

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau = Revue suisse de numismatique = Rivista svizzera di numismatica
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Numismatische Gesellschaft
Band: 65 (1986)

Artikel: History, geography and numismatics in the first century of islamic coinage
Autor: Bates, Michael L.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-174981>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 04.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

MICHAEL L. BATES

HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND NUMISMATICS IN THE FIRST CENTURY OF ISLAMIC COINAGE

I. The Present Situation

No Islamic coinage has been so intensively studied as that of the 7th and the first half of the 8th centuries, the period conventionally named Umayyad¹. Nearly every great Islamic numismatist has contributed in some way to the bibliography of this coinage; the reputations of two late giants in the field, John Walker and George C. Miles, are in large part based on their work on this earliest coinage of Islam. It is not surprising that numismatists are intensively interested in this era. The coinage is attractive for itself, because of its diversity and its links with pre-Islamic civilizations, and it draws further interest as the beginning of a distinctively Islamic coinage. Especially, the coinage of this early era, when not only Islamic coinage but many other aspects of Islamic civilization were being created, has great potential value as reliable historical evidence for a period with virtually no contemporary literary historical sources, a period known mainly from later accounts which are often cursory, biased, and uneven in coverage.

As a result, there is a vast body of published work on the coinage of the Umayyad period, which therefore might be thought to be well known and available for study by historians. This is not the case. The study of Umayyad coinage has scarcely begun.

It is not merely that many questions of detail remain unanswered, or that there are newly discovered coins that are not published yet. On a much more serious level, there is an abundant documentation of Umayyad coinage, but no one as yet really understands it. The coinage so far has been catalogued and studied only within the limits of a conceptual framework which is incoherent, by lumping together unrelated coinages while separating those which are closely linked, and also divorced from historical reality by failing to reflect the evolution of the coinage in time and space. The classification system which is still generally applied to Umayyad coinage serves in fact to disguise the actual evolution of the coinage, leading to misconceptions and errors by numismatists themselves, while making published catalogues and studies of the coinage discouragingly obscure for historians.

The deficiencies of the present system for the study of Umayyad coinage can be best illustrated by an examination of the standard work in the field, John Walker's two

¹ This term will be used in this paper for convenience, bearing in mind that the period includes coins issued under the authority of the early caliphs before the accession in A.D. 661 of Mu'awiya, the first Umayyad caliph, as well as under the caliph 'Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr, who was not an Umayyad, intervening between the eras of the Sufyanid Umayyads (Mu'awiya and his descendants) and of the Marwanid Umayyads (Marwan b. al-Hakam and his descendants), and issues with the names of a number of rebels against central caliphal authority. The wider question of whether dynastic labels are suitable primary classification criteria for Islamic coins is discussed at the conclusion of this paper.

volume catalogue of the Umayyad coins in the British Museum². These volumes include not only the BM's own coins, but also an example of every other variety known to Walker from published sources or his own research in other collections. In many respects, these catalogues are a great advance over earlier treatments of this coinage. They have naturally provided the essential foundation for all research since their publication. In laying the foundation, however, Walker's catalogues have also determined the shape of the edifice built upon it, with unfortunate results. Walker's classification scheme, based primarily on linguistic and typological criteria, has become so definitively accepted that scholars sometimes do not realize that many coins separated by Walker were struck at the same time or place, and many coins catalogued together by him were actually widely disparate in origin.

The first of Walker's two volumes is devoted to the different coinages comprised under the general label Arab-Sasanian, which means that their design in some way perpetuates or imitates Sasanian coin types, or that they bear inscriptions in Pahlavi (middle Persian). This vague and not very helpful label is used to encompass six different coinages:

1. the silver and copper coinage of Iraq and Iran (the former Sasanian empire) under Arab rule from the 640's to the early 8th century;
2. the silver coinage of Damascus in the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, before the introduction of Arabic Islamic dirhams;
3. coins with Bactrian, Arabic, and Pahlavi inscriptions, probably of the late 7th and early 8th centuries and of uncertain geographical origin;
4. 8th and 9th century issues of Sistan or the lands in the east of it;
5. coins of the last half of the 8th century from Tabaristan³; and
6. coins also of the late 8th century from Bukhara⁴.

² A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum. I. A Catalogue of the Arab-Sassanian Coins (Umayyad Governors in the East, Arab-Ephthalites, 'Abbasid Governors in Tabaristan and Bukhara (London, 1941); and ... II. A Catalogue of the Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umayyad Coins (London, 1956).

³ These coins, issued after the Arab conquest of the province in 144 H./A.D. 761, will not be discussed here, since they are not Umayyad, but their treatment by Walker (and by all scholars since he wrote) is a good example of the difficulties raised by his conceptualizations. First, the beginning of this coin series, under the as yet unconquered Sasanian Isbahbad princes in 711-712, is omitted by Walker, on the overly logical ground that they are not Islamic, that is to say, not issued under Muslim authority. This separation has been followed by all subsequent scholars (for example, Heinz Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik* [Handbücher der mittelasiatischen Numismatik II; 1973] pp. 123-134, says nothing about the pre-Islamic issues except that they exist; on the other hand, the companion book in the same series, Robert Göbl's *Sasani-dische Numismatik*, 1968 [English translation, *Sasanian Numismatics*, 1971] does not mention them either). This modern dichotomy, separating pre-Islamic and Islamic coins into two series and studying only the one or the other according to immediate purpose, would have meant nothing to 8th century contemporaries, for whom these were simply the coins of Tabaristan, bearing the name of a non-Islamic or Islamic ruler of the province according to the political situation. Except for the new names, the conquest did not result in a break or change in the production of coins from the Tabaristan mint (see Jamshedji Maneckji Unvala, *Coins of Tabaristan and Some Sasanian Coins from Susa* [1938], the only author to treat the series as a whole). Second, cataloging these Tabaristan dirhams with the Arab-Sasanian coins of the seventh century creates the impression that the Tabaristan coins, like their predecessors, were an inheritance from the Sasanian era, which is not at all the case. The Tabaristan coins began some 13 years

By far the largest of these groups is the coinage issued in the former Sasanian empire in the half-century after the Muslim conquest. The section of Walker's catalogue that includes this large group is entitled «The Umayyad Governors in the East», though not all of those named are Umayyad, not all are from the East, and not all were governors. Walker arranged this material by the name that appears on the coins: First come the issues perpetuating the names of the three emperors whose coins were imitated under the Arabs, then those with the name of one of the Umayyad caliphs, and then those with the name of a «provincial governor», which category includes, strangely, the issues with the names of ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr and Qatari b. al-Fuja'a, both of whom, although not Umayyads, were caliphs, not governors. There might be a certain justification forty-five years ago for Walker's choice of the name on the coin as the primary classification element, since the identification of most mint abbreviations at that time was even more uncertain than today, and the interpretation of the dates very problematic. Granting this, however, Walker's arrangement still seems needlessly chaotic. In the list of governors, aside from the confusion of caliphs, rebels, and actual governors, no distinction is indicated between those governors who were viceroys of all the East, those who were governors of one of its major subdivisions (Basra and Kufa and their respective subdivisions), or those who were governors of a single province, district, or city. The issues of those who served twice in different places are lumped together as a continuity. No distinction is made between those governors who served under ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr and those loyal to the Umayyads. Indeed, it is difficult to see that any principle has been followed in the order of names, other than a rough chronological sequence which is in reality quite misleading. Under each name, the coins are listed sometimes in order by date and under each date by mint, and at other times by mint and then in order by date. The order of mints is seemingly random and is different under each subheading. In sum, it is impossible to discern either the temporal evolution or the geographical distribution of the coinage of Iran under the Arabs in the 7th century, or to use the body of material as historical evidence, or to relate it to administrative systems.

Walker's second volume, published 15 years later, includes the coins that he calls «Arab-Byzantine and post-reform Umayyad», in two separate sections. The first of these terms is one that could well be eliminated completely from the technical numismatic vocabulary. In Walker's usage, which is still current today, it includes four quite

after the introduction of Arabic Islamic dirhams in the rest of Iran, quite possibly as a hostile reaction to the new Arabic coinage. They are a part of the monetary history of Iran in the 8th century, spanning the Umayyad and ʿAbbasid caliphates, with no relation to the seventh century Arab-Sasanian coins except a superficial resemblance and the use of the same language. It is, in fact, not the Arab Tabaristan coins but those of the Ispahbads which belong with those called «Umayyad» as the term is generally used in numismatics, referring to an era and not literally to a specific issuing authority.

⁴ These latter are rarer (at least outside the U.S.S.R.) and less studied than the Tabaristan issues, but parallel objections to their inclusion with the 7th century Arab-Sasanian series may be made. The Bukhara coins with Arabic are a survival of coins struck in the city before and after the Arab conquest which were themselves imitations of Sasanian issues. Bukhara was not part of the Sasanian empire when it was conquered. The only treatment of these coins since Walker is by Richard Frye, *Notes on the Early Coinage of Transoxiana* (NNM 113 1949), pp. 24–31.

disparate series, the only common feature of which is the use of design elements from different Byzantine prototypes. These are

1. the gold and copper coinage of Muslim Syria with Byzantine or Arab figural images;
2. the Egyptian imitations of the distinctive Byzantine copper coinage of Alexandria (which are mentioned only briefly by Walker, as their attribution to the Arabs was then still uncertain);
3. the earliest Arab coinage of North Africa and Spain with Latin Muslim inscriptions;
4. and certain Eastern copper issues with Byzantine elements.

These four bodies of coinage have little in common in origin, chronology, evolution or monetary function, but each of them has close links to coins segregated by Walker to other sections of his catalogues. The eastern coppers certainly belong with the coppers with Sasanian images only and should be treated with the latter (as Walker quite possibly would have done, had they been discovered when his first catalogue was written); probably they belong to the early 8th century. The coppers of Egypt are close but somewhat crude imitations of their Byzantine predecessors, probably beginning at the time of the Arab conquest of Egypt in 641 and ending around the turn of the 8th century. The Syrian gold and copper coins are much more sophisticated imitations, similar to corresponding Byzantine coins but not precisely like any prototype; for several reasons discussed below, they should be assigned to the last decade of the 7th century. The first North African issues, like the first Syrian coins, do not perpetuate the coins being struck at Carthage when the Arabs took the city about 698, but rather are an adaptation of coins of seventy years before. They have inscriptions in Latin that translate those of the reformed Arabic coinage of Damascus and the East, but begin at just about the same time that the «Arab-Byzantine» coinage of Egypt and Syria was ending, while the similar coins of Spain (adapted not from local prototypes but from the Arab coinage of North Africa) begin with the conquest of that country in 711. The series ends in both countries in 717, for a total lifespan of about two decades. Walker's subdivisions of these four series are quite complicated, especially for the diverse Syrian and Maghribi series, but essentially are based on the obverse and reverse designs of the coins, further subdivided in some instances by variation in inscription. Fortunately, the Syrian, Maghribi, and Eastern coinages are separated in the Arab-Byzantine section, but only because of the different languages of their inscriptions, not on the basis of their geographical separation. The subdivisions sometimes follow a rough chronological order but in most cases Walker's sequence has no relation to the chronology of the coins, nor is it true that the type sequence at different mints was the same. Within any subdivision, mints are arranged in Arabic alphabetical order.

The second part of the catalogue comprises the purely Arabic inscriptional issues that began with the reform of the coinage by 'Abd al-Malik in 696–97 and ultimately spread throughout the caliphate. They are divided by Walker first by metal, cataloguing gold, silver, and copper coins in that order. In all three categories, coins without mint name are listed first followed by those with a mint in Arabic alphabetical order. In any subcategory, all coins without a date come first followed by those with dates in chronological order. This arrangement, which Walker carried over almost unchanged from Lane-Poole's first British Museum catalogues of 1875–90, could have been worse, for it is much superior to the practice still sometimes followed today of attempting to

assign dated but anonymous coins to specific caliphs⁵. On the other hand, Walker's arrangement here as elsewhere does nothing to illuminate the historical evolution of the coinage. In describing his arrangement of the reformed dirhams, Walker noted that a geographic order of the mints would certainly be more scientific, but because he feared difference of opinion as to the precise order to be adopted, he did not do so. At the least, it would have been helpful if the mint names in his tabulation of mints and dates (pp. 1x-1xi) had been grouped by province.

Walker's overall arrangement by language, type, and metal, and only then by mint and date, has some advantages. The first three categories are the most immediately apparent features of a coin, and are easy to keep in mind, just as an alphabetical mint order is easier to remember than to remember the province and district in which each of the many Umayyad mints were located. Moreover, there exists some uncertainty over the location of a few Umayyad mints and the boundaries of Umayyad administrative subdivisions. These, however, are precisely the problems that numismatists and historians are supposed to solve, and a typological and alphabetical arrangement makes it too easy to avoid them.

To speak more bluntly, the traditional typological arrangement is not only useless for historical inquiry, but even worse, it obscures the evidence and hinders both numismatists and historians in their work. Superficially similar but historically unrelated issues are lumped together, while closely related coins are dispersed. It is a paradox that numismatists publish quantities of material in hopes that specialist historians will provide the contextual interpretation which numismatists cannot, while historians stand in awe of the arcana of numismatic research, and either suspend their usual critical faculties to accept whatever a numismatist tentatively suggests, or ignore numismatics completely. Numismatists in their own work forget that Walker's typological categories are only a convenient system for arranging coins, and come to regard the order in which coins are cataloged as genuinely reflecting their historical relationships. Students of Arab-Sasanian coinage do not study the reformed Arabic dirhams that immediately followed and even overlap in time with the earlier silver. The study of the reformed dirhams has been largely a process of filling in more X's on Walker's tabulation of dates and mints, with virtually no consideration of the possibility of variation in appearance, fineness, weight standard or minting practice from place to place and over the years. Students of Arab-Byzantine coppers do not look at the reformed Arabic coppers that succeeded them. And because, in Walker's system, coins without a date or mint name have a convenient pigeonhole, they are generally left there. This is an evasion of our scientific responsibility. As one distinguished numismatist has said, «every coin has a mint, and it is the numismatist's basic task to establish with as much certainty and precision as possible where, and when, each piece was struck»⁶.

⁵ Aside from the difficulty of assigning coins in accession years to one or the other caliph, the latter system has the great disadvantage that discontinuities in the issues of Umayyad mints very seldom coincide with the accession of a new caliph.

⁶ D.M. Metcalf, *Coinage of the Crusaders and the Latin East in the Ashmolean Museum Oxford* (1983), p. v.

II. A New Research Framework

What should replace the traditional approach? Every student of Umayyad numismatics has noted, at least implicitly, the existence of great regional diversity in the coinage. Each of the major regional administrations, as well as, to a lesser extent, each province and each city, followed its own course. Evidently, monetary decisions were largely made by governors and mint personnel at the regional, provincial, or local level. There is nothing surprising in this; as one historian of the period of the Medinese caliphs has said, «Madina exercised virtually no control over the newly conquered provinces. Central government as such did not exist . . .»⁷ There is little reason to think that this situation changed radically during the Umayyad caliphate. In particular, there was no centralized minting administration that would have enabled the caliph to give orders to a «superintendent of the mints» who could in turn pass on these orders to his subordinates throughout the caliphate. Rather, any decisions about minting, whether at the center or at the provincial level, were sent out to the governors, who could enforce them directly at mints in their capital but had in turn to pass the instruction on to lower level governors in other places. We also should remember that, without a bureaucracy specifically charged with mint policy, the caliph and his governors were nothing like as concerned with coins as are modern collectors and curators. Unless something went wrong to inconvenience the rulers, or to raise strident complaints from the governed, it is unlikely that much attention was paid to the monetary system. There is no evidence of any innovation which took place uniformly and simultaneously throughout the caliphate⁸. Although the 670's/690's, when 'Abd al-Malik carried through his reforms in Damascus, and the period 96-105/715-724 (the reigns of Sulayman, 'Umar II, and Yazid II) were both decades of major change in the coinage in every province, the nature of the changes in each region was quite different.

These considerations all imply that administrative geography should be the basic framework of any classification that is relevant to the history of the coinage. Such a classification would begin with the five major regional administrations that existed at a level between the caliph and the provincial governors. Each of these was independent and largely autonomous with only a limited general responsibility to Damascus. The best known of these is the East (al-Mashriq in Arabic), largely because nearly all the surviving literary sources for Umayyad history emanate from there. These were the lands of the former Sasanian empire, administered at first by separate governors in Basra and Kufa on the desert border of Iraq, and then unified (usually) under a single governor from 50 H. onward. The two great divisions remained, however. Kufa had essentially the north, and Basra controlled southern and eastern Iran. Kufa's territor-

⁷ M.A. Shaban, *Islamic History, A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132): A New Interpretation* (1971), p. 55.

⁸ The above paragraph is equally true for any of the great Muslim empires until the 19th century; and for that matter for the rest of the world throughout history. Even in the 20th century, neither the British nor the French imposed a uniform monetary system throughout their empires. A coin catalogue that compiled all the gold coinage of the British Empire in one section and all the silver in another, or that arranged the coins according to the portrait of the ruler on them, or arranged the mints alphabetically (Bombay, Capetown, London, Melbourne, Ottawa, etc.) would be strange indeed.

ies included Iraq, Adharbayjan (until 94 H.), the large Jibal province, and the lands south and southeast of the Caspian Sea, while the sphere of Basra comprised southern Iraq; the Gulf provinces Khuzistan, Fars, and Kirman; and Khurasan with its appendage Sijistan. The lines of control varied over the years; at times Kufa, Basra, and Khurasan were each separately responsible to the caliph; more usually the entire region was under a single governor, but Basra and Kufa retained their separate administrative identities under subgovernors. The governor of Khurasan, with Sijistan, was sometimes responsible to the governor of Basra but at other times directly subordinate to the governor of the East or even to the caliph. Furthermore, each of the provinces within the spheres of Basra and Kufa had its separate administration, and the larger provinces, such as Jibal, Fars, and Khurasan, were divided into districts, with governors who appointed local governors.

A region that is less clearly recognized (without even a specific name) both in the medieval sources and modern authorities consisted of the provinces of al-Jazira (northern Mesopotamia), Arminiyya (the Caucasus), al-Mawsil (Mosul), Arran, and Adharbayjan. For a long time, the first two provinces were controlled from Syria and the latter three from Kufa, but after the second civil war 'Abd al-Malik placed all five under his brother Muhammad b. Marwan. It was only then that coins began to be issued in those provinces. They were all governed autonomously, usually by a prominent member of the Umayyad family, until the fall of the dynasty.

The next region to the west was Syria, the metropolitan province of the Umayyads and the only one directly governed by the caliph; but Syria also was divided into five *junds*, army districts, from Qinnasrin in the north to Filastin on the south. These apparently had some degree of autonomy in monetary affairs, but were limited to the issue of copper coinage, except in the capital, Damascus. Very little is known about the administration of Syria in the Umayyad period, or even about the central administration in Damascus. Some aspects of the coinage suggest that the *jund* system may have varied from the descriptions of it in later Arab geographers.

Egypt, always the most centralized of Near Eastern countries, stood at the level of both region and province. Until nearly the end of the Umayyad era, it seems to have had only a single mint, first at Alexandria and then at the Arab capital Fustat (modern Cairo). After a brief issue of coppers at various locations, Egypt again had only one mint until the 11th century.

In the beginning, the Maghrib («west») for the Muslims began with Egypt, and the lands to the west were subordinate to that province's governor, but as the conquests extended, Ifriqiyya (North Africa) became autonomous. Spain in turn was subordinate to Ifriqiyya, but later became independent; even so, the coinage of these provinces always had a great deal in common in the Umayyad period.

All these administrative subdivisions, the sequence of their governors, and the changes in the lines of control over time, must be constantly kept in mind in studying with the coinage of the Umayyads. As a result, the true units of study are not the series defined by type, language, and metal, but rather the production of each mint and by extension, of each province and each region. Even in specialized studies of particular coin series or types, the fundamental unit is the sequence of issues for each individual mint, in correlation with other issues from the same mint but of different type or metal, with the issues of nearby mints in the same administrative unit, and with the

issues that preceded and followed the period of study. The ultimate goal of numismatic research on coins of the Umayyad era should be to establish an accurate chronological sequence of the issues of each mint city, dating these issues both relative to each other and absolutely, including periods when the mint did not operate. These sequences can then be grouped to provide numismatic histories of the districts, provinces, regions, and, if appropriate, of the caliphate as a whole. Even such general topics as metrology, epigraphical style, fineness, and mint technology should begin by establishing the specific practice in each locality before attempting to draw wider conclusions.

This kind of research, proceeding from the specific to the general, would be facilitated and encouraged if numismatic collections and catalogues were organized by region, province, mint, and date rather than by type and metal. This system of classifying coins by itself forces the numismatist to think in historical and geographical terms, and produces unexpected correlations and insights. Moreover, it results in a clear presentation of the numismatic evidence for the benefit of the non-numismatist, that is for the historian who needs to have access to the material relating to a particular time and place. For the amateur also, that is for the collector without specialized training in history or Islamic studies, such a system should prove to be simpler to work with once it becomes familiar. To say that a coin is, for example, a dirham of Damascus in Syria of the year 110 H. is a far more concrete attribution than to describe it as a post-reform Umayyad dirham of the caliph Hisham, with the mint and date as an afterthought. It seems natural to identify a coin by its country of issue, and it will become natural so to identify Islamic coins if we remember that the true countries of the Middle East and North Africa are not the territories enclosed by the shifting limits of dynastic power over the centuries, but rather the districts and provinces whose boundaries have remained substantially the same from before Islam to the present day.

III. A Case Study: The Coinage of Umayyad Damascus

To illustrate the rewards of viewing early Islamic coinage in a geographical and chronological framework, it is only possible in the limits of this paper to examine a single mint, Damascus. Since Damascus, the capital of the caliphate, was the site of the invention of Islamic coinage itself, an invention which has lasted thirteen centuries and spread throughout most of the Old World, it is hoped that this example will not be merely of methodological interest⁹.

The first step is to bring the coinage of Damascus together (it has to be assembled from thirteen different places in Walker's two catalogues, as well as from a body of subsequently discovered issues, published and unpublished). When it is put in chronological order, four phases can be seen, the first only in gold and the latter three including gold, silver, and copper coins. The first and second phases, from 72 or perhaps before to 74 H. (A.D. 692/694), can be described as the imperial images period, because the coins have depictions of emperors adapted or copied from the coinage of the Byzantine or Sasanian empires, as well as some religious images from those preceding coinages. Phase three, from 74 to 77 H. (A.D. 694–697), is that of Arab images,

⁹ The introduction of Islamic coinage has also been recently discussed by Claude Cahen, «Origines et débuts de la monnaie musulmane», *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Comptes rendus* 1985, pp. 17–25.

when Arab or Muslim images were substituted for foreign ones. The principal Arab image used in Syria at this time shows the caliph himself standing, girt with his sword, making it appropriate to call this the standing caliph phase. The fourth phase, from 77 H./A.D. 697 onward, is that of the Islamic inscriptional coinage, also called the reformed or post-reform Umayyad coinage, which had only religious inscriptions in Arabic. In Walker's catalogues, and in all treatments of these coins to the present time, the coins of each of these phases and in each of the three different metals are dealt with separately; to a large extent, these different coins from the same mint are regarded as separate fields of numismatic specialization, and collectors and scholars who are interested in one or two of these categories do not pay much attention to the others. In what follows, we will see what happens when we look at the Umayyad coinage of Damascus all together. We will begin with the assumption that coins minted in the same time and place will have certain features in common, reflecting a general minting policy, and conversely that coins which are similar are likely to have been minted at the same place and time. If we consider the various issues of Damascus as part of the continuous history of the mint, it becomes easier to put the parts of that history together, and to understand when, how, and why the coinage began and evolved.

A) Phase one

The coins included in phase one are perhaps neither numerous or important enough to deserve the designation of a phase, comparable to the well-documented later phases in Damascus coinage, but they are clearly linked to the gold coins of the second phase by their relationship to the same unusual Byzantine prototype, including the same treatment of one detail of that prototype, and can only be seen as precursors of phase two¹⁰. The duration of this early phase and its significance in the evolution of official

¹⁰ The issue discussed here is one of three varieties of imitation Byzantine gold coins on which the crosses that normally appear on that coinage (on the crowns and orbs of the emperors and as the central image of the reverse) have been changed to simple vertical marks or T-crosses: George C. Miles, «The Earliest Arab Gold Coinage,» MN 13, 1967, (quoted here «EAGC»), pp. 207–210, Class A; since discovered: a second example of an imitation of Phocas, Miles 1, Bonhams (London) auction sale no. 6 (14–15/9/81), no. 651; a variant of Miles 2–3, Bank Leu auction, 11 october 1983, no. 1. As a class, these imitations closely reproduce Byzantine imperial portraits and have Greek inscriptions (not always completely literate), but no Arabic. The only evidence of Muslim origin is the modification of the crosses. Only one of the five coins described by Miles has a purported Syrian provenance (his no. 3, now in the ANS, 1983.122.1). Until recently, these seemed to be the earliest Damascus gold coinage, corresponding in part to the coppers with adapted imperial portraits and Greek inscriptions, but William E. Metcalf («Three Seventh-Century Byzantine Gold Hoards,» MN 25, 1980, pp. 97–101) has argued, on the basis of the disparity of style of these coins and the purported find of the ANS coin in a hoard otherwise to be assigned to the 670's, that these, including the three-figure issue, are not a coherent group from a single mint and do not represent an official coinage. Only the ANS coin, on the basis of its purported hoard provenance, can plausibly be attributed to Syria before 692, probably before 680. As a group, they are more likely to have been made privately or semi-officially (that is, perhaps, by local governors or military commanders without central authorization), and not necessarily at the same time or place. Some might even have been made after 'Abd al-Malik's new coinage, to supply lingering demand for coinage in the older Byzantine style.

An exception to Metcalf's arguments has to be made for the variety with three standing figures (Miles subclasses 4 and 5), which, although rare, is ineluctably linked to the three-figure coinage with Arabic inscriptions, as discussed in the text. The two other types in Miles Class A seemingly are not to be regarded as official Damascus coins and will not be further considered here.

minting in Damascus is quite unclear. Let us first examine the four coins in question – for that is all there are. These solidi are all imitations of a Constantinople issue of the last years of the emperor Heraclius which can be assigned to the years 636–639 or 638–641 A.D.¹¹. The prototype has on the obverse full-length portrayals of Heraclius and his two sons Heraclius Constantine and Heraclonas standing facing, each holding in his right hand an orb surmounted by a cross and wearing a crown with a cross. The reverse shows a cross potent on a base of four steps with a monogram characteristic of Heraclius' issues to the left and a single Greek letter or two letter monogram to the right. Greek inscriptions surround the central image. The letters and monograms at the right vary: There are *iota*, *iota-alpha*, and *iota-beta*. The two latter have the *iota* attached as a vertical stroke on top of the *alpha* and *beta*. These three variants represent the Greek numerals 10 through 12 and seem likely to be dates, probably corresponding to years of the Byzantine fifteen-year indiction cycle (thus to 635/636 through 638/639 A.D.)¹². This particular Byzantine prototype is the only Byzantine issue of the seventh century before Justinian II's reign to show any standing figure, and the only one to have three figures. It is also the prototype for the phase two dinars with Arabic figures and inscriptions, a powerful argument for linking these phase one imitations with the phase two coins.

The four coins of phase one reproduce this prototype closely, with literate Greek inscriptions, but are marked as Muslim imitations by the total removal of all crosses from the coin. Those on the orbs and crowns of the standing figures are changed into vertical strokes, while the central cross of the reverse becomes a simple T-shaped staff. The interesting feature of the imitations is their treatment of the monograms and letters in the reverse field of the prototype. Each of the four examples now known is different. The obverses are essentially similar, but vary in detail.

A) Spink Zurich auction catalog, 18 February 1986, no. 86: To the left, the Heracleian monogram as on the prototypes; to the right, *iota* (*pl. 31, 1*).

B) Numismatic Fine Arts (Encino, California) auction II, 25–26 March 1976, no. 513; also in the same firm's fixed price list no. 3 (Beverly Hills, California), December 1977, no. 40: To left *alpha*, to right *iota* (*pl. 31, 2*).

C) British Museum; Walker BMCArabByz p. 18 no. 54; Miles EAGC, p. 209, no. 4: To left *iota*, to right *beta* (*pl. 31, 3*).

D) Private collection, present whereabouts unknown: Miles, p. 209, no. 5 (he saw only a «very unsatisfactory» rubbing of the coin, but the letters are clear): To left *iota*, to right *gamma*.

¹¹ Type IVb in Philip Grierson's classification, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, II, 1 (1968), p. 224; *Byzantine Coins* (1982), p. 94. See also Wolfgang Hahn, *Moneta Imperii Byzantini von Heraclius bis Leo III./Alleinregierung (610–720)* (1981), p. 86.

¹² The identification of the letters as dates on the prototype creates a conflict with reliable (though much later) documentary evidence; Grierson, as a result, refuses to accept the letters as dates and assigns the coins to 638–641, while Hahn argues compellingly for their interpretation as dates despite the conflict which he admittedly cannot resolve. The disagreement is not relevant here, but whether the prototype is assigned to 635–639 or 638–641, it is nevertheless contemporary with the years of the Arab conquest of Syria, a fact possibly of significance.

In sum, the letters on these four coins correspond to the Greek numerals 10 through 13. It seems natural to regard these numerals as dates; and yet there are great difficulties in doing so. It is equally difficult to conceive of any other meaning for the numerals, leaving as the only alternative the possibility that the numerals on the imitations have no significance. Let us consider these two possibilities separately.

The hypothesis that the numbers are dates is supported by the appearance of the Heraclian monogram only on the first variety. This indicates an understandable evolution of the imitations, in which the first feature to be dropped is a complicated detail which probably had no meaning to the imitators. In addition, the fact that the imitators understood the Greek letters as numerals is shown by their disintegration of the monograms forms on the prototypes into their two constituent letters; in this, there is no mere aping of the prototypes. Finally, a significance for these letters is indicated by the existence of an issue with *iota-gamma* (13), for which there is no prototype¹³. On the other hand, if the numbers are dates, it is implied that the issue of these imitations extended over at least four years. When could this have been? The coins are linked to phase two, as has been said, by their unusual prototype and by the fact that phase two coins also have a number, *iota-beta*, resulting from the disintegration of the prototype's monogram into its two letters; it seems unlikely that this bit of ingenuity could have occurred twice independently. If, therefore, these are Damascus coins, it is unlikely that they were issued concurrently with the continuous series of gold coins with Arabic inscriptions, and they must therefore be placed earlier. Logically, the imitations with Greek inscriptions should be put earlier than those with Arabic. At the same time, the close resemblance of phase one and two gold coins suggests that the one followed immediately upon the other. Since, as will be argued below, the phase two gold began in 672/692, the phase one coins could be placed in the four years 689/692. Or, possibly, if the date 12 on the imitations with Arabic is taken as their first year of issue, 692, the Greek inscription imitations with dates 10–13 could be assigned to 690–693, overlapping with the new Arabic type; this is not impossible.

But what then do the numbers 10–13 represent? The only dating systems that might use numbers so low in the 7th century were the Byzantine fifteen-year indiction cycle, and the Iranian system of dating coins by regnal years. Neither leads to a result that makes sense in the numismatic context. In the Byzantine indiction cycles current in the late 7th century, years 10–13 would either correspond to the years 681–685¹⁴ or to the years 690–700. The first span covers the years from the death of Mu'awiya up to the first year of 'Abd al-Malik's reign, which seems an improbable time on historical grounds and conflicts with the numismatic necessity to put the coins of phase one and two close together in time. The second span of years is too late, overlapping with the issue of the standing caliph and purely Arabic dinars. Alternatively, if the numerals on the coins are interpreted as regnal years, the tenth to thirteenth years of 'Abd al-Malik would be approximately 694–697, contemporary with the standing caliph dinars and thus also improbably late. Moreover, there is absolutely no evidence suggesting that

¹³ Although there could have been, for if the letters on the prototypes are dates there would be three years left between the latest date known and Heraclius' death. A Heraclian issue of year 13 is by no means impossible.

¹⁴ The indiction year began on 1 September, so that year 10 in the example mentioned would have run from 1 September 681 to 31 August 682, and so on.

the Arabs used any such system of regnal reckoning in any context in the early centuries of Islam. Justinian II, the contemporary Byzantine emperor, came to the throne in the same year as ʿAbd al-Malik, yielding the same result on the unlikely hypothesis that the dates are his regnal years. If the numerals are dates, they are based on an unknown reckoning for which no other evidence survives today.

Finally, even if we ignore this difficulty, the commencement of minting of these imitations runs head on into a historical improbability if it is put four years before 692, that is in 689 or 690. There is a report, to be discussed below in more detail, that Justinian II rejected gold coins sent by the Arabs because they «had a stamp that was not seen before». The context of this report puts it securely in the period 692 or 693, not earlier. If, then, the Arabs had previously begun making imitations of Roman coins on which the crosses had conspicuously been eliminated, would they not have tried to use these in payment of the tribute? And would Justinian have accepted them? It is impossible that he would have accepted such coins, only to burst into objection some years later. It could be argued, perhaps, that these coins were made for local circulation only, while genuine Byzantine coins were sent in tribute, but this leads the argument into more complication than seems plausible.

The argument that the numbers are meaningless, mere copies of those on the prototype, has positive support in addition to the negative arguments against regarding them as dates. The first is the fact that the numbers on the imitations are exactly the same as the numbers on the prototypes, except for the additional number *iota-gamma*; it is possible that the imitations might have been issued in the same four years of their calendar as the prototype in its calendar, but it would be an astonishing coincidence. Secondly, the last number on the Greek inscription imitations is *iota-gamma*, 13, while the number on the Arabic inscription imitations is *iota-beta*, 12; an overlap of the Greek inscription imitations and those with Arabic is not impossible, but seems unlikely. Finally, the Arabic inscription imitations have only one number, 12, though it seems probable that they were struck for some two to three years, from late 72 until some time in 74 (this attribution is discussed in more detail below). The relative abundance of this issue (Miles listed 8 specimens) supports the notion that it was issued for more than one year. If the date on this issue is merely a fossilized detail, it probably was meaningless on the Greek inscriptions also; if the mint felt the need to date the earlier issue according to some current system of reckoning, it is difficult to understand why it ceased to do so on the subsequent issue.

In sum, even though it is clear that the engravers of the Greek imitation dies (or their supervisor) understood that the Greek letters of the prototypes were numbers, and even though they, for some reason, choose to make coins showing all the numbers found on the prototype series, in the end, we have to believe that they did not understand or care about the significance of these numbers and put them on their imitations merely because there were numbers on the prototype. It seems strange that they would not only copy the numbers but even disintegrate the monograms for increased clarity, without having in mind any meaning for the numbers, but the insuperable difficulty of regarding the numbers on the imitations as dates, or of finding any other meaning for them, leaves no alternative conclusion.

B) Phase two

The second issue includes the first gold coinage issued officially and indubitably by the Arabs, as well as the first Arab silver coins of Syria, perpetuating Sasanian design, and the first Arab coppers in Syria, which like the gold are Byzantine in general appearance. The gold coins (*pl.* 31, 4) have three figures on the obverse in what seems to be Arab dress (certainly not Byzantine imperial costume) with no inscription. The reverse has an adaptation of the «cross on steps» which was a standard feature of Byzantine gold coinage in the sixth and seventh centuries¹⁵. On these Arab coins, the cross is modified to a vertical line with a knob on top, a device not easy to name¹⁶. Around the reverse margin is an Arabic inscription which may be translated «In the name of God: there is no god but God alone; Muhammad is the messenger of God.» This is the first recorded appearance of the Muslim shahada on coins, and possibly the earliest surviving physical record of it. To the left and right of the staff on the reverse are the letters B and I, of uncertain significance, but surely related to the letters on the reverse of the three-figure imitations discussed above with Greek inscriptions. On the Arabic inscription imitations, the letters are reversed in order probably because the engraver, accustomed to inscribing Arabic from right to left, read the letters that way also.

It is hard to understand why the Arabs chose this particular obverse prototype. In the previous century, only a single issue, that of Heraclius and his two sons, shows three figures. It is also the only Constantinople gold issue of the period to show full-length standing figures instead of busts. Why was this one issue, out of all the possibilities, selected? Purely by chance? Or is there some significance in the choice of a type with three figures? Who do the three Arabicized figures represent? Might the three figures represent three Arab persons? Islam had no provision for co-caliphs, the system of Augusti and junior Caesars as depicted on many Byzantine issues, but the Umayyads generally designated one or two of their sons as the next successive heirs to the caliphate, with the title *wali 'ahd*. At the time of the new Arab coinage (and until his death in 85/704) 'Abd al-Malik's brother 'Abd al-'Aziz was the next designated heir to the caliphate, as ordered by their father Marwan; there was no second designated heir, so far as is known. 'Abd al-Malik's sons al-Walid and Sulayman were not designated until after the death of 'Abd al-'Aziz¹⁷. There does not, therefore, seem to be any justification in the contemporary political situation for the portrayal of three figures.

The silver coins (*pl.* 31, 5–6) of this phase bear explicit evidence for their attribution in the form of the mint name Dimashq and the dates 72, 73 and 74 written in Arabic at

¹⁵ Walker, *BMCArabByz* p. 18, no. B.2, and at least 8 others listed by Miles, *EAGC*, pp. 210–211, class B. An issue of forgeries of these dinars was produced in Beirut about 1967; the forged coins can be distinguished from genuine ones by the shape of the letter dal in *wahda*; on the genuine coins the letter is rectangular, on the forgeries triangular.

¹⁶ It might be a representation of the staff, *qadib*, carried by the caliph in his capacity as imam, or religious leader of the community (suggested to me by Dr. Estelle Whelan). Miles, «Earliest Arab Gold Coinage», p. 210, n. 14, had already raised the possibility that the staffs that the three figures appear to hold in their right hands are *qadibs*.

¹⁷ L. Caetani, *Chronographia islamica* (Paris, 1912–), IV, 1023.

either side of the reverse central image¹⁸. They have on the obverse a portrait of the Sasanian emperor Khusraw II, just as on his coins and on the great majority of the Arab-Sasanian coins of Iran issued between about 650 and 670. To the right of his portrait is his name, written in Pahlavi (middle Persian) script, with a laudatory inscription in the same language behind his head. These inscriptions and the design of the portrait, as well as the three circles that surround the entire central design and the three star/moon (or sun/moon) symbols in the margin, are all typical of Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian coins, except that in Iran under the Arabs the use of the name of the Sasanian emperor had long since been replaced by the name of the Arab official under whose authority the coin was issued. In the margin of these coins, interrupted by the star/moon symbols, is an Arabic inscription. This takes two forms: On the coins dated 72, (*pl.* 31, 5) there is only «In the name of God: Muhammad is the messenger of God», while the issues of 73 and 74 (*pl.* 31, 6) have the same longer inscription found on the gold coins described above. The coins of 72 also differ in having the mint name to left on the reverse and the date to right, while on coins of 73 and 74 the positions are reversed. The central image of the reverse of all these is a Zoroastrian fire altar with two attendants, just as on Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian coins of Iran.

The copper coins of this phase have a Byzantine imperial portrait on the obverse, not identifiable with any specific prototype but typical of seventh century Constantinopolitan *folles*, and on the reverse a large capital M, also characteristic of Byzantine coppers (it is the symbol of the numeral 40, for the nominal denomination of the coin, 40 *nummi*; it is doubtful whether the Arabs were aware of this significance, or cared; they would have called such a coin a *fals*, plural *fulus*). At Damascus, there were three varieties of this coinage, showing the emperor enthroned or standing, and, for the mint name, with Greek ΔΑΜ only (*pl.* 31, 7), with the Greek and Arabic names ΔΑΜΑΚΚΟΚ and Dimashq (*pl.* 31, 8), or with the Arabic Dimashq only (*pl.* 31, 9). Presumably this order of the three forms corresponds to their actual chronological order, though this is not certain. The three issues belong in the same short period, and are closely interrelated by stylistic features as well as by the frequent use of an obverse die of one issue with a reverse die of another¹⁹.

¹⁸ Only two specimens of the dirham issue of 72 are known today, one in the Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (1968.863), first published by Miles, «Some Arab-Sasanian and Related Coins», MN 7, 1957, p. 191, no. 6, and another in the Ashmolean Museum (University of Oxford. Ashmolean Museum. Report of the Visitors 1969–70, p. 43, pl. XIII, 1). Examples of 73 and 74 H. are listed by Miles, *ibid.* A dirham of 72 H. from Hims mint has recently been acquired by a private collector, and there is a credible rumor that another such coin exists in a New Jersey collection, along with a post-reform dirham of the same mint dated 85 H. Damascus, therefore, was not the only Syrian mint for dirhams, but evidently silver was minted at Hims only occasionally and in minute quantity.

¹⁹ Michael L. Bates, «The «Arab-Byzantine» Bronze Coinage of Syria: An Innovation by ‘Abd al-Malik,» in A Colloquium in Memory of George Carpenter Miles (1904–1975) (1976), pp. 16–27. Elsewhere in Syria, this phase includes all coins with mint names and Byzantine images. They are mostly similar to issues of Constans II, but there are also large coppers of Scythopolis and Jerash imitating coins of Justin and Sophia of the sixth century. Official issues were produced in this phase at eight Syrian mints, Baysan (Scythopolis), Jarash (Gerasa), Damascus, Baalbak, Hims (Emesa), Tabariyya (Tiberias), and Tartus. There are no coins with imperial images

Having described these three coinages, it remains to show that they actually belong together. Only the silver coins have both a mint name and date. The gold coins have neither, and the copper coins have only a mint name. What is the evidence for the attribution of all three coinages to Damascus in the years 72–74 H.?

The attribution of the three-figure Arabic inscription gold coins to Damascus follows from a simple argument: The later reformed Arabic gold coinage with Arabic inscriptions only and without mint name can be shown to be from a single mint; it is logical and assume that the earlier gold coins come from that mint also; and that mint can be presumed to be Damascus, not only from the assumption that the major gold mint of the caliphate would be in the capital, but also by analogies at several points in the history of the gold coinage with contemporary silver and gold coins with the mint name Damascus. There is no controversy among Islamic numismatists on this question. In addition, the three-figure gold coins are linked to the silver coins of the same phase with the mint name Damascus by their similar inscription and epigraphical style.

Having said this, it must be added that certain features of the post-reform coinage, to be discussed below, raise the possibility that the single mint for gold was not always physically located in Damascus, but rather at the residence of the caliph, whether in Damascus or at one of his peripheral palaces. If this is true, it might help explain certain differences in the gold coinage as compared to the silver and copper, as for example why the figures on the three figure gold coinage are somewhat Arabicized, while the portrayals on the silver and copper are close to the norms for Byzantine and Sasanian imperial portraits; but, since the possibility of a separate establishment for gold is only hypothetical, it is convenient to regard the gold as issued from Damascus. In any event, we do not know where 'Abd al-Malik lived at the time of this early coinage.

The date of the gold and copper coins of this phase is more difficult to establish. The arguments for the two coinages are different. Walker did not date the gold coins precisely, but believed they might be as early as the 680's, or even before, although he thought that in all probability they were issued a year or two before 74 H.²⁰ Miles adopted the latter dating, specifying the years 691–693, primarily, it would seem, because of their close resemblance in many details to the standing caliph dinars of 74–77 H., but he gives no positive arguments in his article for 691 as the *terminus post quem*²¹. Much of the argumentation on this point has been connected with the intro-

from the southernmost jund, Palestine, or from the northern jund, Qinnasrin (including Aleppo), but there are also «mintless» coins of this period, with the same fabric and style as the issues bearing a mint name, which may come from the north or south, as well as another group of coins without a mint name or, usually, any indication of Arab origin, most often poorly struck on irregular flans, which remain still to be attributed and may be unofficial issues of an earlier date. The only study of any of these mints, aside from the present author's essay on Damascus cited above, is Lutz Ilisch, «Die umayyadischen und 'abbasidischen Kupfermünzen von Hims: Versuch einer Chronologie,» Münstersche numismatische Zeitung 10, no. 3 (August 1980), pp. 23–30.

²⁰ Walker, *BMCArabByz*, p. 18.

²¹ Miles, *EAGC*, pp. 224–227; he quotes extensively a private letter from Philip Grierson in support of this dating. In this context, Miles was speaking only of the three figure coins with Arabic inscriptions. He did not try to give the three figure coins with Greek inscriptions a separate date, but placed all the coins of his class A «in the decade before 691 and probably closer to 690 than to 680» (p. 229). Walker placed the version with Greek inscriptions «circa A.D. 690».

duction by Justinian II of a new Byzantine issue with a portrayal of Christ, but the date of that issue is also uncertain and is partially derived from the dating of the new Arab gold coins. Whether the two issues are related at all is only a matter of hypothesis, since there is no historical evidence on the point. Since there are separate reasons to assign the two innovations to the same period, it seems possible that there might have been some relationship between them, but given the ambiguities of the situation it seems better to try to date the beginning of the three figure Arabic dinars using the independent numismatic and historical evidence, and only then to see what relationship they might have to the new Byzantine coinage.

The numismatic evidence for the gold coinage consists in the analogy with the silver coins of Damascus, where the first known date is 72 H. (early June 691–late May 692). Not only is the gold coinage logically analogous to the silver, in that both are somewhat Arabicized versions of the preceding imperial coinages used by the Arabs, but also the epigraphical style of the Arabic inscriptions on both coinages is very similar. On the other hand, it is not essential to believe that coinage in both metals began simultaneously, and on this point it may be remarked that the long inscription on the gold coins is like that found on the second subphase of the silver coinage with dates 73 and 74, not like the short inscription of the known coins of 72. Moreover, it is not possible to conclude, on the basis of the very small number of silver coins known today, that the transition from the shorter to the longer inscription took place exactly at the turn of the years 72–73. The change may have been made in 72, in which case we would expect to find coins of that year with the longer inscription, or in 73, in which case we would find coins with the short inscription and that date. Finally, there is no compulsion to believe that the inscription on gold and silver had to be the same at the beginning; an alternative is that the silver coinage originally had a shorter inscription, then was changed to conform with the gold. In sum, the numismatic analogy, if it is accepted, points to 72 H., or possibly 73, but provides no precise and firm date for the beginning of Arab gold coinage.

The historical evidence may permit greater precision. There are two reports relevant to the date of the first Arab gold coinage, one²² Arab and one Byzantine. The Arab report originates with Abu'l-Zinad 'Abd Allah b. Dhakwan, a scholar of the Umayyad era who died about 130–132 H. His reports were recorded by al-Waqidi, whose works are lost; but al-Baladhuri and al-Tabari quote the report from al-Waqidi²³. The report in its simplest version reads, in full, «'Abd al-Malik was the first to

²² There are many Arab reports purporting to give the date of the first Arab gold coinage, but nearly all relate to the beginning of the standing caliph or Islamic reformed dinars; or to events in Iraq, not Damascus; or are so obviously wrong as to be irrelevant. In general, there is no informed contemporary Arab source on the beginnings of Islamic coinage; all surviving reports are either attempts to understand what might have happened, or ought to have, or are memories of people who were alive at the time but not on the scene of events.

²³ al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (1866), p. 469; also quoted by al-Baladhuri, p. 467, and by al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, II, 939, with the same *isnad* («citation») but in the two latter places adding respectively the specific years 74 and 76. Since neither of these years can correspond to the *'am al-jama'a* mentioned in the report, and since each of the two authors has previously quoted a report specifying the year which is added to Abu'l-Zinad's report, it is evident that the specific years have been added by the two authors and were not mentioned in al-Waqidi's version of the report. The second version of the report in al-Baladhuri is surely closest to the original. «Report» is used in this discussion as a translation of the Arabic *hadith*.

strike gold and silver coins in the *‘am al-jama‘a*.» The *‘am al-jama‘a*, «year of unity», is the year in which the contest for the caliphate between ‘Abd al-Malik and his rival ‘Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr came to an end, and is generally considered to be the year 73 H., in which Ibn al-Zubayr was killed. This year extended from late May 692 to mid-April 693. We should bear in mind for the moment, however, that Abu’l-Zinad must have been young and was not active in public life at the time of the new coins; his terse report suggests no special knowledge and may have been based either on hearsay or on his memory of an event in which he had no personal involvement. The connection he makes between the new coinage and the *‘am al-jama‘a* is significant, as will be seen, but does not necessarily point to 73 H.

The more valuable report comes from a non-Islamic source, Theophanes, a Byzantine historian of the ninth century. In his *Chronographia* Theophanes mentions under three successive years the restoration of unity in the Islamic world, the refusal of Justinian to accept new gold coins paid to him in tribute by the Arabs, and the battle of Sebastopolis in which an army led by Justinian was severely defeated by the Arabs. Theophanes alleges that the new gold coins of the Arabs were one of the causes of the rupture of the truce between the Arabs and Byzantines and of the subsequent battle²⁴. Since his passage is often discussed but seldom quoted, it may be useful to give it almost in full as recently translated²⁵: «In this year, thanks to a lack of good sense, Justinian broke the peace with ‘Abd al-Malik. [‘He sent Cypriots to resettle their island, which was to have been left neutral.‘] Also, Justinian would not accept the money ‘Abd al-Malik sent, as it had a new type of stamp and had never been that way before. When ‘Abd al-Malik heard this, he satanically dissembled and called on Justinian not to break the peace, but rather to accept his money. Though the Arabs could not accept the Romans’ impress on their own coins, they would give the Romans the correct weight of gold and there would not be any loss from the new Arab coinage. But Justinian thought ‘Abd al-Malik’s request was caused by fear. He did not understand that what the Arabs wanted was . . . to break the peace with a pretext that seemed plausible. This is just what happened. [‘P. 64: Justinian, at ‘Abd al-Malik’s request, sends columns to use in rebuilding the Ka’ba. In the next year’] Justinian made a selection from the Slavs [‘and formed a special army of 30 000 men. He then’ wrote to the Arabs that he would not abide by the peace which had been agreed upon in writing. ‘With his special army and all the cavalry’] he travelled by sea to Sebastopolis. The hypocritical Arabs did not choose to break the peace, but imperial guilt and indiscretion forced them to do so.»

²⁴ James D. Breckenridge, («The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II» NNM no. 144 (1959), pp. 73–75 dismisses Theophanes’ explanation, but this is only because Breckenridge believes that the Arabs broke the truce unilaterally and attacked the Romans; it is clear enough from Theophanes that in fact it was Justinian who advanced to Cilicia and thus made the first aggressive move, so that the insistence of the Arabs in sending the tribute in their unacceptable coins – perhaps even their infringement on the imperial monopoly of gold minting (Robert S. Lopez, «Mohammed and Charlemagne: A Revision», *Speculum* 18 [1943], pp. 14–38) – becomes a plausible reason for Justinian to consider the truce violated and to take steps to enforce payment of the tribute in proper coin.

²⁵ The *Chronicle of Theophanes*, translation Harry Turtledove (1982), p. 63. In the quotation here, brackets enclose material condensed from Turtledove’s translation. Theophanes puts the refusal of the new coins in *Annus Mundi* 6183, which Turtledove equates with 1 Sept. 691 to 31 August 692.

This all hangs together well enough, if we discount Theophanes' natural anti-Arab prejudice (he, or his source, wants to blame Justinian for the termination of the treaty and the disaster that followed, while at the same time blaming the Arabs for their hypocrisy in meeting Justinian's advance). Whether or not the new coinage was one of the «real» causes of the subsequent war is immaterial for numismatics. What clearly emerges from the text, however, is that, according to Theophanes, the new coinage came after the reunification of the caliphate, and before the battle of Sebastopolis. The latter *terminus ante quem* is certain, because one result of the battle was that the Arabs ceased to pay tribute, so there could have been no occasion for them to send new gold coins to the Byzantines afterwards. According to the standard authors on Byzantine history, the battle took place in 692. Presumably Justinian would have mounted his attack during the normal campaigning season in the area, which was, according to an Arab author, from 10 May to 8 September²⁶. Allowing some leeway for contingencies, we can say that the battle must have been before the end of September 692, or before the end of the fifth month of 73 H., and could possibly have been as early as May 692 (which overlaps the last month of 72 and the first month of 73 H.). The only original Arab source to mention the battle, al-Tabari, places it in 73 H.

Certainly a period of several months at least must be presumed to have intervened between the first striking of Arab coins and the battle: the coins would have to have been minted in a quantity large enough at least to pay the tribute²⁷, the money would have to have been sent to Justinian, he would have sent his protest to 'Abd al-Malik, 'Abd al-Malik had to consider and return his reply, Justinian had to raise and transport his army to Cilicia, and the Arabs had to make their way there to meet him. One can easily imagine as much as a year elapsing. But, if Theophanes' sequence of events is correct, the new coins did not reach Justinian until after the Muslims had reunified the caliphate. What, then, is the date of this latter event, as perceived by the Byzantines?

The Muslim and modern historians mark the end of the civil war with the final defeat and death of Ibn al-Zubayr, which occurred on 17 Jumada I 73 or 5 October 692 according to most sources (a few put it a month later). Theophanes is, then, either seriously in error when he makes the battle of Sebastopolis come long after this event; or he (or his source) did not have this event in mind when he spoke of the end of the Muslim civil war. For all practical purposes, in fact, the caliphate had been reunified a year earlier, in Jumada I or II (the fifth or sixth Muslim months) of 72 H., October-November 691, when 'Abd al-Malik's forces defeated Ibn al-Zubayr's governor of the East in Iraq²⁸. Almost immediately thereafter, the victorious general was sent to besiege Ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca. Although it then took a year to eliminate Ibn al-Zubayr completely, the process was lengthened by the reluctance of the attackers to assault the holy city and the Ka'ba itself. For observers in Byzantium, such as Theophanes' source, and for most people in Syria and Iraq, the middle of 72 would have been the time at

²⁶ Qudama, quoted by M. Canard, «Byzantium and the Muslim World to the Middle of the Eleventh Century», Ch. XVII of *The Cambridge Medieval History*, IV, *The Byzantine Empire*, part 1, *Byzantium and Its Neighbours* (1966), p. 697.

²⁷ The tribute was 365 000 solidi per year, according to a Byzantine source; 'Abd al-Ameer 'Abd Dixon, *The Umayyad Caliphate 65–86/684–705 (A Political Study)* (1971), pp. 122–123.

²⁸ For these dates, see Dixon's detailed analysis, pp. 134–139.

which the fighting finally ended and 'Abd al-Malik's authority was established throughout the land. It seems very probable that it was this event that was associated in Abu'l-Zinad's memory with the beginning of gold coinage in Damascus, leading him to date the coinage to the *'am al-jama'a*. And it is without much doubt this event which makes an appropriate *terminus post quem* for the initiation of the new Arab gold coinage. With his final victory all but accomplished, 'Abd al-Malik could turn his attention to peaceful projects. Recently, for example, it has been argued that the Dome of the Rock was begun in the year 72²⁹; surely not until after the victory in Iraq.

Returning for a moment to the numismatic evidence, there is further reason to regard 'Abd al-Malik's victory in Iraq as the necessary precedent of the new coinage. The epigraphical similarity of the Arabic inscriptions on the gold and on the silver coins of phase two has been remarked above; the essence of this similarity is the peculiar archaic quality of the Arabic script, which, like all the Arabic inscriptions of the Arab-Sasanian coinage of the East, was evidently engraved by workmen who were accustomed to engraving Pahlavi (middle Persian). That is, the strokes that are assembled to form the Arabic letters are essentially the same in form as the strokes that make up Pahlavi letters, though the alphabets of the two languages are different. The coins themselves, then, are evidence that the workmen who made them were brought from Iraq or elsewhere in the East, and this could only have happened after 'Abd al-Malik's victory. Indeed, where else could the men have come from? The nearest mints to Damascus were Alexandria (or perhaps already by 72 H., Fustat), Constantinople, and Basra, but the early Damascus coins have no stylistic affinity whatever with the crudely engraved Egyptian coppers, while Constantinople is out of the question for evident reasons. The rather nicely engraved gold coins are hardly the work of locally recruited self-taught beginners, and most conclusively, the silver coins in every detail of their design are typical of the Arab-Sasanian style of the East in the early 70's – not the work of untrained men attempting to imitate a foreign coinage. The workers were surely Persian die engravers brought from Basra or another Eastern mint, and available to 'Abd al-Malik only after his victory in Iraq.

Assembling together all these considerations, the beginning of Arabic gold coinage³⁰ can be securely placed after Jumada I or II, 72 (October–November 691), and realistically a few months after that date to allow time for the organization of the mint and transport of its personnel from Iraq. The mint was certainly open before the end of 72 (before 22 May 692), because the earliest silver coins bear that date. Also, gold coins surely began to be issued at least some months before the summer of 692, when the battle of Sebastopolis occurred. With a high degree of confidence, we can then say that gold and silver coinage began in Damascus in late 72 H./early 692. The date of the end

²⁹ In a forthcoming monograph by Julian Raby and Sheila Blair on Jerusalem in 'Abd al-Malik's era, Dr. Blair allowed me to read a partial draft.

³⁰ Although the preceding arguments apply mainly to Arabic inscription imitations, it seems likely, in view of the discussion above of phase one, that the imitations with Greek inscriptions were struck for a very brief period immediately before those with Arabic, and therefore that the date of their commencement was nearly the same.

of the phase two issues presents no problem, since the last known date on phase two silver, 74, is the same as the first date on the standing caliph gold coins, though there is no historical connection that would enable greater precision than this one year, from 13 May 693 to 1 May 694.

The redating implied by assigning the copper coins with imperial Byzantine portrayals to the same era as the phase two silver and gold is far more radical. Walker and others believed that the coppers of Byzantine type began with the Arab conquest of Syria or shortly thereafter and extended nearly to the end of the century, while the standing caliph coppers are dated by Walker from ca. 670 into the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705). The major modification to this picture has been the gradual realization that Syria probably issued no coinage at all under the Arabs until, probably, 692. The dating of the copper began to be brought forward when Grierson and Miles³¹ noted that the reverse of nearly all standing caliph coppers is derived not from Byzantine copper coinage, but rather from the reverse of Byzantine gold; and this reverse appears in Muslim coinage only with the standing caliph obverse in 74 H. It is therefore reasonable that the type was adapted first for gold coins, and only then transferred to the copper. Moreover, it is far more plausible that the gold and copper coins with a similar innovative obverse, the standing caliph, were issued simultaneously. Since the gold coins are dated 74–77 (about 693–697), and there is also a silver issue with the standing caliph, dated 75, the standing caliph copper without much doubt must be put at the same time.

If this adjustment is made, the date for the termination of the presumably earlier imperial image coppers is brought forward to 74, leaving a span of some 60 years from its inception, if it began at the time of the conquest, as Walker believed. Two arguments, however, can be made against this chronology³². First, it is extremely unlikely that the Arabs began issuing coinage in Syria immediately after the conquest, and improbable that they would have begun at any time in the subsequent years before ʿAbd al-Malik's reign; and second, the coinage with imperial images cannot have extended over a long period, but rather was only a brief issue. The first proposition is based on the absence of any Byzantine minting in Syria before the Arabs, with the improbability that any caliph before ʿAbd al-Malik would have made such an innovation; on marked difference in fabric between the Byzantine and Arab coppers, showing that mint technology was not taken over by the Arabs from the Byzantines (the Arab coins are of superior workmanship); and on the fact that the Arab coins are not simple perpetuations of a Byzantine prototype (as was the case in Egypt and Iran) but merely have the familiar attributes of Byzantine money, intended to circulate with it, or substitute for it. The second argument is supported by the fact that the different imperial types at each of the Syrian mints are few in number and very similar in style, and are often die-linked to each other. There is virtually no possibility that the issue of these coins extended over five decades. Their lifespan must have been short, and can easily be fitted into two or three years, as the copper parallels of the earliest gold and silver

³¹ Philip Grierson, «The Monetary Reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik: Their Metrological Basis and Their Financial Repercussions,» *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 3, 1960, pp. 246–247; see also Miles «The Iconography of Umayyad Coinage», *Ars Orientalis* 3, 1959, p. 209.

³² See M. Bates, «The «Arab-Byzantine» Bronze Coinage.»

coins of Damascus, immediately preceding the standing caliph issues and probably to be put in the years 72–74/692–694. Although it is impossible to prove that the copper coinage of Damascus did not begin a year or a few years before the gold and silver, the commencement of the latter coinages seems the most likely time for the beginning of the copper also. Before 692, Syria got along on gold and copper coins imported from Byzantium and silver coins from Iraq and Iran, all of which are often found in hoards of the 7th century.

If, finally, we ask why coinage was introduced in Damascus at this time, the literary sources tell us little. Only one report purports to reveal the discussions that must have taken place in the court of ‘Abd al-Malik³³. According to this story, ‘Abd al-Malik learned that the papyri exported to Byzantium from Egypt were marked with a cross and Christian inscription; he ordered this changed to Islamic religious inscriptions. The emperor objected and threatened to put derogatory references to the Prophet on the coinage that came to the Arabs from Constantinople. ‘Abd al-Malik was advised (by ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. Marwan in Bayhaqi’s version, by Khalid b. Yazid in Baladhuri’s, by the ‘Alid Muhammad b. ‘Ali b. al-Husayn in al-Damiri’s) to defuse this threat by forbidding the entry or circulation of Roman dinars, striking his own instead. It is impossible to say how much historical reality is concealed in this report. Certainly the Byzantine emperor would not have put any reference to the Muslim prophet on his coins, even negative, and the report is clear that the Arab response was to a threat, not to actual coins, but the report may nevertheless refer to the issue of new solidi by Justinian II with a portrait of Christ, which the Arabs might well have found objectionable. In Bayhaqi’s longer version, ‘Abd al-Malik is also advised as to the design and inscriptions of the new coinage, but the proposed design is approximately that of the reformed Islamic dinar, indicating that the transmitters of the report were entirely unaware of the preceding dinars with images. It is obvious that this report is not based on first hand evidence, but it may preserve in some fashion rumors and stories that were current in Damascus about the time of the new innovations. All the other reports on the origin first of Arab Syrian coinage and then of the new Islamic type are patently *ex post facto* attempts by later reporters to explain the innovation, and never bear any relation to the actual numismatic evidence.

One factor that has not been previously considered is the Arab tribute payment to the Byzantines, amounting, according to one source, to 365,000 dinars (that is, solidi) per year³⁴. Where did these solidi (for there were no other gold coins available) come from? Finds of hoards of solidi in Syria, and the use of the solidus as prototype for the first

³³ In its longest form, in al-Bayhaqi, *al-Mahasin wa’l-masawi* (1961), II, 232–236 (known to me only as extensively quoted and paraphrased by Hassan ‘Ali Hallaq, *Ta’rib al-nuqud wa’l-dawawin fi al-‘asr al-umawi* (1978), pp. 33–39); a shorter version is in al-Baladhuri, *Kitab futuh al-buldan* (ed. M.J. DeGoeje, Leiden, 1863–1866), p. 240; the version of the story in al-Damiri (d. 808/1405–06), *Hayat al-hayawan*, translated by H. Sauvaire (*Matériaux pour servir à l’histoire de la numismatique et de la métrologie musulmans* (1882), pp. 26–31, is explicitly derived from al-Bayhaqi, though it is different and longer. Neither author cites a source for the story, Bayhaqi as usual but untypically for Baladhuri. The latter, however, quotes ancillary reports supporting the story from al-Mada’ini, a reputable historian, and ‘Awana b. al-Hakam, the best informed of the muhaddithun on Syria under the Umayyads.

³⁴ The figure is obviously 1000 dinars per day, and this neat correspondance suggests the possibility of a historical fiction, though it is perhaps not impossible.

Arab gold coinage, suggest that there were solidi in circulation in Syria after the Arab conquest. These would have come from the booty of the conquest itself, probably from additional booty taken in raids on Byzantine territory, and perhaps from a favorable trade balance between Syria and Byzantium; but the supply could not have been infinite, and payment of a substantial tribute might well, after the first years, have drained not only the treasury but also the stock of solidi available for taxation. On the other hand, there must have been a certain stock of gold in the country, in the form of bullion, jewelry, and vessels. Bullion gold itself could not have been used to pay the tribute; if it were, Justinian could have no objection to the new Arab coins, since as bullion they were as good as any other form of payment. It might be suggested, therefore, that one motive for the new coinage was to monetarize stocks of gold that otherwise could not be used.

Still, this cannot be the entire explanation; it does not, for example, explain why silver and copper coins were also minted. We are on safer ground if we simply assume that 'Abd al-Malik perceived the inconvenience and economic loss that resulted from the absence of minting in Syria and proceeded to remedy the situation. A mint's function, after all, is to turn metal into money. Without a mint, bullion could be turned into gold coins only by selling bullion or unusable coins to merchants; if there was sufficient demand for gold coinage in Syria (implying sufficient bullion to support the demand), a trade in bullion might grow up between Syria and Constantinople, the nearest gold mint, even though such trade was illegal under Byzantine law³⁵. Because it was illegal, this trade would probably have had to proceed through several intermediary stages; the profits from it at each stage would have had to be sufficient to cover transportation, security costs, and, ultimately, the Byzantine mint charges; and most of the costs and profits would have gone to foreigners. In other words, the exchange of bullion for coins in Syria probably took place at a substantial discount on the value of the bullion. Installation of a mint eliminated the costs of middlemen and transportation, and enabled the treasury as well as other customers to turn bullion into coinage for essentially only the cost of the labor required. The remarkable aspect of the matter is not that 'Abd al-Malik instituted minting, but rather that a half century elapsed after the Arab conquest before a mint was set up in the capital of the caliphate. It may well be that booty and trade provided a sufficient supply of coinage to meet Syria's needs before payment of the tribute began; or perhaps the delay is to be explained by conservatism or preoccupation with other matters.

It was mentioned above that a new Byzantine gold solidus, with a portrait of Christ on the obverse, was issued for the first time at about the same time as the first Arab gold coins. For long, both Islamic and Byzantine numismatists have seen some connection between the two events: Either the new Arab gold coinage was a result of Muslim dislike of Justinian's solidi with the portrait of Christ; or Justinian's coin was a sort of revenge or counterblow for Arab impertinence in producing their own gold coins pro-

³⁵ Michael F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–450* (1985), pp. 275–299. It is unlikely that imperial prohibition could completely stop the trade; but the more effectively such prohibition was enforced, the greater the difficulty of obtaining gold coins for bullion in Damascus, the greater the discrepancy in the value of the two commodities, and the greater the advantage to the Syrians and the Arabs in having their own mint.

claiming Allah and Muhammad. In the foregoing discussion, a number of reasons have been advanced to explain the timing and motivation of the new Arab coinage entirely on the basis of events and necessities in the Muslim world; but it has to be admitted that it is irresistably tempting to connect the introduction and rapid evolution of Islamic gold coins between 692–697 and the introduction of a radically new Byzantine gold coin type in Justinian II's first reign, 685–695. But what is the connection? We do not, in fact, know the date of the new Byzantine coin. At least since Breckenridge's study³⁶ the date of the new coin has been accepted as 692. This dating is based in part on the possible connection of the new Byzantine coin with the new Arab coinage, and in part on the possible relationship of the new Byzantine coinage with certain canons issued by the Quinisexte Council of the church, convoked by Justinian in 692 (or so it is said; the date of the Council itself is not easy to establish, according to Breckenridge³⁷). The most relevant canon is considered to be Canon 83, which forbids the representation of Christ by the symbol of the lamb, and orders that henceforth he be represented only in his human form. Neither this or any other canon of the council says anything about coinage; nor was there any lamb or other non-human symbol of Christ on the old-style Byzantine coinage; nor was there any previous rule preventing human representation of Christ. It may well be that the year of the council was one when discussions of the representation of Christ were in the air, but the fact should be honestly faced that this basis for the dating of the new coins is put forward only because there is absolutely no other evidence – almost nothing is known of internal Byzantine events in Justinian's first reign. There is no reason why the new coinage might not have been introduced several years before the council, or several years afterward. We simply do not know. Since it seems to be possible to date the new Arab coinage fairly precisely and certainly, it remains to Byzantine numismatists to re-examine the coinage of Justinian II's first reign to see if it too can be more precisely dated. If we can decide, at a minimum, which coinage came first, it will be easier to speak of action and reaction, cause and effect. Byzantinists should remember, at least, that Breckenridge's date is only a plausible hypothesis resting on several speculations, and not a fixed datum.

As for the rapid evolution of the coinage once begun, the coins tell their own story: The new coinage begins with Arab imitation or adaptation of the familiar foreign coins they were already using. Then, presumably because of national or religious objections to this, they substituted Arab and Muslim images for the imperial and religious images of the Byzantine and Sasanian coins; but one can imagine that there was hostility to the creation of Islamic religious imagery as well as to the portrayal of the caliph as if he were the successor to the former emperors, and so the purely religious Islamic type was created. Subject to the unlikely discovery of a contemporary historical source, this seems to be as close as we can come to the possible reasons for the rapid succession of monetary innovations in Damascus at the end of the seventh century.

³⁶ Cited above, n. 24.

³⁷ *Iconography*, p. 10, n. 14. Strictly speaking, Breckenridge follows Leclercq in dating the council to Indictio V, that is, 1 September 691 to 31 August 692.

It has been suggested that it was not the first Arab gold coinage, but rather the standing caliph or purely Arabic coins that were the Arab reaction to the new Byzantine coinage portraying Christ, but until the latter is more securely dated, nothing can be said about this.

C) Phase three

The coinage of the third phase, with the standing caliph image, exists in gold, silver and copper. The gold coins (*pl. 31, 10*) have on the obverse a figure standing, wearing what seems to be a *kaffiya* or Bedouin scarf headdress, with his hand on a sword girt around his waist. The various details of this portrayal, which is important for the dress and regalia of the early caliphs, are discussed by Miles and need not to be described here³⁸. Around the margin of the obverse is the same religious inscription that appears on the reverse of the previous gold issue. On the reverse of the standing caliph gold is the same symbol as the previous issue, the modified cross on steps, and an Arabic inscription «In the name of God this dinar was struck» followed by the date in words. The known dates are from 74 to 77 H³⁹.

The corresponding dirhams are known only with the date 75 H. (*pl. 31, 11*). Their obverse greatly resembles the previous dirhams of Damascus, with the same imperial portrait, except that the knot of hair at the back of the figure's head has been eliminated, and the Pahlavi inscriptions to right and left have been replaced by an Arabic inscription reading «struck in the year five and seventy». The reverse is radically modified. The Zoroastrian fire altar and attendants of the previous dirhams have been replaced by single figure similar to that on the obverse of the standing caliph gold, with inscriptions to left and right reading *amir al-mu'minin khalifat Allah* – «Commander of the Believers, Caliph of God.» The name of the mint is not inscribed on the coin⁴⁰.

The copper coinage of this phase has the standing caliph image on the obverse, surrounded either by the same religious inscriptions as on the obverse of the gold and silver coins (*pl. 31, 12*), or by the inscription *li-'Abd Allah 'Abd al-Malik Amir al-Mu'minin* («of the servant of God 'Abd al-Malik commander of the believers» *pl. 31, 13*). Presumably the first inscription is the earlier form, though this is not certain. On the reverse is another modified version of the cross on steps, with a circle replacing the horizontal arm of the cross. To the right is the mint name *Dimashq* and in the margin the *shahada* as on the obverse of the corresponding dinars and dirhams, but without the preface «In the name of God». Standing caliph coppers were also issued at about fourteen other mints. In this phase, coins appear for the first time from mints in Palestine (where the coins have a cursive *m* on the reverse instead of the modified cross on steps) and, to the north, in the Quinnasrin district of Syria and the adjacent Diyar Mudar district of

³⁸ Miles, EAGC, pp. 216–224.

³⁹ Nearly all the known specimens are cataloged by Miles, EAGC, pp. 212–214. The unique example of 74 H. is in the Karachi Museum. The unique dinar of 75 H. described by Miles is now in the collection of the American Numismatic Society (1970.63.1). The two specimens of 76 are in the British Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale, and in addition to the specimens of 77 listed by Miles (in the Bibliothèque Nationale and one formerly in the Jena collection) there is now a third in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum.

⁴⁰ Only two specimens exist, one in Moscow and one in the ANS (1966.151.1); see George C. Miles, «Mihrab and 'Anazah: A Study in Early Islamic Iconography,» in *Archeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld* (1952), nos. 4–5.

al-Jazira. Possibly, however, some of the new mints had previously issued imperial image coppers without a mint name, because there are many examples of such coins still to be attributed. All the standing caliph mints use one or both of the two obverse inscriptions found on the Damascus coppers, except for two obscure places in the Qinnasrin district, Manbij and Ma'arrat Misrin, which use *khalifat Allah amir al-mu'minin*, the same inscription as on the reverse of the standing caliph silver, probably because of administrative confusion⁴¹.

The attribution of these coins presents little problem. The dinars and dirhams are dated, and even though they bear no mint name, analogy is a sufficient argument for their attribution to Damascus. It is all but certain that the date of the commencement of the standing caliph coppers at Damascus (and elsewhere in Syria and Jazira) coincided with the commencement of the standing caliph gold in 74 H./A.D. 693–694, because, if imitation of previous imperial coins was unacceptable in gold, it would most likely have been unacceptable in copper as well. For the same reason, it is improbable that any Sasanian type silver coins with the date 75 will be found, even though that is the only date known at present for the standing caliph silver coinage. Rather, a possibility exists that standing caliph dirhams of 74 will be found, though a lack of demand for silver coinage (which presumably was not previously much used in Syria) may have caused delay in introducing the new type in silver. It is not certain how long the standing caliph phase may have lasted for silver coinage, because the subsequent Arabic post-reform dirhams were not introduced until 79 H., two years after the commencement of post-reform dinars. The question is complicated by the existence of another dirham issue which possibly should be placed at Damascus between the standing caliph and reformed dirhams. The issue, which bears no mint name or date, is quite different from those that preceded it (*pl. 31, 14*). The obverse has an unusual portrait of Sasanian style but without the normal Sasanian regalia, and on the reverse there is a representation of the *mihrab* of a mosque with the spear (*'anaza*) of the Prophet upright within it. The obverse inscriptions include the name Khusraw in Pahlavi script and the standard religious inscription, while the reverse has the same caliphal titles as on the standing caliph reverse, along with a new inscription, *nasarahu Allah* («may God grant him victory»)⁴². It is not certain that this issue should be placed at Damascus, despite the fact that it has caliphal titles not known on coins elsewhere than in Syria. If from Damascus, should it be regarded as contemporary with the standing caliph gold coinage, replacing the standing caliph silver issue in 75 or after, or did it fill the gap between the end of the standing caliph gold in 77 and the beginning of post-reform silver coinage in 79? One thing is almost certain: the standing caliph coinage in copper and silver (if it was still being issued) ended when the standing caliph gold ceased in 77 H. If the image came to be unacceptable on gold, we may be sure it was also forbidden in the other metals.

D) Phase four

Phase four, beginning in 77 H. for gold (*pl. 31, 15*) and 79 H. for silver (*pl. 31, 16*), is that of the purely Islamic coinage bearing only religious inscriptions in Arabic. The most remarkable feature of this new coinage, considering its longevity, is the near total

⁴¹ Standing caliph coppers are very common; see Walker, *BMCArabByz*, pp. 22–42.

⁴² Miles, *loc. cit.* (n. 40). Four specimens are known.

absence of any experimentation or fumbling in its adoption. The first gold dinars of 77 are exactly like the last Umayyad ones of 132, and not greatly different from the 'Abbasid dinars of the first seventy years or so. This archaic style in fact persisted in North Africa on the dinars of the Aghlabids and early Fatimids until well into the tenth century. In silver, there is only one dirham without a mint name, probably from Damascus (though its attribution still needs to be carefully considered) to attest to a preliminary stage of dirham production before the adoption of the standard design, which was, like that of the dinar, retained to the end of the Umayyad era and with minor modification for some time into the 'Abbasid period (and, at the mint of Cordoba under the Umayyad amirs of Spain, until nearly the end of the ninth century). Moreover, the general design of the new coins, which several lines of horizontal inscription enclosed by a circular marginal inscription, became standard on gold and silver Islamic coinage until the tenth century, and in the countries loyal to the Sunni 'Abbasid caliphate until the thirteenth century in the East and the fourteenth century in Egypt and Syria. Most of the inscriptions were also retained, even when their arrangement varied.

No study of the output of reformed dinars and dirhams from Damascus has been made. Such a study should be based primarily on a die study, that is a detailed catalogue of the individual stamps used to produce the obverses and reverses of dinars and dirhams year by year. On the basis of the number of dies used in each year, it would be possible to graph fluctuations in the quantity of coins issued, assuming that the number of coins produced per die was relatively constant. This assumption, however, is only approximately true; for example, if there are five teams of strikers working in the mint, five sets of dies have to be prepared even if there is not enough work to keep all the teams busy throughout the year. At Damascus, however, it seems likely that output was large enough that no pair of dies would last for a full year, making it necessary to make new dies as needed so that the number of dies would closely approximate the number of coins issued, on the average. A die study of either precious metal coinage from Damascus would also yield suggestive data for the interpretation of the secret points on the coins and probably also for the organization of work in the mint. It is less safe to draw conclusions about output from present day representation of dates, because chance factors intervene to too large an extent in the survival of coins, but it is notable and surely significant that dirhams of Damascus in the last years of the Umayyad caliphate are extremely scarce. In fact, three of the last four years are not represented at all in Walker's catalogue, in contrast to a reasonable abundance of all years up to about 126⁴³. The rarity of late Damascus dirhams is doubtless related to the resumption of dirham minting at the mint «al-Jazira» (usually considered to be the town Jazirat Ibn 'Umar in Jazira province) in 127 after a hiatus of several decades. The explanation of both phenomena is the accession to the caliphate in 127 of Marwan II, who had been governor of the North and maintained his capital in al-Jazira after his accession to the caliphate. The caliphal revenues that had flowed to Damascus to help supply the mint there now

⁴³ Dirhams of the three missing dates, 129, 130 and 132 have now been found. One of 129 is in a private collection; one of 130 is published by Nicholas Lowick, «The Sinaw Hoard of Early Islamic Silver Coins», *Journal of Oman Studies* 6, 1983, p. 213 no. 94 (and two more are reported in private collections); and one of 132 (with the Umayyad reverse inscription, not the shorter 'Abbasid one) is in a private collection.

went to the Mesopotamian mint. In addition, the disintegration of the eastern part of the caliphate must have contributed to a reduction in caliphal revenues, but despite this, the late issues of the mint al-Jazira are not uncommon today.

The apparent uniformity of dinars and dirhams of Damascus is varied by some evolution of epigraphic style and by the presence of points (small dots) in certain years on both coinages. Comparison of a coin of 77 H. with one of 132 H. (*pl. 31, 17*), the end of Umayyad coinage, shows that although the inscriptions are the same, the style of the epigraphy evolved considerably. At the beginning, the letters are rounded and somewhat irregular, with a clear affinity, as has been mentioned, to the style of the Pahlavi (and Arabic) inscriptions of the Arab-Sasanian coinage. By the end, the letters are taller, more carefully shaped, and more even in proportion: All tall vertical letters, such as *alif* and *lam* are the same height, as are all half height letters, *sin*, *ya'*, *dal*, and the like, and the letters that drop below the line such as *waw* and *ra'* hang to the same level. The base line of the writing is as straight as if ruled (probably it was)⁴⁴. Although epigraphical evolution can be seen even in the comparison of any two dinars or dirhams a decade apart, it is not so easy to distinguish clear turning points for the changes. Rapid evolution seems to occur in the years around 84 and 100 H., both periods of widespread change in the coinage of other parts of the caliphate, but there is no sharp demarcation of style in any year or between any one year and the next. A chronological atlas of the epigraphy of Damascus dinars and dirhams would be most useful: it could serve as an index for putting the undated coppers of Damascus and perhaps other Syrian mints in order, and would serve as a precise basis of comparison with the epigraphy of manuscripts and inscriptions on objects and buildings. More definite results might be yielded by a quantitative study, measuring the changes over time in such features as the total height of the central inscriptions on the obverse of dinars or the diameter of the inner marginal circle on dirhams (both increase markedly with the years; is the increase gradual or spasmodic?). The evolution of style on dinars and on dirhams seem to be parallel, but a careful examination might show whether dies for the two coinages were engraved by the same group of die cutters or not. These impressionistic remarks should be taken only as suggestions for research on this important topic, which would be best undertaken by an art historian or at least by someone with a better visual sense than the present writer.

Another feature common to dinars and dirhams is the presence on many of them of small dots that are regularly associated with certain letters of their inscriptions. These are called «secret points» by numismatists, by analogy with similar dots that occur on other coins to provide information only to employees of the mint and other persons who knew the codes. For example, the coins of France from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century had dots near one letter or another to indicate the mint of issue. On Umayyad Damascus dinars and dirhams, the points are most commonly placed above or below certain letters; in fact, they are nearly all the same as the diacritical marks used to

⁴⁴ It should be noted that the epigraphical style of Damascus coins at the end of the Umayyad period is quite different from that of other mints, such as Wasit in Iraq. As with other topics, the evolution of Umayyad epigraphy must be studied mint by mint and province by province, not as an entity. The variation in epigraphical style from mint to mint is the most obvious argument against the proposals sometimes put forward that minting under the Umayyads was somehow centralized in one location.

distinguish consonants of similar shape, but generally only one letter of the hundred or so on a coin has such marks, and this is never a letter that has particular need of special distinction. Rather, the points occur on the same place for several years at a time; then are changed to another position, or omitted for a while. It has been suggested that the dots on Umayyad dinars indicate different mints, but this is not possible because in any year or span of years there is only one dot pattern, not separate contemporary patterns. At any given time, all have the same points; the variation is chronological.

	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87
Dinars	O	O	O	O/A	A	Y	Y	Y	Y/Kh/O	D	DB
Dirhams			O	O	O/B	B	B	B	B	T	BB
	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98
Dinars	Y	Y	B	B	B/O	B	O	O	O	O	O/B
Dirhams	BB	BB	B	B(H)	B(H)	BB	O	O	O/BBT	O/B	B
	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109
Dinars	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	O	O/Y	Y	O
Dirhams	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B/O	O	O

At some times, the location of points on dinars and dirhams is the same, but at other times they are different. For example, in the year 83, all dinars have two points under the *ya'* of *yulid* and all dirhams have a point under the *ba'* of *bi-Dimishq*, while from 99 to 101, all dinars and dirhams have a point under the *ba'* of *duriba*; on the other hand, in the year 94 there are no points on dinars or dirhams. The sequence can be simplified somewhat by ignoring the words that have points and looking only at the letter; for example, in the year 90 dinars have a point under the *ba'* of *duriba* and dirhams have a point under the *ba'* of *bi-Dimishq*, but – perhaps – the essential feature is that both have a point under the same letter, *ba'*. Collating these letters year by year produces the table shown (in which an O indicates no points), from which it appears that *ba'* and *ya'* are the most frequently pointed letters, and perhaps indicate two separate minting entities of some sort, which are sometimes indicated by points under different letters for reasons that cannot as yet be understood.

As a possible hypothesis, since the dots on dinars begin shortly after the beginning of striking of dirhams, it may be suggested that the points at first were intended to distinguish two separate minting establishments, one for dinars and one for dirhams. Changes in the dots on dinars might indicate changes in the administration of that establishment; when the points on dinars and dirhams are the same, it may be possible that production of both currencies was in the same place. Perhaps, to be more specific, dinars were initially produced at a mint in the caliph's residence (even outside Damascus itself), while dirhams were produced in the city. Consolidation of these two facilities under one roof may have been indicated by the use of dots under the same letters on dinars and dirhams; once this had become permanent, the dots became superfluous, explaining why they were eliminated from 108 H. onwards.

This is speculative, of course. In the present context, the immediate point is that an explanation of these points cannot be found without comparison of their evolution on dinars and dirhams which are generally studied separately. Whatever the explanation, the frequent congruence of these points on Damascus dirhams and dinars with no mint name is concrete evidence for the attribution of the dinars to the caliphal mint in or near

Damascus, rather than to some other province such as Egypt; and the uniformity of the sequence through the years is evidence against the hypothesis that dinars with no mint name were struck in more than one place.

Another topic relating to the post-reform gold coinage of Damascus provides one of the best possible illustrations of the danger of segregating coins from the same time and place into different series. Among Umayyad gold coins with no mint name and Arabic legends only, there are fractional dinars denominated as «halves» (*nisf* on the coins) and «thirds» (*thulth*)⁴⁵. Their dates range from 90 to 103 H., and like most full dinars, they have no mint name. The inscriptions on these coins are mostly shorter versions of those found on full dinars, except that their central reverse legend is *bism Allah al-rahman al-rahim*, words not found on dinars, in place of the longer dinar central inscriptions. This same inscription is found on all Spanish and North African Arabic dinars from about 100 H. to about 110 H., along with Maghribi fractional gold coins. All these latter are known to be North African or Spanish simply because they bear the mint names «Ifriqiyya» and «al-Andalus».

Because the inscriptions on fractional dinars with no mint names are the same as those on the early Maghribi dinars and fractions, Walker made the strange proposal that all fractional dinars were issued in the West at one of those two mints⁴⁶. Strange, because both Western mints had their own distinctive series of fractional gold coins with Latin or with Latin and Arabic inscriptions up to 98 H., as Walker knew because he catalogued them. In fact, in his introduction, he provides a table showing the dates of dinars and fractions with the shorter inscriptions he calls the «western legend», and eleven pages later two more tables showing the dates of Muslim Latin dinars and fractions from Western mints. Walker was led astray because he insisted on treating the two coinages, «Arab-Latin» and «post-reform», separately. Had he merely combined the three tables, it would have been immediately obvious that the dates on African Latin fractions and on reformed fractions overlap. How is it possible to imagine that the mints in North Africa and Spain were issuing at one and the same time their own fractional gold currency with Latin inscriptions, and simultaneously another fractional gold currency with nothing but Arabic inscriptions; and the latter preceding by ten years the introduction of full dinars and fractions with Western mint names and purely Arabic inscriptions? (Not to mention the chronological overlap of the Arabic fractions with mint names and without.) How can one explain the slow evolution from Latin through Latin/Arabic to Arabic on Western dinars, if completely Arabic fractions were already being struck there for a decade? All this should be obvious, and is when the coins are put together; but Walker and many of his successors did not do so, because the Arab-Latin coinage is one speciality and the reformed Arabic coinage another – East is East and West is West, and the twain never seem to meet. Pending concrete evidence, it seems most plausible to regard the fractions without mint name as products of the same mint that issued the full dinars without name, that is, Damascus. Plausibly, the inscriptions on these are different from those on full dinars merely because the fractions are smaller and provide less space. The question that remains to be answered is, Why did the Maghribi mints at first adopt the inscriptions of Damascus fractions for their

⁴⁵ Half solidi and one-third solidi were also issued by the Byzantines.

⁴⁶ BMCArabByz, pp. lviii-lix, 99.

Western dinars when coins with Arabic inscriptions were introduced at the turn of the century?

The reformed Umayyad copper coinage of Syria is far more diverse from mint to mint and in its evolution at each mint. There are many varied inscriptions, from the simplest short form of the *shahada* only to issues with full date, mint, and governor's name. Many Syrian coppers have simple abstract images as well as inscriptions. Neither the beginning nor the end of the Umayyad copper coinage of Syria can be precisely dated because most of the coins do not bear dates, and many do not even have mint names. There is no way at present of knowing if the standing caliph coppers were retained at any mints after the beginning of reformed dirhams, nor any way to be sure that some of the coppers in the Umayyad catalogues are not in fact from the early 'Abbasid era. It is also still impossible to classify geographically all the Umayyad coppers without mint name, even into major regional categories. It seems likely, however, that much of the Umayyad copper of Syria can be attributed to specific mints, even when the mint name is not on the coin, and placed in chronological order with some approximation of absolute dating. The key is basic traditional numismatic technique: Mint by mint studies, using die linkage, overstriking, hoard evidence, archeological provenance, and stylistic comparison, to which may be added the more modern evidence available from the analysis of metal composition. None of this has been done; but it is clear that no progress is made as long as the coins are classified in alphabetical order by mint and each issue is treated in isolation.

IV. Conclusion

The example of Damascus, though hopefully interesting for its own sake, is intended to illustrate some of the benefits accruing from a geographical and chronological ordering of Umayyad coinage. This approach is equally appropriate for other Muslim dynasties, not only large empires like the Umayyads, 'Abbasids, Buyids, Seljuqs, or Ottomans, but also such seemingly centralized states as the Fatimids or Mamluks. In addition, the ordering of coins by place and time of issue ought not necessarily to be limited by dynastic classifications. One good example is Egypt in the eighth century, where there is no essential change in the coinage and weights at the time of the 'Abbasid caliphate. On the contrary, the first «'Abbasid» copper issue of Egypt revives an older Umayyad type to replace an innovative issue of the last Umayyad governor. There is no essential change in Egypt's currency until the time of Harun al-Rashid. Again, the coinage and monetary history of Iraq and western Iran in the tenth century will perhaps never be completely understood until scholars begin to ignore the traditional distinctions between the coins of the 'Abbasids, the various Buyid lines, and such local dynasts as the Ziyarids, Musafirids, Bawandids, Hasanwayhids, Sajids, and Sa'luqids, not to mention the occasional issues of western Iran that bear the names of Samanid rulers. It seems likely that if there are any real differences among these coins other than the names on them, the distinctions will emerge more clearly if we first have complete and coherent numismatic histories of the various mints and provinces.

Another implication of the geographical diversity of the coinage of the first century of Islam, that is, in general, of the Umayyad caliphate, is perhaps of more interest to those

who are not numismatic specialists. The mint is among the key institutions of financial administration; it is the place where governors, or governments, can take bullion and old coins that they may have collected in taxes or otherwise gained to be melted down and made into current coin for expenditures. Periods of widespread innovation in minting practice are likely to be periods of innovation in other matters. Since direct control of minting was in the hands of local governors, not of a general minting organization covering the entire caliphate, we would expect to find that innovations in any geographic area would be accompanied by innovations in other aspects of administration; periods when innovation was widespread would be periods when we could expect to find widespread changes in other fields. When minting is centralized, as it was in Iran from about 104 H. until the disruptions of the 'Abbasid revolution, we should expect to find centralization also of other aspects of administration. Conversely, if the nature and evolution of the monetary system of each of the major Umayyad provinces are different, it suggests that systems of land tenure, taxation, and local administration are also likely to vary sharply. But this is perhaps not new to most specialists in Umayyad history, since much recent work has been done on these lines. The changes I propose in the study of Umayyad numismatics would only bring the field into line with presently existing trends in Islamic historiography.

Finally, I want to make a special appeal to historians who are not numismatic specialists: Please don't wait for numismatists to get around to providing the numismatic material in a coherent organization suitable for utilization as historical evidence. I'm sorry to say that it probably won't happen, at least for a long time. The kind of numismatic studies that historians need will not come about until historians themselves take their obligation to assemble and understand the coin evidence for any research project as seriously as they take their obligation to deal with the evidence on paper. The best qualified student of any coin series is the trained historian with a full knowledge of the history and culture of the period and region. It is far more difficult to acquire that knowledge, and the historian's skills that make it possible, than it is to acquire the rudimentary expertise for numismatic research. My closing maxim is borrowed from a remark by Avram Udovitch: «Numismatics is too important to leave to the numismatists.»

Michael L. Bates
American Numismatic Society
Broadway at 155th Street
New York
N. Y. 10032, USA

List of illustrations

1. AV solidus/dinar, n.m., n.d. Spink Zurich auction sale 18 February 1986, no. 86.
2. AV solidus/dinar, n.m., n.d. Numismatic Fine Arts auction sale 25–26 March 1976, no. 513.
3. AV solidus/dinar, n.m., n.d. British Museum (Walker, BMCArabByz pl. V no. 54).
4. AV solidus/dinar, n.m., n.d. ANS 1002.1.107.
5. AR dirham, Dimashq, 72 H. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Report of the Visitors 1969–70, p. 43, pl. XIII no. 1).
6. AR dirhaam, Dimashq, 74. H. ANS 1971.316.35.
7. AE fals, DAM, n.d. ANS 1917.215.3294.
8. AE fals, DAMASCOS/Dimashq, n.d. ANS 1970.107.25.
9. AE fals, Dimashq, n.d. ANS 1956.89.1.
10. AV solidus/dinar, n.m., 75 H. ANS 1970.63.1.
11. AR dirham, n.m., 75 H. ANS 1966.151.1.
12. AE fals, Dimashq, n.d. ANS 1971.316.1203.
13. AE fals, Dimashq, n.d. ANS 1917.216.3458.
14. AR dirham, n.m., n.d. ANS 1944.100.612.
15. AV dinar, n.m., 77H. University Museum, Philadelphia (on loan to ANS, 1002.1.406).
16. AR dirham, Dimashq, 79 H. ANS 1950.135.12.



