

Court Cultures in the Muslim World

Seventh to nineteenth centuries

**Edited by Albrecht Fuess and
Jan-Peter Hartung**

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2 The representation of the early Islamic Empire and its religion on coin imagery

Stefan Heidemann

The crucial early decades¹

How did the theology of Islam and its idea of an empire evolve, based on the Hellenistic Romano-Iranian foundation, in the face of Christianity, Judaism, Neo-Platonism and Zoroastrianism? This much debated question has raised much scepticism and polemic against “established” knowledge and its sources. The extreme points of view taken in this controversy are possible to maintain because there are few undisputed Arabic sources on the first decades of Islam. Since the beginning of this discussion, in the 1970s, much progress has been made. Increasingly, sources have been studied that are almost independent from the Arab Islamic tradition.² In this discourse, the imagery and text on coins has become more important than ever and knowledge of these coinages has grown tremendously since the 1990s. Coins offer the only continuous and contemporary independent and primary source for the period of the genesis of the new religion and its empire. The present contribution attempts to provide an overview of the development of coin imagery and the representation of the evolving Islamic polity, as it is discussed today. Ultimately the Hellenistic iconography with images of deities was replaced by an “iconic” representation of the empire by the Qur’ānic Word of God.³

The first decades: Representation of power and religion

1. The early phase: Imitation of coinages

In the seventh century Muslim armies swiftly conquered three major zones of monetary circulation and took over much of their fiscal and monetary organization: in the centre of the former Byzantine territories, in the east of the Sasanian Empire and in the west of Germanic North Africa and Spain.

In the Byzantine territories, the workhorse of the fiscal cycle, of taxation and state expenditure, the gold *solidus* or *nomisma* (see figure 2.1) was used, while the money utilized for daily purchases was the copper *folles* (plural *folles*) (see figure 2.2). In the first decades after the battle of Yarmūk in 636 CE and the establishment of the Taurus border zone, Byzantine gold and copper coins



Figure 2.1 Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine, *nomisma*, Constantinople, without date [c. 616–625 CE], Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 2007-04-001 (4.21 grams).

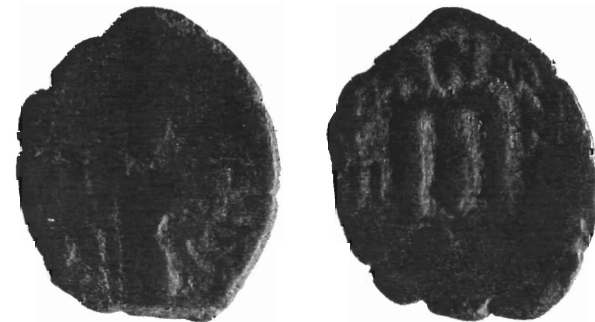


Figure 2.2 Anonymous, *folles*, Constantinople, regnal year 3 of Constans II (643–644 CE), Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-D05 (4.80 grams).

remained in circulation in Syria, probably until the reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705 CE) in 77–9/696–9. The obverse of the *folles* shows the emperor or the emperors—here (see figure 2.2) the standing figure of Constans II (r. 641–68 CE) wearing a crown with a 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 standard copper coin. Archaeological findings show that from about 641 CE on, Constantinople continued to supply substantial quantities of newly minted copper coins to its lost provinces of Syria and northern Mesopotamia. The importation of Constans II *folles* slowed down and came to a halt in about 655 to 658 CE.⁴ How should this continued importation of copper coins to the lost provinces be interpreted politically? Rome-Byzantium still thought of itself as the universal world empire, but with soft borders, not as a state in the modern sense with well-defined borders that provide separation in a number of

respects. Early Islam, outside the Hijaz, was the elite religion of a tribally organized military. During the period of conquest, the *futūḥ*, the Islamic religion possessed only a rudimentary theology, which was probably even more basic among military units. At that time Islam would almost certainly not have been perceived as a new and equal religion by outsiders, especially when compared with the sophisticated and diverse Christian theology and the other contemporary religions such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism, or the pagan pantheon turned into its late neo-Platonic form. Contemporary Byzantium might have seen the conquest as a menacing rebellion resulting in a temporary loss of authority and—if they had noticed the religious dimension at all—as an Arab heresy of Judaeo-Christian origin.⁵ Neither perception would have necessarily challenged the universal claim of the all-embracing Roman Empire, since the idea of Rome was neutral to religion. Uprisings, territorial losses and gains, and heresies constituted a recurrent challenge during the more than millennium of Roman history. This early situation can be compared in certain respects with the historical situation of the Germanic migration and conquest of the Western Roman Empire.

For these early decades there is no contemporary evidence that the Arab-Islamic leaders developed an imperial ideology of their own. The idea of having a universal empire is different from having a state, with institutions and a governing body. As leaders of the victorious Arab armies, inspired by the teachings of the new Prophet, they were probably at first content with their *de facto* rule. Despite their successful conquests, the Arab-Islamic elite may have thought that universal rule could only be achieved within the framework of the Roman Empire with its capital at Constantinople. What evidence would support such a hypothesis? First, the idea of Rome was widespread and historically powerful also in Asia until the Ottoman period.⁶ The Arab population and tribes in Bilād al-Shām and northern Mesopotamia, especially the Ghassanids, were exposed to the idea of Rome for almost 800 years. Secondly, frequent and large-scale attempts to conquer Constantinople were ventured in the period under study until about the time of the uprising of the caliph 'Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr in the 680s CE. Thirdly, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) relates a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet who called for the conquest of Rome (Constantinople), saying that until that had been accomplished there would be no Day of Judgement.⁷ This can be read to mean that the Day of Judgement will come only after the creation of the (Roman) universal empire of Islamic denomination.

Already during the Persian occupation of Syria and northern Mesopotamia, local imitations of current Byzantine copper coins supplemented the circulating stock.⁸ When the import of the aforementioned Constans II *folles* faded out, imitations were struck in much larger quantities probably until the mid-660s or even until about 670 CE. The most commonly imitated type was the then-current “standing emperor” of Constans II. These coins are encountered in a broad variety. Their mints cannot yet be located.⁹ We do not know who the regulating authorities were. We know from the reports on the *futūḥ* that the Christian urban and parochial elite represented the cities when dealing with Islamic military tribal leaders and were the mainstay of the early Umayyad civil administration.

2. The phase of dissociation: Umayyad “Imperial Image” coppers

The next phase, after importation and imitation, can be assumed to have begun in the 660–70s CE during the reign of Mu'āwīya. It ended around the years 691–4 CE, the years of the Marwānid reforms.¹⁰ Luke Treadwell assumed that there was some sort of coordination in the main provincial mints in Syria, if not a central policy. His assumption complements the picture of a more pronounced role by Mu'āwīya in state building, that is now becoming apparent from inscriptions and papyri (see figures 2.3 and 2.4).¹¹ These so-called “Imperial Image” coppers still depict Byzantine emperors and crosses. Officially recognized regular mints were set up and named on the coins, in Greek and/or Arabic. Validating expressions in both languages, such as *kalón* or *ṭayyib* (both meaning “good”), *bismi 'llāh* (“in the name of God”)¹² or others were included in the design. This established Arabic as the language of the validating authority. Almost no attempt was made to represent the new state or religion on coins. Petty coinage, first and foremost, served as a means of exchange.



Figure 2.3 Anonymous, *fals*, Damascus, without date [c. 50s/660–74/692], Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-D09 (3.84 grams).



Figure 2.4 Anonymous, *fals*, Emesa/Hims, without date [c. 50s/660s–74/692]; validating mark KAAON and *ṭayyib*; Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-C08 (3.85 grams).



Figure 2.5 Anonymous, *nomisma*, without mint [Damascus?], without date [c. 660–680 CE], Islamic Coin Auctions (2006), no. 13 (4.42 grams).

An awareness of the cross as a symbol can be seen in a comparatively limited series of imitative gold coins, probably struck in Damascus, closely copying a *nomisma* of Heraclius and his son Heraclius Constantine, with slightly blundered Greek legends (see figure 2.5). The prominent “cross on steps” on the reverse (see figure 2.1) was transformed into a “bar on a pole on steps”. Hoard evidence suggests a date for these imitations not much later than 680 CE, around the period of Mu‘āwīya.¹³ At this stage and in this iconographic context the new design was probably regarded first of all as a mutilated cross. The cross might have been perceived as more than merely a Christian religious symbol and identified also with the rival Byzantine Empire. Thus it could also be termed a de-Byzantinized cross.¹⁴

3. The former Sasanian realm

How did the currency and visual representation of power and religion develop in the newly conquered lands of Iraq and Iran? The centralized Sasanian Empire was attacked at its apogee, despite the devastation and chaos caused by the aftermath of Heraclius’ victory. Even after the assassination of Khusraw II (r. 590/1–628 CE) in 628 and the almost complete annihilation of the army in the battle of Nihāwand in 641 CE, institutions and the monetary economy remained largely intact. The centralized Sasanian state enabled the conquerors to take over the administration swiftly.

In the Sasanian Empire the coinage of the fiscal cycle was the uniform silver *drahm* of about 4.2 grams that was struck during the reign of Khusraw II in about 34 mints. The typical late Sasanian *drahm* (see figure 2.6) shows on the obverse the portrait of the *shāhānshāh*—either Khusraw II or Yazdgard III (r. 632–51 CE); their portraits are almost identical—with an enormous winged crown as a sign of his royalty. On the reverse side the fire altar served as the central symbol of Zoroastrianism, the dualistic Iranian religion. Priest attendants stand on either



Figure 2.6 Khusraw II, *drahm*, mint abbreviation ‘HM (Hamadhān), regnal year 29 (618–619 CE), Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 302-B05 (3.46 grams).

side. Beside them are abbreviations indicating the mint and the regnal year of the ruler. Few coins were minted between the decisive battle of Nihāwand in 641 CE (regnal year 10) and the assassination of Yazdgard III in his last retreat in Marw in 651 CE (regnal year 20). Coins struck in the conquered territories are almost indistinguishable from those struck under the authority of Yazdgard III, except that the mints lay outside his shrinking realm.¹⁵

The next phase lay between regnal year 20 of Yazdgard and about 30 Yazdgard Era (YE) corresponding with 31–41/651–61. In contrast to Byzantium, the Sasanian Empire collapsed completely and the *shāhānshāh*’s claim to universal rule ended. The Islamic conquerors did not attempt to maintain this claim until the Abbasids. The outlook of the Syrian Umayyads was different, following from the Roman tradition. Coins continued to be struck in the names and with the portraits of “Khusraw II” or “Yazdgard III” and with the fire altar and its attendants. The dating remained according to the regnal years of Yazdgard (see figure 2.7). Frequently, but not always, additional Arabic validating expressions appear (they are still here and appear) in the obverse margin usually in the second quadrant, such as *bismi ‘llāh* (“in the name of God”) or *jayyid* (“good”). These general expressions have no specifically Islamic connotation. The resulting picture for the early decades seems to correspond to a situation in which the Sasanian administration remained operational or largely intact, but functioned only at a provincial level and was responsible to Arab governors.¹⁶ In the 30s/650s the mint authorities began dating coins with Hijrī years written in Pahlavi.¹⁷ The introduction of the new era in coins indicates that the administrative Arab elite were becoming aware of its Islamic identity but there was still no overt representation of the Islamic religion and its empire.

Contemporary Georgia shows that religious iconographic symbols were of importance in coin imagery elsewhere. Christian Georgia had belonged to the



Figure 2.7 “Yazdgard III”, posthumous, *drachm*, abbreviation SK (Sijistān), regnal year “20 YE” [immobilized date, 31–c. 41 AH/651–c. 661 CE], Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 304-C04 (3.49 grams).



Figure 2.8 Georgia, Bagratids, Stepanos II (r. 639–663 CE), *drachm*, without mint [Tiflis?], without date; Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 302-C04 (3.03 grams).

Sasanian realm. A strong sense of religious identity is found here. New coins, supplementing the circulating stock of *drachms* (see figure 2.8), show on the obverse a portrait resembling that of Hormizd IV (r. 579–90 CE), but the Georgian inscription names the Bagratid king Stepanos who reigned 18–43/639–63. On the reverse the fire altar was distinctly replaced by a Christian altar with a cross on top.

The third and fourth phases¹⁸ of development cover approximately the years 40–72/661–81, that is, the Sufyānid period up to the Second *fitna*. As in Syria, a



Figure 2.9 ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Āmir, governor of the Basra-prefecture, *drachm*, abbreviation DP (probably Fasā in the Dārābjird district), year 43AH [immobilized date, c. 43–47/663–668], Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 2005-15-002 (4.04 grams).

gradual regularization of the administration, including minting, is visible on the coins. The names of *Khusraw* and *Yazdgard* were replaced, at first occasionally and then regularly from 50/671, with the names of the provincial governors in Pahlavī script (see figure 2.9). At many mints the Yazdgard era ceased to be used and was replaced with the Hijrī year.

Some years after the First *fitna*, between 656 and 661 CE, Umayyad governors began to affirm their rule with a reference to God in Arabic in the obverse margin. The first was the governor of the East, Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 670–84 CE). Since 47/667–8 he regularly promulgated his authority with the legend *bismi ‘llāh rabbī*, “In the name of God, my Lord”. Other governors followed this example.¹⁹

4. The Second *fitna*—Zubayrid and Khārījite challenges

The Second *fitna*—the Zubayrid movement and caliphate of Ibn al-Zubayr between 681 and 693 CE—and the much fiercer Khārījite challenge between 687 and 697 CE constitute the fifth phase, and mark a watershed in the progress towards a clear iconographic expression of the new religion and state. ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr was a close, venerated member of the family of the Prophet. He emphasized the religious character of the caliphate and demanded a state in accordance with the principles of Islam. After Mu‘āwiya’s death in 60/680, Ibn al-Zubayr strongly opposed the Sufyānid claim to the caliphate and was supported in many parts of the empire.

In 62/681–2 ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr’s name first appeared on coins of Kirmān. In 64/684, the coins show that he assumed the imperial title “*amīr* of the believers” (see figure 2.10). In the year 67/687 his brother Muṣ‘ab secured Basra in Iraq



Figure 2.10 'Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, "amīr of the believers" in Pahlavī, *drachm*, abbreviation *D'J* (Jahrum in the Dārābjird district), year 60 YE (72/692), Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 2005-15-004 (4.12 grams).

and the territories to the east as far as Sijistān. The Umayyads seemed to have lost their cause. The coin designs of the Zubayrid governors in Iraq and Iran remained almost the same as before, with the portrait of the *shāhānshāh*, the fire altar, and its attendants.

Between the years 66/685 and 69/688–9, the Zubayrid governor of the East placed the legend *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*—"Muḥammad is the messenger of God"—in Arabic in the obverse margin of the coins for the first time. These were struck in Bīshāpūr in the Fārs province (see figure 2.11). Probably in 70/689–90, according to a numismatic analysis by Lutz Ilisch, the Zubayrid authorities of Aqūlā, the older twin city just north of the important garrison town Kufa, went a step further.²⁰ Coins were created with the name of "Muḥammad [is] the messenger of God" in front of the portrait of the *shāhānshāh* and—for the first time—the profession of faith and the unity of God, the *shahāda*,²¹ was placed in Arabic in the obverse margin (see figure 2.12): *bismi 'llāh lā ilāha illā 'llāh waḥdahū* ("In the name of God, there is no deity other than God, He is alone"). Also in 70/689–90, an anonymous coin with the Pahlavī inscription "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" in place of the governor's name was struck in Kirmān province, then probably under Khārijite control.²² The Zubayrids and Khārijites thus propagated the new Islamic imperial rule with reference to the Prophet and putative²³ founder of the state. The acknowledgement and invocation of the messenger-ship of Muḥammad was obviously fundamental to the new religion. Even ideologically opposed groups referred to him in this way. With the growing debate over a community built on Islamic principles, the representation of Islam and its state became essential for the legitimization of power.²⁴ These changes were the first successful attempts in coin protocol which heralded the next decisive changes in the religious and imperial self-image of the elite.



Figure 2.11 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abdallāh ibn 'Āmir, Zubayrid governor, *drachm*, abbreviation *BYSh* (Bīshāpūr in Fārs), year 66AH (685–686 CE), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in: Album/Goodwin (2002), no. 152.



Figure 2.12 Anonymous, *drachm*, mint 'KWL' (Aqūlā), year 70AH (689–690 CE); Sotheby's (1983), no. 80.

In the year 72/691–2, the Zubayrid governor of the remote province of Sijistān in south-eastern Iran, brother of the aforementioned innovative governor of the East, went a step further by replacing the Zoroastrian fire altar and attendants with a profession of the new faith; Iraj Mochiri transcribed the Pahlavī inscription thus: "Seventy-two/One God but he/another God does not exist/Muhammad [is] the messenger of God/SK [mint abbreviation for Sijistān]" (see figure 2.13).²⁵ The *shahāda* appears here in Pahlavī script and in the Persian language. Replacing the



Figure 2.13 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abdallāh ibn 'Āmir, Zubayrid governor, *drahm*, abbreviation SK (Sijistān), year 72AH (691–692 CE), coll. Mohsen Faroughi (courtesy of Stuart Sears).

fire altar in the same way as the altar with a cross from Georgia did, the *shahāda*, is the first known “iconic” symbol of the Islamic religion and its empire. The Zubayrid governors had targeted the ideological and religious deficiencies of the Sufyānid Umayyad regime. In the provinces under Khārījite control, Islamic religious propaganda addressed the crucial question of legitimate power: *lā ḥukma illā li'llāh* (“Guidance/Sovereignty belongs only to God”) and *bismi 'llāh walī 'l-amr* (“In the name of God, the master of authority”).²⁶ In 72/691–2, the Marwānids reconquered Iraq, and in 73/692, brutally suppressed the caliphate of 'Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca. The ideologically much more aggressive Khārījite movement, though, still controlled much of Iran.

Finding a new ideological formula for the Umayyad Empire

The reforms and activities of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and his omnipotent governor of the East, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, can be seen on the one hand as an attempt to integrate the defeated moderate Zubayrid movement and on the other hand, as a forceful reaction to the ongoing and ideologically much more potent Khārījite challenge. At the latest at this time, if not before, the idea of a universal Islamic Empire in its own ideological right arose. Mecca was too far away for a representative imperial religious cult to be successfully controlled. In 72/691–2 'Abd al-Malik built the present Dome of the Rock and the Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem, probably the first architectural manifestations of the new Islamic Empire. The choice of Jerusalem placed the imperial state religion in the tradition of Judaism and Christianity and in the centre of the medieval world.

The elements of traditional coin design were reconsidered as well. Two necessities had to be balanced: first, the conservatism of precious metal coin design to

make the coins acceptable, and secondly, the need to create a symbolic rhetoric for both Islam and its empire. Between 72/691–2 and 77/696–7, the Marwānid administration experimented with new symbols and designs; not all the imagery is fully understood today. A recurrent theme was the inclusion of the formula *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*, and increasingly the profession of the unity of God. These legends were the symbol of Islam comparable to the cross, fire altar and menorah. Muḥammad, the all-but-human messenger of God, was raised to a position almost as sacred as the divine revelation itself. The anachronistic iconographic symbols on the coins, however, were secondary in ideological terms and had to serve as recognizable marks of value. Based on the Zubayrid slogans on coins, the search for appropriate new designs and symbolic representations of the Marwānid Empire seems to have started in Damascus in 72/691–2. With the exception of some coppers the new emissions were anonymous. These experiments followed a different but related course in Syria, in the super-provinces of Kufa and Basra and in the northern provinces (Jazīra, Armenia and Azerbaijan).²⁷

At the latest in 72/691–2, 'Abd al-Malik began to experiment with coin designs in Syria. His administration chose yet another circulating type of Heraclius' *nomisma* as a model, initially leaving the anachronistic Greek inscription in place (see figure 2.14). The obverse shows three standing emperors still wearing tiny crosses on top of their crowns. On the reverse the cross, as the symbol of the Christian Byzantine Empire, was replaced by a “bar on a pole on steps”. The emblems of the rival Christian Empire were gradually removed, while the recognizable design pattern of the circulating Byzantine gold coinage was retained.²⁸

Before 72/691–2, silver *drahms* were not known to be minted in Syria. The new Marwānid Damascus *drahms* (see figure 2.15) were modelled on the current Sasanian *drahm* retaining the images of the *shāhānshāh* and the fire altar with attendants. The coins are anonymous; the invocation *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* in Arabic is placed in front of the portrait, however at first without the profession of the unity of God.²⁹ The Zubayrid propaganda was adopted as suitable for the ongoing power struggle with the Khārījites. From 72/691–2 to 74/693–4, the



Figure 2.14 Anonymous, *nomisma*, without mint [Damascus?], without year [c. late 60s–72/late 680s–691–692 CE], Spink (1986), no. 86.



Figure 2.15 Anonymous, *drahm*, Damascus, year 72AH (691–692 CE); Peus (2004), no. 988 (3.8 grams).



Figure 2.16 Anonymous, *nomisma*, without mint [Damascus], without date [73–74/692–694], Spink (1986), no. 87.

name *Khusraw* in Pahlavī is again found in front of the portrait so that the design, with the exception of the Arabic invocation of Muḥammad on the margin, remains the recognizable standard *drahm* design.³⁰ In the year 73/692–3 the invocation of the messenger of God, Muḥammad, was supplemented with an Arabic *shahāda* in the obverse margin of the silver, and probably also on the undated gold coins of Damascus (see figures 2.16 and 2.17), and on the *drahms* of Kufa too.

The gold coinage followed the same course. Probably in 73/691–2, but before the year 74/693–4, the crosses were finally removed from the conventional meaningless image of the emperors and the symbol on the reverse was replaced by a “globe on a pole on steps”.³¹ Probably parallel to the silver issue of 73/691–2, the profession of faith, including the unity of God and the invocation of the messenger of God, Muḥammad, encircled the central symbol (see figure 2.16). The



Figure 2.17 Anonymous, *dīnār*, without mint [Damascus], year 77AH (696 CE), Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-A02 (4.45 grams).



Figure 2.18 ‘Abd al-Malik, *fals*, Qinnasrīn (in northern Syria), without date [74–77/693–696], Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 303-F08 (3.15 grams).

“globe on a pole on steps” and these invocations had by then become frequently used symbols.³²

Between the years 74/693–4 and 77/696, the next ideologically more consistent, indeed almost unified, iconographic representation of the empire was created for Syria, in gold, copper and silver (see figures 2.17 to 2.19). The obverse of the gold and copper coins shows the image of the standing caliph. The precious metal coins are anonymous, giving only titles, but some copper issues name ‘Abd al-Malik (see figure 2.18). An important mark of the figure’s imperial status is his long, broad sword sheathed in a scabbard, the hilt firmly in his grip. On the gold *dīnār*, the caliph is surrounded by the *shahāda* and the invocation of the messenger-ship of Muḥammad. The reverse repeats the “globe on a pole on steps” motif; the design was modified on copper coins. The reverse uses the familiar “globe on a pole on steps” design but with the addition of an ellipse, thus resembling the Greek letter *phi*. The precise rendering of the “globe (or other tops) on a



Figure 2.19 Anonymous, *drahm*, without mint [Damascus], year 75AH (694–695 CE), Gorny and Mosch (2007), no. 5599 (3.34 grams).

pole” with ellipse motif varied considerably at the different mints in Bilād al-Shām and the western Jazīra. On the silver coins in Damascus in 75/694–5, the image of the *shāhānshāh* remained on the obverse as the iconic mark of the *drahm*. The standing ruler is placed on the reverse (see figure 2.19). On either side of his image, the title *amīr al-mu'minīn* was inscribed for the first time in the Arabic language and script. A second title is found here for the first time on a dated document as well, the divination of the emperor as *khalīfat Allāh* (“deputy of God”). The title enhanced his claim to politico-religious leadership.³³

The depiction of a ruler on both sides may not have been a satisfactory design, as Treadwell suggested. The solution was probably a new type with the caliph’s half bust and the arch. It did not entirely deviate from the accepted Sasanian appearance of *drahms* but nevertheless created an ideologically more consistent design (see figure 2.20). It was also anonymous, but with imperial titles, though it bears neither mint nor date. It was presumably struck in Damascus between 75/694–5 and 79/697–8. Instead of the conventional portrait of the *shāhānshāh*, a new half-length portrait was created. It was close to Sasanian iconography, but distinctive. The figure’s hand firmly holds the hilt of his broad, sheathed, sword similar to the standing caliph type. This newly created image can be understood as the representation of the caliph type. The name “Khusraw”, placed again in front of the portrait, has been reduced to a meaningless part of a conventional coin design. The margin carries the *shahāda* and the reference to Muḥammad that had become the norm by then. The reverse shows an arch on columns with capitals. On either side of the arch are the imperial titles, “*amīr* of the believers” and “deputy of God”, as on the standing caliph *drahms*. The arch covers a lance or spear, and on either side is the inscription *naṣr Allāh* (“Victory of God”) or *naṣara Allāh* (“May God give assistance”). Treadwell discarded earlier interpretations of



Figure 2.20 Anonymous, *drahm*, without mint [Damascus], without date [c. 75–79/694–698], Baldwin’s (2001), no. 1569.

the arch as a prayer-niche (*mihrāb*) for art history reasons. This kind of decoration was mainly part of a late Roman convention to frame any image, here a lance, which is, according to the inscription, a symbol of victory.³⁴

The iconographic significance of the “bar/globe on a pole on steps” and its variations is no longer known. The different representations must be considered as a group, but they lack an unambiguous counterpart in the growing corpus of early Islamic imagery. Various interpretations have been suggested, but none is entirely satisfactory because of the lack of parallel sources in literature and iconography. In 1967 George C. Miles saw it as a *qaḍīb*, a ceremonial staff or rod.³⁵ Alternatively, in 1999 Nadia Jamil interpreted the symbol as the *qutb* or *omphalos*, the lynchpin of the world, a parallel to the cross of Golgatha, which is seen on Byzantine gold *nomisma* (see figure 2.1). This would point to Jerusalem, the centre of the imperial religious cult. According to Nadia Jamil, the rotation of the world might be visually expressed in the ellipse on the copper coins (see figure 2.18). The suggested foreshortening perspective of a movement, though, raises serious doubts about such a theory.³⁶

Hanswulf Bloedhorn suggested another plausible interpretation.³⁷ On the famous mosaic map of Jerusalem in Madaba (sixth century CE) a monumental Roman column is depicted as a pole on steps with something on top (capital, globe?) standing on the plaza before the northern gate of the city (today the Damascus Gate) (see figure 2.21). In the early Islamic period this column seems to have been still a landmark. Al-Muqaddasī (d. 381/991)³⁸ and other writers knew the nearby gate as that of the “column,” *Bāb al-Amūd*. Such monolithic columns symbolized urban and civic pride and were a common feature in late Roman and even Umayyad cities, and therefore understandable even without a specific allusion to Jerusalem.³⁹ In this interpretation the pellet on the top of the pole on the coins might represent a globe without a cross and the bar might

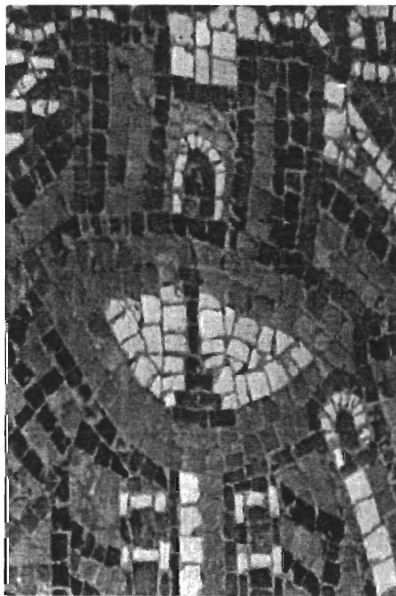


Figure 2.21 The Bab al-Amūd in Jerusalem on the Madaba map.

Photo: David Bjorgen (2005), Wikipedia, Madaba (Dec. 2007).

represent an empty platform or capital. The urban column would then be a non-religious symbol and close enough to the Byzantine Christian “cross on steps” to serve as a recognizable mark of value. This function of the symbol is apparent on North African gold coins. The mark for the Byzantine *semmissis* was the cross standing on a globe; this was continued as a “globe on a pole on steps” for Islamic *semisses*. The sign for the Byzantine *tremissis*, a cross potent, was transformed on the Islamic *thulth* into the early Islamic “bar on a pole on steps”.⁴⁰ In Syria the only gold coin struck was the *nomisma/dīnār*. A distinguishing mark for a denomination was not necessary, but a recognizable design connected the *dīnār* with the previous Byzantine *nomisma*. The “steps” of the cross potent was the most distinct design element of the reverse. In the period of Mu‘āwīya the “bar on a pole on steps” had probably appeared for the first time (see figure 2.5); it is not possible to interpret it as other than a de-Christianized or de-Byzantinized object on “steps”. It became a conservative symbol for the value of the coin, like the *shāhānshāh*. The *phi*-shaped symbol on steps on the copper coins should be considered as a mere mark of value too, replacing the Greek *M* or *m*. It might thus simply be regarded as being a Greek *phi* for *folles* as John Walker alluded.⁴¹ Whatever the original symbolic meaning of these images might have been, it was obviously secondary to their function as marks of value and fell into oblivion

after ‘Abd al-Malik’s reforms. The lance and the globe/bar on a pole on steps or column should be seen as non-venerated objects of pride, power and victory and as a substitute for the symbols of the other religions.

The profession of faith as the symbol of religion and the Word of God as the symbol of the Universal Empire

Between late 77/696 and 79/699, the definitive symbolic representation of Islam and the Islamic Empire was introduced on coinage. This occurred immediately after the victory over the Khārijite caliph Qatārī ibn al-Fujā’a (r. 69–79/689–99), and must be seen as an attempt to legitimize Marwānid rule in the entire empire with Islamic propaganda common to all Muslim factions. This reform was organized by the caliph in Damascus in close cooperation with al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, the supreme governor of the former Sasanian east. In 77/696 new *dīnārs* were struck (see figure 2.22), probably in Damascus. They bear the new religious symbols of Islam and the empire, the *shahāda*, encircled by the Qur’ānic *risāla*, the prophetic mission of Muḥammad (shortened version of Qur’ān 9:33), and on the opposite side the Word of God, the beginning of the *sūrat ikhlās* (shortened variety of Qur’ān 112), surrounded by the date of the striking.

Late in the year 78/697–8 al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ordered the reform of the *dirhams* in his realm. The new coins weighed about 2.8 to 2.9 grams with slight regional differences. The new design was very similar to that of the new *dīnārs*, but in addition carried the mint name. As far as we can currently tell, the reform began in Kufa, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Jayy and Shaqq al-Taymara in the Jibāl. The following year saw the adoption of the new design by more than 40 mints all over the east (see figure 2.23), many of them in the former regions of Khārijite dominance—and in the imperial capital Damascus.⁴²

Until the time of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–75 CE), precious metal coins remained anonymous. Not only the name of the ruler but also his image was removed from any representation of the empire on precious metal coins. This constituted a historically unprecedented breach with Hellenistic coin imagery



Figure 2.22 Anonymous, *dīnār*, without mint [Damascus], year 93AH (711–712 CE), Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 306-A02 (4.23 grams).

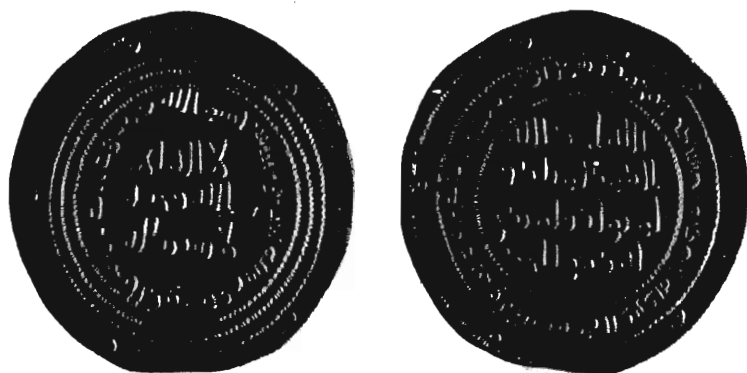


Figure 2.23 Anonymous, *dirham*, Kufa, year 79AH (698–699 CE), Oriental Coin Cabinet Jena inv. no. 305-H10 (2.87 grams).

going back about a millennium in the Roman west and the Iranian east. The path for the change was laid during the Zubayrid and Khārijite wars by the almost complete separation of the meaningless images, serving as mere marks of value, and the Arabic inscriptions carrying ideological messages.

On the silver coins the ruler's side bears the Word of God, the *sūrat al-ikhhlās*, surrounded by the *risāla* that represents the sovereignty of God, almost a concession to Khārijite thinking. The *shahāda* is found on the opposite side. On coins in the Hellenistic tradition the latter is the side used for religious symbols. The aniconism of the precious metal coins for circulation was the result of the new iconic symbols: the Qur'ānic Word of God as an expression of sovereignty and the profession of faith as an expression of religion. Anonymity did not mean modesty, because the new Islamic universal emperor claimed to be nothing less than *khalīfat Allāh* (deputy of God). This presupposes an entirely new understanding of the role of the Islamic Empire and its religion.

Summary of the history of coinage and the representation of Empire and religion

Coin iconography reveals the early search for an identity of the Arab Islamic state that ultimately led to a suitable formula to represent the new, all-embracing universal Islamic Empire in its own ideological right. Until the period of the Zubayrid and Khārijite wars, almost no distinct imperial representation on coins can be discerned. Repeated attempts to conquer Constantinople can be interpreted as the wish of the then-new Arab-Islamic elite to inherit the Roman claim to universal rulership. From about the late 650s CE until the uprising of 'Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, the Second *fitna*, minting was gradually regulated at the level of the provinces and districts. But the images of a Byzantine emperor with a cross insignia, the

portrait of *shāhānshāh* and the symbol of Zoroastrianism, the fire altar, remained the standard designs until the reign of 'Abd al-Malik. The most serious political, military and ideological challenge to the Umayyad regime was the Second *fitna*, the caliphate of 'Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr between 62/681–2 and 73/692 and the even more aggressive Khārijite movement between 68/687 and 78/697. For the first time, as a manifestation of the new Islamic imperial self-consciousness, in 66/685–6, Zubayrid governors put the invocation of the messenger-ship of Muḥammad on the coins; then, presumably in 70/689–90, extended it with the profession of the unity of God. In 72/691–2, one Zubayrid governor even replaced the fire altar of Zoroastrianism with these invocations in the Persian language and written in the Pahlavī script. These iconic statements are indeed the first symbols of Islam and comparable to the cross, fire altar and menorah.

In the period between 72/691 and 77–78/694–8, the experiments of 'Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf can be seen as a response to these challenges, in an attempt to integrate the Zubayrid movement and to face the ideological Khārijite menace. After the suppression of the Khārijites in the years 77–78/696–8, coin design was radically changed. Precious metal coinage finally became anonymous; iconographic representations were abandoned. The Islamic Empire had finally found its distinctive symbolic form of representation: the bare iconic Word of God, the *sūra* 112, representing the sovereignty of the new universal empire, along with the prophetic mission of Muḥammad (Qur'ān 9:33) and the profession of faith, the *shahāda*, which symbolized the new distinct religion.

Notes

- 1 A detailed and fully annotated version of this contribution can be found in Heidemann (2009).
- 2 See Sivers (2003); Hoyland (1997); Johns (2003).
- 3 For an introduction to the numismatics of this transition period, see Sears (1997); Heidemann (1998); Treadwell (2000); Foss (2004); Album/Goodwin (2002) Oddy (2004); Phillips (2004); Goodwin (2005).
- 4 See Phillips/Goodwin (1997); Heidemann (1998); Foss (1994–9); Walmsley (1999); Pottier/Schulze/Schulze (2008).
- 5 See Hoyland (1997), 523–47, esp. 535–8.
- 6 See Humbach (1983); idem (1987); Thorau (2004).
- 7 See Abel (1958).
- 8 See Pottier (2004); Goodwin (2004); Pottier/Schulze/Schulze (2007); idem (2008).
- 9 See Album/Goodwin (2002); Pottier/Schulze/Schulze (2008).
- 10 See Treadwell (2000), 2–6.
- 11 See Donner (1986); Foss (2002b); Hoyland (2006).
- 12 These short expressions have no specific religious connotation.
- 13 See Foss (2002b).
- 14 In Byzantium the cross became almost an imperial symbol that denoted the victory of the emperor over his enemies. See Moorhead (1985), 178.
- 15 See Tyler-Smith (2000).
- 16 See Sears (1997), 377–402; Album/Goodwin (2002), 34–7.
- 17 See *ibid.*, 8f.
- 18 The phases are according to Album in *ibid.*
- 19 See *ibid.*, 12–5; Sears (2003a).

- 20 See Ilisch (2007).
- 21 In this contribution the term *shahāda* denotes only the profession of the unity of God.
- 22 See Foss (2005). For the history of the Khārijites, see idem (2002).
- 23 As founder of an empire, the Prophet Muḥammad is as putative as Osmān for the Ottoman Empire and Romulus and Remus or Aeneas for the Roman Empire.
- 24 See Donner (2002–3), 40f.
- 25 See Mochiri (1986), 168–72; Ilisch (1992).
- 26 See Foss (2002a); Sears (2003a).
- 27 For the developments in the provinces, see Treadwell (1999), Sears (2003b).
- 28 See Miles (1967), 209f, nos. 4f.
- 29 See Sears (1995); idem (2003b); Ilisch (2007).
- 30 See Walker (1941), 23 no. DD1 (74h); Miles (1952), pl. xxviii no. 4 (74h, coll. P. Balog); Miles (1957), 191f no. 6 (72h); Bates (1986), 243f; Shams Isḥrāq (1990), 95 no. 137 (73h); Jazsar (2000), (72h); Album/Goodwin (2002), no. 278 (72h), no. 279 (73h).
- 31 See Bates (1986), 246.
- 32 See Miles (1967), 210f.
- 33 For the controversial discussion about this title, see Rotter (1982), 33–5; Crone/Hinds (1987), 4–23, esp. 20f and n. 81; Madelung (1997), 46 n. 51.
- 34 For this type, see Treadwell (1999); idem (2005).
- 35 See Miles (1967), 208; 212.
- 36 Jamil (1999).
- 37 Brief personal communication, email dated 3 March 2007.
- 38 See al-Muqaddasī (1906), 167.
- 39 See Arnould (1998); idem (1999), 109; Baumann (2000). On the mosaics in the Lion church and in St Stephen's church in Umm al-Raṣāṣ in Jordan a similar column at the intra-mural side of the gate is visible. In the centre of the forum of Jerash a column may also have stood. See Harding (1949), 14.
- 40 For the Byzantine denominations, see Walker (1956), xxxii, xl–xli, 64–78; Balaguer (1976); Hahn (1981); Bates (1992), 272f, 282; Bates (1996).
- 41 See Walker (1941), xxiii.
- 42 See Klat (2002).

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