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A Bedouin *Amīr* in Fāṭimid Ṭabariyya: The Earliest Numayrid Coin Excavated in Tiberias

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Abstract

The fifth century AH/eleventh century CE in Shām and the Jazīra was a period of a receding monetary economy, and drastically shrinking number of produced coins. Contemporary legal texts supported by archaeologically provenanced coin finds suggested that the reduced highly alloyed black *dirhams* were only circulating in a narrow region of origin. It came therefore as a surprise to find the earliest Numayrid *dirham* far from its supposed mint in Ḥarrān (modern Altınbaşak, Şanlıurfa Province, Turkey) in an excavation in Tiberias. The coin also establishes a *terminus post quem* for a disputed dating of the particular site.

THE FIND AND ITS CONTEXT

Tiberias or al-Ṭabariyya was the most important and prosperous Islamic city in northern Palestine under Fāṭimid rule during the eleventh century CE (Avni 2014:71–87). This is witnessed in particular by the rich archaeological finds of the period, including a large number of gold and silver coin hoards, often mixed with jewelry.¹ It was thus unsurprising when the excavation of a large Fāṭimid-period courtyard building with stone-lined installations and storerooms located on the southernmost fringes of the Fāṭimid town yielded coins.² Five coins, of which

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- 1 The IAA coin database has roughly 300 excavation coin finds registered from Fāṭimid Tiberias. Among these are eight hoards excavated in different parts of the city, many of them from private dwellings: (1–2) two hoards of gold and silver *dinars* and *dirhams* with pieces of gold and silver jewelry, deposited after 1063 CE (Wasserstein 1998a; 1998b); (3) a hoard of 15 billion *dirhams*, deposited after 1021 CE (unpublished); (4) a hoard of 15 gold pieces discovered in excavations in 1935, deposited post 1014 CE (unpublished); (5) a hoard of 25 *dinars*, deposited after 985 CE (unpublished); (6) a hoard of 16 gold coins and jewelry deposited after 1024 CE (Berman 2004:221–224); (7) a hoard of 85 late Byzantine anonymous *folles* and two Fāṭimid billion coins (Bijovsky 2008:65–100); (8) a hoard of 98 *dirhams*, deposited after 978 CE (unpublished). See also Avni 2014:87.
 - 2 The building was discovered during salvage excavations conducted by Eli Yannai on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) at the Gane Menorah site, south

three were identifiable, were discovered on the dirt floor of the building, close to one of its walls, together with numerous intact pottery vessels dated to the Fāṭimid period.³ Two of the coins belonged to the earlier Islamic town and were no longer in circulation at the time of the sealing of this context: an Umayyad *fals* showing a horizontal figure of a bird on a pedestal, minted in Ṭabariyya in the 80s AH / first decade of the eighth century CE (*SNAT Palästina*:30, No. 1; Fig. 1); and an anonymous Abbasid cast copper of a type produced in relatively largely quantities between the 190s/800–810s and the 230s/830s (Heidemann 2003:159–160, Group VI-cast coins; Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Umayyad post-reform *fals*, minted in Ṭabariyya, first decade of the eighth century CE (IAA 147156)

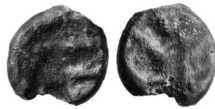


Fig. 2. Anonymous Abbasid cast copper, issued between the 800s and the 830s CE (IAA 147157)

The third and final coin of this assemblage is a billon *dirham* datable to the early eleventh century. It was found together with the Umayyad *fals*, and constitutes a rare find. The type, so far unpublished, is one of three known coins today issued by the Bedouin *Amīr* Abū Qawām Waththāb ibn Ja‘bar al-Numayrī in Ḥarrān in the Diyār Muḍar (present day Altınbaşak, Şanlıurfa Province, Turkey) between 407–409 AH/1016/7–1018/9 CE (Fig. 3). This is based upon a comparative analysis of the formulae and dates appearing on this coin with other coin types, as detailed below.

of Tiberias in 2008. The building was constructed directly upon the Early Bronze Age stratum (Yannai 2014). We would like to thank Yannai for his assistance and permission to publish this important coin.

3 The coins were cleaned in the IAA laboratory by Victoria Nosikovskiy; they were photographed by Clara Amit (IAA).



Fig. 3. Abū Qawām Waththāb ibn Ja‘bar al-Numayrī, Ḥarrān, 407–409 AH.

Obv. Central legend in double line circle:

pellet
 لا اله الا الله
 وحده لا شريك له
 الأمير السيد
 مؤيد الدولة
 أبو قوام

(*al-amīr al-sayyid / Mu‘ayyad al-dawla / Abū Qawām*)

Two additional pellets are found under *yā*’ of *sharīk* and under *dāl* of *dawla*

Marginal legend: (...هذا الدرهم...)

Rev. Central legend in double dotted circle

الله
 محمد رسول الله
 صلى الله عليه وعلى آله
 الإمام المنصور
 أبو علي الحاكم
 بإمر الله أمير المؤمنين

(*al-imām al-manṣūr / Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥākīm / bi-Amrillāh amīr al-mu’ / minīn*)

℞ *dirham*, ↑, 3.10 g, 24 mm.

The archaeological evidence seems to indicate that the Fāṭimid building was destroyed in a catastrophic event, possibly an earthquake (Yannai 2014). If so, the date of the Numayrid *dirham* provides pivotal evidence that this was possibly the major earthquake of 1033 which severely damaged large parts of Tiberias (Guidoboni and Comastri 2005:26–32; see also Stacey 2004:8–9).

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Numayrid *dirham* dates to a period of the so-called ‘settlement gap’ in Northern Mesopotamia (the Jazīra), a period of severe urban decline and an almost complete lack of datable artifacts and architectural structures for the period of Bedouin domination (Heidemann 2005:86). That the period appears often in the archaeological

record as a ‘settlement gap’ is the result of missing datable artifacts, foremost of which are coins. One reason for their archaeological disappearance is not a gap of settlement as such, but the abandonment of the use of copper coinage in most regions of the empire after the 230s/830s until the sixth/twelfth century. Also a severe shrinking of the contemporary monetary economy can be observed among in the fifth/eleventh century by die studies of the rare silver coinage. Despite this, in the eleventh century Fāṭimid southern Shām remained considerably more monetarized than northern Shām and the Jazīra, now under the sway of Bedouin tribes, of the Kilāb, Numayr and ‘Uqayl.

The discovery of the Numayrid *dirham* in Ṭabariyya is surprising, because it is found far outside its expected circulation zone, the Diyār Muḍar, the westernmost part of the Jazīra. All Numayrid coins retrieved in controlled archaeological excavations come either from Ḥarrān (Heidemann 2002a, No. 37 [HA 118]), being struck at the mint of Ḥarrān, or from al-Raqqā (Heidemann 2005), being struck at the mint of al-Raqqā. The latter mint appears only in a small homogenous hoard of eight coins, from an excavation there in September 1991 (Heidemann 2005:88–91). These finds led to the expectation that debased *dirham aswads* in the fifth/eleventh century mainly circulated in the nearby hinterland. This expectation is also based on legal writings of the period which state that debased *dirhams* are only permissible as legal means of exchange when they are *rā’ij fī al-balad*, “current in the city or region” (Heidemann 2002b:374–378). One coin found outside its narrow circulation zone certainly does not negate this hypothesis.

The excavated coin is as far as we know the earliest document of the Bedouin Numayrid emirate in the Ḥarrān. It was struck by Abū Qawām Waththāb ibn Ja‘bar al-Numayrī, then rising in regional political prominence. Waththāb became the leader of the Banū Numayr roaming the Diyār Muḍar, the Balīkh valley, and occasionally in northern Syria, in about 380 AH/990–991 CE. After the death of the Ḥamdānid ruler of Aleppo, Sa‘īd al-Dawla (r. 381–392 AH /991–1002 CE) in 392/410, the thirteenth-century historian Ibn Shaddād mentioned that Waththāb made himself independent in Ḥarrān (*istabadda bihā*), meaning probably that he no longer acknowledged the overlordship of the Ḥamdānids in Aleppo and their successor and former military slave (*ghulām*), Lu’lu’ al-Sayfī al-Kabīr (r. 394–399 AH/1004–1008 CE). In the turbulent years following the chiliastic uprising of al-Aṣfar al-Taghlibī in 395 AH/1004/5 CE Waththāb was instrumental in suppressing this movement. Until probably 399/1008–1009 al-Raqqā remained in the hands of Ḥamdānid governors, followed by the Fāṭimids who extended their authority in northern Syria. Ḥamdānid power had faded with the takeover of Lu’lu’ al-Sayfī who acknowledged in Aleppo the overlordship of the Fāṭimids, as evidenced by his coins.⁴ Fāṭimid gold coins were issued in al-Raqqā in 401 AH/1010/11 CE

4 Badr al-Dīn did not mint in his own name but continued the Ḥamdānid protocol

and billon *dirhams* in al-Raḥba in the same year (Heidemann 2002a:75–76, Nos. 1–2). Waththāb probably attained formal autonomy in Ḥarrān in 407 AH/1017 CE when Aleppo came under direct Fāṭimid rule. This is the *terminus post quem* for the issue found in Ṭabariyya. The title Mu’ayyad al-Dawla was bestowed on him probably by the Fāṭimid caliph according to the evidence coin protocol (see also Heidemann 2002b:81–82, No. 3). Hence, he held the same hierarchical rank as the Ḥamdānids had held previously, directly answerable to the Fāṭimid caliph. Waththāb died in 410 AH/1019/20 CE.⁵

NUMISMATIC SIGNIFICANCE AND DATING OF THE COIN

The excavated coin presumably pre-dates the two other known coins of the same type struck by Waththāb in Ḥarrān in the year 409/1018. All three coins of Waththāb acknowledge the overlordship of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amrillāh (r. 386–411 AH/996–1021 CE).⁶ The coin from Ṭabariyya is the third known. As opposed to the known type, it includes the Shiite profession of faith ‘*Alī walī Allāh*’, ‘Alī is the friend of God. In the year 407 AH/1017 CE the Fāṭimids assumed direct control in Aleppo, and probably granted the title Mu’ayyad al-Dawla to Waththāb. Had the coin appeared without the Shi’ite device, it might have been even an earlier type, before 407 AH, from a time when the acknowledgment of the Fāṭimid caliph might have been a mere political statement of allegiance, and not a subordination with granting of titles and the inclusion of Fāṭimid/Shiite devices. The present coin type with the Shi’ite device seems to signal a more sophisticated acknowledgement of the Fāṭimid caliph after their takeover of Aleppo in 407 AH. The reverse formula which includes the *kunyā* of the caliph, *Abū ‘Alī*, is the same as on the Ḥamdānids coins of Sa‘īd al-Dawla (r. 381–392 AH/991–1002 CE) in Aleppo⁷ which was continued by issues of Lu’lu’ al-Kabīr in the name of the two Ḥamdānids, Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī and Abū l-Ma‘ālī Sharīf (r. 392–399 AH/1002–1008/9 CE)⁸, and Lu’lu’⁹s

acknowledging the Fāṭimids as overlords. For the coins see Lane-Poole 1897:336. Photo files Universität Hamburg SB 03484 (private collection).

- 5 For more detail on the political context, and references to the sources, see Heidemann 2002b:64–82.
- 6 Description of the coins in Heidemann (2002b:81–92; first coin: Universität Tübingen coll., Bestand Ilisch; second coin: photo files Universität Hamburg SB 02262).
- 7 All *dirhams*:
 - a. Ḥalab, 391 AH, ←, 4.49 g, 25 mm; Israel Museum coll.; Balog coll. tray 9/5763;
 - b. Ḥalab, [386–392 AH], 4.78 g; Peus, Auktion 371, April 24, 2002, No. 832 (=Westfälische Auktionsgesellschaft, Auktion 45, September 26, 2007, No. 6616);
 - c. Ḥalab (386–392 AH), ←, 6.45 g; photo files Universität Hamburg, SB 12184;
 - d. Ḥalab, 39x (391 or 392 AH), ↙, 1.22 g; pierced; photo files Universität Hamburg, SB 12185.
- 8 *Dirham*, Ḥalab, (392–399 AH), Lane-Poole 1897:336; ↖, 3.56 g, 22 mm; photo files

successor and son, Murtaḍā al-Dawla (r. 399–406 AH/1008/9–1015/6 CE).⁹ The naming of the *kunyā* connects the coin found in Ṭabariyya with preceding series from Aleppo, and places it before the other two known coins.

Waththāb's coins of 409/1018 (mentioned in note 6) have a shortened protocol for the caliph without the *kunya* and with the attribute *al-manṣūr* for *al-imām*.¹⁰ The title of *al-amīr al-sayyid* on the coin from Ṭabariyya is noteworthy. While the Ḥamdānids did not use any titles in addition to their *alqāb*, and Waththāb did not use this title on his issue of 409/1018, later Numayrids constantly used the title of *al-amīr* but without any attribute. The title *al-amīr al-sayyid* has its precedents on coins mostly minted in the Jibāl region by Būyid amīrs at the end of the fourth/tenth century (Treadwell 2001). The use of the *kunya* for the Fāṭimid caliph and the unusual and discontinued title *al-amīr al-sayyid* point to the possibility that the coin was minted before the issue of 409/1018.

Based upon the above considerations, the coin of Waththāb found in Ṭabariyya is likely to have been struck in Ḥarrān between 407/1016 and 409/1018.

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Universität Hamburg, SB 03484.

9 *Dirham*, Ḥalab, (399–406 AH), ⲗ, 3.60 g; photo files Universität Hamburg, SB 03485; ⲗ, 6.95 g; photo files Universität Hamburg SB 03486.

10 *Al-manṣūr* is used here as an attribute (victorious) to *al-imām*. The personal name of al-Ḥākim *Manṣūr* (without the definite article) is not mentioned on this coin.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AJC* Y. Meshorer *Ancient Jewish Coinage*. Dix Hills, NY 1982
- AJN* *American Journal of Numismatics*
- BMC* e.g., *BMC Arab.*: G.F. Hill. *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia*. London 1922
- BMCO* e.g., *BMCO* 1: S. Lane-Poole. *The Coins of the Eastern Khaleefehs in the British Museum. Catalogue of the Oriental Coins in the British Museum* 1. London 1875
- CH* *Coin Hoards*
- CHL* Y. Meshorer, G. Bijovsky and W. Fischer-Bossert. *Coins of the Holy Land: The Abraham and Marian Sofaer Collection at the American Numismatic Society and the Israel Museum*. Ed. by D. Hendin and A. Meadows. New York 2013
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
- CNP* e.g., L. Kadman. *The Coins of Akko Ptolemais* (Corpus Nummorum Palaestiniensium IV). Jerusalem 1961
- CRE* e.g., H. Mattingly. *The Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum I. Augustus to Vitellius*. London 1923
- DOC* e.g., P. Grierson. *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection* 3. *Leo III to Nicephorus III 717–1081*. Washington, D.C. 1973
- IEJ* *Israel Exploration Journal*
- IG* *Inscriptiones Graecae*
- IGCH* M. Thompson, O. Mørkholm and C.M. Kraay. *An Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards*. New York 1973
- INJ* *Israel Numismatic Journal*
- INR* *Israel Numismatic Research*
- LA* *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Liber Annuus*
- LRBC* e.g., P.V. Hill and J.P.C. Kent. Part 1: The Bronze Coinage of the House of Constantine, A.D. 324–46. In *Late Roman Bronze Coinage (A.D. 324–498)*. London 1965. Pp. 4–40
- MIB* e.g., W. Hahn. *Von Anastasius I. bis Justinianus I (491–565)*. *Moneta Imperii Byzantini* 1. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Denkschriften 109. Veröffentlichungen der Numismatischen Kommission 1. Vienna 1973
- MIBE* W. Hahn. *Money of the Incipient Byzantine Empire (Anastasius I–Justinian I, 491–565)* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte der Universität Wien 6). Vienna 2000
- MIBEC* W. Hahn and M. Metlich. *Money of the Incipient Byzantine Empire Continued (Justin II—Revolt of the Heraclii, 565–610)*. (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte der Universität Wien 13). Vienna 2009
- MN* *American Numismatic Society Museum Notes*
- NC* *Numismatic Chronicle*
- NCirc.* *Numismatic Circular*
- NNM* *Numismatic Notes and Monographs*
- RIC* e.g., C.H.V. Sutherland. *The Roman Imperial Coinage* I. *From 31 BC to AD 69*. London 1984
- RN* *Revue Numismatique*
- RPC* e.g., A. Burnett, M. Amandry and I. Carradice. *From Vespasian to Domitian (AD 69–96)*. *Roman Provincial Coinage* 2. London 1999
- RRC* M.H. Crawford. *Roman Republican Coinage*. Cambridge 1974
- SC* e.g., A. Houghton and C. Lorber. *Seleucid Coins. A Comprehensive Catalogue. Part I. Seleucus I through Antiochus III*. New York, Lancaster, PA-London 2002
- SICA* e.g., S. Album and T. Goodwin. *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean 1: The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*. Oxford 2002
- SNAT* e.g., L. Ilisch. *Sylloge Numorum Arabicorum Tübingen–Palästina IVa Bilād aš-Šām* I. Tübingen 1993
- SNG* *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum* (with suffix as necessary, e.g. *SNG Cop.*)
- SNR* *Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau*
- TINC* *Transactions of the International Numismatic Congress*
- TJC* Y. Meshorer. *A Treasury of Jewish Coins from the Persian Period to Bar Kochba*. Jerusalem-Nyack 2001
- ZfN* *Zeitschrift für Numismatik*