

Ayybid divisional currency in Egypt by Al-Kmil Muhammed I

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AYYŪBID DIVISIONAL CURRENCY ISSUED IN EGYPT BY AL-KĀMIL
MUḤAMMAD I.

Paul Balog

Hundreds of copper coins struck by Ayyūbid princes from Saladin down to al-Kāmil Muḥammad have been studied and published so far. Yet it is surprising that in this abundant material not one coin can be attributed to an Egyptian mint. Whenever the mint-name is preserved on a coin, it is always a Syrian or Mesopotamian place. Furthermore, all the fulūs with no mint or with the mint missing belong to the types which are characteristic for Syrian or Mesopotamian issues. In two cases, although much of the legends including the mint have disappeared through corrosion, the type of the coins leaves no doubt that they belong to the Yemeni branch of the dynasty. In the great mass of the Ayyūbid copper coins seen by me there has been only one exception, a unique small square fals of Saladin, struck in the early years of his reign from the dies of a «black dirhem», typical of the Cairo mint. As no second specimen has been found, one has to assume that this exceptional coin was a minting experiment which had to be abandoned for some valid reason, probably for the lack of bullion.

It follows from the above that starting with the reign of Saladin, no copper was struck in Egypt for a rather long time. This assumption is corroborated in an outstanding monograph by Hassanein Rabie¹ who points out that «according to Maqrīzī, copper fulūs were in circulation in Egypt until 622/1225, as a local currency for the purchase of cheap goods, but were not legal tender in the same sense as dinars or dirhems. It appears that their circulation was limited, as the coining of the fulūs was in the hands of the local Walis, without centralised control. After 622/1225, copper fulūs attained the status of official currency. According to Dawadārī and Nuwayrī, Sultan al-Kāmil ordered copper fulūs to be struck in Cairo and Miṣr (Fustāt), and they became valid currency.»

I cannot agree with Maqrīzī that there ever was any copper coinage issued by Walis, i.e., by local or district governors in Ayyūbid Egypt, struck privately or non-officially and tolerated by the central government. No coin has ever been found which shows the name of a local Wali, or an anonymous fals which would point to such an issue. On the contrary, all the Ayyūbid fulūs found in Egypt come from Syria and Mesopotamia. What happened is, I believe, that they reached Egypt with travellers and traders and were accepted by the local population willingly. They do not seem to have satisfied the needs of the Egyptian market, however. These coins, unfamiliar to the Egyptians, may have been those mentioned by Dawadārī and Nuwayrī.

The statements of Dawadārī and Nuwayrī that no copper coins were minted in Ayyūbid Egypt prior to 622 H can be accepted therefore as correct. Still, the Egyptian economy needed some kind of divisional currency before the Syrian and Mesopotamian fulūs started to circulate, and even afterwards, because the imported copper coins were probably far too few to satisfy the market. It seems to me that Saladin simply continued to issue glass-paste jetons to be used as token currency, a practice which he inherited from the previous Fāṭimid régime together with

¹ The financial System of Egypt A. H. 564–741/A. D. 1169–1341. Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 181–820. Maqrīzī, *Igātha* pp. 66–67, trad. Wiet pp. 65–66; idem *Shudūr* pp. 67–68, trad. de Sacy, p. 182, Rn. 1. Dawadārī, *Durar*, fol. 200^r and Nuwayrī, XXVII, fol. 27.

other minting traditions². It is well known that the Ayyūbid glass-paste jetons do not include the Ayyūbid Sultan's name, only that of the reigning 'Abbāsid Caliph: al-Mustaḍī from Saladin's first regnal year 567 H until 575 H and afterwards al-Nāṣir from 575 until 622 H. These jetons represent the reigns of Saladin, al-'Azīz 'Uthmān, al-Manṣūr Muḥammad, al-'Ādil I and also al-Kāmil. Only in 622 H did al-Kāmil replace the Caliph's name with his own protocol. Although the last mentioned jetons also lack the mint and date, they can safely be attributed to the year of al-Kāmil's general coin reform because they show the same process of transformation of the writing from the traditional Kūfic to Naskhy which can be observed on the gold and silver coinage of al-Kāmil starting with 622 H.

The lack or scarcity of copper coinage and the inferior quality of the silver inconvenienced economic life in Egypt and the population started to protest more and more intensely, so that al-Kāmil finally was obliged to capitulate and introduced, in 622 H, a general currency reform³. On the gold, the innovation was purely formal: instead of the age-old, traditional Kūfic the legends were now written in skillfully engraved, pleasing Naskhy which gave the coins an attractive aspect. But the fine gold content, which was always fairly good, even if a little less than under the early Fāṭimids, remained unchanged; the weight of the gold coins was already random and no longer fixed to the weight of the dinar or mithqāl of 4.25 grams; it could not be accepted by tale, only by weight.

The second phase of al-Kāmil's reform was a colossal financial fraud. In spite of the Sultan's promises and protestations of honesty that the new round dirhem (mustadīra) was to contain a much higher proportion of fine silver than the hated, crudely manufactured and low silver content (ca. 25 per cent) black dirhem or dirhem waraq, the new issue contained about the same percentage of silver, or only very slightly more. This rank fraud was, it would seem, not discovered until recently by some numismatic research⁴.

Returning to the original aim of this paper, we have now material proof that Maqrīzī, Dawadārī and Nuwayrī recorded correctly that during the currency reform of 622 H, al-Kāmil really introduced regular issues of copper coinage. Only a handful of the «reform» fulūs are known so far and few are published⁵, but they have not been associated with Cairo, as they are mintless. Yet even without mint or date there is no doubt in my mind that they represent the copper coins which al-Kāmil had struck in 622 H. The style of writing is exactly that of the last jetons issued by him in artistic Naskhi and the general appearance is quite unlike that of his typical Syrian and Mesopotamian copper coins. Further proof that we are dealing with an Egyptian series of issues between 622 and 623 H is the consecutive presence on the coins of the Caliphs al-Zāhir and al-Mustaṣir, like the gold and silver of this period. The fulūs published by Zambaur (Contributions no. 279 and 281) seem to be silver round dirhems, coated completely with verdegris, as it often happens with this kind of coin.

² P. Balog, *Les jetons Fāṭimites en Verre*. *Revue Belge de Numismatique*, 1961, pp. 171–183, 2 Pl. – P. Balog, *The Ayyūbid Glass Jetons and Their Use*. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 9/3, 1966.

³ P. Balog, *Etudes Numismatiques de l'Égypte Musulmane III*. *Bull. de l'Institut d'Égypte* 36, 1952, pp. 17–55, 14 Pl.

⁴ P. Balog, *History of the Dirhem in Egypt from the Fāṭimid Conquest Until the Collapse of the Mamlūk Empire*. *Revue Num.* 1961, pp. 109–146, 1 Pl. – J. L. Bacharach and A. Gordus, *Studies on the Fineness of Silver Coins*. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 11/3, 1966, pp. 298–317.

⁵ Cf. the reference in the present catalogue.

CATALOGUE

Opaque Glass-Paste Jetons

A. No border

محمد
الملك الكامل

ANS. 21, 2.97 White.

ANS. (ex Balog coll.) 22, 3.02 Yellowish green with blue green (Ill. A).

B. No border

الملك
الكامل
محمد

ANS. (ex Balog coll.) 26, 5.96 Pale yellow, streaked with brown (Ill. B).

C. No border

ايوب
الملك الكامل
محمد بن ابي بكر
ابن

ANS. 30, 8.55 Turquoise blue (Ill. C).

D. Border: plain circle

الملك
الكامل

ANS. (ex Balog coll.) 27, 5.73 Pale honey (Ill. D).

E. No border

(الكا)مل

ANS. (ex Balog coll.) 10, 0.48 Turquoise blue (Ill. E).

Only the last two letters of al-Kāmil are on the flan. The name may have been preceded by the title al-Malik, either above, in which case it belongs to the category D., or to the right on the same line.

Copper

A. With the Caliph al-Nāṣir (therefore before 30 Ramaḍān 622 H)

The only specimen recorded was published by Zambaur in his «Contributions», 1906, no. 279 (8, 0.68). Its small diameter and the distribution of the legends indicate that it must have been a globular silver dirhem and not a copper fals, but, as often happens, completely covered by a layer of verdegris. Nearly all the globular dirhems which I have seen were in similar condition before cleaning and such a coin may easily lead to the erroneous conclusion that it is a genuine copper coin.

B. With the Caliph al-Zāhir (1 Shawwāl 622–614 Rajab 623 H)

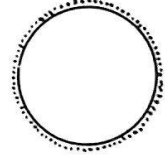
Zambaur described another coin («Contributions», 1906, no. 281) with the diameter of 10 mm. Judging from his description (neither coin was illustrated) this is also a copper-encrusted silver globular dirhem of al-Kāmil.

The following coins belong to the series of copper coinage issued by al-Kāmil Muḥammad in 622 and the following years. There is no marginal legend on any issue.

1. Var. a. Border on both sides: plain circle in circle of pellets.

بن ايوب
املك الكامل
بن ابي بكر

محمد امير
الامام الظاهر
المؤمنين



Zambaur, «Contributions», 1906, no. 282. Diameter and weight not given. Zambaur noticed the similarity with the Cairo dinars after 622 H.

2. Var. b. Border as above.

محمد بن
الملك الكامل
ابي بكر

امير
الامام الظاهر
المؤمنين

Ashmolean-Thorburn 16, 3.34 Balog 19, 2.80 (Ill. 2.1) München 88154. 19, 2.42 Paris 1. 22, 4.41 (Ill. 2.2) 2. 21, 3.84 (Ill. 2.3) 3. 16, 2.42.

C. With the Caliph al-Mustanṣir (after Rajab 623 H).

Type I

3. Var a. Border as above.

محمد بن
الملك الكامل
ابي بكر

المستنصر
بالله
الامام المنصور
امير المؤمنين

Lavoix 658. 16, 2.34.

4. Var. b. Border as above.

محمد بن
الملك الكامل
ابي بكر

ابو جعفر
الامام المنصور
امير المؤمنين

Balog 1. 18, 2.74 (Ill. 4.1) 2. 19, 3.35 (Ill. 4.2).

Type II

5. Var. a. Border on both sides: plain circle in which linear tetrafoil with pointed arches.

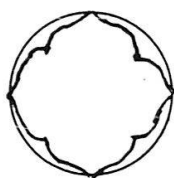
In the small segments between the plain border and the tetrafoil:

R upper	R lower	L lower	L upper
ل الله	سو	محمد ر	(لا اله الا الله)

R upper	R lower	L lower	L upper
مؤمنين	اميرا	جعفر	ابو

Center

محمد بن
الملك الكامل
ابي بكر



Center

ابو جعفر
الامام المنصور
امير المؤمنين

Album 4. ANS. 1. 20, – 2. (Wood) 26, – 3. (Chimirri) 24, – and four more coins Ashmolean-Thorburn 23, 3.81 Ashmolean (A. C. Kay) 23, 3.20 Ashmolean-Bodleian 153. 24, 4.30 Balog 1. 22, 4.06 2. 23, 4.99 3. 24, 4.10 (Ill.) 4. 25, 4.37 (Ill.) BMC. IV. 418. 23. 3.46 Østrup 1487., 1588. Wien 7736. 22, – Fahmy 553–562. (23m 3,29, 22, 3.20, 21, 4.35, 21, 3.80, 20, 3.20, 23, 4.30, 17, 2.02, 15, 1.52, 19, 2.25 and 23, 3.70).

6. Var. b. Border on both sides as above.

In the small segments illegible traces of a legend.

Centre

محمد بن
الملك الكامل
ابي بكر

Centre

ابو جعفر
الامام المنصور
امير المؤمنين

BMC. IV. 416. 17, 2.95 417. 1,33 Khedivial 1425–1427. München 88153. 26, 4.486 92444. 22, 2.483 86412. 23, 2.541 Zambaur – Windisch-Graetz 175. 17, – Fahmy 563. 17, 2.95 564. 23, 3.70.



A



C



B



E



2.1



2.2



2.3



4.1



2.1



2.2



2.3



4.1



4.2



5.1



5.2



4.2



5.1



5.2