 and SH 1383, two complete sets featuring distinct designs were simultaneously issued. One set corresponds to Type VII, and the other to Type VIII, underscoring the diversity and volume of check releases during this period.

## IX. Griffin miscellaneous designs

In contrast to the previous types, these particular types were not intended for circulation as cash checks or banknotes. These designs, along with potentially unreported

<sup>5</sup> While low-quality images of this specimen check can be found online, no data exist that it has ever been observed in circulation or appeared in private collections.

varieties, served as guaranteed order checks that were issued solely upon the request of the drawer. They have been issued in parallel with other guaranteed checks until very recently. Nonetheless, it is beneficial to provide some samples here, as the design elements of this type closely resemble older generations.

G.IX.1 is from the Pahlavi era, with Stamp. 1 and an alphabetic letter accompanying the serial number. Conversely, the other examples showcased here are from after the Islamic revolution. G.IX.2 displays a serial number with a numero-alphabetical fraction, while G.IX.3, being more recent, adopts the coded fractional system commonly used on modern checks. Typically, these checks feature Wmk. 1 and are characterized by a green version of Stamp. 6. Unlike some previous designs, the reverse of these checks does not incorporate any additional visual elements and may instead include text information.



G.IX.1

G.IX.2

G.IX.3

Figure 17: Guaranteed checks of group IX

Table 9: Group IX guaranteed checks

| Code   | Denomination | Details   | SH Year     | CE Year     | Serial No.           |
|--------|--------------|---|-------------|-------------|----------------------|
| G.IX.1 | Optional     | Big size, Light green border, yellow underprint     | Pahlavi Era | Pahlavi Era | ث 229197             |
| G.IX.2 | Optional     | Big size, Squareish, Green border, cream underprint | After 1381? | After 2002? | ج/25 975107          |
| G.IX.3 | Optional     | Small, Rectangular, Green border, cream underprint  | ?-to date   | ?-to date   | 17-9401 <sup>6</sup> |

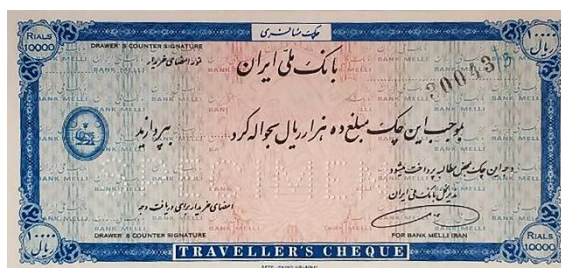
<sup>6</sup> Some time around SH 1385 (2006), banks initiated the practice of incorporating codes within serial numbers to indicate the issuing bank. In this case, the code "17" represents Bank Melli and will be consistently used on Melli checks moving forward.

## TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks were issued to facilitate the transportation of substantial sums of money within the country. These checks, while less prevalent than guaranteed checks, likely encompass a broader array of designs and denominations that have not been documented in this article.

### I. Pahlavi, Specimen, Faded old Bank Melli logo

The check depicted in Figure 18 is from the time of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and bears the signature of Yousef Khoshkish. Its central design features a faded rendition of the old Bank Melli logo, with a depiction of a lion and sun on the left side, replacing the traditional stamp duty. The word "SPECIMEN" is perforated on this uniface 10,000 Rials check, yet it also shows the serial number 30043, with an additional handwritten "/3" added later by pen. While the authenticity of this specimen remains to be determined, its design appears to serve as the foundation for the subsequent generation of these checks. Additional research is needed to confirm if other denominations exist.



*T.1.3 Specimen*

Figure 18: Specimen traveler's check of group I

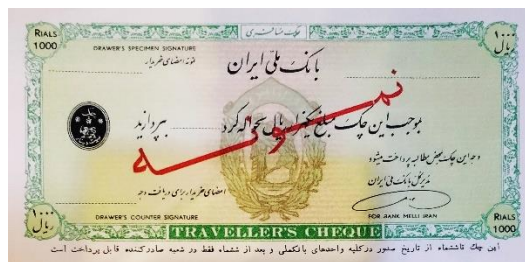
### II. Pahlavi, Old Bank Melli logo as the main design

Unlike the specimen shown in Figure 18, which seems to have never entered circulation, traveler's checks from group II were issued during Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's era for public use. While their borders resemble the previous group, the main design and the logo were improved, presumably to put more emphasize on it. Stamp. 2 was also incorporated in their design. Signed by Yousef Khoshkish, these checks are one-sided, lack security threads, but include Wmk. 1. Regarding redemption policy, these checks adhere to the same guidelines as the guaranteed checks within group G.III.

In Hamed Ra'i's collection, there exists an uncut sheet of specimen versions of these traveler's checks. Each denomination is represented once on the sheet, all featuring a red overprint with the Persian word 'نمونه' (Specimen). These specimens are separately depicted in Figure 19. While the authenticity of this uncut sheet requires verification, the design and small details appear promising. The sheet is one-sided, with remnants of the red overprint visible on the other side, and lacks watermarks or any security features. Additionally, none of the specimen versions bear serial numbers.



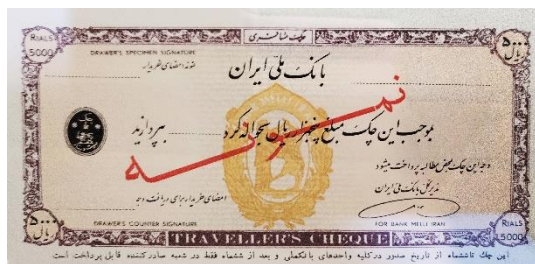
T.II.1



T.II.1 Specimen



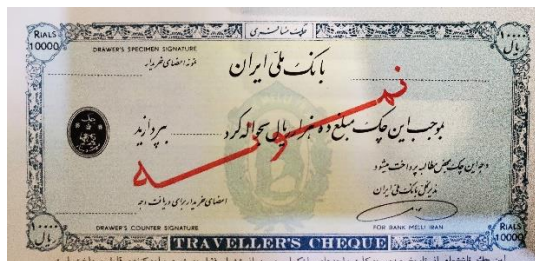
T.II.2



T.II.2 Specimen



T.II.3



T.II.3 Specimen

Figure 19: Traveler's checks of group II

Table 10: Group II Pahlavi traveler's checks

| Code   | Denomination | Details       | SH Year | CE Year | Serial No. |
|--------|--------------|---------------|---------|---------|------------|
| T.II.1 | 1,000 Rials  | Green         | 1352    | 1973    | 1003202    |
| T.II.2 | 5,000 Rials  | Cream         | 1352    | 1973    | 1002705    |
| T.II.3 | 10,000 Rials | Blue & yellow | 1352    | 1973    | 1002701    |

### III. Foreign traveler's

Two specimen checks are showcased in Figure 20, where a noteworthy characteristic is the predominant use of English text in their prints. It is plausible that these checks were specifically designed for foreign travels, likely during the Pahlavi era. Intriguingly, it is worth noting that the name of Bank Mellat is spelled as "Bank Millie" on these specimen checks.

Table 11: Foreign design traveler's checks

| Code     | Denomination | Details | SH Year | CE Year | Serial No. |
|----------|--------------|---------|---------|---------|------------|
| T.III.1a | 100 Rials    | Red     | ?       | ?       | Specimen   |
| T.III.1b | 100 Rials    | Green   | ?       | ?       | Specimen   |



T.III.1a



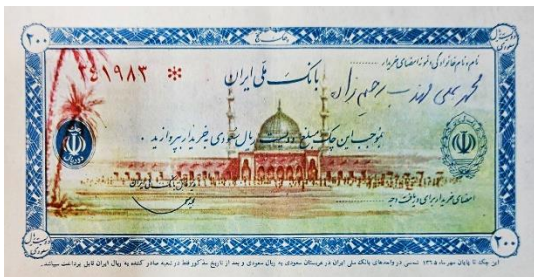
T.III.1b

Figure 20: Foreign design traveler's checks

#### IV. Hajj Pilgrim Checks

These checks were issued post the Islamic revolution and, although not explicitly labeled as traveler's checks, they were specially designed to cater to Islamic pilgrims embarking on the Hajj journey to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. An intriguing aspect of these checks is that they were payable at every branch of Bank Melli in Saudi Arabia, with the currency of transaction being the Saudi Rial, rather than the Iranian Rial, which adds a unique dimension to their usage.

However, following the specified redemption period, they could only be redeemed at the issuing branch, and the payment would be made in Iranian Rials. Remarkably, one side of these checks features graphics, while the other side is plain white with spaces designated for filling in essential information. This includes details such as name, birth certificate number, passport number, caravan number, name of the province, and the responsible branch.



T.IV.1



T.IV.2



T.IV.3

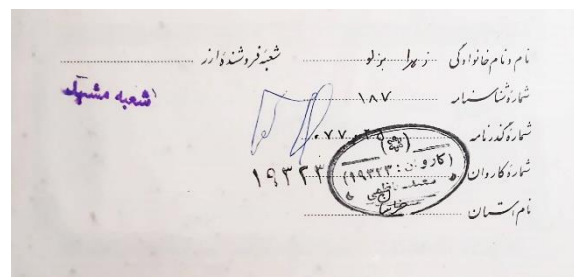


Figure 21: Hajj pilgrim checks

The checks issued in SH 1365 were signed by Majid Ghasemi, while others bore the signature of Kazem Najafi ‘Elmi. They all incorporate the new logo of Bank Melli, Wmk. 1, and Stamp. 4. It is important to acknowledge that there may be other variations and denominations for this issue that are yet to be documented.

Table 12: Hajj checks

| Code   | Denomination    | Details                       | SH Year            | CE Year | Serial No. |
|--------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------|------------|
| T.IV.1 | 200 Saudi Rials | Prophet’s Mosque, blue border | 1365? <sup>7</sup> | 1986?   | 341984     |
| T.IV.2 | 350 Saudi Rials | Turquoise, black border       | 1365?              | 1986?   | 557000     |
| T.IV.3 | 400 Saudi Rials | Ka’ba, black border           | 1366?              | 1987?   | 1360658    |

## V. Kish checks

Kish, an island located off the southern coast of Iran in the Persian Gulf, serves as both a prominent tourist destination and a preferred travel choice for many Iranians, who visit the island periodically. Kish checks, although quite rare, are believed to have been produced to streamline financial transactions for travelers heading to Kish Island. These checks are available in three distinct denominations: 10, 50, and 100 thousand Rials.

Regrettably, Kish checks do not bear a printed issuance date. However, the presence of Asad-Allah Amir Aslani’s signature on these notes indicates that they were most likely issued prior to SH 1379 and were probably in circulation during the SH 1370s. The redemption period for this series extended for one year, during which time the checks were accepted for payment at all Bank Melli branches in Kish. After this initial period, only the issuer branch would redeem them. These checks feature the Bank Melli logo integrated into their design, alongside Wmk. 1 and Stamp. 4.

Table 13: Kish checks

| Code   | Denomination  | Details | SH Year | CE Year | Serial No. |
|--------|---------------|---------|---------|---------|------------|
| T.V.1  | 10,000 Rials  | Blue    | 1370s   | 1990s   | No serial  |
| T.V.2a | 50,000 Rials  | Green   | 1370s   | 1990s   | 407999     |
| T.V.2b |               |         |         |         | ٢/1 479998 |
| T.V.3  | 100,000 Rials | Purple  | 1370s   | 1990s   | 336000     |

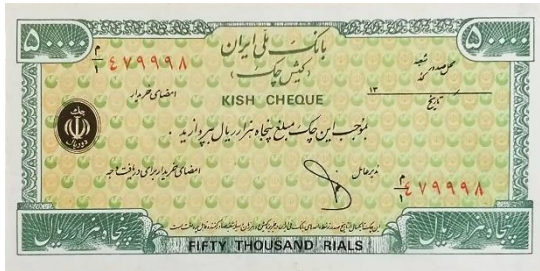
<sup>7</sup> These checks lack a specific date, but they were redeemable until SH 1365 Mehr 1<sup>st</sup> (1986, September 23<sup>rd</sup>). Thus, considering the standard six-month redemption period typically associated with these checks, it is reasonable to infer that they might have been issued in the same year.



T.V.1



T.V.2a



T.V.2b (Fraction in serial number)



T.V.3

Figure 22: Kish checks

It is intriguing to note that none of the 10,000 Rials Kish checks, observed by the author, feature serial numbers. Additionally, an interesting pattern emerges with the 50,000 Rials denomination, which consists of two subtypes labeled as “a” and “b”. Notably, subtype b includes a fraction ( $\frac{1}{1}$  in this instance) added to the serial number. This pattern suggests the possibility of similar variations existing within other denominations as well.

## VI. Traveler’s Checks with Bank Melli logo

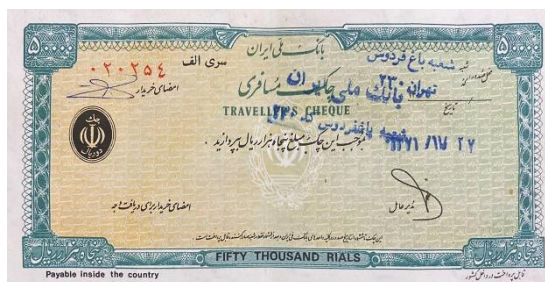
The design of these checks closely resembles the Kish series; however, unlike Kish checks, these notes were not restricted to a single destination. They adhere to the same redemption policy as guaranteed checks within group G.III. Within the first six months of issuance, any Bank Melli branch would accept them for exchange into cash. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that these checks were only payable within the country, as indicated on the notes.

The primary design element of these checks prominently features Bank Melli’s logo, with the reverse side left empty. They also incorporate Stamp. 4 and Wmk. 1, primarily in a vertical orientation, and bear the signature of Asad-Allah Amir Aslani.

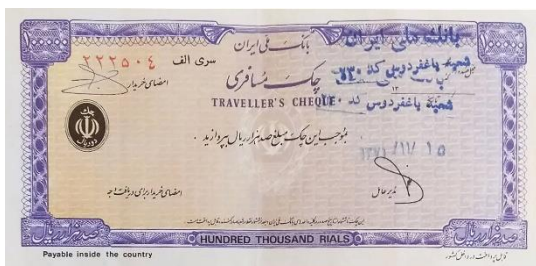
The checks within group VI, as illustrated in this work, are categorized into two subtypes, each with minor design differences. Subtype “a” checks feature a single serial number located in the upper left corner, accompanied by an alphabetic letter, with the signature positioned near the lower right corner. In contrast, subtype “b” checks exhibit double serial numbers placed in both upper and lower corners, with the serial including a full fraction. Furthermore, the signature is positioned closer to the center of the check. These distinct subtypes are currently observed only in the 50,000 Rials and 100,000 Rials denominations. However, similar variations are anticipated in other denominations, if they exist.

Table 14: Group VI traveler's checks

| Code        | Denomination  | Details    | SH Year   | CE Year   | Serial No. |
|-------------|---------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| T.VI.1a     | 50,000 Rials  | Green      | 1371-1372 | 1992-1993 | الف 020254 |
| T.VI.1b     |               |            |           |           | -          |
| T.VI.2a     | 100,000 Rials | Purple     | 1371-1372 | 1992-1993 | الف 222504 |
| T.VI.2b     |               |            |           |           | ص/4 666534 |
| T.VI.3a & b | 200,000 Rials | Light Blue | 1371-1372 | 1992-1993 | -          |
| T.VI.4a & b | 500,000 Rials | Dark Blue  | 1371-1372 | 1992-1993 | -          |



T.VI.1a



T.VI.2a



T.VI.2b

Figure 23: Traveler's check of group VI

## VII. Enhanced security features

This subsequent series underwent several modifications aimed at enhancing the security features of the notes. The design closely follows that of subtype "b" of group VI, with notable changes being the addition of a watermark and a security thread on the left side of the checks, and the relocation of the stamp mark to the right side, where it was replaced by Stamp. 5. These alterations were implemented to bolster the security measures of these notes.

Table 15: Group VII traveler's checks

| Code    | Denomination  | Details    | SH Year       | CE Year       | Serial No. |
|---------|---------------|------------|---------------|---------------|------------|
| T.VII.1 | 50,000 Rials  | Green      | ? (1372-1379) | ? (1993-2000) | -          |
| T.VII.2 | 100,000 Rials | Purple     | ?             | ?             | -          |
| T.VII.3 | 200,000 Rials | Light Blue | ?             | ?             | -          |
| T.VII.4 | 500,000 Rials | Dark Blue  | ?             | ?             | پ/1 231672 |



Figure 24: An advertisement with real images of traveler's check of the VII series

## MELLI CHECKS (Buildings Series)

These bank checks represent the final generation of checks issued by Bank Melli before the Central Bank introduced the unified "Iran Checks." Melli Checks remained in circulation until the year SH 1387 (2008 CE), at which point the government implemented a ban on the production of any bank checks as a form of paper money. By that juncture, banks were effectively generating currency, contributing to inflationary pressures.

Given that these notes lack printed dates and instead feature hand-stamped dates by bank clerks, there is a plausible likelihood that they were issued during SH 1386 and remained in circulation during SH 1386–1387 (2007–2008 CE).

Table 16: Melli checks

| Code | Denomination    | Details   | SH Year | CE Year | Serial Denominator |
|------|-----------------|---|---------|---------|--------------------|
| M.1  | 200,000 Rials   | Blue, Bank Melli's Zoorkhane (traditional gymnasium)                                  | 1386    | 2007    | 17-0101            |
| M.2  | 500,000 Rials   | Red, Bazaar branch building   | 1386    | 2007    | 17-1201            |
| M.3  | 1,000,000 Rials | Green, Central branch building  | 1386    | 2007    | 17-2213            |
| M.4  | 2,000,000 Rials | ? <sup>8</sup>  | 1386    | 2007    | 17-3×××            |
| M.5a | 5,000,000 Rials | Yellow, Bank Melli museum building, denomination in red to the right of the watermark | 1386    | 2007    | 17-4158            |
| M.5b | 5,000,000 Rials | Yellow, Bank Melli museum building, denomination in red to the left of the watermark  | 1386    | 2007    | 17-4165            |

<sup>8</sup> The presence of this denomination is subject to uncertainty, but it remains highly plausible due to the reserved control digit "3" within the serial numbers, which suggests the potential existence of this denomination.



M.1



M.2



M.3



M.5a



M.5b

Figure 25: Melli checks

These checks notably do not bear a stamp duty mark. However, they incorporate security features such as Wmk. 7 and Wmk. 4 (positioned along the security thread), with security threads of types Thrd. 3 and Thrd. 4 (typically found in lower denominations). Furthermore, the inclusion of UV. 1 and fluorescent ink in certain texts and the bank logo further bolster the security aspects of these checks.

The serial number format for this issue follows the pattern of “Bank code – Denomination control digit | Serial count.” In the case of Melli Bank, the bank code is consistently represented as 17. The control number is designated as 0 for 200,000 Rials, 1 for 500,000 Rials, and this trend continues for higher denominations.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the signature featured on this series belongs to Ali Sedghi, corresponding to his tenure as the CEO of the bank during SH 1385–1388 (2006–2009 CE).

## Conclusion

This article has systematically categorized the checks issued by Bank Melli Iran from 1958 to 2007 into 17 distinct categories. The captivating designs and notable variations make these notes highly sought-after by collectors on a global scale. While this study has showcased around 75 different checks, it is imperative to acknowledge that there likely exists a multitude of additional types and subtypes yet to be documented. Subsequent research endeavors should aim to uncover new variations, no matter how subtle, encompassing aspects such as fonts, colors, and especially the UV designs incorporated into these checks.

## Acknowledgment

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### **About the author**

**Seyed Omid Mohammadi** is an avid coin and banknote collector from Iran. His main interest centers on researching Islamic and ancient Iranian coins, with a particular focus on countermarked coinage. Having learned numismatics from Saeed Soleimani, he has collaborated with him on several articles in this field. Mohammadi's overarching goal is to utilize his background in engineering, specifically in artificial intelligence, to apply data-driven approaches to the study of numismatic items.

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