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## RETHINKING LAVOIX'S ATTRIBUTION OF THE DĪNĀR DATED 210 AH/AD 825-826

### *Abstract*

*The paper aims at reconsidering a dīnār attributed to the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (198-218 AH/AD 813-833), first published in 1887 by the French scholar H. Lavoix. Later on, this attribution was repeated, without questioning, by a number of scholars despite the fact that – at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the Sicilian numismatist B. Lagumina had noticed that the legends on the gold specimen in the BnF's coin cabinet were comparable to the silver issues of the revolt leader Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr al-Ṭunbudī. The author of this contribution proves, using historical sources and through a close scrutiny of the known specimens, both in gold and silver, that the dīnār catalogued by Lavoix is a gold issue minted in al-Qayrawān by Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr al-Ṭunbudī and that it cannot be considered, as previously believed, as an 'Abbasid dīnār.*

### *Keywords*

*H. Lavoix, Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr al-Ṭunbudī, Aghlabids*

At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French scholar Henri Lavoix (Paris 1820-1892) published in his *Catalogue des monnaies musulmanes de la Bibliothèque nationale*, a *dīnār*, dated 210 AH/AD 825-826, in the name of Maṣṣūr. He attributed the coin to the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (198–218 AH/AD 813- 833)<sup>1</sup>.

Few years later, the Sicilian numismatist Bartolomeo Lagumina (Palermo 1850-Agrigento 1930)<sup>2</sup>, publishing the first dirhams in the name of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr al-Ṭunbudī minted in Ifrīqiyya in 210 AH., noted that the inscriptions in the dirhams in the name of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr were similar to those of the 'Abbasid *dīnār* edited by Lavoix<sup>3</sup>. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Farruja De Candia independently noted this very same detail<sup>4</sup>.

None of the following scholars paid any attention to this important remark and they continued to refer to Lavoix's attribution<sup>5</sup>. However Ḥasan Ḥ. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, acknowledging the remarks by Lagumina and De Candia, commented about the coinage of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr: «we do not know if it was possible for Maṣṣūr al-Ṭunbudī to strike dinars in his name when he conquered the capital of the Ifrīqiyya as we don't have any»<sup>6</sup>.

In 1982 Muḥammad Abū al- Faraj al- 'Uṣ studied the dirhams with the name of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr minted in Ifrīqiyya dated 210 AH., but he did not mention any *dīnār*<sup>7</sup> neither Ṣālih b. Qurba<sup>8</sup> in 1986.

The legends on this *dīnār* dated 210 AH (pl. 1, fig. 1)<sup>9</sup> read:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. LAVOIX H., *Catalogue des monnaies musulmanes de la Bibliothèque nationale*. Vol. I: *Khalīfes orientaux*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale 1887. No. 882, pl.IV.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SORAVIA B., *Lagumina, Bartolomeo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 63 (2004), pp. 84-85.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. LAGUMINA B.M., *Ripostiglio di monete arabe rinvenuto in Girgenti*, «Archivio Storico Siciliano» n.s., XXIX (1904) pp.82-83,90.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. DE CANDIA F.J., *Monnaies aghlabites du Musée du Bardo*, «Les Cahiers de Tunisie» IV (1956), pp. 97-98.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. LOWICK N., *Early 'Abbasid Coinage. A Type Corpus, 132-218 AH / AD 750-833. A posthumous work by Nicholas Lowick*, edited by Elizabeth Savage, Ms. of the 1999 version in FINT Zn 99a, no.148; FAHMY S., *Dawla' Banī al-Sarī*, «Majalla' dirāsāt atāriyya islāmiyya» 4 (1991); BERNARDI G., *Arabic Gold Coins. Corpus I*, Trieste, EUT, 2010, no. 110.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 'ABD AL-WAHHĀB Ḥ. Ḥ., *Al-Nuqūd al-'arabiyya fī Tūnis*, Tunis, Central Bank of Tunisia, 1965, p.76, no. 96.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. AL-'UṢ M., *Monnaies aghlabides étudiées en relation avec l'histoire des Aghlabides*, Damas, Institut Français de Damas, 1982, p.109, no.240.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. SALEH B. QURBA, *Al-maskūkāt al-maġribiyya min al-fath al-islāmī ilā suqūt dawla banī Hammād*, al-Jazā'ir, al-Mu'assasa al-Wataniyya li-l-kitāb, 1986, pp.243-248.

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Francois Thierry of the Coin Cabinet of the BnF in Paris for providing me with a new image of this coin.

OBVERSE	REVERSE
Field (within a circle)	Field (within a circle)
لا اله إلا / الله وحده / لا شريك له	عدل / محمد / رسول / الله / منصور
Margin:	Margin:
محمد رسول الله أرسله بالهدى ودين الحق ليظهره علي الدين كله	بسم الله ضرب هذا الدينر سنة عشرة ومائتين

Historical sources and previous studies point out that Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr controlled al-Qayrawān in 210 AH. for 16 or 40 days, after having dismissed the Aghlabid ruler Ziyada<sup>t</sup> Allāh I (201-223 AH/AD 817-838)<sup>10</sup>. During this short period he was also able to mint his coinage: dinars and dirhams. This was made possible by the great skill of the employees of al-Qayrawān mint, the most important mint in the whole Ifrīqiyya.

So, we can confidently attribute this *dīnār* to the revolutionary Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr al-Ṭunbudī, which as I will explain later, comparing the general shape and the inscriptions of the Maṣṣūr's dirhams with the Aghlabid coinage of the same period.

Dirhams in the name of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr minted in Ifrīqiyya and dated 210 AH are known since the beginning of the last century, when Lagumina published the first example<sup>11</sup> and, thereafter, since Ḥassan Ḥ. 'Abd al-Wahhāb published a second example<sup>12</sup>. Seemingly this second dirham ended up in the Bardo Museum in Tunis<sup>13</sup>. In 1988 Ḥāmid al-'Ajābī identified a third example of these dirhams, currently in Tunisia at National Institute for Antiquities and Arts. Unfortunately he gave an incorrect reading of the year of the coins (220 AH/AD 835-836) whilst the right date is 210 AH<sup>14</sup>.

The dirhams in the name of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr consist of just one type (pl. 2, fig. 2) and the inscriptions are as follows:

<sup>10</sup> Cf. IBN 'IDĀRI AL-MARRAKUŠI, Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-Bayān al-Muḡrib fī akhbār mulūk al-andalus wa-l-Maḡrib*, edited by I. 'Abbās, Bayrūt, Dār al-'arabiyya li-l-kitāb, 1983<sup>3</sup>, 4 vols: vol. I, pp. 96-101.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. LAGUMINA, *Ripostiglio di monete*, cit.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 'ABD AL-WAHHĀB Ḥ.Ḥ., *Un tournant de l'histoire aghlabite*, «Revue tunisienne» XX (1937-38), pp. 343-352.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. DE CANDIA, *Monnaies aghlabites*, cit.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. AL-'AJABĪ Ḥ., *al-Maskūkāt al-'Arabiyya*, Tunis 1988, p. 173, no. 213, Pl.23 (W.2.77 gr. D. 25 mm).

OBVERSE	REVERSE
Field (within a circle with six dots):	Field (within beaded circle)
لا شريك له / الله وحده / بخ بخ / لا اله إلا	عدل / محمد / رسول الله / منصور بن نصر / منصور
Margin:	Margin:
بسم الله ضرب هذا الدرهم بإفريقية سنة عشرة (كذا) ومائتين	محمد رسول الله أرسله بالهدى ودين الحق ليظهره علي الدين كله ولو كره المشركون

This *dīnār* is identical to the *dīnār*-s in the name of Ziyāda' Allāh, as there is a circle enclosing the inscriptions of the Obverse and Reverse. Moreover these two issues share the same script: a simple Kufic with thick letters. The little difference between the inscriptions of Maṣṣūr's issues, in gold and silver, was intentional and linked to the principles that animated the revolt he headed. It is possible to notice the following details:

- 1) The slogan of the Aḡlabid dynasty "to conquer" *غلب* was removed from the top of the Reverse field and replaced by the word *عدل* "justice" which was the slogan of Maṣṣūr's revolt aiming at achieving justice and at preventing corruption.
- 2) Maṣṣūr put his name at the bottom of the Reverse field replacing the name of the Aḡlabid prince. It is interesting to note that the dirhams of Maṣṣūr recorded both his complete name – that is Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr – and his first name – Maṣṣūr – engraved beneath the inscriptions of the Reverse field; whilst in his *dīnār* his first name – Maṣṣūr – appears only beneath the Reverse field pointing out that he was the leader of the revolt and the ruler who ordered to strike this *dīnār*.
- 3) The word *maṣṣūr* has a double meaning: in one hand it is a personal name – Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr is the one who ordered to strike the *dīnār*; on the other hand it means also "The One Granted Victory" or "Victor" as Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr also defeated Ziyāda' Allāh conquering al-Qayrawān.
- 4) The date on the *dīnār* – 210 AH – corresponds to the victory that Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr achieved at al-Qayrawān.

All this considered we can conclude that this *dīnār*, dated 210 AH., belongs to the revolutionary Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr – not to the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mūn as first suggested by H. Lavoix and later repeated by other scholars. In particular the *dīnār* records the name Maṣṣūr beneath the Reverse field together with the known dirhams in the name of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr. This *dīnār*, exactly as the dirhams of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr, records the slogan “justice” above the inscriptions of the Reverse field. Maṣṣūr adopted this slogan during his revolt against Ziyāda’ Allāh – a detail that confirms that the *dīnār* belongs to Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr. The date of this *dīnār* – 210 AH. – is the same date on the dirhams, when Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr conquered al-Qayrawān and minted coins in his name. Both these issues were meant to attest that al-Qayrawān and the Ifrīqiyya were under the control of Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr after having defeated the Aghlabid prince Ziyāda’ Allāh. Last but not least this *dīnār* proves that Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr minted gold coins, an element that confirms historical chronicles mentioning that he minted coinage, not just silver issues but also gold ones, after taking over al-Qayrawān.



PLATE 1 – *Dīnār* in the name of Maṣṣūr dated 210 AH  
preserved in the Coin Cabinet of the BnF (Paris)



FIGURE 1 – *Dīnār* in the name of Maṣṣūr dated 210 AH, with Maṣṣūr ‘Victorious’ at the bottom of the Reverse field and the slogan: عدل (*adl*) ‘justice’, above the Reverse field



**PLATE 2 – Dirham in the name of Maṣṣūr minted in Ifrīqiyya, dated 210 AH preserved in the National Institute for Antiquities and Arts (Tunisia), Ḥāmid al-‘Ajabī 1988 (p. 173, No. 213, Pl. 23: W. 2.77 gr.; D. 25 mm)**



**FIGURE 2 – Dirham in the name of Maṣṣūr minted in Ifrīqiyya, dated 210 AH**