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HISTORY OF  
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Sixth to Eleventh Centuries

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Chapter 16. Numismatics



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## Numismatics

STEFAN HEIDEMANN

### Islamic coins as a historical source

At least since Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), the historical-critical approach to any study of history has demanded parallel independent proof in order to establish firmly a given historical fact. Historians of Islamic societies have almost no primary documents or archives for the period prior to the fifteenth century. In contrast to the scarce primary documents, the secondary sources – literary and historical accounts, especially from the ninth to the tenth centuries – are abundant.

This gross imbalance between the lack of primary documents, produced in the course of the events, and chronicles written much later has led scholars to depend greatly upon medieval but secondary authors. Since they typically wrote from the point of view of a city, a ruling house, a ruler or a religious community or school of law their accounts are necessarily biased. Without independent documents or material evidence the modern historian is often unable to corroborate or to refute these literary accounts; sometimes even important lacunae in our knowledge may remain unnoticed. After being widely neglected following the First World War the study and use of Islamic numismatic documents have again become a prospering academic subject, particularly in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup>

Islamic coins of the classical period can be characterised above all as bearers of texts of up to 150 words (fig. 16.35). The texts on coins struck during the first six-and-a-half centuries of Islam often mention up to five names, providing the entire hierarchy of power – from the local governor up to the caliph at the time and location of minting. They usually name the mint town, sometimes even the urban quarter, usually the year, and sometimes even the month and the day. Religious legends provide hints of the political orientation of the ruler

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter bibliography below.

who commissioned the coin. The inclusion of the name onto the coin protocol (*sikka*) and in the Friday prayer (*khutba*) served in their time as proof of who the actual ruler was. Both had a similar political value. The reference to the hierarchy of rulers in the Friday prayer was purely verbal and therefore transient, whereas on coins the protocol can be found permanently stored on a metal object that was frequently reproduced, like a 'bulletin of state'. As what are normally precisely datable archaeological artefacts, they open a further dimension of information.<sup>2</sup>

### Coins as source of economic and legal history

Money as a means of coordinating human decisions and economic exchange is a complex social invention. It must always adjust to the prevailing economic, political and juridical conditions. Seen from another angle, its design and evolution reveal much about the societies creating it. In the pre-modern world the supply of coins – the physical instruments for the exchange of goods and services – were usually scarce. However, in order to function as an 'absolute price' (*thaman mutlaq*) or 'equivalent' (*thaman*) – that is, as money – at least one certain type of coin has to be available in sufficient quantities. Non-physical forms of money, bills of exchange (*hawāla*) and cheques (*suftaja*), were developed in the Middle East, but they were used only among small communities bound by ties of trust and kinship, such as, for example, in networks of long-distance merchants in major trade cities.

The value of coins was determined by market forces. It always exceeded the value of the same amount of metal as a mere commodity, although it was bound to the metal content, the difference being smaller for high-value coins than for petty coinage. If a coin-type was generally accepted and was in sufficient supply, it was maintained over a long period and remained stable in design and usually in metallic content.

Two separate currencies always existed side by side, serving distinct needs within different social classes: high-value money, usually gold or pure silver coins; and petty coinage, usually debased silver, billon or copper coins. Gold coins, and, to a certain extent, silver coins, constituted the principal currency for wholesale and long-distance merchants (*tujjār* and *jallābūn*) as well as for

2 S. Heidemann, 'Settlement patterns, economic development and archaeological coin finds in Bilād aš-Šām: The case of the Diyār Muḍar', in K. Bartl and A. Moaz (eds.), *Residences, castles, settlements: Transformation processes from Late Antiquity to early Islam in Bilād al-Sham. Proceedings of the International Conference held at Damascus, 5–9 November 2006*, *Orient-Archäologie* 24 (Rahden, 2009).

fiscal administration and state expenditure. It was also the money of high-ranking state officials and military, who needed it to store wealth, to transfer it conveniently over long distances and to make payments of large sums. High-value coins could be traded between regions, and stood in competition with other similar coins. Geographically well-defined borders of currency zones hardly existed. If they did exist, then it was for economic reasons and fiscal measures.

The second currency type fulfilled the needs for daily purchases. It was the money of small dealers, artisans, workers (*sūqa* and *bā'a*) in the urban market (*sūq*) and, of course, of the rest of the urban population. The urban population was dependent for their livelihood on income that usually came from their activities within the boundaries of a city or town, and thus on purchases within the urban markets. The majority of the people in pre-modern societies – the rural population, peasants and nomads – relied mainly on subsistence. Only certain extra requirements and excess produce were bought and sold in the *sūq*.

The ratio in price between high-value and petty coinage was usually determined by supply and demand. The demand for small coins far exceeded their supply, as the central authorities usually neglected to provide a sufficient supply. This allowed a much higher profit for those who could provide these means of exchange – in other words, the local fiscal and political authorities or private money-changers. Petty coins could also be imported from other regions at a profit.

During the third/ninth century the legal prescriptions for money became fully developed, the most important among them being the theory of value and the prohibition of *ribā* (illegitimate profit according to the *sharī'a*). Islamic law forbids two equal amounts of precious metal from being valued differently in one single transaction. This is the core of the prohibition of *ribā*. Islamic legal theory determined the value of money to be identical with the intrinsic value of the bullion. Only silver and gold were the commodities that could be legally used for any transaction as 'absolute price'. Muslim jurists of the fifth/eleventh century, however, were aware of the contradiction between observed empirical reality and the normative imperative of the revealed law. They recognised that the fluctuating value of coins was based on the interest of the public in it – that is, on the market forces. In order to facilitate a monetary economy in the period of regional currencies with different finenesses and weights the jurists invented several legal arguments to ensure that market exchanges were in accord with Islamic law.

The majority of the jurists did not regard copper coins – the generic term is *fals/fulūs* – as money or ‘absolute price/equivalent’; if they regarded them at all, then they did so only as a substitute for money. Copper coins could serve in some, but not all, legal transactions, as did gold and silver.<sup>3</sup>

### The development of the representation of a new universal religion and its empire: Zubayrid and Khārijite challenge and Umayyad reform

Coins and their imagery are our only contemporary continuous primary source for the genesis of the self-representation of the new religion and its empire in the seventh century. Our understanding on these early coins has grown quickly since the 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

The Islamic armies swiftly conquered three major zones of monetary circulation, and took over much of their fiscal organisation: the former Byzantine territories in the centre; the Sasanian empire in the east; and Germanic North Africa and Spain. In the Byzantine territories the workhorse of the fiscal cycle, of taxation and state expenditure, was the gold *solidus* or *nomisma* of about 4.55 grams (fig. 16.1). The money used for the daily

- 3 C. M. Cipolla, *Money, prices and civilization in the Mediterranean world* (Princeton, 1956), pp. 27–37; R. Brunschvig, ‘Conceptions monétaires chez les juristes musulmanes (VIII–XIIIe siècles)’, *Arabica*, 14 (1967); Avram L. Udovitch, *Partnership and profit in medieval Islam* (Princeton, 1970), pp. 55–6; S. Heidemann, *Die Renaissance der Städte in Nordsyrien und Nordmesopotamien: Städtische Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Bedingungen in ar-Raqqā und Ḥarrān von der Zeit der beduinischen Vorherrschaft bis zu den Seldschuken*, Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts 40 (Leiden, 2002), pp. 356–61, 367.
- 4 M. Bates, ‘History, geography and numismatics in the first century of Islamic coinage’, *Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau*, 65 (1986); S. Heidemann, ‘The merger of two currency zones in early Islam: The Byzantine and Sasanian impact on the circulation in former Byzantine Syria and northern Mesopotamia’, *Iran*, 36 (1998); L. Treadwell, *The chronology of the pre-reform copper coinage of early Islamic Syria*, Supplement to Oriental Numismatic Society Newsletter 162 (London, 2000); S. Album and T. Goodwin, *The pre-reform coinage of the early Islamic Period*, Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean 1 (London, 2002); A. Oddy, ‘Whither Arab-Byzantine numismatics? A review of fifty years’ research’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 28 (2004); T. Goodwin, *Arab-Byzantine coinage*, Study in the Khalili Collection 4 (London, 2005); C. Foss, *Arab-Byzantine coins: An introduction, with a catalogue of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection* (Cambridge, MA, 2009). For the economic and political history see esp. J. Johns, ‘Archaeology and the history of early Islam: The first seventy years’, *JESHO*, 46 (2003); M. G. Morony, ‘Economic boundaries? Late Antiquity and early Islam’, *JESHO*, 47 (2004). For the iconographic development see S. Heidemann, ‘The development of the representation of the early Islamic empire and its religion on coin imagery’, in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qurʾān in context: Historical and literary investigations into the Qurʾānic milieu* (Leiden, forthcoming).

purchases, the copper *folles* (pl. *folles*) (fig. 16.2), was sold by the treasury as well. In 629/30 Heraclius (r. 610–41) had concentrated all minting in the imperial capital, Constantinople. During the Sasanian occupation between 606–7 and 628 irregular mints were established in Syria, supplementing the circulating stock of copper coins.<sup>5</sup> In the Sasanian empire the money of the fiscal cycle was the uniform silver *drahm* of about 4.2 grams, which was struck in the days of Khusrau II (r. 590/591–628) in about thirty-four mints (fig. 16.3). Almost nothing is known about late Sasanian copper coinage. Tiny coppers, which are now rare, probably circulated in the major urban centres. Their issues became especially rich in design under Arab rule, and constitute an excellent source for art history.<sup>6</sup> In Spain and North Africa monetary economy had receded since the Roman empire, since the fifth century. The third of the *solidus*, the *tremisses* (c. 1.5 g), was the main and only coin struck in Spain and the rest of western Europe (cf. fig. 16.4). In North Africa Carthage was the only mint to continue striking petty coinage.

In the first decades after the battle of Yarmūk in 636 CE and the establishment of the Taurus border zone, Byzantine coppers remained in circulation, and were with few interruptions almost continuously supplemented by new imports from Byzantium. In contrast, the influx of *nomismata* dropped considerably. The obverse of the *folles* shows the emperor – here (fig. 16.2) the standing figure of Constans II (r. 641–68) wearing a crown with cross, holding a globus cruciger in one hand and a long cross in the other. On the reverse the **m** indicates the Greek numeral 40, the mark of value of the Byzantine standard copper coin. According to archaeological finds, an end to the importing of these coins can be discerned in the late 650s.

The importing obviously disregarded political boundaries. The selling of coppers was profitable for the Byzantine treasury. Early Islam, outside the Hijāz, was the elite religion of a tribally organised military. During the period of conquest the Islamic religion possessed only a rudimentary theology, which was probably even more basic among military units. Contemporary Byzantium might have perceived the conquest as a menacing rebellion and – if they had noticed the religious dimension at all – an Arab heresy of Judaeo-Christian origin. This perception would not necessarily have challenged the universal claim of the all-embracing Roman empire, since the idea of Rome

5 H. Pottier, *Le monnayage de la Syrie sous l'occupation perse (610–630)*, Cahiers Ernest Babelon 9 (Paris, 2004).

6 R. Gyselen, *Arab-Sasanian copper coinage*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 284, Veröffentlichungen der numismatischen Kommission 34 (Vienna, 2000).

was neutral to religion. In these early days the Umayyads in Damascus did not develop an imperial state ideology of their own. As leaders of the victorious Arab armies they were probably content with their de facto rule and modest fiscal exploitation. Numerous attempts to conquer Constantinople might be interpreted as the inheritance by the rising Islamic Arab power of the universal Roman claim.

The minting of the first copper coins in the former Byzantine territories commenced after 636 CE. These imitations supplemented the circulating stock and followed even weight reductions in Byzantium.<sup>7</sup> We do not know who the regulating authorities were, but it is possible that military authorities in the garrisons, local authorities in the cities, money changers or merchants were involved in their production. Beginning in the 660s with the Sufyānid reforms, some sort of coordination, if not central policy, can be assumed. In a study, Luke Treadwell focused his attention on the developments in the mints of the provincial capitals Damascus, Tiberias and Ḥimṣ. Although these 'imperial image' coppers still depict Byzantine emperors with cross insignias, they now have carefully prepared flans and carefully engraved dies. The mints were named on the coins, in Greek, Arabic or both. Validating expressions were included, such as KAAON or *ṭayyib* (both meaning 'good'), or *jā'iz* ('current') (figs. 16.5, 16.6). No attempt to represent the new state or religion was made; petty coinage first of all served as means of exchange. The Sufyānid government set up a 'very loose tributary state'.<sup>8</sup>

As a centralised state, the Sasanian empire fell while at its apogee – at least as far as its administration, its army, which was based on cash payments, and its monetary economy were concerned. Silver coins were the backbone of the fiscal cycle, and were available in enormous quantities. The typical late Sasanian *drahm* (fig. 16.3) of about 4.2 grams shows on the obverse the portrait of the *shāhānshāh* – either Khusrau II (r. 590–628) or Yazdegerd III (r. 632–51) – with an enormous winged crown as sign of their royalty. On the reverse, the fire altar served as the central symbol of the dualistic Iranian religion, Zoroastrianism. Priest attendants stand on either side, and beside them are abbreviations indicating the mint and the regnal year of the ruler. Dies were probably cut in a central workshop and then distributed to the provincial mints, a recurrent phenomenon in the later Islamic coinage. In his twentieth regnal year, 651, the last *shāhānshāh* Yazdegerd III was assassinated in Marw,

7 H. Pottier, I. Schulze and W. Schulze, 'Pseudo-Byzantine coinage in Syria under Arab rule (638-c.670): Classification and dating', *Revue numismatique belge*, 154 (2008).

8 C. F. Robinson, *Empire and elites after the Muslim conquest: The transformation of northern Mesopotamia*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge, 2000), p. 166.

the last eastern remnant of his empire. The coins in the conquered territories are almost indistinguishable from the coins under the authority of Yazdegerd III, except that mints lay outside his shrinking realm. For some time after 31/651 coins continued to be struck with the names and portraits of Khusrau II or Yazdegerd III and with the fire altar. Frequently – but not always – additional Arabic validating marks were set on the margin, such as *bism Allāh* ('in the name of God') or *jayyid* ('good'), as on Syrian copper coins. The resulting picture for the early decades seems to correspond to a situation in which the Sasanian administration remained operational, but broken down to a provincial level and now responsible to Arab governors.<sup>9</sup> Starting in about 40/661, with Mu'āwiya's regime, the names of Khusrau II and Yazdegerd III were replaced, first occasionally and then regularly with the names of the provincial governors in Pahlavi, placed in front of the traditional portrait of the *shāhānshāh*. In many mints, but not in all, the dating shifted to the *hijra* year (fig. 16.7)

The Zubayrid and Khārijite challenges between 681 and 697 – the period of the second *fitna* – mark the watershed towards the initial inclusion of Islamic symbols in the coin imagery and finally to a clear iconographic expression of religion and state. 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr was a close, venerated and merited member of the family of the Prophet. He emphasised the religious-political character of his caliphate and demanded a state in accordance with the principles of Islam, whatever this meant at that time. After Mu'āwiya's death in 60/680 he strongly opposed the Sufyānid regime, and was supported in many parts of the empire. As early as 62/681f. his name was put on coins of Kirmān. The coins show in 64/684 that he assumed the caliphal title 'amīr of the believers' (fig. 16.8). In 67/687 his brother Muṣ'ab secured Baṣra, Iraq and the territories to the east as far as Sīstān. The Umayyads seemed to have lost their cause.

Between 66/685 and 69/688f., in the city of Bishāpūr, *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* (Muḥammad is the messenger of God) was placed for the first time on coinage, on that of the Zubayrid governor of the east. The coin image itself remained as before, the portrait of the *shāhānshāh* and the fire altar. The Zubayrids thus propagated the new Islamic imperial rule with reference to the Prophet and putative founder of the state. Probably in 70/689f. the Zubayrid authorities created a coin with the name of Muḥammad in front of the portrait of the *shāhānshāh* and in the margin a reference to Muḥammad, for the first time including the profession of faith and the unity of God, the *shahāda*, in

9 S. Sears, 'A monetary history of Iraq and Iran, ca. CE 500 to 750', Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago (1997).

Arabic: *lā ilāha illā Allāh waḥdahū*.<sup>10</sup> In 72/691f. the Zubayrid governor of the province of Sīstān, in south-eastern Iran, replaced the Zoroastrian fire altar with the profession of the new faith (*shahāda*). Iraj Mochiri read the Pahlavi script thus: ‘Seventy-two / One God but He / another God does not exist / Muḥammad [is] the messenger of God / SK [mint abbreviation for Sīstān]’ (fig. 16.9).<sup>11</sup> Clearly dated, the *shahāda* appears here on a contemporary document in Pahlavi script and in the Persian language. Together with the Prophetic mission of Muḥammad, it is the first symbol of the Islamic religion and its empire known. The Zubayrid governor had targeted the ideological–religious deficiencies of the Umayyad regime. In the same year the Marwānids re-conquered Iraq, and in 73/692 the caliphate of ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr was brutally suppressed in Mecca.

The Marwānid activities that followed can be seen as aimed at integrating the defeated moderate Zubayrid movement in ideological terms, as well as a forceful reaction to the ongoing Khārījite menace. At this point in history at the latest, the idea was created of an Islamic universal empire in its own ideological right. In 72/691f. ‘Abd al-Malik built the present Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem as probably the first architectural manifestations of the new Islamic empire. The choice of Jerusalem placed the imperial religion in the tradition of Judaism and Christianity and in the centre of the medieval world.

Between 72/691f. and 77/696f. the Marwānid government experimented with new symbols as representations of religion and imperial power, not all of which are well understood today. Most famous is the image of the standing caliph on gold, silver and copper coins in Syria and northern Mesopotamia (figs. 16.10, 16.11). On the Syrian silver *drahms* and on some copper coins ‘Abd al-Malik asserted his claim to being *khalīfat Allāh* (the deputy of God), to enhance his politico-religious leadership (fig. 16.11).<sup>12</sup> However, the recurrent theme of all

10 L. Ilisch, ‘The Muhammad-drachms and their relation to Umayyad Syria and northern Mesopotamia’, *Supplement of the Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society*, 193 (Autumn 2007).

11 M. I. Mochiri, ‘A Pahlavi forerunner of the Umayyad reformed coinage’, *JRAS*, (1981). Further discussion in S. Sears, ‘A hybrid imitation of early Muslim coinage struck in Sijistan by Abū Bardhā’a’, *American Journal of Numismatics*, 1 (1989); and L. Ilisch, Review of *American Journal of Numismatics*, 1, *Der Islam*, 69 (1992).

12 For the iconographic interpretation see N. Jamil, ‘Caliph and Qutb: Poetry as a source for interpreting the transformation of the Byzantine cross on steps on Umayyad coinage’, in Jeremy Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and early Islam*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9, part 2 (Oxford, 1999); L. Treadwell, ‘The “orans” drachms of Bishr ibn Marwān and the figural coinage of the early Marwanid period’, in Johns (ed.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and early Islam*; L. Treadwell, ‘“Mihrab and ‘Anaza” or “sacrum and spear”? A reconsideration of an early Marwanid silver drachm’, *Muqarnas*, 30 (2005).

experiments in coin design was the inclusion of the name of the founder of the religion and the putative founder of the empire, *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*, sometimes together with the *shahāda*. This was the symbol of Islam comparable to cross, fire altar and menorah. The Zubayrid idea was firmly adopted.

Between 77/696 and 79/699, just after the final defeat of the Khārijite caliph Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā'a, the definitive symbolic representation of Islam and the Islamic empire on coinage was launched. In 77/696 new *dīnārs* were produced (fig. 16.12) – probably in Damascus – bearing the new religious symbols of the Islamic empire: the *shahāda*, encircled by the *risāla*, the Prophetic mission of Muḥammad (Q 9:33), and on the opposite side the word of God, the *sūrat ikhlāṣ* (Q 112) and the date of minting. Late in 78/697f. al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, the governor of the east, ordered the reform of the *dirhams* in his realm, similar to the new *dīnārs*, but stating the mint name also, as on Sasanian *drahms*. The reform started in Kūfa, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Jāy and Shaqq al-Taymara in al-Jibāl, as far as we can currently tell. The following year saw the application of the new design in more than forty mints (fig. 16.13).<sup>13</sup>

Precious-metal coins remained anonymous until the time of the 'Abbāsīd al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75). The image and the name of the ruler were taken out of any representation of the empire. This constituted a historically unprecedented breach with a tradition of Hellenistic coin imagery going back about a millennium. The epigraphic image of the profession of faith and the words of God can be read as 'the sovereignty belongs to God', almost a concession to Khārijite thinking. Anonymity did not mean modesty, because the new Islamic universal emperor claimed nothing less than being *khalīfat Allāh*: the deputy of God.

### Umayyad and early 'Abbāsīd coinage

The new currency system of the empire consisted of an almost pure gold *dīnār* regulated to the *mithqāl* weight (4.2 g), an almost pure silver *dirham* regulated to a *dirham* weight (2.8–2.9 g) and unregulated copper coins which had a token character. This became the standard model for currency in the emerging Islamic law. Although the Umayyad empire was far from a centralised state, the coinage does show a high degree of organisation and centralisation, owing

<sup>13</sup> M. Klat, *Catalogue of the post-reform dirhams: The Umayyad dynasty* (London, 2002); L. Ilisch in *Dr. Busso Peus Nachf. Münzhandlung Frankfurt, Katalog 369* (31 October 2001), no. 1467, pp. 80–1.

to its Sasanian heritage.<sup>14</sup> It can be supposed that the gold coinage, which mentions no mint, would have been struck almost exclusively at the caliph's court, first in Damascus and later in Baghdad. Mints for *thulths* (*tremisses*), *nişf* (*semissis*) and some *dīnārs* were set up in al-Andalus and Ifrīqiya (Qayrawān) (fig. 16.4). With 'Abd al-Malik's reforms all old Byzantine gold coinage vanished immediately from circulation in Egypt, Syria and northern Mesopotamia, indicating a tight fiscal regime on the gold circulation in the former Byzantine territories. During the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–93/786–809) the production of gold *dīnārs* in more than one mint became apparent, as indicated by the inclusion of the names of provincial governors and specific mint marks (fig. 16.14).

The organisation of silver coinage serving the fiscal authorities in the former Sasanian east was different. The new design soon spread to all mints in the east and the capital Damascus; in 97/715f. it was adopted in Ifrīqiya, and finally, in 100/718f., in al-Andalus. It was struck in about a hundred mints. After the foundation of Wāsiṭ in Iraq and the move of al-Ḥajjāj to his new capital in 83/703f., Wāsiṭ became the paramount silver mint of the empire until the 'Abbāsīd *coup d'état*. For a brief time between 84/703f. and 89/707f. Wāsiṭ was the only *dirham* mint except for Damascus; all others were closed down.<sup>15</sup>

Between 132/749f. and 147/765f. Baṣra and Kūfa became the principal silver mints of the empire. This paramount role then shifted in 146–7/765–7 to Maḍīnat al-Salām and to Rayy/al-Muḥammadiyya, the first after the foundation of the palace city in Baghdad – the mint was opened in 146/765f. – and the latter after the establishment of the heir apparent in Rayy in 145/762f.<sup>16</sup> The 'Abbāsīd takeover had little impact at first on the coin design; except that the *sūrat al-ikhlaṣ*, which was associated with the Umayyads, was replaced by *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*, stressing the connection of the 'Abbāsīds to the family of the Prophet (fig. 16.15).

In Rayy in 145/762f., the year of the menacing 'Alīd revolt and its repression, the heir apparent, Muḥammad (r. 158–69/775–86), began to insert the newly adopted honorific title (*laqab*) al-Mahdī and his name into the *dirham* coin protocol, abandoning the anonymity of precious metal coinage (fig. 16.16). Later he continued this as caliph.<sup>17</sup> From now on, until the coinage reform of

14 A. S. DeShazo and M. L. Bates, 'The Umayyad governors of al-'Irāq and the changing annulet patterns on their dirhams', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 14 (1974); M. Bates, 'The dirham mint of the northern provinces of the Umayyad caliphate', *Armenian Numismatic Journal*, 15 (1989).

15 R. Darley-Doran, 'Wāsiṭ, The mint', *Elz*, vol. XI, pp. 169–71.

16 T. S. Noonan, 'Early 'Abbāsīd mint output', *JESHO*, 29 (1986).

17 M. L. Bates, 'Khurāsānī revolutionaries and al-Mahdī's title', in F. Daftary and J. W. Meri (eds.), *Culture and memory in medieval Islam: Essays in honour of Wilferd Madelung* (London and New York, 2003).

al-Ma'mūn (r. 194–218/810–33), various names appear on the coinage – the caliph, the heir apparent, viziers, governors, officials – sometimes as many as four names, giving a kaleidoscope of the administrative structure of the empire, which is not yet fully understood (figs. 16.17, 16.22).<sup>18</sup>

The circulation of silver coins was far from uniform, unlike the new gold *ḍīnārs*. Umayyad and Sasanian *dirhams* still circulated until the early fourth/tenth century. Some regions maintained, along with the imperial coinage, a local one, usually debased silver of Sasanian appearance, notably in Ṭabaristān (an exception as they are of pure silver) (fig. 16.18), Sīstān and the oasis of Bukhārā (fig. 16.19).<sup>19</sup>

The copper coinage was of almost no concern to the central government; it was left for the regional or local Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd authorities to supply, and for some supplemental coinage even private commercial enterprises can be assumed. According to Islamic law copper coins did not constitute money that was legally valid in all transactions. Thus a huge variety of copper coins with many names of local *amūrs* and officials existed. Images were occasionally applied too. Thus the copper coins are an excellent source for local administration, history and art history (fig. 16.20).<sup>20</sup> This decentralised production resulted in temporary and regional shortages in petty coinage, frequently bridged by cast imitations (fig. 16.21) and importation from other regions. In the period of Hārūn al-Rashīd the growing demand in northern Mesopotamia exceeded by far the regular production of copper coinage. Coins were thus cast until their model was unrecognisable, and plain copper sheets were cut into mainly octagonal pieces.<sup>21</sup>

18 N. D. Nicol, 'Early 'Abbāsīd administration in the central and eastern provinces, 132–218 AH/750–833 AD', Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington (1979); N. Lowick and E. Savage, *Early 'Abbāsīd coinage: A type catalogue 132–218 H/AD 750–833. A posthumous work by Nicholas Lowick*, ed. Elisabeth Savage, distributed MS (London, 1996).

19 For Ṭabaristān: H. M. Malek, *The Dābūyīd Ispahbads and early 'Abbāsīd governors of Ṭabaristān: History and numismatics*, Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication 39 (London, 2004). For Sīstān: S. Sears, 'The Sasanian style drachms of Sistan', *Yarmouk Numismatics*, II (1999).

20 H. Bone, 'The administration of Umayyad Syria: The evidence of the copper coins', Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University (2000); Lowick and Savage, *Early 'Abbāsīd coinage*; S. Shammā, *A catalogue of 'Abbāsīd copper coins: Thabat al-fulūs al-'abbāsiyya* (London, 1998). Single studies: see L. Ilisch, 'Die Kupferprägung Nordmesopotamiens unter Hārūn ar-Rashīd und seinen Söhnen (786–842 AD)', in International Association of Professional Numismatists (eds.), *Numismatics: Witness to history*, IAPN publication 8 (Basle, 1986); S. Heidemann, 'Die frühe Münzprägung von ar-Raḡqa/ar-Rāfiqa als Dokumente zur Geschichte der Stadt', in S. Heidemann and A. Becker (eds.), *Raḡqa*, vol. II: *Die islamische Stadt* (Mainz, 2003).

21 S. Heidemann, 'Der Kleingeldumlauf in der Ghazīra in früh-'abbāsīdischer Zeit und die Münzmissionen aus al-Kūfa', in Heidemann and Becker (eds.), *Die islamische Stadt*.

## The reforms of al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'taṣim billāh

The devastating war of succession between al-Amīn (r. 193–8/809–13) and al-Ma'mūn marked a turning-point. The latter initiated a reform in the design of the coinage, which went along with a reorganisation of coin production as a whole. The reform started with the first changes in design in 201/816f. (fig. 16.22) and found its definitive appearance in 206/821f. (fig. 16.23). The new style was consecutively adopted during the following years in almost all mints.<sup>22</sup>

First of all, gold and silver coins were given a standardised design based on the *dirham* without altering the weight standards. The most obvious change in the design was a second marginal obverse legend praising the victory of God (Q 30:4–5). This design continued with few alterations until the fifth/eleventh century. Whereas the old style preferred an angular Kūfīc script, the new style exhibited a neat curvilinear calligraphy. The new-style coinage of al-Ma'mūn once again became anonymous. The number of mints was reduced to the major capitals of the empire. The production of silver and gold coinage dropped considerably, and even more under his successors.

Al-Mu'taṣim billāh (r. 218–27/833–42) dismissed anonymity again, and added his name to the new design on the reverse in 219/834 (fig. 16.24). This became the rule. From 236/850 under al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh (r. 231–47/847–61) the name of the heir apparent was also included. The production and distribution of dies was almost centralised. The extent of the new capital city of Sāmarrā', built and provisioned entirely by tax money, is impressive proof of the high degree of the empire's centralisation at its peak.<sup>23</sup>

In the wake of the second devastating war of succession in 251–2/865–6 al-Mu'tazz billāh (r. 252–5/866–9) resumed the production of precious-metal coins on a large scale. Many mints were set up in the provinces. Weakened, the empire gradually lost its grip on its peripheral provinces. In Panjhīr/Transoxania in 259/872f. Ya'qūb ibn al-Layth (r. 247–65/861–79)

22 T. El-Hibri, 'Coinage reform under the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Ma'mūn', *JESHO*, 36 (1993); S. Shammā, *Aḥdāth 'aṣr al-Ma'mūn kamā tarwihā al-nuqūd* (Irbid, 1995).

23 M. Bates, *The expression of sovereignty in the Abbasid caliphate, 218–334 H/833–946 CE* (forthcoming); L. Ilisch, 'Stempelveränderungen an islamischen Münzen des Mittelalters als Quelle zur Münzstättenorganisation', in T. Hackens and R. Weiller (eds.), *Actes du 9ème congrès international de numismatique. Berne, Septembre 1979: Proceedings of the 9th International Congress of Numismatics, Berne, September 1979* (Louvain-la Neuve and Luxemburg 1982). Cf. L. Treadwell, 'Notes on the mint at Samarra', in C. Robinson (ed.), *A medieval Islamic city reconsidered: An interdisciplinary approach to Samarra*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 14 (Oxford, 2001).

was probably the first provincial ruler to add his name to the caliph's protocol on silver coins as proof of his autonomy (fig. 16.25). At least from 265/878f. on, with the rule of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn in Egypt, the inclusion as an autonomous *amīr* into the coin protocol became a regular feature (fig. 16.26). His model was followed by the Sāmānids in Transoxania and many other ruling houses. *Sikka* and *khuṭba* in the name of the regional ruler became a sign of autonomy within the frame of the 'Abbāsīd empire until its end in 656/1258.

In the 'Abbāsīd core provinces the inclusion of the vizier's honorific title (*laqab*) in 291/903f. and in 320/932f. set precedents for the imperial government. In 324/936 the first *amīr al-umarā'*, Ibn Rā'iq, had abolished the distinction between civil and military administration. The *amīr al-umarā'* Bajkam was the first to be included in the coin protocol in 329/940 (fig. 16.27). In 334/945 the caliph delegated his power to the Būyids (fig. 16.28) and following them to the Saljūqs (figs. 16.31, 16.32), and these always – with few exceptions – appear on the coinage with flourishing honorific titles (figs. 16.28, 16.32) until the sixth/twelfth century when the caliph freed himself from Saljūq political domination.<sup>24</sup> Autonomous rulers who depended on the Būyids, such as the 'Uqaylids in northern Mesopotamia (fig. 16.29), and the Ḥasanwayhids<sup>25</sup> in Kurdistān, among others, acknowledged the Būyids as overlords and added their names to the hierarchy of power listed in the coin protocol. Others at the periphery, such as the Ikshīdids<sup>26</sup> in Egypt or the Sallārids<sup>27</sup> in Azerbaijan (fig. 16.30) acknowledged only the caliph. Sometimes further mint marks, names of die-engravers and dynastic emblems (*tamghās*) were added (figs. 16.34, 16.35). For the historian the *sikka* became an unrivalled tool for defining length of reigns, the extent of territories, especially for local dynasties, and shifting political–religious allegiance (cf. fig. 16.39), which are not in the focus of the main chronicles.

During the middle decades of the third/ninth century copper coinage vanished almost completely from the urban markets from Spain to Iran (fig. 16.20), remaining only in certain limited regions such as Sāmānīd Transoxania (fig. 16.32). Fragmentation of the circulating precious-metal coins served the needs of small change in the rest of the Islamic empire.

24 L. Treadwell, *Buyid coinage: A die corpus (322–445 AH)* (Oxford, 2001).

25 'A. Qūchānī, 'The territory of Abū al-Nadīm Badr b. Ḥasanūyah based on his coins', *Iranian Journal of Archaeology and History*, 8, 2 (1994) (in Persian).

26 J. L. Bacharach, *Islamic history through coins: An analysis and catalogue of tenth-century Ikshīdīd coinage* (Cairo, 2006).

27 R. Vasmer, 'Zur Chronologie der Gāstāniden und Sallāriden', *Islamica*, 3 (1927).

Coins were circulating more and more by weight expressed in standard *dirhams* and *dīnārs* instead of by tale or count.<sup>28</sup>

Starting slowly, probably in the time of al-Muqtadir billāh (r. 295–320/908–32), the fineness of the silver coinage dropped, varying from region to region, and the strict weight regulation was abandoned. After the political, economic and military collapse of the central lands of the ‘Abbāsīd empire during the fourth/tenth century the silver *dirham* declined to a debased copperish coin with no regulated fineness or weight.<sup>29</sup> Now different kinds of *dirhams* were used, each current only within a limited region. Amounts of money were expressed in terms of monies of account.<sup>30</sup> Actual payments of coins were transacted by weighing the coins. In the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries the number of coins being struck diminished dramatically in the central lands of the empire. In the narrative sources these coins are referred to as ‘black *dirhams*’ (sing. *dirham aswad*), because of their dark appearance (fig. 16.39). In Egypt they were then called *dirham wariq*,<sup>31</sup> the ‘silver[ish] *dirham*’. Legal texts addressed them more appropriately as *darāhim maghshūsha*, ‘debased *dirhams*’. The monetary sector of the urban economy in the core lands of the Islamic empire – northern Syria, northern Mesopotamia, Iraq and western Iran – shrank to a low that may not have been experienced since Hellenistic Antiquity.

This monetary situation caused frequent complaints by jurists and theologians. It was open to unintended violations of the *ribā* prohibition, the unequal market value of the same amount of precious metal: *dirham aswads* from different circulation zones might contain a different amount of silver alloy; the intrinsic amount of silver in foreign *dirhams* might be unknown (*majhūl*), or the coins might be valued differently in the market with no regard to the real content of precious metal. In order to avoid *ribā* and to facilitate commerce, jurists allowed transactions with *dirham aswads* only as long as they involved current *dirhams* circulating within a single zone (*rā’ij fi l-balad*).<sup>32</sup> In order to distinguish one issue of black *dirhams* from the other the issuing authorities gradually diverged from the classical coin design. To remedy this

28 L. Ilich, ‘Whole and fragmented dirhams in Near Eastern hoards’, in K. Jonsson and B. Malmer (eds.), *Sigtuna Papers: Proceedings of the Sigtuna symposium on Viking-age coinage 1–4 June 1989, Stockholm*, Commentationes de nummis saeculorum in Suecia repertis. Nova Series 6 (London, 1990).

29 T. S. Noonan, ‘The start of the silver crisis in Islam: A comparative study of Central Asia and the Iberian peninsula’, M. Gomes Marques and D. M. Metcalf (eds.), *Problems of medieval coinage in the Iberian area*, vol. III (Santarém, 1988).

30 ‘Monies of account’ are denominations not actually struck, or no longer struck, but used to determine legally amounts of money in transactions, contracts or debts.

31 M. Bates, ‘Wariq’, *El2*, vol. IX, p. 147.

32 Heidemann, *Renaissance*, pp. 369–80.

unsatisfactory monetary situation, sporadic attempts at coinage reform were made in some regions, but were of no avail in the long run (fig. 16.28).

### The eleventh century: the currency system at the brink of the reform

In the periphery, however, in Central Asia and in Egypt, a high level of monetary economy and an army based on cash payment remained. The Sāmānids had the advantage of rich silver mines in present-day Afghanistan, and the resulting huge volume of coinage fostered a trade with these coins which, via the Volga river, reached the countries around the Baltic Sea in the fourth/tenth century (fig. 16.31). Although by contrast the *dirhams* of the Ghaznavids (384–582/994–1186) with a high silver content in the late fourth/tenth and first half of the fifth/eleventh centuries were a regional coinage, they were nevertheless struck in abundant quantities. As early as the Sāmānid period the *dīnār* of Nīshāpūr gained fame for its purity and stability (fig. 16.34). It became one of the preferred trade coins circulating between Iraq, eastern northern Mesopotamia and Central Asia. It maintained its leading position into the Saljūq period while the *dīnārs* of the other eastern Iranian and Transoxanian mints, Ghazna, Herat, Marw, Balkh, Bukhārā and others debased, sometimes to such an extent that they consisted almost of pure silver and served only as regional standard currency (fig. 16.35).

The situation was different in Egypt. The Ismāʿīlī Shīʿite Fāṭimids challenged the ʿAbbāsīd claim of universal rulership both ideologically and militarily, and thus their coinage named only the Fāṭimid caliph. After their conquest of Egypt their coins presented a visual distinction to the classical late ʿAbbāsīd coinage, moving towards a design consisting mainly of rings of concentric inscriptions (figs. 16.36, 16.37). The Fāṭimids profited from the North African gold trade as well as from trade with the northern Italian mercantile republics. The Fāṭimid *dīnār* (fig. 16.36) of a regulated weight and an undisputed pure gold content became the preferred trade coinage for the Islamic Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and Iraq. On the level of the petty coinage the North African–Egyptian *dirham* suffered the same decline as it did in the entire Islamic world (fig. 16.37).<sup>33</sup> Copper coinage was also abandoned. A debate between Paul Balog and Michael Bates centring around the question whether the abundant glass tokens of the Egyptian

<sup>33</sup> N. D. Nicol, *A corpus of Fāṭimid coins* (Trieste, 2006).

Fāṭimid and Ayyūbid period served the purposes of daily purchases has not yet been settled (fig. 16.38).<sup>34</sup>

### Outlook: the reform

Islamic coinage of the middle Islamic period was quite different from the degenerated state of the classical coinage system. The renewal commenced slowly from the end of the fifth/eleventh century and ended at about the middle of the seventh/thirteenth. The 'black *dirham*' (fig. 16.39) disappeared mostly in the course of the sixth/twelfth century. In Syria Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd (r. 541–69/1150–74) issued it for the last time in 546/1151f. in Aleppo, although it continued to be struck in Mosul into the 650s/1250s and in Egypt into the Mamlūk period. In the last decades of the fifth/eleventh century copper coinage resumed in northern Syria, northern Mesopotamia and the Caucasus through the appearance of imported Byzantine *folles*, called in Arabic sources *qirtās* or *qarṭīs* (pl. *qarāṭīs*). In the middle decades of the sixth/twelfth century a successful indigenous copper-coin production commenced, mainly in the Zangid and Artuqid realm (fig. 16.40). Regional copper coinages spread to the other western Saljūq successor states. In 571/1175f. – after almost 250 years – the Zangids in Aleppo and the Ayyūbids in Damascus reintroduced a *dirham* of almost pure silver with a regulated weight of about 2.8 grams (fig. 16.41). The success of the reform was achieved through the northern Italian trade of European silver. The reform spread from the Levant to the entire Middle East. Once again a currency system was established that conformed to the requirements of Islamic law.<sup>35</sup>

34 P. Balog, 'Fāṭimid glass jetons: Token currency or coin-weights?', *JESHO*, 24 (1981); M. L. Bates, 'The function of Fāṭimid and Ayyūbid glass weights', *JESHO*, 24 (1981).

35 S. Heidemann, 'Economic growth and currency in Ayyūbid Palestine', in R. Hillenbrand and S. Auld (eds.), *Ayyūbid Jerusalem: The Holy City in context* (London, 2009) pp. 1187–1250.

## Chapter 16: Numismatics

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a



b



Plate 16.1 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Byzantium, Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine, *nomisma*, Constantinople,  
(ca. 616–25 AD)

a



b



Plate 16.2 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Byzantium, Constans II, *follis*, Constantinople, regnal year 3 (643–4 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.3 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Sāsānians, Khusrau II, *drahm*, 'HM (Hamadhān), regnal year 29.

a



b



Plate 16.4 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Umayyads, *tremisses*/*thulth dīnār*, Afrika (Qairawān).  
Scale 1.5:1

a



b



Plate 16.5 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Umayyads, *fals*, Emisis/Hims, [c. 50s/670s–74/692].

a



b



Plate 16.6 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Umayyads, *fals*, Damaskos/Dimashq, [c. 50s/670–74/692].

a



b



Plate 16.7 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Umayyads, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir ibn Kurayz, *drahm*,  
(Darabjird), AH 43 (663–4 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.8 (a, b, obverse and reverse) Zubayrids, ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr, *drahm*, (Dārābjird-Jahrum), Yazdegerd era 60 (72/692).

a



b



Plate 16.9 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Zubayrids, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn ‘Abd Allāh, *drahm*, (Sistān), year 72 AH (691–2 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.10 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Umayyads, *dīnār*, [Damascus], year 77 AH (696 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.11 (a, b, obverse and reverse) Umayyads, *fals*, Manbij, [74–7/692–6].

a



b



Plate 16.12 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Umayyads, *dīnār*, [Damascus], year 93 AH (711–12 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.13 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Umayyads, *dirham*, al-Kūfa, year 79 AH (698–9 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.14 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
‘Abbāsids, *dīnār*, [al-Rāfiqa], year 191 AH (806–7 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.15 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
‘Abbāsids, *dirham*, al-Kūfa, year 132 AH (749–50 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.16 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, al-Mahdī, *dirham*, al-Rayy, year 146 AH (763–4 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.17 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, al-Amīn, *dirham*, Armīniya (Dābil), year 190 AH (805–6 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.18 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, ‘Umar ibn al-‘Alā’, *dirham*, Ṭabaristān, 123  
 post-Yazdegerd era (158/774–5).

a



b



Plate 16.19 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, al-Mahdī, *dirham*, [Bukhārā], [158–69/775–85].

a



b



Plate 16.20 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, al-Mu‘taṣim, *fals*, al-Rāfiqa, 226 AH (840–1 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.21 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, *fals*, (Syria), [c. 130–50/750–70], cast.

a



b



Plate 16.22 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, al-Ma‘mūn, *dirham*, Iṣfahān, year 204 AH (819–20 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.23 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, *dirham*, Madīnat al-Salām, year 208 AH (823–4 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.24 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ‘Abbāsids, al-Mu‘taṣim, *dirham*, Madīnat al-Salām, year 226 AH (840–1 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.25 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 Ṣaffārīds, Ya‘qūb ibn al-Layth, *dirham*, Panjhīr, 261 AH (874–5 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.26 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 Dulafīds, Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, *dinār*, Māh al-Baṣra, year 273 AH (886–7 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.27 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ʿAbbāsids, al-Muttaqī, *dirham*, Madīnat al-Salām, year 329 AH (940–1 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.28 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 Būyids, Qiwām al-Dīn, *dirham*, Shīrāz, year 400 AH (1009–10 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.29 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 ʿUqaylids, Janāh al-Dawla, *dirham*, Naṣībīn, year 385 AH (995–6 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.30 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
 Sallārīds, Jastān and Ibrāhīm, *dīnār*, Marāgha, year 347 AH (958–9 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.31 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Sāmānids, Ismā'īl, *dirham*, al-Shāsh, year 292 AH (904–5 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.32 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Sāmānids, Naṣr, *fals*, Bukhārā, year 305 AH (917–6 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.33 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Ghaznavids, Maḥmūd, *dirham*, Ghazna, year 399 AH (1008–9 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.34 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Saljūqs, Malikshāh, *dīnār*, Nīshāpūr, year 484 AH (1091–2 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.35 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Saljūqs, Sanjar, *dīnār*, Walwālīj, Muḥarram 493 AH (1099 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.36 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Fāṭimids, al-'Azīz, *dīnār*, Miṣr, year 368 AH (978–9 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.37 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Fāṭimids, al-Mu'izz, *dirham*, al-Manṣūriyya, year 358 AH (968–9 CE).



Plate 16.38 Fāṭimids, al-Mustanşir, glass token.

a



b



Plate 16.39 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Numayrids, Manīʿ (r. c. 440–54/1050–62), *dirham*.

a



b



Plate 16.40 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Zangids, Nūr al-Dīn, *qirṭās*, Damascus, year 558 AH (1162–3 CE).

a



b



Plate 16.41 (a, b, obverse and reverse)  
Zangids, al-Şāliḥ Ismāʿīl, *dirham*, Aleppo, year 571 AH (1175–6 CE).

