

ORIENTAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETYINFORMATION SHEET NO.15EARLY ARAB COINS OF TUNISIAPart II - The Aghlabids, 184-296 AH (800-909 AD)

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Historical Background

That part of Africa which more or less corresponds to today's Tunisia had been occupied by the Arabs in the second part of the 7th century AD and the region - called "Ifriqiyah" by the Arabs - had been ruled by Governors appointed first by the 'Umayyad and then by the Abbasid Caliphs (see the first article of this series).

Difficulties in communication had favoured the development of a certain degree of autonomy and the concentration of power in the hands of a small elite of locally established Arabs. The governors appointed by the Abbasid Caliphs after 151 AH (767 AD) were in fact all members of the same Arab family. In spite of this trend towards local rule, unrest increased and military revolts occurred in the region.

In 184 AH (800 AD), Caliph Harun al-Rashid appointed Ibrahim ibn Aghlab - whose father had been killed by soldiers under his command some 35 years earlier - as Amir of Ifriqiyah, in recognition of his role in the negotiations which had put a temporary end to the revolts. At the same time the Caliph granted Ibrahim ibn Aghlab the right to transmit the government to his descendants thus establishing dynastic rule over the Ifriqiyah. It was stipulated that the province should remain nominally subject to the Caliphs of Baghdad and that the Caliph, instead of sending an annual contribution of 100,000 dinars, would receive an annual tribute, fixed at 40,000 dinars. This condition was not always fulfilled and the local Amir had often to ask for help from the Caliph.

Ibrahim established his capital in Kairouan and founded a new town about 3 km to the south, which he called al-Abbassiyah, in honour of the Caliph, a name which had already been used to indicate Kairouan. Under Ibrahim and his successors - who took their dynastic name from al-Aghlab, the father of Ibrahim - the Ifriqiyah became practically independent and the period of Aghlabid rule was one of religious fervour accompanied by the development of agriculture, trade and public works, notwithstanding continuing political and economic problems.

One of the main sources of trouble was the relationship between the ruling Arab class and the local Berber population. Heavy taxes were imposed and the local administrators often took advantage of a complex bureaucracy to pursue their own personal interest. Even more serious was the unrest among the soldiers who were supposed to maintain internal security and guard the borders. Instead they frequently rebelled against the central government, helped at times by ex-soldiers who had settled in the region. This situation eventually led the Amirs to create a "Praetorian guard" consisting mainly of loyal Negroes and charged to protect the Amir and to repress revolts. This centralising of military power contributed to a gradual weakening of the defences along the borders and thus indirectly to the eventual downfall of the Aghlabid dynasty.

Under the Amir Ziyadat Allah I (201-223 AH, 816-837 AD) several military chiefs in the northern part of the region asserted their independence. In part as a diversion, Ziyadat Allah launched in 212 AH (827 AD) a campaign for the conquest of Sicily. Byzantine control over the island was deteriorating and Sicily was the only neighbouring region still in the hand of the Christians.

The first Arab landing in Sicily took place in response to a request for help received from Euphemius, a Sicilian naval commander of greek origin who had proclaimed his independence from the Byzantine emperor. Euphemius was murdered by Sicilians shortly thereafter, but the Arabs gradually extended their occupation notwithstanding some local resistance and the intervention of Venice and other Italian maritime republics. By the end of the 9th century AD practically the whole of Sicily was occupied and it was to remain under Arab domination until the Norman conquest of 1060 AD.

The Sicilian campaign was a success for the Arabs, but it contributed to the downfall of the Aghlabids by weakening their strength in Ifriqiyah. The Shiite Arabs who had settled to the west of the region controlled by the Sunni Aghlabids intensified their harassment at the borders, with the help of Berber tribes and of small Arab kingdoms, including the descendents of ibn Rustam, a former ruler of Ifriqiyah who had escaped to the west when the Abbasids had occupied the region. Under the last of the Aghlabid rulers, Ziyadat Allah III, a cruel and hated ruler, the Shiite Arabs and their Berber allies, the Kotama, defeated what was left in Ifriqiyah of the Aghlabid troops and in March 909 AD (296 AH) occupied Kairouan, thus putting an end to the Aghlabid period and opening the way for the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty.

Description of the Coins

The coins minted by the Aghlabids are basically similar to those of the early Abbasid Caliphs and remained uniform in type throughout the period of Aghlabid rule. They are in general well made and may be considered among the best examples of Arab coins. The basic design is comprised of Kufic script set in 3 to 5 horizontal lines on both the obverse and the reverse, surrounded by single circular marginal legends.

Gold Coins

The majority of the gold coins which are known for this period are dinars varying from 17 to 20mm in diameter and from 3.63 to 4.25 grams in weight. A few 1/4 dinars have been described, all issued by Ibrahim II and weighing approximately 1.0 grams.

The normal obverse consists of a central horizontal legend in 3 lines giving the first part of the kalimah لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له (There is no god but/God He is alone / there is no associate to Him) while a circular marginal legend bears the "prophetic mission" (Koran IX, 33). On some coins a fourth line is added below the Kalimah, with a proper name, in all probability, that of the officer in charge of the mint or the treasury. The following names have been recorded:-

Ibrahim I	Musa	Muhammad II	Hasan
	(on copper coins only)		
Ziyadat Allah I	Masrur	Ibrahim II	Shakar
Muhammad I	Khalaf		Balagh
	Jabran	Ziyadat Allah III	Hattab
Ahmad	illegible		Abu Nadar

The reverse is similar and consists of 5 central horizontal lines of which line 2, 3 and 4 contain the second part of the kalimah محمد رسول الله (Muhammad is the Apostle of God) and line 5, the name of the Amir.

With the exception of the coins of Ibrahim I, line 1 has the word **غلب** ("ghalaba", He has conquered), a reference to the victory of God over the infidels and therefore to the successes of the Arabs but at the same time the symbol of the dynasty. It is significant that this word does not appear on the gold coins which have been attributed to Ibrahim as especially minted for the payment of the annual tribute to the Caliph.

The early coins of Ibrahim I have at the bottom, the word "ghalaba" or the formula "for the Caliph". On coins dated 193 to 196 AH, "for the Caliph" is moved to the top line with the word al-Imam or al-Amin appearing at the bottom.

The circular reverse legend has the "bismillah" with the date but not the place of minting which in the case of gold coins was presumably always Kairouan.

Silver Coins

Silver dirhams of this period are less numerous than gold coins and are known from four only of the eleven Aghlabid Amirs. The basic design is similar to that of the dinars, but notwithstanding their limited number, these coins show more variety, especially in the reverse legends. In common with contemporary Abbasid dirhems, the mint/date formula is on the obverse for coins of Ibrahim I, of Abd Allah I and of Ziyadat Allah I, whereas those of Ibrahim II follow the arrangement of the dinars. The normal mint was Ifriqiyah but other mints are shown on coins of Ziyadat Allah I and the name al-Abbasiyah is known for a half dirhem of Ibrahim I, and all coins of Ibrahim II.

Three different issues of Ziyadat Allah I dated 210 exist, two having the formula "for the Caliph" instead of the name of the Amir. One comes from **مجاز** (Majaz, today Mejez-el-Bab) with the name **علي** ('Ali) on the obverse, and one from Ifriqiyah with the name **علون** ('Alun). These coins provide some supporting evidence for the attribution of the "lil-Khalifat" dinars to the Aghlabids. It should be noted that dinars of this period have the name Masrur.

On the third of the dirhams of 210 AH, the word **عدل** (just) replaces "ghalaba" on the reverse with the name of Mansur ibn Nasir (al Tambadhi), a military chief who occupied Kairouan for a short time and who declared his independence. The word Mansur i.e. "the Victor" is repeated under the name.

Another silver coin issued during the reign of Ziyadat Allah I has **سقلية** (Sicily) as mint and bears the name **سليمان بن داود** (Sliman ibn Daud). The legends and their arrangement are those of the 'Umayyad coins which were then minted in Spain. The name is probably that of a 'Umayyad general put at the disposal of Ziyadat Allah for the Sicilian campaign and it is likely that the coin had been minted in Spain, to be used for paying the soldiers in Sicily.

No dirhams of later Aghlabid Amirs are known until 275 AH when Ibrahim II reformed the coinage after his victory of 267 AH (880 AD) over an Egyptian army had put him in possession of the treasure of the Tulunids. The silver coins of low weight and poor alloy then in circulation in Ifriqiyah - most of them in fragments and used in transactions according to their weight - were withdrawn and replaced by new coins with the legends copying those of the dinars of this period. The value of these new dirhams was fixed at 10 for 1 dinar, although their recorded weights range between 1.0 and 1.65 grammes, instead of the 2.20 to 2.97 of the early dirhems.

Copper Coins

The issues of two Amirs only are represented by the relatively few copper coins of this period which have been described and these can seldom be attributed with confidence. On most of those likely to belong to this series the marginal legends, which include the date, are worn or missing, and the central legends are often simplified.

Summary of Aghlabid coins

Gold Coins - when not otherwise specified the coins correspond to the following general description:-

Obverse Circular legend (Koran IX, 33):

Central legend in 3 horizontal lines:

Line 1	لا اله الا الله	There is no God but
Line 2	الله وحده	God He is alone
Line 3	لا شريك له	there is no associate to Him

Reverse Circular legend (date)

Central legend in 5 horizontal lines:

Line 1	غلب	("ghalaba")
Line 2	محمد	Muhammad
Line 3	رسول	is the Apostle
Line 4	الله	of God
Line 5		(name of the Amir)



207



290



Gold Coins No Mint named

Amir	Above Rev.	Below Rev.	Dates Known	Diameters mm	Weights grams	Notes
Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab	-	ghalaba	189,192	18	4.20	
184-196/800-811	-	lil-Khalifat	189,190	17-18.5	3.95-4.24	attributed to Ibrahim by Farrugia de Candia
	lil-Khalifat	al-Amin	193,194,195	18	3.80-4.10	
	"	al-Imam	196	17-18.5	4.10-4.20	"
'Abd Allah ibn Ibrahim	ghalaba	'Abd Allah	197,199, 200,201	18.5-19	4.20-4.24	
196-201/811-816						
Ziyadat Allah ibn Ibrahim	ghalaba	Ziyadat Allah	204 202-206, 210	19 18	3.60 4.05-4.25	al-Ifriqiyah below obverse (possibly Aghlabid)
201-223/816-837	"	"	207-216 219-222	17-18.5	3.00-4.25	Masrur below obverse
Al-Aghlab ibn Ibrahim	ghalaba	al-Aghlab	223-226	18	3.88-4.20	
223-226/837-840						
Muhammad I ibn al-Aghlab	"	Muhammad	226-229	18.5-19	4.10-4.19	Khalaf below obverse
226-242/840-856	"	"	231, 232, 234 -236, 241	17-19	4.14-4.21	
	"	"	233	19	4.20	Jabran below obverse

Gold Coins (Continued)

Amir	Above Rev.	Below Rev.	Dates Known	Diameters mm	Weights grams	Notes
Ahmad ibn Muhammad	ghalaba	Ahmad	242, 243, 245, 246, 248-9	17-19	3.90-4.20	
242-249/856-863	"	"	245, 247 249	18	4.20-4.25	below obverse
Ziyadat Allah II ibn Muhammad	No coins known					
249-250/863-864						
Muhammad II ibn Ahmad	ghalaba	Muhammad	251-4	18-19	4.08-4.21	
250-261/864-874			257-9			
	"	"	260	18	4.14-4.20	Hasan below obverse
Ibrahim II ibn Ahmad	"	Ibrahim	261	17.5-19	4.15-4.20	Shakar below obverse
261-289/874-902	"	"	265-7	19	4.19-4.22	Balagh below obverse
	"	"	267-8, 274	13	1.0-1.05	$\frac{1}{2}$ dinar - " "
	"	"	262-3, 267- 270, 272 274-281, 283-4, 287-9	18-20	3.63-4.22	
			272	13	1.04	$\frac{1}{2}$ dinar

Gold Coins (Continued)

Amir	Above Rev.	Below Rev.	Dates Known	Diameters mm	Weights grams	Notes
'Abd Allah II ibn Ibrahim 289-290/902	ghalaba	'Abd Allah	290	18	4.06-4.17	
Ziyadat Allah III ibn Abd Allah 290-296/902-908	" " "	Ziyadat Allah " "	291-3 290, 293 295-6	18-19 18-19 19-20	4.07-4.20 4.11-4.18 3.88-4.18	Hattab below obverse Abu Madar below obverse

Silver Coins - When not otherwise described, the legends are:-

Obverse Circular legend: "bismillah", place - usually **افريقيه**
Ifriqiyah and date of minting.
Central legend: first part of the "kalimah" in 3 lines

Reverse Circular legend: Koran, IX, 33
Central legend: in 5 lines, including the second part
of the "Kalimah"

Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab 184-196 AH (800-811 AD)

Reverse Circular legend: (by the authority of al-Mamun Abd Allah
Commander of the believers)

Line 1	غلب	"ghalaba"	AH 184,186, 187,189,190, 191,194.
Line 2	محمد رسول	Muhammad is the Apostle	1.90-2.90 gms.
Line 3	الله صلى الله	of God God bless	
Line 4	عليه و سلم	him and grant him peace	16.5-24mm
Line 5	ابراهيم	Ibrahim	

Similar but $\frac{1}{2}$ dirhem of al-Abbassiyah AH184, 1.40 grams, 18mm. Mint/date formula preceded by "by the authority of the Commander of the believers".

Reverse Central legend:

Line 1	غلب	"ghalaba"	AH189
Line 2	محمد رسول الله	Muhammad is the Apostle of God	2.85-3.1gms
Line 3	صلى الله عليه و سلم	God bless him and grant him peace	
Line 4	بما امر به الامير المأمون	by the authority of the Amir al-Mamun	
Line 5	ابراهيم	Ibrahim	24-26mm

Reverse Central Legend:

Line 1	بج	good	
Line 2	محمد رسول	Muhammad is the Apostle	AH 195
Line 3	الله نبي	of God the Prophet	2.72 gms.
Line 4	رحمته	mercy	23mm
Line 5	للخليفة	for the Caliph	

'Abd Allah ibn Ibrahim 196-201 AH (811-816 AD)

Obverse	Central Legend: kalimah on line 1, 2 and 4		
	Line 3	بج	good
Reverse	Central legend		
	Line 1	غلب	"ghalaba"
	Line 2	محمد رسول	Muhammad is the Apostle
	Line 3	الله ما أمراً الأمير	of God by the authority of the Amir AH 198
	Line 4	عبد الله بن ابراهيم	'Abd Allah ibn Ibrahim 24 mm
	Line 5	عبد الله	'Abd Allah

Ziyadat Allah ibn Ibrahim 201-223 AH (816-837 AD)

Obverse	Central legend: kalimah on line 1, 2 and 4		
	Line 3	مسرور	Masrur
Reverse	Central legend		
	Line 1, 2 and 3		as preceding coin of 198 AH
	Line 4	زيادة الله بن ابراهيم	Ziyadat Allah ibn Ibrahim AH208,209
	Line 5	زيادة الله	Ziyadat Allah 2.82-2.90 gms. 26mm

Coins minted during the reign of Ziyadat Allah but bearing different names

Obverse	Central legend: kalimah on line 1, 2 and 4		
	Line 3	بج	very good
Reverse	Central legend		
	Line 1	عدل	just AH 210
	Line 2	محمد	Muhammad 2.70 gms.
	Line 3	رسول الله	is the Apostle of God 26mm
	Line 4	منصور بن نصر	Mansur ibn Nasir
	Line 5	منصور	Mansur

Obverse	Central legend: kalimah on line 1, 2 and 4		
	Line 3	علون	'Alun
Reverse	Central Legend		
	Line 1	بج	very good AH 210
	Line 2	محمد رسول	Muhammad is the Apostle 2.95 gms.
	Line 3	الله نبي	of God the Prophet 26 mm
	Line 4	رحمه	mercy
	Line 5	للخليفة	for the Caliph

Obverse Circular legend: **بجاز** (Majaz) instead of **إفريقيه**
Ifriqiyah
Central legend as above but:
Line 3 **علي** 'Ali AH 210
Reverse Circular legend missing 2.80 gms.
Central legend as preceding coin with 'Alun on obverse 25mm

Obverse Circular legend: **سقلية** (Siqaliyah) instead of Ifriqiyah
Central legend
Line 1 **لا اله الا** There is no god but
Line 2 **سليمان بن** Sliman ibn
Line 3 **الله وحده** God He is alone
Line 4 **داود** Daud
Line 5 **لا شريك له** there is no associate to Him

Reverse Central legend (Koran CXII):
Line 1 **الله احد الله** God is alone God AH 216
Line 2 **الصبوح لم يلد و** is eternal He begets not and
Line 3 **لم يولد و لم يكن** is not begotten nor is there 2.03 gms.
Line 4 **له كفو احد** like unto Him anyone 26 mm

Ibrahim II ibn Ahmad 261-289 AH (874-902 AD)

Obverse Legends same as those of the gold coins of this period

Reverse Circular legend: **العباسية** (al-Abbassiyah) instead of
Ifriqiyah

Central legend

Line 1 **غلب** "ghalaba AH 275, 279-
282
Line 2 **محمد** Muhammad 1.0-1.65gms.
Line 3 **رسول** is the Apostle 16-22mm
Line 4 **الله** of God
Line 5 **ابراهيم** Ibrahim

Copper Coins - When not otherwise described, the coins conform to the standard type described for the silver coins.

Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab 184-196 AH (800-811 AD)

As the first issue of silver coins

AH 189

1.55-2.20gms.

18-19mm.

Reverse Central legend in 4 lines

Line 1, 2 and 3: second part of the kalimah

Line 4 غلب "ghalaba"

AH 189

1.55-2.30gms.

18-21mm

Obverse Central legend in 4 lines

Line 1, 2 and 4: first part of the kalimah

Line 3 موسى Musa

2.15 gms.

Reverse as preceding type

19mm

Reverse Central legend in 5 lines

Line 1 غلب "ghalaba"

AH 18x

Line 2 لا

2.17 gms

Line 3, 4 and 5: second part of the kalimah

20mm

Ziyadat Allah ibn Ibrahim 201-223 AH (816-837 AD)

Circular legend missing, obverse and reverse

Obverse Central legend in 4 lines

Line 1, 2 and 4: first part of the kalimah

Line 4 موسى Musa

Reverse Central legend in 5 lines

Line 1 غلب "ghalaba"

Line 2, 3 and 4: second part of the kalimah

Line 5 ز يادة الله Ziyadat Allah

