

ROMAN K. KOVALEV

The College of New Jersey – Ewing

PRODUCTION OF DIRHAMS AT THE MINT
OF DAMASCUS (DIMASHQ) IN THE FIRST FOUR
CENTURIES OF ISLAM AND THE QUESTION
OF NEAR EASTERN METALLIC ZONES*

Abstract

An examination of 159 hoards with 1822 dirhams minted at Damascus during the first four centuries of Islam sheds much light on a number of important questions regarding the economic history of the Near East during the Umayyad, 'Abbāsid, and Ikhshīdid eras. Using the hoard-count method of estimating mint outputs, it has been determined that the Damascus mint was significantly active only during the Umayyad period, a time when the city was the capital of the caliphate. Having no local silver mines and lacking revenue transfers from the provinces after 127 H, Damascus was, at best, a marginal mint for the production of dirhams. However, because Syria and the eastern Mediterranean region in general fell into a gold-copper metallic zone during the period in question, it is surprising that Damascus was at all an important mint when the city was the capital of the Islamic world.

Keywords

Dirhams, Damascus, Mints, Umayyad, 'Abbāsid, Ikhshīdid

* The core finding of this inquiry were presented at the Symposium on Islamic Numismatics, From the 8th to the 11th Century, held at the Danish Institute (November 5-7, 2007), Damascus, Syria. Since then, the study has been expanded and modified in certain areas. I should like to thank Dr. Michael Bates of the American Numismatic Society for kindly reading through the original draft of this paper and offering various suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

A great deal can be learned about economic and social history through the study of coin production at given mints during certain periods. Above all else, until quite recently precious or semi-precious metals (gold, silver, and copper) were essential for the issue of coins. Therefore, a certain measure of wealth on behalf of their emitters is presumed, since it required access to these valued commodities. However, the absence or paucity of copper, silver, or gold coin production should not be mistaken as evidence for the dearth of these metals or poverty in societies.¹ In the same way, the minting of coins cannot always be deemed as an indicator of affluence or surplus of the required metals.² With these observations made, societies that did mint coins obviously had access to the metals needed for their manufacture and, generally speaking, did so when there was demand for it: coins were issued for a reason, to fulfill a special function in a specific place. Although it is usually possible to determine who emitted coins, when and where, reasons why they were produced often remains unknown. Nonetheless, having answers to the former three questions can sometimes offer some clues to address the latter question – why they were minted?

In themselves, coins fulfill two salient economic purposes: stockpile wealth and serve as media for exchange. But, reasons for producing coins are many, and far from all are related to economics. Thus, while state or private mints may have released coinage for the collection of taxes or at the request of certain members of their societies for economic reasons (e.g., merchants who needed coins to conduct commercial operations), they were also minted by or at the request of governments to cover state expenses (e.g., pay soldiers or builders of construction projects).³ But,

¹ Far from all societies found a need to produce coins, for they found proxy currencies or commodity substitutes (e.g., silks, salt, seashells, precious metal ingots, chunks, or dust), used credit transactions, or relied on coins minted by other societies. See, for instance, P. van Alfen, "Uncoined Money in the Ancient World," *American Numismatic Society Magazine* 2.1 (2003): 16-17; J.S. Deyell, *Living Without Silver: The Monetary History of Early Medieval North India* (reprint; New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press India, 1999); Lien-sheng Yang, *Money and Credit in China: A Short History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952); P. Xinwei, *A Monetary History of China*, vol. 1, tr. E.H. Kaplan (Bellingham: Western Washington Univ. Press, 1994); D.C. Twitchett, *Financial Administration Under the T'ang Dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), 71ff.

² For instance, keeping with the theme of early Islamic history: during the Civil War in 196 H. Caliph al-Amīn, who was short of cash, issued to his supporters vials of perfume as payment, but later melted down silver and gold vessels for the minting of coins; see, Masudi, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*, tr. and ed. P. Lunde and C. Stone (London: Routledge, 1989), 150, 156. In other words, "wealth" and "surplus" of precious metal supply is always relative.

³ As it concerns the early Islamic world, somewhat recently H. Kennedy has suggested that mints were established in Syria in the late seventh century and coins issued there and elsewhere were specifically designated as payments of the military; see, his *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London-New York: Routledge, 2001), 68-71.

coins were also issued for political and religious reasons. Since the coin's surface could be inscribed with meaningful legends or images, they served as the preeminent medium for disseminating ideology/propaganda in pre-modern times.⁴ Yet, although coins were not always minted for economic purposes, almost as soon as they were produced they came to perform such functions since their owners used them to stock capital and act as vehicles in the exchange of goods and services. Whatever the reasons for their issue, understanding levels of coin production at certain mints during specific timeframes can reveal much about the state of the economy and society where they were emitted. These findings are especially useful for the study of societies and eras for which other primary sources are unreliable, limited, or unavailable, such as for the early Islamic period.

The present study is dedicated to the production of dirhams – medieval Muslim silver coins – at the mint of Damascus (Dimashq) during the first four centuries of Islam. This inquiry is one of a series of studies that have attempted to explore early Muslim dirham emission at various mints across the Islamic world. Previous works have examined mints of Iberia, central Asia, northern Iran, and the middle Volga basin, operated by the Spanish Umayyads, Sāmānids, Buwayhids, Ziyārids, Amīrs of Dāmīghān, Bāwandids, Justānids, Sīmjūrīds, Zaydī Imāms of Hawsam, and Volga Bulḡārs.⁵ What has been lacking, however, is a study dedicated to the emission of

⁴ Indeed, it has been argued many times that coinage as an invention had its origins in its propaganda function; see, for instance: T.R. Martin, "Why did the Greek Polis originally need coins?," *Historia Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 45, no. 3 (1996): 257-83. There are a great many examples that can be provided, especially for the ancient Greco-Roman coins, but staying to the period and region under examination, the early Arabic coins were filled with blatant Muslim religious and political messages, perhaps unlike any other coin type. Because these caliphal coins were so well recognized, common, and accepted across large areas of early medieval western Eurasia, various other rulers came to imitate these coins and add their own unique messages to them in order to defuse their local political and religious agendas; see, for instance: P.W.P. Carlyon-Britton, "The Gold Mancus of Offa, King of Mercia," *The British Numismatic Journal & The Proceedings of The British Numismatic Society* vol. V, 1st Ser. (1908): 55-72; J. Allan, "Offa's Imitation of an Arab Dinar," *The Numismatic Chronicle & Journal of The Royal Numismatic Society* vol. XIV, 4th Ser. (1914): 77-89; C.E. Blunt, M. Dolley, "A Gold Coin of the Time of Offa," *The Numismatic Chronicle* vol. VIII, 7th Ser. (1968): 151-60; R.K. KOVALEV, "Creating 'Khazar Identity' Through Coins – The 'Special Issue' Dirhams of 837/38," *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2005), 220-53; idem., "Grand Princess Olga of Rus' Shows the Bird: Her 'Christian Falcon' Emblem," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 39:4 (2012): 416-517; idem., "What Do 'Official' Volga Bulḡār Coins Suggest About the Political History of the Middle Volga Region During the Second Half of the Tenth Century?" *Central Eurasia in the Middle Ages. Studies in Honour of Peter B. Golden*, ed. István Zimonyi (in the press).

⁵ Th.S. NOONAN, R.K. KOVALEV, "The Dirham Output of the Spanish Umayyad Emirate, ca. 756-ca. 929," *Homenagem A Mário Gomes Marques*, eds. M. Castro Hipólito, et al (Sintra: Instituto de Sintra, 2000), 253-60; idem., "The Dirham Output and Monetary Circulation of a Secondary Sāmānid Mint: A Case Study of Balkh," *Moneta Mediaevalis: Studia numizmatyczne i historyczne ofiarowane*

dirhams at an eastern Mediterranean/western Near Eastern Islamic mint, or the region of Greater Syria/Bilād al-Shām. Since Damascus was the capital mint for most of the Umayyad era and continued to be an important city of the Muslim civilization in later times, it would be most attractive and appropriate to begin such a study with its production of dirhams during the first four centuries of Islam, which will span the Umayyad as well as the ‘Abbāsīd and Ikhshīdīd eras.⁶

* * *

There are two principal methods available to study mint outputs. One, the “die-count” approach, provides data on the absolute or projected total production of each mint based on the estimates of the number of coins that could have been struck with an individual die or stamp used for striking coins.⁷ The other is the “hoard-count” method, which relies on calculating the relative number of coins produced in light of the total number of pieces preserved in hoards or coin deposits. It rests on the assumption that the coins in hoards constitute a very good index or sample of mint output, a supposition whose theoretical soundness was demonstrated by Bengt Thor-

Profesorowi Stanisławowi Suchodolskiemu w 65. rocznicę urodzin, ed. R. KIERSNOWSKI, et al (Warsaw: Wydawn, 2002), 163-74; R.K. KOVALEV, “Mint Output in Tenth-Century Bukhārā: A Case Study of Dirham Production and Monetary Circulation in Northern Europe,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 28:1-4 [Festschrift for Thomas S. NOONAN, vol. I, ed. R. K. KOVALEV and H. M. Sherman] (2001): 245-71; idem., “Dirham Mint Output of Sāmānīd Samarqand and its Connection to the Beginnings of Trade with Northern Europe (10th century),” *Histoire et Mesure [Monnaie et espace]* 17:3-4 (2002): 197-216; idem., “The Mint of al-Shāsh: The Vehicle For the Origins and Continuation of Trade Relations Between Viking-Age Northern Europe and Sāmānīd Central Asia,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 12 (2002-2003), 47-79; idem., “Dirham Mint Output in the Southern Caspian Sea Provinces of Gilān, Ṭabaristān, Jurjān, and Qūmis in the Tenth-Early Eleventh Centuries” [Proceedings of the Conference “Two Centuries of Islamic Numismatics in Russia. General Results and Prospects. Sept. 24-29, 2012, St. Petersburg] (in the press); idem., “The Production of Dirhams in the Coastal Caspian Sea Provinces of Northern Iran in the Tenth-Early Eleventh Centuries and their Circulation in the Northern Lands,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 19 (2012): 133-84; idem., “What Do ‘Official’ Volga Bulḡār Coins Suggest”.

⁶ It should be noted that the Qarāmiṭa/Qarmaṭīs (ca. 358-367 H.) also struck dirhams at Damascus (361-362, 364-365, and 367 H.). But, aside from there being so very few of these coins, they are also not found amongst the hoards recorded in the catalogue that is used for the database of this study. Therefore, this issuing body will be omitted from the present inquiry. For these coins, see A. Vardanyan, “From Sectarrians to Politicians: Twelve Years of Qarmaṭīd Military Activity in Syria, Palestine and West Arabia (357-368/967-978),” *Revue Numismatique* 167 (2011): 423-50.

⁷ For some excellent and recent examples of such an approached used to study early Islamic mints, see G. RISPLING, “Stampkalkyl over mynt från Samarkand,” *Nordisk Numismatisk Unions Medlemsblat* 2 (2005): 47-56; L. TREADWELL, *Buyid Coinage: A Die Corpus (322-445 A.H.)* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2001); idem., *Craftsmen and coins: signed dies in the Iranian world (third to the fifth centuries AH)* (Vienna: Verlag Der Österreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 2011).

deman some years ago.⁸ It is true that the method has its drawbacks, if improperly utilized, i.e., not considering the context of the hoard's find-spot and using a limited quantity of hoards for such a study. Thus, Lutz Ilisch correctly observes that there are fundamental problems with this approach when working with medieval Near Eastern coin deposits, due to their general poor state of preservation.⁹ Indeed, with the exception of a minority of hoards that were discovered in "controlled environments" – mostly archaeological excavations – many deposits from the Near East are dealer's hoards, i.e., they were found under unknown circumstances in unspecified places and offered for sale to dealers who acted as intermediaries between the finders and final buyers. Aside from the problem of not knowing the exact place or even approximate find-spot of these hoards, they are often broken up and partially dispersed. In order to raise the price of hoards, finders or middlemen sometimes add additional coins that were not part of the original deposit. In this way, the hoard becomes "contaminated" and, hence, of greatly diminished value for research. Nevertheless, because hoards found in "controlled" situations are rare in the Near East, it is necessary to turn to dealer's hoards for additional evidence. Having made this note of caution, it needs to be underscored that the use of all of the Near Eastern hoards and their dirhams may well alleviate significant inaccuracies in the statistical results. To put it simply, using a large pool of data increases the likelihood that the generated statistics would reveal the larger, general patterns and expose aberrations.

It is possible to increase the statistical viability of the hoard-count method by examining not only Near Eastern hoards, but the many others found in other areas of Afro-Eurasia, particularly in eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus) and the Baltic where some 73 percent of all dirhams have been discovered, although it is true that by far most Damascus dirhams occur in Near Eastern hoards. While adding to the total number of dirhams and hoards that can be studied, there are problems with the deposits from the Northern lands as well. Hence, while many hoards from eastern Europe have been well studied and published, there are a number that have received inadequate attention. Also, although the huge number of hoards and dirhams found in Sweden have been very well studied, as those found in the Baltic States and Finland, deposits discovered in other Baltic lands suffer from massive fragmentation, something that complicates their identification; this is a particularly acute problem for deposits of Poland, Germany, and Denmark. But, with all these real problems

⁸ B. THORDEMAN, "The Lohe Hoard: A Contribution to the Methodology of Numismatics," *Numismatic Chronicle* 8 (1948): 188-204. Also see Th.S. NOONAN, "Early 'Abbasid Mint Output,'" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 29 (1986): 113-75; reprinted in *The Islamic World, Russia and the Vikings, 750-900: The Numismatic Evidence* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate-Variorum, 1998).

⁹ L. ILISCH, "Ursachen und Verbreitung von Schatzfunden im Allgemeinen und von Schatzfunden arabischer Münzen im Ostseeraum im Besonderen" http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/lelewel-gespraech/5-2012/ilisch_ursachen (accessed 1/15/2014).

observed, statistically the data that is available is more than adequate, due to its sheer volume. Moreover, there is no reason to think that scholars who identified (or not) the dirhams found in these Northern lands' hoards specifically excluded those minted at Damascus from their studies. Nor is there any reason to believe that these particular coins were fragmented more often than any others. In other words, it is most unlikely that the relative numbers of Damascus dirham found in deposits of eastern Europe and the Baltic are in any significant way skewed in relations to their absolute volumes or relative numbers *vis-à-vis* others. Altogether, as will be discussed below, when taking all of the hoards together from all regions of Afro-Eurasia, 159 of them contained 1797 dirhams from Damascus. In view of this quite substantive volume of hoards and coins, it will be posited that, on the balance, it is more than possible to construct a reliable and statistically sound database for the study of dirham production at the mint of Damascus.

While the hoard-count approach does not provide data on the absolute output of a mint, as does the die-count technique, it can shed much light on the general patterns of mint production for specific years coins were emitted. Of course, it would be most desirable to have both types of studies (die-count and hoard-count) conducted for any given mint. Alas, when dealing with early Islamic numismatic, die-count inquiries are not available for the vast majority of mints and it is most unlikely that this needed subject of inquiry will be addressed anytime in the near future.¹⁰ Nor can any corpus of early Islamic coins be of utility for the study of mint outputs. Even the most comprehensive and extensive museum or numismatic collection catalogues and sylloges cannot be used for such a study, since their assemblages do not constitute large-scale groupings of random coin finds. Indeed, quite to the contrary: such collections are usually amassed through careful, selective gathering of single coins by issuing authorities, mints, years, types or rare and well-preserved specimens. For example, if one consults M.G. Klat's *Catalogue of the Post-Reform Dirhams* or N.D. Nicol's *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean*, one would come to the conclusion that Damascus regularly emitted dirhams under the Umayyads, which, as will be seen, was not at all the case.¹¹ Context is missing when consulting such lists, since

¹⁰ It should be noted that in the very few cases when die- and hoard-count examinations have been carried out for specific mints, such as for specific years of dirham issues from Samarqand and al-Shāsh, statistics have revealed that both methods collaborate and substantiate each other. See, KOVALEV, "The Mint of al- Shāsh," 50 and G. RISPLING, "The Earliest Samanid Silver Coinage at Samarqand and al-Shash According to a Die-Study" (1998-11-27) [unpublished]. Also, see RISPLING, "Stampkalkyl over mynt från Samarkand," p. 47 and n. 3 on pp. 55-56, where he discusses the merits of using both methods as well as makes observations regarding the above study.

¹¹ M.G. KLAT, *Catalogue of the Post-Reform Dirhams. The Umayyad Dynasty* (London: Spink, 2002); N.D. NICOL, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean*, vol. 2 [Early Post-Reform Coinage] (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2009).

they do not offer the relative figures of one year of production versus another. The same can be said about the otherwise most useful S. Album's *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*:¹² all that can be gained from it is data on the relative rarity of some coins over others. And, even when published collections or catalogues do contain hoards – even large ones – that can be used to study the output of certain mints, it is never certain that any one of them are representative of the larger picture of coin outputs: the mint and date profiles of coins in any given hoard may be “anomalous” rather than “typical” due to or the result of when and where the hoard was assembled and deposited (not speaking of the problems of “contaminated” deposits).

In sum, at least for the present, no other methodology is available to seriously address the production of dirhams for the first four centuries of Islam at Damascus other than the hoard-count method. As indicated above, to increase the reliability of this approach it is necessary to turn to multiple hoards, coming from as wide a geographic and chronological range as possible. The database devised for this study provides just such a tool.

SURVEY OF NUMISMATIC DATA USED IN THE STUDY AND BASIC OBSERVATIONS

The data for this study derives from the nearly finished for publication complete catalogue of dirham hoards (defined as a deposit of coins with five or more dirhams) from across Afro-Eurasia dating from ca. 700 to ca. 1100 C.E.¹³ Presently, the volume contains about half a million dirhams, deriving from more than 1650 hoards (published and unpublished) that have been discovered as far as Portugal and Ireland in the west, Afghanistan in the east, Oman in the south, and Norway in the north.¹⁴ Of its 1650+ coin hoards, 159 or 9.6% contain post-reform dirhams issued by the mint at Damascus.

All of the hoards with Damascus dirhams were deposited between the first quarter of the eighth and the first quarter of the eleventh century C.E., or over the course of some 300 years. The 159 hoards yield at least 1822 dirhams from the mint.¹⁵ Of

¹² S. ALBUM, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 3rd ed. (Santa Rosa: Stephen Album Rare Coins, 2011).

¹³ Th.S. NOONAN, R.K. KOVALEV, *Dirham Hoards from Medieval Western Eurasia, c. 700-c. 1100* [Commentationes De Nummis Saeculorum IX-XI in Suecia Repertis. Nova series 13] (Stockholm) (in preparation).

¹⁴ R.K. KOVALEV, A.C. Kaelin, “Circulation of Arab Silver in Medieval Afro-Eurasia,” *History Compass* 5/1 (2007): 1-21.

¹⁵ Because the exact quantities of dirhams struck at various mints are not always reported, it is often difficult to discern their exact numbers. Sometimes, all that is reported is that “some” dirhams struck at such- and-such mint in such-and-such hoard were found. In such cases, I have taken the

this total, 1176 can be dated to precise years (e.g., 93 H.); 621 can only be assigned to specific dynasties or rulers; and, all that is known of the remaining 25 coins is that they were struck at Damascus sometime during the first four centuries A.H. Thus, the available sample provides 1797 (1176+621) datable dirhams with which to work. These figures, along with the 159 hoards, thus become the main database for the study of Damascus' mint output (Table II). It should be noted that the number of dirhams from this mint used in the present study is not absolute, since the stray or single finds of these coins that are archived in museums and private collections across the world are not included into the total. The reason for excluding these individual coins has everything to do with the nature of the current inquiry, which is exclusively based on hoards and the hoard-count method of estimating mint output. With that said, it is highly doubtful that the inclusion of these single coins would, in any meaningful way, augment the larger picture drawn in the present study based on hoards.

TABLE I – The spatial distribution of dirhams struck in Damascus

REGION	NUMBER OF HOARDS	% OF TOTAL HOARDS	NUMBER OF DIRHAMS	% OF TOTAL DIRHAMS
Near East	47	29.6%	1,347	74%
Central Asia	6	3.8%	38	2.1%
North Africa and Sicily	3	1.9%	31	1.7%
Iberia	3	1.9%	32	1.8%
Southern Caucasus	12	7.5%	59	3.2%
Russia, Ukraine, & Belarus	28	17.6%	120	6.6%
Sweden	43	27%	136	7.5%
Northern Germany	3	1.9%	41	2.2%
Poland	4	2.5%	8	0.4%
Southeastern Baltic	5	3.1%	5	0.3%
Denmark	3	1.9%	3	0.2%
Finland	2	1.3%	2	0.1%
TOTAL	159	100%	1,822	100%

minimal number of one dirham from the mint and included it into the total. While such a conservative estimate may underestimate the total quantity of dirhams discovered, in view of the lack of precise data, little else can be done.

TABLE II – Dirham mint output of Damascus by dynasty

DYNASTIES	NUMBER OF DIRHAMS WITHOUT EXACT DATES	NUMBER OF DIRHAMS WITH EXACT DATES	TOTAL NUMBER OF DIRHAMS	% OF TOTAL
Umayyads	590	1,023	1,613	89.8
‘Abbāsids	19	135	154	8.6
Ikhshīdids	11	18	29	1.6
TOTAL	621	1,176	1,797	100

MINT OUTPUT OF DAMASCUS

The database shows that during the first four centuries of Islam, dirhams were minted at Damascus by the Umayyad, ‘Abbāsīd, and Ikhshīdīd dynasties. The first of these rulers were by far the most prolific in striking dirhams. Indeed, 89.8% of all dirhams issued at the mint were Umayyad. This can be explained by the position Damascus held as the political capital of the Muslim world during practically all years of this dynasty’s rule, with the exception of the last seven or so years when the capital was moved to Ḥarrān in al-Jazīra.¹⁶ The next dynasty to rule the caliphate – the ‘Abbāsīd (including ‘Abbāsīd governors and Ṭūlūnīd amīrs¹⁷) – produced 8.6% of the total dirhams struck at the mint. Thus, less than one-tenth of the dirhams minted at Damascus were struck by the ‘Abbāsīds, which is a very nominal number, especially when considering that they controlled the city four times longer than the Umayyads. Again, this can at least partially be explained by the ‘Abbāsīd relocation of the capital of the caliphate to Madīnat al-Salām/Baghdād (est. ca. 762 C.E.) in the province of al-‘Irāq soon after the advent of the dynasty. Starting with its first dirham issues in 146 H. and continuing into the next several decades, Madīnat al-Salām became the primary mint of the caliphate, as would be fitting for a caliphal capital situated in al-‘Irāq.¹⁸ Finally, the Ikhshīdīds issued their “official” dirhams at Damascus in

¹⁶ For the shifts of capitals in the second half of the 740s through the mid-750s, see J. Lassner, *The Shaping of ‘Abbāsīd Rule* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), ch. 6.

¹⁷ All grouped here with the ‘Abbāsīds due to their very few numbers.

¹⁸ During the interlude between the transfer of the capital from Ḥarrān to Madīnat al-Salām, al-Saffāḥ and al-Manṣūr struck nearly all of the caliphal dirhams at the mints of al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa, the latter being the initial capital of the caliphate in al-‘Irāq before it moved to nearby al-Ḥāshimīyya by al-Saffāḥ. Interestingly, al-Saffāḥ did not strike any dirhams at this new capital and al-Manṣūr issued these coins there in very tiny quantities (only in 138-141 and possibly 145 H.); see, ALBUM, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 50. Indeed, the province of al-‘Irāq was by far the most dominant issuer of dirhams during the first 13-14 years of the ‘Abbāsīd era, where just al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa struck 86-100% of all

331-358 H. Only 1.6% of all dirhams emitted at the mint were struck by this dynasty. With their political and economic powerbase situated in Egypt, Damascus was of a secondary, provincial importance to this dynasty that controlled it for only a very brief period. Hence, in absolute terms, the Ikhshīdids minted very few dirhams at Damascus. Below, dirham output of Damascus under each of these three dynasties will be examined in detail.

UMAYYADS

The Umayyads began to issue dirhams (of Sasanian type) at Damascus under ‘Abd al-Malik (66-86 H.) in 72 H., or seven years prior to this caliph’s well-known dirham monetary reform of 79 H.¹⁹ The earliest of these rather rare dirhams in our database dates to 77 H. The initial year’s output was very nominal and, indeed, there are no dirhams from the mint in the database for the following year. However, from the year of the monetary reform it is clearly indicated in the database that dirhams came to be minted regularly and in relatively large numbers until 100 H. or the middle of the short reign of ‘Umar II (99-101 H.), when there was an unprecedented boom in production. Prior to discussing the sharp rise in output in 100 H., several observations need to be made in regard to the issuing years 85-89 H.

In themselves, 85-89 H. do not present anything that would seriously distinguish them from the previous (from 79 H.) or following (to 100 H.) years of dirham production (perhaps except for the peak in emissions in 89 H., which is a slight escalation from the earlier pinnacles). But, it is precisely for this reason that these years are of interest. The years 85-89 H. represent a period when Damascus, at least in theory, could have experienced a boom in dirham output. During these five years, Damascus was one of only ten mints in operation across the Muslim world, none of which except for Wāsiṭ were of any significance in their emission. In all, during the period 85-89 H. the maximal number of mints in operation per year was six and minimal three

dirhams minted in the caliphate between 132 and 145 H.; see, NOONAN, “Early ‘Abbasid Mint Output,” 141-142. Hence, prior to the advent of Madīnat al-Salām as the caliphal capital mint, al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa both fulfilled its coin-producing role.

¹⁹ Ph. Grierson, “The Monetary Reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik: Their Metrological Basis and Their Financial Repercussions,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 3:3 (1960): 241-64; M.L. Bates, “History, Geography, and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage,” *Revue suisse de Numismatique/Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau* 65 (1986): 231-262; idem., “The Coinage in Syria Under the Umayyads, 692-750 A.D.,” *The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilād al-Shām During the Umayyad Period: Proceedings of the Third Symposium*, eds. M. ‘Adnān Bakhīt and R. Jāmi‘ah al-Urdunīyah (Amman: Univ. of Jordan Press, 1989), 195-228.

(85 H. – 4, 86 H. – 3, 87 H. – 4, 88 H. – 5, and 89 H. – 6²⁰), which is a great reduction from the earlier period (82 H. – 13, 83 H. – 16, and 84 H. – 10²¹). In total contrast, 36 mints (in addition to Damascus and Wāsiṭ) struck dirhams in 90 H.: of these eight were mints that had previously not produced dirhams while the rest of the 28 were reactivated after their closure sometime between 79 and 84 H. Quite clearly, 85-89 H. were very special years when dirhams were produced only in Damascus and Wāsiṭ in any notable quantities. In this light, it could be expected that Damascus would have increased its dirham output during this period. Based on our data, this did not occur. To attempt to understand this apparent incongruity, it is necessary to consider why mints were closed to begin with during the years 85-89 H.

To explain the mint closures, it has been posited that al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (40-95 H.) – the governor of al-‘Irāq – terminated the eastern mints and monopolized the production of dirhams at Wāsiṭ between 84 and 89 so as to control the monetary supply and thus give him a monetary/fiscal advantage over his rival Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ash‘ath until the former was no longer challenged as governor after 85 H. But, presumably this restriction on dirham output caused a shortage of coined silver and damaged trade and commerce; hence, al-Ḥajjāj permitted eastern mints to resume dirham emissions in 90 H.²² While the above explanation has some merits, it has several important flaws. For one, seven mints in the east besides Wāsiṭ were still in

²⁰ When these other mints struck some miserable numbers of dirhams during these five years, they were mostly situated in the southern Caucasus: “Albanaq,” Arrān, Dabīl, and Tiflīs, presumably because silver was available there for their emissions. Astān, al-Dasakir, and Ḥarrān seem to be the exceptions: the former two located in al-‘Irāq and the latter in al-Jazīra. In this connection it should be noted that the mints of the southern Caucasus and al-Jazīra may, in fact, have been one traveling military camp mint in the area, striking coins under different mint names for military payments (‘aṭā’) to soldiers; see, M. Bates, “The Dirham Mint of the Northern Provinces of the Umayyad Caliphate,” *Armenian Numismatic Journal*, Ser. 1, vol. 15 (1989): 89-111; Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs*, 70.

²¹ The others being: “Albanaq” (=? Alvank/Albania), Arrān, Astān, Awdh (mint place unknown), Dabīl, al-Dasakir (probably in al-‘Irāq), Ḥarrān, and Tiflīs. None of the other mints were in operation for the duration of the years 85-89 H. and produced very few dirhams, all now considered very rare or extremely rare. For the sake of perspective, prior to 85 H., thirteen mints were operational in 82 H.; sixteen in 83 H.; and, ten in 84 H. The following year, in 85 H., aside from Damascus and Wāsiṭ (which became operational in 84 H. or a year after the city was founded) only Dabīl and Tiflīs struck these coins. In 86, again beside Damascus and Wāsiṭ, only Dabīl was operational. The following year (87 H.), al-Dasakir and Ḥarrān emitted some tiny quantities of these coins in addition to those issued by the two other major mints. The year 88 H. witnessed continued dirham production at al-Dasakir, Ḥarrān, Damascus, and Wāsiṭ, but Awdh joined in emitting these coins. Ḥarrān, Damascus, and Wāsiṭ continued to produce dirhams in 89 H., but were also supplemented by the mints “Albanaq,” Arrān, and Astān. These observations are based on the table of Umayyad mints listed in ALBUM, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 40-41.

²² R. DARLEY-DORAN, “Wāsiṭ, The mint,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. XI (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 169-170.

operation in 84 H.²³ Only in 85 H., after al-Ash‘ath was defeated, Wāsiṭ became the sole large-scale dirham-producing mint in the east.²⁴ Hence, the connection between the closure of mints and al-Ash‘ath’s rebellion is not there to be made.

But, perhaps the largest problem with ascribing a centralized and “monopolistic” monetary policy in the east to al-Ḥajjāj and al-Ash‘ath’s revolt is that caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (66-86 H.) had initiated such measures already in the early 80s H. in Syria, as is well attested to by the high degree of state central control in the production of copper coins (fulūs) in the region.²⁵ By the late 80s H., however, this central control over coining fulūs in Syria began to unravel and by the 90s H. was completely undone as the production of these coins passed to the authorities (if not privately-run mints) of the regions.²⁶ This development in Syria’s copper coinage is, of course, paralleled by the appearance of numerous mints striking dirhams in 90 H. and thereafter in the east. Therefore, it can be suggested that in the last year or two of the monetary reformer-Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign and the beginning years of al-Walīd I’s (86-96 H.), these two rulers attempted to exert strong central control over coin production across the caliphate. This policy restricted and centralized dirham production to Syria and al-‘Irāq – at the capital of Damascus and in Wāsiṭ, the latter established as the chief Syrian garrison-town (unofficial capital) of the east in 83 H. and began to strike coins the next year under al-Ḥajjāj’s supervision.²⁷ The program continued until 90 H., when central control over coin production and restriction to two operative mints was lifted across the Muslim lands. Noteworthy is that this will not be the last time that the Umayyad caliphs would implement a centralized and restrictive monetary policy. As will be seen below, after the activation and reactivation of mints across al-‘Irāq and Khurāsān during al-Walīd I’s mid-reign years, numerous mints continued to issue dirhams across the east under Sulaymān (96-99 H.) and ‘Umar II (99-101 H.)

²³ Namely, Ardashīr Khurra, Hamadhān, Iṣṭakhr, Jūr, Marw, al-Rayy, and Sābūr – mostly situated in Iran and near its borders. It should also be noted that the closure of mints in al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa during these years of revolt is most understandable, since these cities were in rebellion against al-Ḥajjāj. In other words, the succession of dirham production there had nothing to do with al-Ḥajjāj’s monetary policies.

²⁴ It should be noted that the dates of the rebellion are not certain, but there is little dispute that it did not carry on into 85 H. and beyond. For the chronology of the revolt (generally dated to ca. 81-84 H.), see G. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam. The Umayyad Caliphate A.D. 661-750* (London: Routledge, 1986), 67-9.

²⁵ H. Bone, *The Administration of Umayyad Syria: The Evidence of Copper Coins* [Dissertation] (Princeton Univ., 2000), 285, 309.

²⁶ Bone, *The Administration of Umayyad Syria*, 286-87, 309-10.

²⁷ There is nothing inherently contradictory in proposing that the policy was initiated and sustained by the caliphs in Damascus while executed under the supervision of the governor of al-‘Irāq al-Ḥajjāj. For the latter’s control over the production of dirhams in the east, see A.S. DeShazo, M. Bates, “The Umayyad Governors of al-‘Irāq and the Changing Annulet Patterns on their Dirhams,” *Numismatic Chronicle* 7/14 (1974): 112, 116.

until Yazīd II (101-105 H.) terminated them once again and restricted dirham emission in the central lands to the same two main mints.

Returning to Damascus as a mint: what is quite evident is that the very years when the 85-89 H. mint closures occurred, Damascus shows no appreciable measure of increased dirham production, perhaps one exception being the 89 H. peak, although far from impressive in relative terms to the larger pattern. Just as telling is that the striking of dirhams at Wāsiṭ that began in 84 H. and its position as one of the two main operative mints until 89 H. appears to have had no notable impact on the emission of these coins at Damascus. In light of this, it can be presumed that sufficient volume of dirhams were available in Syria not to warrant Damascus to produce more or less of these coins. It also seems evident that Damascus was not made responsible for emitting dirhams to compensate for the mints that were closed. Nor does it appear that the mint was linked to the larger coined-silver monetary economy of Syria or the central Islamic lands in general, for had it been, it would be reasonable to expect that it would have struck more of these coins due to their increased demand because of their decreased supply. Why this may have been the case will be addressed below.

Turning to the mass-dirham producing year 100 H. at Damascus – it needs to be noted that the coins from this year come from multiple and numerous hoards, not an anomalous single deposit with a high concentration of these coins. Thus, Damascus' dirham emission was unusually high this year: more than five times greater than the previous year and almost six times larger than the following. Indeed, 100 H. was the most active dirham-striking year in the history of the mint – represented by 93 coins in the database, i.e., 9.1% of all Umayyad strikes come from this year.

Several reasons can be advanced to explain such an upsurge in production at the mint in 100 H. For one, Damascus may have struck these coins to pay the Syrian army that was dispatched by the caliph to fight the Khārījites who rose in revolt that year in al-'Irāq.²⁸ Alternatively, 'Umar II, who was known for being a fiscal reformer,²⁹ may have ordered the mint to produce large quantities of coins as part of some new economic policy. Or, there was some major inflow of silver into the capital mint that year which was not recorded in the written sources. Indeed, none of these explanations are necessarily mutually exclusive, particularly the latter two. What is known numismatically is that the very same year – 100 H. – Wāsiṭ, the other key mint, appears to have terminated its rather intense production of dirhams. After

²⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation*, tr. D.S. Powers, vol. 24 [The Empire in Transition] (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 76-8.

²⁹ J. WELLHAUSEN, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, tr. M.G. WEIR (Calcutta: Taylor & Francis, 1927), 267-311; H.A.R. GIBB, "The Fiscal Rescript of 'Umar II," *Arabica* II (1955): 1-16; M.A. SHABAN, *The 'Abbāsīd Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), 86-92; idem., *Islamic History A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132): A New Interpretation*, 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), 131-5.

issuing these coins regularly and in large quantities since 84 H., the mint suddenly ceased to operate in 100 H. (none are known); minted very few in 101 H. (considered rare); and, again none at all in 102 H. (none are known). Starting the following year (103 H.), however, Wāsiṭ resumed issuing dirhams and did so in rather notable quantities until 132 H.³⁰

The most probable explanation for the disruption in Wāsiṭ's production in 100-102 H. was 'Umar II's administrative division of the eastern lands (al-'Irāq and Khurāsān) into three governorates of al-Baṣra, al-Kūfa, and Khurāsān, while vacating the Syrian garrison from Wāsiṭ (which ceased to be the seat of the governor already in 97 H.). However, the next caliph (Yazīd II – 101-105 H.) reestablished Wāsiṭ as the chief Syrian garrison.³¹ In other words, it would be reasonable to presume that with the withdrawal of the Syrian garrison from the city (perhaps in 100 H.) dirhams were no longer struck at Wāsiṭ, but were emitted when troops returned (probably in 103 H.). In light of this, it would be logical to conclude that at least in 100 H. Damascus took over the leading role of striking these coins from Wāsiṭ and emitted an unprecedented quantity of them that year, most probably to pay the Syrian troops operating in the eastern provinces while pacifying the Khārijites.

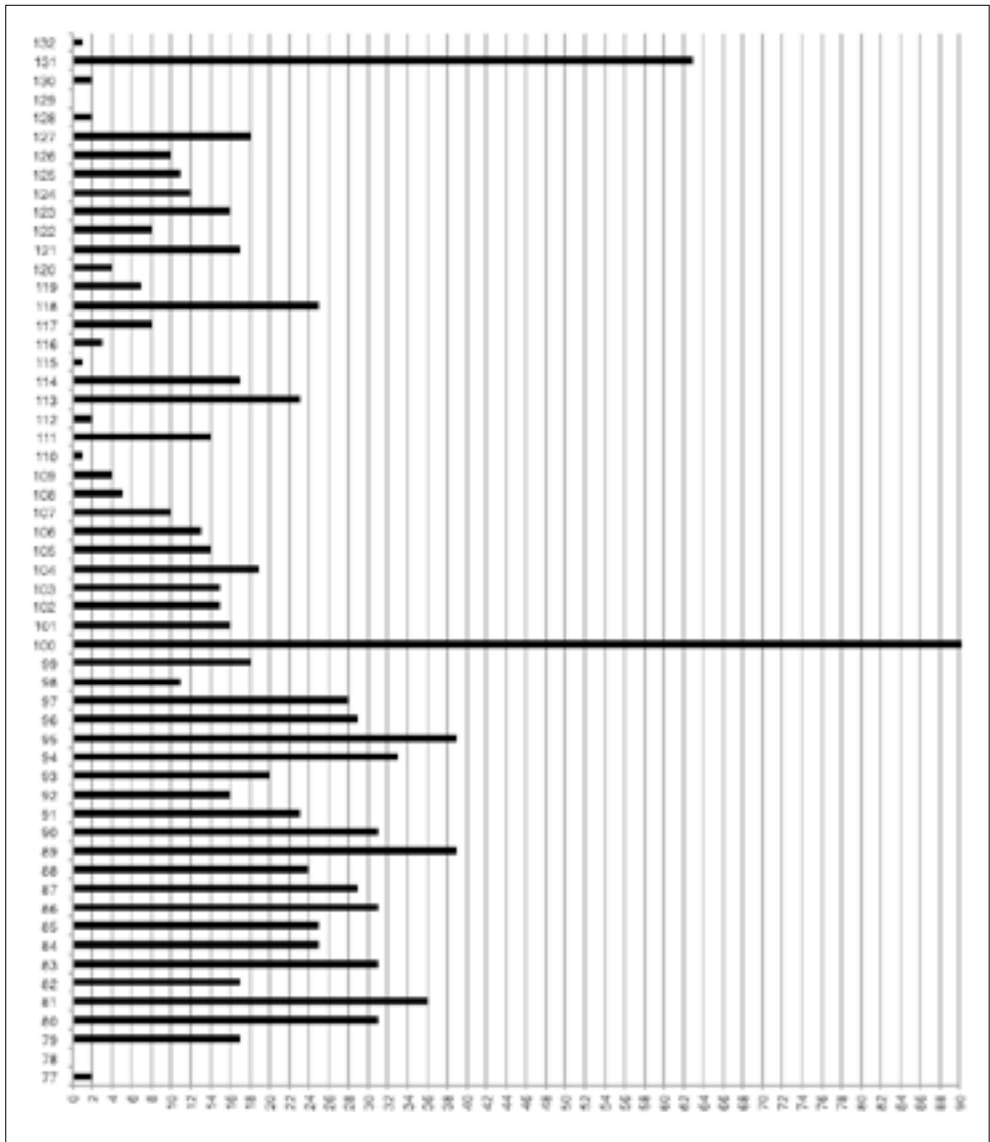
After 'Umar II's reign ended in 101 H., there was a steady, but not altogether catastrophic, decline in the quantities of dirhams minted at Damascus until the very last years of the Umayyad dynasty. Although there were years of rather numerous emissions (e.g., 113, 118, 127 H.), the overwhelming majority of years produced fewer dirhams than the 80s-early 100s H. What is more, there were certain years (e.g., 110, 112, 115, 128 H.) when dirham production practically ceased. For 129 H. there are no examples at all in the database, although some dirhams from this year are known.³² Taken as a whole, from the time dirhams began to be emitted at Damascus until the last year of 'Umar II's rule in 101 H., 65% of all dirhams minted in the city by the Umayyads had been produced (664 total in the database) [Figure I].

The relatively large emission of dirhams at Damascus prior to 101 H. and the subsequent drop that lasted through the mid-120s H. is rather strange, particularly when keeping in mind that this was the capital mint of the caliphate. What is more, the above finding contradicts what is presently assumed about the mint. Thus, it has been argued that upon becoming caliph, Hishām (105-125 H.) ordered the closure of most of the mints in the provinces and required the forwarding of coins and bullion to Damascus and Wāsiṭ where they could be converted into dirhams. Therefore, these two mints must have been the key suppliers of the coins to the rest of the

³⁰ ALBUM, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 41.

³¹ SHABAN, *Islamic History A.D. 600-750*, 1, 132-3.

³² ALBUM, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 40.



Y = Years H./X = Quantities

FIGURE I – Dirham mint output of Damascus under the Umayyads (77-132 H.)

caliphate, indeed held a “monopoly” over their production.³³ To be sure, such a conclusion can be derived at, since several Arabic sources relate that Hishām ordered a silver coinage reform in 106 H. to be carried out by his governor of al-‘Irāq, Khālīd ibn ‘Abdallāh (105-120 H.) who, subsequently (and later governor Yūsuf ibn ‘Umar – 120-126 H.), maintained very close supervision over the production of dirhams.³⁴ The reforms mentioned in the accounts are substantiated by numismatic evidence, which shows that obvious changes were made to the coins struck between 106 and 120 H. in Damascus and al-‘Irāq: e.g., larger flan/die sizes, but not greater weights, and different annulet patterns.³⁵ But, do these monetary reforms translate to mean that the mints of Damascus and Wāsiṭ came to hold a “monopoly” on the emission of dirhams during Hishām’s caliphate?

Several problems arise with the above conclusion. First, while it is true that Hishām’s reign witnessed a period during which Damascus and Wāsiṭ were by far the most dominant mints for the striking of dirhams, their supremacy was felt only within the central regions of the lands of Islam – Mashriq (Syria and al-‘Irāq) and regions east of it to Khurāsān (Ādharbayjān, Ṭabaristān, Jibāl, Fārs, Zaranj, Kirmān, and Sijistān). Thus, the mints of al-‘Irāq, such as al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa, ceased to produce dirhams after 101-102 H. and only resumed emissions in 128 H., or just after Hishām’s reign. Mints to the east of Mashriq also terminated production at the same time: Jayy, Iṣṭakhr, Dārābjird, Sijistān, and Zaranj after 102 H.; Ṭabaristān after 103 H.; Kirmān after 105 H.; and, Ādharbayjān after 106 H. However, aside from Damascus and Wāsiṭ, during the 100s through the early/mid-120s H. the caliph permitted dirhams to be struck at a number of key mints outside of the central regions – some more regularly active than others – such as in Iberia (al-Andalus), North Africa (Ifriqiya), southern Caucasus (Armīniya and then al-Bāb), and Cisoxania/eastern Khurāsān (Balkh/Balkh al-Bayḍā’/al-Mubāraka).³⁶ In this way, if Hishām or

³³ J. WALKER, *A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum. Part 2: Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umayyad Coins* (London: British Museum Press, 1956), lxiii-lxiv; M. Broome, *A Handbook of Islamic Coins* (London: Seaby Publ., 1985), 7, 10. Recently, Kennedy (*The Armies of the Caliphs*, 70-1) argued for the same point of view.

³⁴ For the primary sources, see al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, pt. 2, tr. P.K. Hitti (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), 267; al-Maqrīzī in WALKER, *op cit.*, lxiii and D. Eustache, “Études de numismatique et de métrologie musulmanes,” *Hespéris Tamuda* IX (1968): 99-100, nn. 57-9; idem., “Études de numismatique et de métrologie musulmanes,” *Hespéris Tamuda* X (1969): 114-5.

³⁵ DeShazo, Bates, “The Umayyad Governors of al-‘Irāq,” 116-7, n. 25.

³⁶ See ALBUM, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 40-1; F. Schwarz, *Bahj und die Landschaften am Oberen Oxus* [Sylloge Numorum Arabicorum Tübingen; XIVc. Ḥurāsān III] (Tübingen-Berlin, 2002), p. 6-7, nos. 455 (108 H.)-474 (128 H.). For dirhams struck in 105 H. in Kirmān (not noted in Album), see the Meshed? (Khurāsān, Iran, pre-1966), *tpq* 115 H., hoard. Aside from the resumption of Umayyad dirham emissions at al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa after Hishām’s reign, production of these coins also recommenced at the mints of Jazira (126 H.) and Sijistān (127 H.), Jayy (129 H.) (only one known dirham was struck that

his governors of al-‘Irāq – Khālid ibn ‘Abdallāh and Yūsuf ibn ‘Umar – did create a “monopoly” over mints, it only applied to the central territories of the caliphate. Mints of the peripheral lands continued to operate, although there were fewer of them than before.

Second, it should be noted in the above list of mint closures across the central lands that nearly all were terminated not under Hishām, but during the rule of his predecessor – Yazīd II. Indeed, al-Balādhurī clearly states that it was under this caliph that the governor of al-‘Irāq – ‘Umar ibn Ḥubayra (102-105 H. arrived in 103?) – “...refined the silver more than his predecessors had done, improved the dirhams, and was strict in regard to its exchange.”³⁷ It is true that ‘Umar ibn Ḥubayra and his immediate successors issued purer dirhams than previously.³⁸ Therefore, it would appear that the more stringent monetary policies in regard to silver coinage in al-‘Irāq predated Hishām by a number of years, something that is collaborated by the closure of all mints in the central Islamic lands except Damascus, Wāsiṭ, and Ādharbayjān during the caliphate of Yazīd II. During Hishām’s era, these policies were only continued, not introduced, by his governors of al-‘Irāq who, according to al-Balādhurī, initiated even more strict controls over dirham production.³⁹ But, it needs to be underscored that Hishām closed only one mint (Ādharbayjān) in the central lands, as all others Yazīd II had already shut. Hence, the reforms in regard to silver coinage – specifically that of concentrating dirham production at Damascus and Wāsiṭ – were carried out under Yazīd II, and Hishām continued the policies of his predecessor until his death in 125 H. Here it should be observed that Yazīd II’s measures may well have had their roots in the program that was already laid out by ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Walīd I in 85-89 H., one that was based on centralized coin production, supervised by strong state central control. But, the impetus behind these particular closures and restrictions most likely lay with the reestablishment of Wāsiṭ as the chief Syrian garrison and the main mint in the east in ca. 101-ca. 103 H.

year; see the Old Termez (Termez oblast’, Uzbekistan, 1981), *tpq* 128 H., hoard below), and al-Sāmiyya began to strike dirhams for the first time, although only in 131 H. Not all of these mints, it should be noted, became regular producers, since some clearly issued dirhams for special occasions. In addition, ‘Abbāsīd revolutionary partisans, but mainly the Khārjites (the rebel Imām Abdallāh b. Mu‘āwiya), also reactivated various mints: northern (al-Rayy, 128-131 H.; Jurjān, 130 H.; Hamadhān, 129 H.; Māhayy, 129 H.), central (Jayy, 127-130 H.; al-Taymara, 128-129 H., Ṭanbarak, 133 H.; Dārābjird, 129 H.; Sābūr, 129 H.; Ardashīr Khurra, 129 H.), and southern (Rāmhurmuz, 128 H.; Iṣṭakhr, 128-129 H.) Iran as well as Khurāsān (Marw, 127-128 and 130-133 H.), Cisoxiana (Balkh, 130-132 H.), and al-‘Irāq (al-Kūfa, 128 H.); see: ALBUM, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 47; C. Wurtzel, “The Coinage of the Revolutionaries in the Late Umayyad Period,” *The American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 23 (1978): 166-79.

³⁷ al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, pt. 2, 266.

³⁸ A good reason for why this was the case has been proposed by J. Bacharach, “Al-Mansur and Umayyad Dirhams,” *Yarmouk Numismatics* IV (1992): 10.

³⁹ al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, pt. 2, 267.

Third, the notion that Wāsiṭ and Damascus supplied dirhams to other cities and provinces in the caliphate at the time when these two mints held a “monopoly” on the striking of the coins in the central lands needs to be reevaluated. To begin, to suggest that these two mints provided dirhams to the rest of the caliphate implies that the central government directed the distribution of these coins to other regions. However, this is most unlikely. Regional mints struck coins for their own local purposes, and if the caliphs ever had the need to dispatch coins from the center to the periphery, this would have been done on special, rare occasions, e.g., pay troops (perhaps as in 100 H. from Damascus). Under normal circumstances, natural market forces would have been responsible for the distribution of coins, not state fiat.

Next, while the output of dirhams at Wāsiṭ has not yet been addressed in detail (although there is good reason to believe that it was by far the most productive Umayyad mint⁴⁰), it is now evident that Damascus issued relatively few dirhams in the late 100s through the early 130s H., as compared to earlier periods. If Yazīd II and Hishām hoped to concentrate dirham production in the capital, their goals do not appear to have been reached, as the mint produced fewer of these coins than even before ca. 101 H. and did so quite erratically. For this reason, it is not at all clear how Damascus could have been a major supplier of dirhams for the central, not speaking of the more distant, regions of the Islamic world. Based on the hoards from the central/east-central lands of the caliphate and those deposited in the peripheral territories dating to the 100s-early 130s H., it does not at all seem that Damascus was an important contributor to the silver coin-stock of the caliphate. This is illustrated by the profiles of 23 hoards dating from these years in the central (fourteen total) and peripheral (nine total) Umayyad lands in Table III.

Table III makes it quite clear that dirhams issued at Damascus after 101 were a great rarity across the Muslim world until the early 130s H. If they occur at all in hoard of the central domains – six (43%) of the fourteen hoards do not contain any at all – their numbers never exceed 7.8% of the total dirham coin-stock, even when they are discovered in Syria or Damascus, itself. What is also quite telling is that hoards from Syria-Palestine, Iraq, and Iran deposited between 102 and the early 130s H. are dominated by pre-102 H. dirhams, which always represent more than half of the coin assemblage (exception is the Capernaum, *tpq* 122 H., deposit of five coins which appears to be the anomaly, probably due to its tiny size). Thus, post-101 H. or “new” dirhams from Damascus are rare indeed. What is also interesting is that during the period from 102 to 125 H., not one dirham from any other mint operating in the peripheral territories in the 100s to the mid-120s H. was deposited in any of

⁴⁰ DARLEY-DORAN, “Wāsiṭ, The mint,” pp. 169-170; U.S. LINDER WELIN, “Wāsiṭ, the mint-town,” *K. Humanistika Vetenskapssamfundets i Lund Årsberättelse/Bull. De la Société Royale des Lettres de Lund*, no. IV (1955-6): 128-9.

the hoards of the central lands. Indeed, based on the profiles of these hoards, it would appear that the central caliphate during this quarter century, or the approximate period of Hishām's rule, relied almost exclusively (although decreasingly) on old or pre-102 coins and to some (increasing) degree on new or post-101 H. dirhams struck in Wāsiṭ. Damascus, however, was insignificant. Evidently, enough dirhams (struck in a wide range of pre-102 H. mints) were available in the central caliphate not to warrant the production of more dirhams locally or, for that matter, import/transfer others issued in the peripheral lands into the same area by way of state fiat (as taxes) or through natural (supply-demand) market forces.

TABLE III – Dirhams Hoards from the Umayyad Lands⁴¹ deposited in the 100s-early 130s

Hoard name, year found – <i>tpq</i> & (total quantity of dirhams found in hoard/total quantity of dirhams that contained dates and mints) *	Number and % of pre-102/pre-Yazīd II/Hishām mint-closure issues	Number and % of Post-101/pre-Yazīd II/Hishām mint-closure issues	Number and % of Post-101/pre-Yazīd II/Hishām mint-closure issues from Wāsiṭ	Number and % of Post-101/pre-Yazīd II/Hishām mint-closure issues from Damascus	Number and % of Post-101/pre-Yazīd II/Hishām mint-closure issues from other mints
Central Islamic Lands					
1. Area of Baghdād, Iraq, 1906 or earlier – <i>tpq</i> 106 (110/110)	108/98.2%	2/1.8%	2/1.8%	0	0
2. Sūsa, Khuzistān, Iran, ca. 1856 – <i>tpq</i> 106 (ca. 170/33)	29/87.9%	4/12.1%	2/6.05%	2/6.05%	0
3. Pella of the Decapolis, Jordan, 1979-1983 – <i>tpq</i> 112 (11/11)	7/63.6%	4/36.4%	4/36.4%	0	0
4. Ghodhlaniyya, Syria, ca. 1960 – <i>tpq</i> 119 (126/126)	110/87.3%	16/12.7%	14/11.1%	2/1.6%	0
5. Strāf, Iran, pre-1985 – <i>tpq</i> 121 (24/17)	11/64.7%	6/35.3%	5/29.4%	1/5.9%	0
6. Capernaum, Israel, 1978-1992 – <i>tpq</i> 122 (6/5)	2/40%	3/60%	3/60%	0	0
7. Shushter, Iran, by 1879 – <i>tpq</i> 125 (5/5)	4/80%	1/20%	1/20%	0	0
8. Nippur, Iraq, 1962 – <i>tpq</i> 126 (90/88)	49/55.7	39/44.3%	38/43.2%	0	1/1.1%
9. Somewhere in the Middle East, 1974 or earlier – <i>tpq</i> 128 (86 or 89)	24/27-27.9%	62/69.7-72.1%	57/64-66%	3/3.4-3.5%	2/2.2-2.3%
10. Beit Shean, Israel, 1993 – <i>tpq</i> 129 (122/110)	5.5%	104/94.5%	102/92.7%	0	2/1.8%
11. En Nebk, Syria, 1957 – <i>tpq</i> 130 (102/102)	39/38.2%	63/61.8%	54/53%	8/7.8%	1/0.98%

⁴¹ It should be observed that the dirhams struck in Iṣṭakhr, al-Kūfa, Kirmān, and Zaranj in 102-103 H., while technically post-101 H. issues, are pre-Yazīd II reform coins and these mints will be terminated by this caliph the next year after these coins were struck. For this reason, when they were found in the hoards listed in Table III, they were considered pre-102 H. dirhams.

12. The Bāb Tuma District of Damascus, Syria, ca. 1950 – <i>tpq</i> 130 (142/142)	76/53.5%	66/46.5%	65/45.8%	1/0.7%	0
13. Damascus, Syria, 1950 – <i>tpq</i> 131 (2508/2508)	634/25.3%	1874/74.7%	1587/63.3%	153/6.1%	134/5.3%
14. Iran?, pre-1985 – <i>tpq</i> 132 (2247/2247)	1008/44.9%	1239/55.1%	1091/48.5%	105/4.7%	44/2%
Peripheral Islamic Lands					
1. Mountain Region of Armenia, Armenia, 1979 – <i>tpq</i> 107 (89/35)	32/91.4%	3/8.6%	2/5.7%	0	1/2.9%
2. Somewhere in Afghanistan, ca. 1967 – <i>tpq</i> , 112 (131/131)	107/81.7%	24/18.3%	4/3%	0	20/15.3%
3. Meshed?, Khurāsān, Iran, pre-1966 – <i>tpq</i> 115 (193/193)	176/91.2%	17/8.8%	11/5.7%	0	6/3.1%
4. Šenavan, Aparan raion/Aragatsotn marz, Armenia, 1957 – <i>tpq</i> 119 (13/13)	8/61.5%	5/38.5%	5/38.5%	0	0
5. Near or in Fez?, Morocco, ca. 1966 – <i>tpq</i> 119 (ca. 300/X)	---	---	---	---	---
6. Alcaudete, Jaén province, Spain, before 1988 – <i>tpq</i> 122 (26/26)	17/65.4%	9/34.6%	6/23.1%	1/3.8%	2/7.7%
7. Near Volubilis/Waīlāh, Morocco, 1951 – <i>tpq</i> 125 (231/231)	198/85.7%	33/14.3%	19/8.2%	2/0.8%	12/5.2%
8. Garraf, Barcelona province, Spain, 1954, <i>tpq</i> 128 (165/151)**	121/80.1%	30/19.9%	18/11.0%	3/2%	9/6%
9. Old Termez, Termez oblast', Uzbekistan, 1981 – <i>tpq</i> 128 (93/92)	9/9.8%	83/90.2%	52/56.5%	0	31/33.7%
<p>* <i>tpq</i> = <i>terminus post quem</i> or the year of the latest coin in a hoard, indicating the approximate date of the hoard's deposit. The reasoning behind dating hoards based on the latest coin is connected with the logic that the hoard could not have been deposited before the youngest coin was entered into it; on the other hand, if the hoard was deposited much later than the youngest coin, it would be expected that newer coins would have been added to it before its burial.</p> <p>** The account of the hoard notes six dirhams from the mint of "al-'Abbādān" (79, 80 - 2, 90, 100, 106 H.), two from "Adrīna" (110 and 114 H.), and one from "Bukhārā" (115 H.). The former two "mints" are unknown to me or to the basic literature on Umayyad mints and, hence, are most probably missreadings. The same can be said about the last mint. While Bukhārā existed at the period, it did not strike Umayyad dirhams. Perhaps this was a Bukhār-Khudāt Arabic-Sogdian Bilingual drachm, but it is more likely that this is a misreading of Balkh, which did issue dirhams in 115 H. In any case, these nine questionable dirhams will be discounted in the statistics.</p>					

The situation changed in ca. 128 H. when hoards came to contain, increasingly, more than half post-101 H. coins, with the exception of one – the *tpq* 130 H. Bāb Tuma District of Damascus deposit that held 46.5% of these “new” coins. Otherwise, the hoards of 128-132 H. carry 55.1%, on the lowest end, to as much as 94.5%, on the highest, post-101 H. coins. Nonetheless, it must be underscored that the rise in the deposition of post-101 dirham in these hoards had very little to do with increased inclusion of dirhams minted during this period at Damascus. It was Wāsiṭ, and to a much smaller degree mints operating in the peripheral Islamic lands in the 100s-early 130s H. (max. 5.3% of total), that was responsible for most of these post-101 H.

coins; consistently, these dirhams come to comprise about half or more of the hoards. Likewise, it should be stressed that the quantities of dirhams struck in the immediate post-Hishām era were most marginal in these assemblages and contributed very little to the spike in the deposition of post-101 dirhams in the hoards of 128-132 H.

In the peripheral provinces, of the eight hoards for which there is adequate information, five had not one post-101 H. dirham from Damascus. The three that did never had any larger volume of post-101 H. coins from the mint than 3.8% of the total coin-stock. Also, quite revealing is that the dirhams issued in 102-132 H. at Damascus were absent from hoards of the peripheral domains until the early 120s, i.e., Alcaudete, *tpq* 122 H., from Spain. In the two subsequent hoards deposited in the western-most areas of the Umayyad caliphate – northwest Africa/Maghrib and Iberia/al-Andalus – these coins are also present, but in much smaller quantities. Indeed, based on the known hoards ranging from Cisoxiana/Khurāsān in the east, the southern Caucasus in the north, to the Maghrib and al-Andalus in the west, Damascus dirhams struck in 102-132 H. simply did not circulate anywhere other than in the very far west, and only in ca. 122-ca. 128 H.

As with the central regions of the caliphate, the hoards of the peripheral areas are almost totally dominated by pre-102 H. dirhams, coming from a great variety of mints. Indeed, with the exception of one deposit from Trasoxiana (Old Termez, *tpq* 128 H.), the minimal quantity of these coins constituted 61.5% of the hoards while 91.4% maximum. As in the central lands, besides the “old” coins in circulation, which by far outnumber all others, post-101 H. dirhams from Wāsiṭ were a notable component of hoards. However, unlike in the central provinces, these dirhams from Wāsiṭ were almost always less than 40% of the coin-stock; the exception is the Old Termez hoard that held 56.5% of these dirhams. Many of the contemporary assemblages in Syria-Palestine, Iraq, and Iran could hold as much as 64-66% and even 92.7% of these coins. At the same time, most of the peripheral hoards held a greater volume of post-101 H. locally-issued dirhams or those struck in other, non-central territories during this period: 2.9%, on the low end, and 33.7%, on the high. Indeed, only one hoard of the eight held no local or peripheral provincial coins. This stands in total contrast to the deposits of the central caliphate where eight of the fourteen hoards contained no “new” or post-101 H. peripheral-issued dirhams. When these coins did appear after 126 H., their absolute maximum quantity per hoard did not exceed 5.3%. Hence, somewhat not surprisingly, but still important to ascertain, peripheral lands relied mostly on pre-101 H. dirhams issued in the central regions, supplemented by a small, although important, quantity of coins from local mints operating in the 100s-early 130s H., as well as some post-101 H. dirhams from Wāsiṭ. Post-101 H. Damascus dirhams were, however, a great rarity, and could be found only in tiny quantities in the Maghrib and al-Andalus in the years ca. 122-ca.-128 H.

Taken all together, there are very good reason to believe that alongside Wāsiṭ Damascus acted as the preeminent mint for the striking of dirhams in the central region of the caliphate during the reign of Hishām or the period of 105-125 H. However, the latter gained this position prior to Hishām, or during the caliphate of Yazīd II and the rule of his governor of al-‘Irāq in ca. 101-ca. 103 H. As discussed above, concentrating dirham production at these two mints was not a novelty for Umayyad rulers, as this was already practiced in 85-89 H. It is also most evident that Damascus’ primacy applied only to the central areas of the caliphate – Syria, al-‘Irāq, and regions west of Khurāsān; dirhams continued to be issued across the peripheral lands of the Umayyad state from Iberia and North Africa in the west, southern Caucasus in the north, and Cisoxiana/Khurāsān in the distant east. It would appear that these mints were productive enough not to warrant the import (i.e., transfer via taxes or commerce) of dirhams issued at the two central Islamic mints of Damascus and Wāsiṭ, since so very few of them were discovered in the distant provinces. Apparently, enough old or pre-101 H. dirhams were available in the peripheral provinces not to require the issuing of more silver coins. Nor the coins that were issued in the peripheral territories were exported in any notable volumes to the central provinces. There, it was mainly dirhams struck at Wāsiṭ and Damascus that could be found in significant quantities. With all this said, it is critical to underscore that the output of these coins was so nominal at Damascus after 100 H. that this mint cannot be seen in any way as a major provider of dirhams for any region of the Islamic world, including Syria and even the city itself.

To return to the specifics of dirham output at Damascus under the late Umayyads, it would be worthwhile to make the observation that its production witnessed a major drop after 127 H., or a year after Hishām’s death. The exception was the last full year of the Umayyad regime in 131 H., when the paucity of production suddenly seems to be reversed. For that year, there are 63 coins from Damascus in the database, making it the second-most productive year after 100 H. However, it needs to be observed that 62 of these 63 coins derive from a single, large deposit – the 1950 Damascus hoard – with the *tpq* date of 131 H. Since all but one of the coins for this year come from one hoard, it is very unlikely that these dirhams are representative of the general pattern of output at the mint. Therefore, these coins should be treated as an anomaly and discounted as an aberration.⁴²

⁴² Another good reason to believe that these dirhams are anomalous is their overrepresentation in the Damascus 1950 Hoard: dirhams from Wāsiṭ constituted 73.7% (1751 coins) of the hoard’s Umayyad content and those from Damascus 8.6% (208 coins), the reverse is true for the year 131 H. – Damascus is represented by 62 coins, while Wāsiṭ by only 4, i.e., 93.5% Damascus vs. 6.5% Wāsiṭ. In general, the high volume of dirhams from Wāsiṭ *vis-a-vis* Damascus deposited in this hoard is not unusual: in another hoard deposited in Damascus just a year earlier (The Bāb Tuma District of Damascus, Syria, ca. 1950 – *tpq* 130 H.), 90.9% (70 coins) of its Umayyad content was from Wāsiṭ vs. 9.1% (7 coins)

Overall, it is quite evident that Damascus greatly declined in its dirham output during the last two decades or so of Umayyad rule. In part this is understandable, at least for the closing years of the dynasty. With the rise of Marwān II (127-132 H.) in 126 H. and his assumption over the caliphate the following year, the capital and the city's seat of *bayt al-māl* was transferred from Damascus west to Ḥarrān in al-Jazīra,⁴³ foreshadowing the move of the economic and political center of the Islamic world from Syria in the eastern Mediterranean eastwards to al-‘Irāq by the ‘Abbāsids: to al-Ḥāshimiyya in ca. 132 H. and then in 144 H. to Madīnat al-Salām/Baghdād. Indeed, while Damascus' dirham output dropped to near nothing after 127 H., the mint of al-Jazīra (acting for Ḥarrān) recommenced its production of the coins in 126 H. and issued them through the last years of the Umayyad regime and ceased emission with the demise of Marwān II and the advent of the ‘Abbāsids in 132 H. Possessing no local silver mines and not receiving tax revenues from the provinces in silver coins or bullion, it is not surprising that Damascus would cease to issue dirhams in any notable quantities after ca. 128 H. But, as will be discussed below, there are other reasons that can be advanced to explain the collapse of the mint after ca. 101 H.

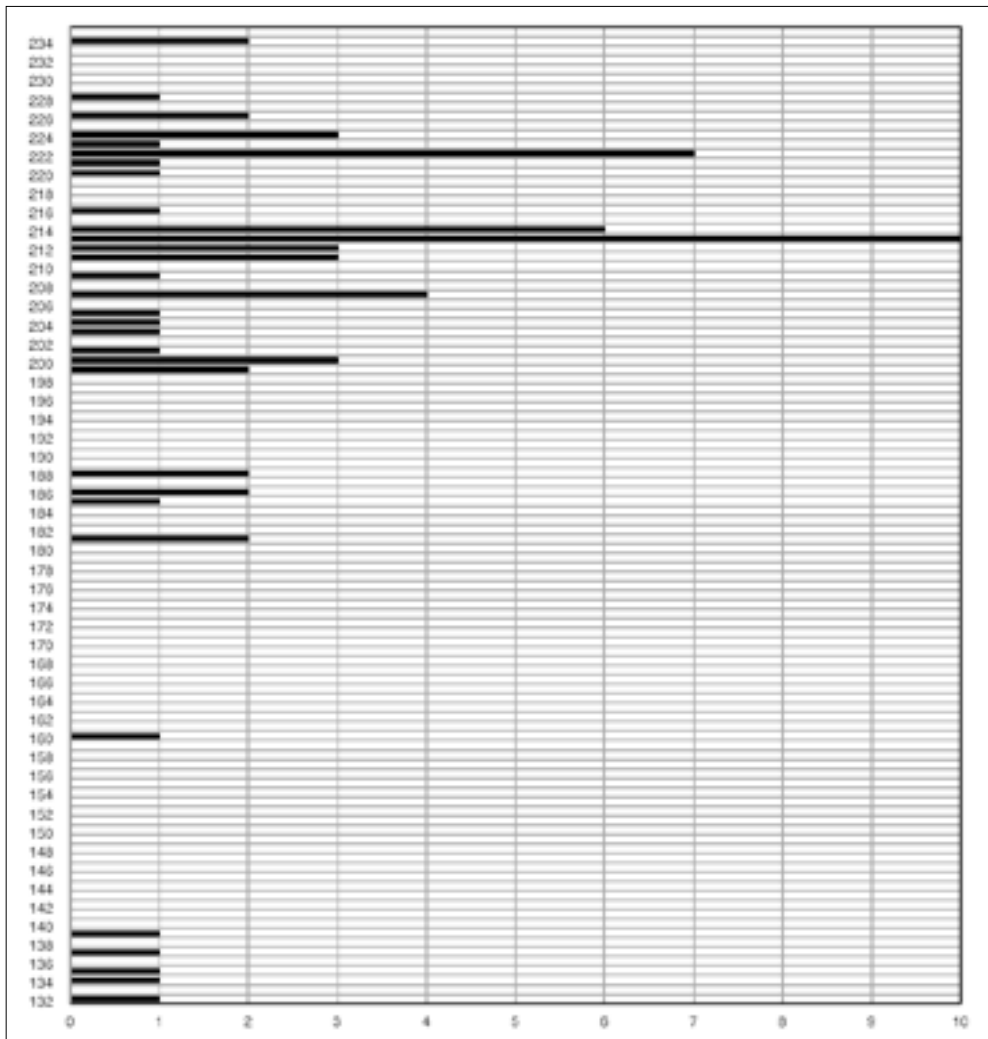
‘ABBĀSIDS

The ‘Abbāsids initiated their production of dirhams at Damascus as early as 132 H.: that year al-Saffāḥ began to strike coins at the mint. For several years after the advent of the dynasty, Damascus continued to issue dirhams, but at even lower rates than under the late Umayyads. Thus, for the first eight years of ‘Abbāsīd rule, the database contains only one coin each for the years 134-135 and 137-139 H., while no dirhams at all are recorded for the years 133, 136, and 138 H. Indeed, 139 H. was the last year dirhams appear to have been struck at the mint until 160 H., when one coin is recorded for that year. Thereafter, dirhams do not seem to be minted until 181 H., when there is some sign of activity at the mint with the record of two coins. During this period of Ḥārūn al-Rashīd's reign (170-193 H.), the mint also struck the coins in 185-186, and 188 H. but, again, in very nominal quantities (represented by 1-2 coins per annum). Thence, the mint became dormant for over a decade until mint-

from Damascus. Moreover, the dirhams from Damascus for the year 131 H. in the Damascus 1950 hoard are the latest in the deposit. In other words, taken together, it is very likely that these 62 newly-struck dirhams were added to the hoard in Damascus just prior to its deposit in the city that same year.

⁴³ al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation*, tr. C. Hillenbrand, vol. 26 [The Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate] (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 239, 242, 250; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation, An Annotated Translation*, tr. J.A. Williams, vol. 27 [The ‘Abbāsīd Revolution] (New York: SUNY Press, 1985), 4. Also see Bates, "History, Geography and Numismatics," 231-61.

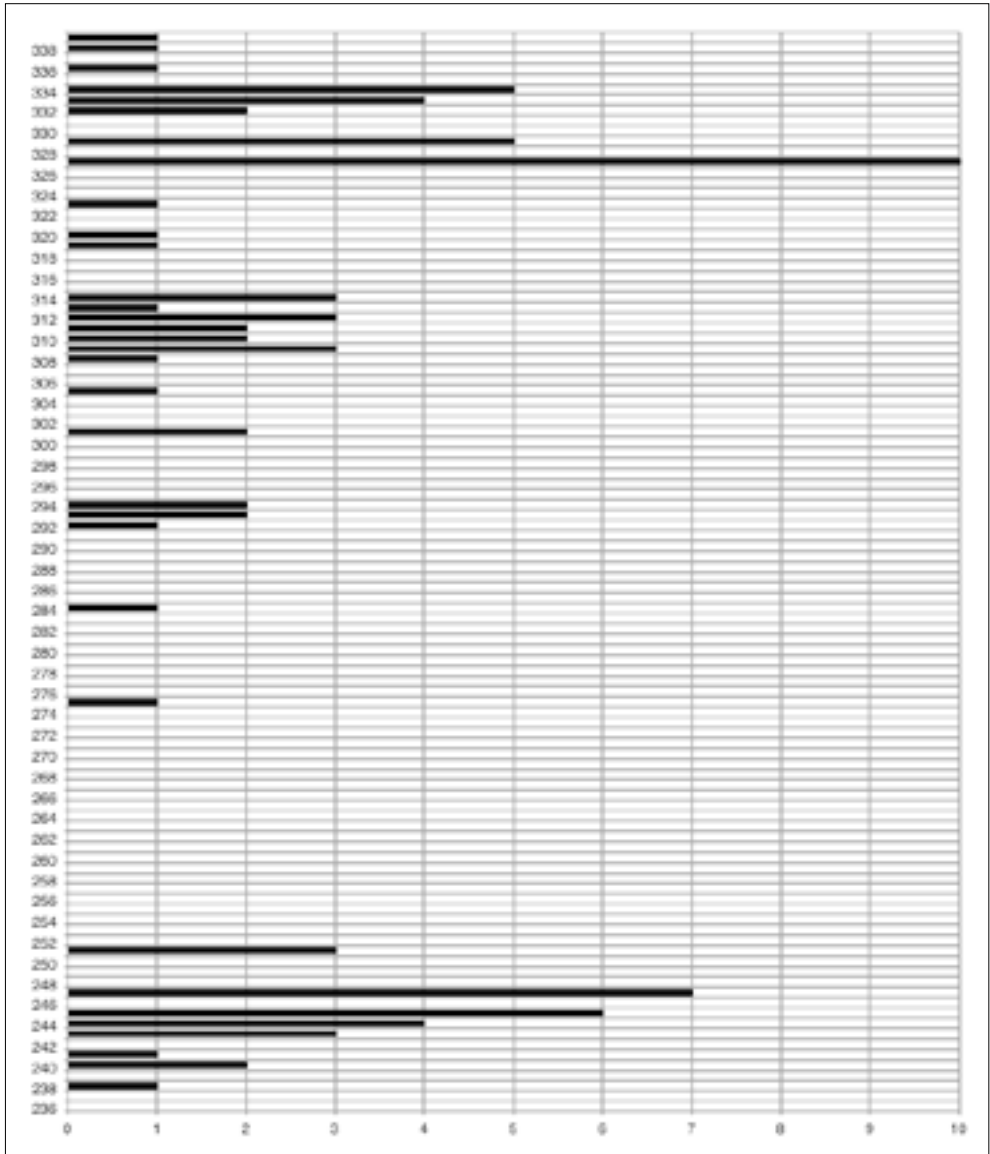
ing recommenced in 199 H. Overall, prior to this date, Damascus struck a miserable quantity of coins, producing only 10.4% of the total issued by the dynasty – all during the long period of more than sixty years.



Y = Years H. / X = Quantities

FIGURE II – Dirham mint output of Damascus under the early ‘Abbāsids (132-235 H.)

From 199 through the mid-220s H. Damascus seems to have undergone its “hey-day” of output under the ‘Abbāsids: its levels of production witnessed peaks unseen previously and later for this dynasty. The years for which there are from three to ten



Y = Years H./X = Quantities

FIGURE III – Dirham mint output of Damascus under the ‘Abbāsids and ikhshīdids (236-339 H.)

coins each in the database include 200, 207, 211-214, 222, and 224 H. However, there were also years during this quarter century for which there is only one dirham per annum, while other years have no coins at all in the database. Subsequently, for much of 225-235 H. production levels dropped again, with two coins recorded for 226 and 234 H., and only one for 228 H. [Figure II]. Overall, during these ca. 35 years (199-235 H.) the Abbāsids struck 40.7% of all the dirham this dynasty issued at Damascus.

After 236 H., dirham production continued in Damascus, but very erratically. Thus, between 236 and 256 H. there were several years when the mint issued dirhams at some notable volumes, such as in 243-245, 247, and 251 H. It is tempting to explain this upsurge in emission by the move of Caliph al-Mutawwakil (232-247 H.) to Damascus in the summer of 244 H. and his apparent, unsuccessful, attempt to reestablish the capital of the caliphate in the city.⁴⁴ But, the overall pattern is that of decline in production and there are many more years during which the mint seems to have been inactive. For instance, between 252 and 284 H., no dirhams from the mint are recorded in the database, except the one issued officially by the Ṭūlūnids in 275 H. Mint dormancy was broken in 284 H. with one coin registered, only to once again fall into inactivity until 292-294 H. when some dirhams once again began to be emitted. Such was the pattern for the next three decades – a slight upsurge in 308-314 and then collapse until 319-326 H. [Figure III]. The years 328-339 H. saw a rise in production, but this was due to the minting of these coins by another ruling body, as will be discussed below. Overall, 48.1% of all dirhams issued at Damascus by the dynasty were minted in the later ‘Abbāsīd era, but mostly in the years 238-251 (20%) and 308-327 H. (20.7%).

In sum, Damascus under the ‘Abbāsīds clearly became a secondary mint, one that produced few coins and did so most irregularly. The near total absence of emissions during the first half century of ‘Abbāsīd rule is noteworthy, when only 6.7% of all dirhams minted in the city by the dynasty were issued. When Damascus did emit these coins, the vast majority (81.4%) were struck in 199-235 (40.7%), 238-251 (20%), and 308-327 H. (20.7%).

IKHSHĪDIDS

Included into the ‘Abbāsīd total (presented in Figure III) are Ikhshīdīd amīrs who, while the former’s governors/amīrs since 324 H. and struck coins only in the name of the caliphs, began adding their own names to the coins starting in 331 H., thus

⁴⁴ P.M. Cobb, “Al-Mutawakkil’s Damascus: A New Abbasid Capital?” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 58:4 (1999): 241-57.

announcing that they were henceforth to rule in their own capacity as Ikhshīdid).⁴⁵ Because a good number of these dirhams lack precise year of issue due to wear or other reasons, they could not be included in the annual production graph of Figure III. However, since there are so few Ikhshīdid dirhams from Damascus, it would be of use to list these coins and do so in table form (Table III).

TABLE III – “Official” Ikhshīdids dirhams struck at Damascus

<p>Muḥammad ibn Ṭughj al-Ikhshīd (323-334 H.)</p> <p>332 (2)</p> <p>333 (4)</p> <p>334 (3)</p> <p>324-334 (3)</p>
<p>Abū 'l-Qāsim Ūnūjūr (334-349 H.)</p> <p>334 (2)</p> <p>336 (1)</p> <p>339 (1)</p> <p>339 (1)</p> <p>334-339 (1)</p> <p>334-349 (1)</p> <p>335-349 (5)</p> <p>340-349 (3)</p>
<p>Ikhshīd Amīr indeterminable</p> <p>330-338 (1)</p>
<p>Kāfūr (355-357 H.)</p> <p>358 (<i>sic!</i>) (1)</p>

First, what is interesting to observe is that even prior to issuing dirhams at Damascus in their own names starting in 331 H., the mint experienced a mild recovery already in 327 H., for which there are ten “unofficial” Ikhshīdid/‘Abbāsīd dirhams recorded in the database; five others are present for 329 H. [Figure III]. Perhaps these were “preview”

⁴⁵ J.L. Bacharach argues, rather convincingly, that although the Ikhshīdids did not strike their own coins (except some donative pieces) until 331 H., they still had full control over the mints as early as 324 H.; see his *Islamic History Through Coins. An Analysis and Catalogue of Tenth-Century Ikhshīdid Coinage* (Cairo-New York: The American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2006), pp. 49ff, 133. Fig. III includes both the “unofficial” (struck in 327 and 329 H.) and “official” (starting with 332, not 331 H., since this earliest issues are not recorded in our database) Ikhshīdid dirhams.

years for the increased production at the mint in the early 330s through 340 H. Second, in very relative terms, it can be said that the Ikhshīdids struck a comparatively larger quantity of their “official” dirhams (and did so rather regularly) at Damascus – 29 in total recorded in the database, representing 1.6% of the total Damascus dirhams. When the 15 “unofficial” dirhams the Ikhshīdids struck in 327 and 329 H. are added to their “official” coins, the figure would be higher (2.5% of the total for the mint). In this way, it would be fair to say that the Ikhshīdids temporarily revived the mint of Damascus from the late 320s through the 330s H. Nevertheless, the mint was not nearly as active as it had been even during the late Umayyad era, a time when Damascus was in a state of near total inactivity.⁴⁶ As Jere L. Bacharach points out, reasons for the emission of these coins by the Ikhshīdids can only be guessed at: were they statements of political legitimacy of their rule in parts of Syria; payment for troops in Syria in the struggle with the Ḥamdānids; payments for new expenditures in Syria; or, all of the above?⁴⁷ No doubt, other good reasons can be proposed that are not necessarily connected with governmental needs, such as simple demand for currency amongst the local merchant community or the full entrance of the region into the silver monetary zone (see below).

DIRHAM MINT OF DAMASCUS

When looking at the overall pattern of dirham emission at the mint of Damascus, by far the most productive dynasty was the Umayyad – issuing 89.8% of all these coins, mostly during the short two-decade period from the time when the mint began to issue reform dirhams in 79 H. until 101 H. (ca. 65% of the Umayyad total). These coins were struck at Damascus soon after the city became the capital of the caliphate and the seat of *bayt al-māl* or the Muslim treasury to which came taxes and *khums* or one-fifth of all booty.⁴⁸ It can be presumed that the silver supply for the striking of these dirhams mostly came from the old Persian east where it was available in huge volumes in the form of Sasanian drachms; these coins were looted by the Arabs by

⁴⁶ It would be of use to note that museum collections, at least as they were at the time R.J. Bikhazi conducted his study, do not add any new dirhams with dates not collected in our database. All that can be said is that, as is suggested in the data of Table III, the largest number of specimens of Ikhshīdid dirhams recorded in museum collections come from the years 333 (5 museum coins vs. 4 in our database) and 334 (9 museum coins vs. 5 in our database). See R.J. Bikhazi, “The Struggle for Syria and Mesopotamia (330-58/941-69) As Reflected on Ḥamdānid and Ikhshīdid Coins,” *The American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 28 (1983): 182.

⁴⁷ Bacharach, *Islamic History Through Coins*, 64.

⁴⁸ For the financial office or *dīwān* established by ‘Umar I (13-23 H.), see M.I. Moosa, “The *Diwān* of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb,” *Studies in Islam* 2 (1965): 67-78; G.-R. Puin, *Der Diwān von ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb. Ein Beitrag zur frühislamischen Verwaltungsgeschichte* (Bonn: Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms- Universität zu Bonn, 1970).

the tens (indeed hundreds) of millions during the early decades of the initial Muslim conquest of the Persian Empire, something that initiated ‘Umar I (13-23 H.) to establish the financial office of the *dīwān*.⁴⁹ In addition, drachms were present in Syria even before the rise of Islam, as they entered this region in large quantities during its Sasanian occupation in 610-29.⁵⁰ Thus, with the dirham monetary reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik in 79 H. Damascus had an enormous volume of silver reserves for the striking of these coins and issued them regularly and in relatively large numbers for the next two decades, presumably in fulfillment of the larger program ‘Abd al-Malik and his immediate carried out to establish and maintain an important mint at the political center of the Islamic world.

The remaining 35% of the coins were emitted at Damascus during the last three decades of Umayyad rule. In the course of most of these years (ca. 102-ca. 126 H.), alongside Wāsiṭ, the mint held a monopoly on the striking of dirhams in the central lands of the caliphate, i.e., Syria, al-‘Irāq, and regions east of it to the borders of Khurāsān. However, dirhams also continued to be struck in the peripheral Islamic provinces (Spain, North Africa, southern Caucasus, Trans- and Cisoxiana), although

⁴⁹ To offer some examples of the enormous quantities of Sasanian drachms seized by the early Umayyads and their officials: when hearing of the news of the acquisition of half a million dirhams (actually Sasanian drachms) from al-Baḥrayn, caliph ‘Umar I first could not believe it and then when he saw with his won eyes that such a huge sum was, indeed, brought to the Muslim community (*umma*), he decided to establish a financial office or *dīwān* to manage the inflow of treasures (Balādhurī, *Origins*, 2, 246). But, the half million dirhams was nothing compared to what was soon to come with the many new conquests, such as the treasures of the Sasanians. Supposedly, the Sasanian shahanshah Khusrow II (560-628) possessed in his private treasury “three times a hundred billion and twice two hundred million” [not clear what, but probably drachms or capital estimated in these most standard types of silver coins of the Sasanians] (*Book of Gifts and Rarities/Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf*, tr. Gh.Ḥ. al-Qaddāmī (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), 225). Indeed, seeing that the Sasanian mint output of drachms dramatically increased under Khusrow II, there must have been an enormous quantity of these coins in the royal treasury and elsewhere in the Sasanian lands (S. Sears, “Monetary Revision and Monetization in the Late Sasanian Empire,” *Matériaux pour L’histoire Économique de Monde Iranien*, eds. R. Gyselen, M. Szuppe [Cahiers de Studia Iranica, 21]) (Paris: Peeters Publ., 1999), 149-63; A. Kolesnikov, “The Quantity of Silver Coinage and Levels of Revenues in Late Sasanian Iran,” *op cit.*, 123-30). In just one year of his rule (the eighteenth), the shahanshah took in more than 668 million drachms into his treasury (al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation*, tr. C.E. Bosworth, vol. 5 [The Sāsānids, the Byzantine, the Lakmids, and Yemen] (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 378. A part of this treasure would be inherited by the Arabs when they took the treasury of the last Persian ruler Yazdagird III (632-ca. 651 CE) in 637 with the capture of Ctesiphon, one of the Sasanian capitals, and then at the Battle of Jalūlā’ that same year. According to one account, the booty acquired at both of the battles was estimated at 60,000,000 dirhams (al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation*, tr. H.A. Juynboll, vol. 13 [The Conquest of Iraq, Southwestern Persia, and Egypt] (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 20-34, 44-5; Balādhurī, *Origins*, 2, 263-4).

⁵⁰ M.G. Morony, “Syria Under the Persians 610-629,” in M.A. Bakhit, ed. *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Shām During the Early Islamic period up to 40 A.H./640 A.D.* (English and French Papers), vol. 1 (Amman: Univ. of Jordan Press, 1987), 87-95.

at fewer mints. Damascus acquired its key position as a mint of the central territories during the rule of Yazīd II (101-105 H.) and continued to hold it for the duration of the caliphate of Hishām (105-125 H.). During this period, the mint produced dirhams, but in relatively lower numbers as compared to the last two decades of the first century H. Almost all of these coins stayed within the confines of the central provinces, just as those struck in the earlier decades. Indeed, the mint's output was so marginal during the 100s to the early 120s H. that it cannot be seen as a major emitter of dirhams even for Syria itself.

As discussed above, Damascus collapsed as a mint in 127 H. almost certainly as the result of the relocation of the capital and its *bayt al-māl* from this Syrian city first to al-Jazīra and then to al-‘Irāq. Having no local silver mines and no longer receiving revenues from the provinces in silver coins or bullion, Damascus ceased to issue dirhams in any notable quantities after ca. 127 H. But, as noted earlier, even several decades before the loss of capital status, starting with the mid-100s H. Damascus was far from an impressive, capital mint in the production of dirhams, particularly when compared to Wāsiṭ. If the volume of dirham production in the capital of the caliphate is any indicator of its political influence and economic importance, it would then appear that the last two to three decades of Umayyad rule were hard years for Damascus. In the absence of silver mines in Syria, Damascus would have had to rely on bullion imports from Islamic silver-rich areas such as Spain, North Africa, southern Caucasus, Trans- and Cisoxiana to strike its coins. However, because these regions issued their own local dirhams, it precluded its export in the form of bullion to the capital. But, the near absence of coins from these peripheral provinces in the central lands of the caliphate – Damascus included – suggests that the mints operating in the distant Muslim territories struck these coins for local use and rarely, if ever, sent them as taxes to the capital. The dearth of dirhams from the peripheral domains may thus suggest that political and economic ties between the capital and the distant provinces during the last three decades of Umayyad rule may have been very weak.

Be that as it may, there may well be another quite plausible explanation for the general paucity of dirham production at Damascus during the later Umayyad and much of the subsequent eras, namely the position of Syria in the larger West Asian metallic monetary zones. Specifically, prior to the Muslim conquest of Syria in 636 CE, Byzantine Syria and upper Mesopotamia lay inside a bimetallic monetary zone based on gold and copper coinage. Areas to the east, or the territories of ancient Iran (including the province of al-‘Irāq), also lay within a bimetallic zone, but one based on the silver Sasanian drachm as well as a copper coin. A clear line was drawn between these two monetary zones along the Taurus Mountains, following the political-geographic-military borders of Sasanian Iran and the early Byzantine Empire.⁵¹

⁵¹ S. Heidemann, "Numismatics," *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1 [The Formation

Prior to the Islamic conquest, the early Byzantine state issued gold coinage in Constantinople and forwarded it to Oriens (Syria and upper Mesopotamia) to be collected locally as taxes, which subsequently were transferred back to the capital; copper coinage (which was linked to the gold) was used for local and regional small-scale commercial transactions. Muslim rulers retained the fundamental elements of this bimetallic monetary system, as Syria/Bilād al-Shām and upper Mesopotamia/al-Jazīra continued to be taxed in gold coinage, only now struck locally by the Muslims. Gold (dīnārs) and copper (fulūs) coins were minted in both of these regions in the Umayyad era: dīnārs at Damascus and fulūs at some two-dozen regional mints, including Damascus. As during the Byzantine era, fulūs acted as the basic form of currency in Syria, issued by the state to facilitate everyday transactions and probably pay the military. However, as Stefan Heidemann argues, the centuries-old border between the gold and silver zones was breached and then fused in al-Jazīra and Syria after the Muslim conquest of these regions. In other words, in addition to the use of gold and copper coins, silver pieces became part of the larger (now trimetallic) monetary economy of the region sometime after 14 H./636 CE.⁵²

While Heidemann's main observation is an important one and quite pertinent to the topic at hand, there are some important questions that remain to be addressed and answered regarding his hypothesis, such as when and where the gold-copper and silver zones crossed and blended into a single trimetallic monetary system, as well as the role silver coinage played in the economy of the regions.⁵³ Thus, on a very basic level, the question that has to be asked is the extent and depth to which Syria and al-Jazīra came to be included into the silver zone, and when did this occur? Moreover, did the two regions experience the same monetary fate chronologically and can they be deemed as a single unit?

Based on a selection of Umayyad- and early 'Abbāsīd-era hoards found in the Near East that contained Sasanian drachms and the metrological affinities of cut/clipped Sasanian drachms with early Umayyad dirhams, Heidemann argues for the

of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries] (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 651-4; idem., "The Merger of Two Currency Zones in Early Islam. The Byzantine and Sasanian Impact on the Circulation in Former Byzantine Syria and Northern Mesopotamia," *Iran XXXVI* (1998): 95-113.

⁵² Heidemann, "The Merger of Two Currency Zones in Early Islam," 95-113. For the fulūs and possible reasons for their issue (mainly commercial and military payments) in Syria during the Umayyad era, see Bone, *The Administration of Umayyad Syria*, pp. 13-5; R. Foote, *Umayyad Markets and Manufacturing Evidence for a Commercialized and Industrial Economy in Early Islamic Bilad al-Sham* [Dissertation] (Harvard Univ., 1998).

⁵³ Heidemann, "The Merger of Two Currency Zones," 108. Heidemann suggests that "The dominant position of the gold coinage in circulation might have been challenged by the influx of silver coins;" *op cit.*, 100. This may well have been the case, but this challenge most probably did not affect the status of gold coinage in relations to taxes; in large-scale commerce silver may have supplemented gold, but very doubtfully would have replaced it in Syria and Egypt, at least not until the latter Abbāsīd era.

inclusion of Syria and al-Jazīra into the silver zone very early in the Umayyad era, i.e., by the time of the earliest dirham emissions at Damascus in 72 H.⁵⁴ However, it must be observed that while Sasanian drachms could be found in very early eastern-most hoards of the Islamic lands (Pakistan?, 1974, *tpq* 57 H., and Northwestern Afghanistan? or Northeastern Iran?, pre-1991, *tpq* 72 H., hoards) and in deposits of the mid-Umayyad-era in the southern Caucasus (Dzhimi, Azerbaijan, 1913, *tpq* 98 H.), they were absent from hoards of the central Muslim territories until ca. 126 H.⁵⁵ Also, as compelling as the metrological similarities between the cut/clipped Sasanian drachms and early Umayyad dirhams may be, there is no reason to assign the “amending” of these coins to fit the Umayyad weight standards to the lands of Syria and al-Jazīra. Aside from that they could have been cut/clipped anywhere in the Islamic lands – not necessarily in the regions in question – there is also no reason to believe that they were cut in the earliest Umayyad years; because these coins come from post-126 H. hoards, they could well have been cut at that time or shortly before then. These problems aside, the study of the dirham mint at Damascus can shed some light on the very question of when the two monetary zones came to merge.

For one, the fact that only Damascus struck dirhams in all of Greater Syria, and did so in nominal volumes and quite irregularly during the last three decades of the Umayyad era would at best suggest only marginal inclusion of Syria into the silver zone. Although it is true that silver coinage was not struck at all in Syria prior to the Arab conquest, one has to ask what role these coins played in the larger economy of the area when they were minted, since the volume of their production was so low and quite irregular after the first two decades following the dirham monetary reform of ‘Abd al-Malik in 79 H. Furthermore, the near absence of dirhams struck in the peripheral lands from the monetary circulation of Greater Syria (0-5.4% in hoards) also suggests that these coins were not gravitating to the region either through state fiat or natural economic forces. All in all, one could question whether silver coinage was even an essential component of the monetary system of Greater Syria during the period in question? It may also be asked whether ‘Abd al-Malik and his immediate successors initiated and perpetuated a silver currency in Syria and for Syria that was not viable for the area?

⁵⁴ Heidemann, “The Merger of Two Currency Zones,” 100-7.

⁵⁵ It is also quite likely (although the present author does not know for certain) that Sasanian drachms were part of the so-called “Kirmān hoard” that contained thousands of Arab-Sasanian drachms, which actually appears to have been four different deposits that were combined into one: one parcel seems to have come from Sijjstān, *tpq* 84 H.; second perhaps from Kirmān, *tpq* 83? H.; third perhaps from Fārs, *tpq* 76 H.; and, fourth perhaps from Baṣra, *tpq* 63 H. See ALBUM, *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 23. If Sasanian drachms were amongst the coins found in any of these hoards, all were obviously deposited well to the east of Syria and in the classical lands for silver drachm circulation, i.e., fully supporting the evidence derived from the two other hoards listed above.

Indeed, if one steps back a bit and considers the possibility that dirhams were, in fact, unessential to the workings of the larger Syrian economy in the 100s-early 130s H., and perhaps even earlier, and that this area of the Islamic world had only marginally, at best, merged into the eastern silver zone, the erratic and negligible production of these coins at Damascus would make much sense. To be sure, it can be argued that although Damascus issued few silver coins and did so on occasion, these dirhams were adequate supplies for this region's monetary needs. Aside from the observation made above regarding the general absence of dirhams from the distant provinces in the central Islamic territories, it should also be noted that old Sasanian drachms and even pre-reform Umayyad silver coins also did not circulate in this region, at least not until ca. 126 H. As will be discussed elsewhere, of the seven known hoards from the central Islamic domains (Syria, Palestine, al-'Irāq, and Iran) and four others from regions to its north (southern Caucasus) and east (Khurāsān and Cisoxiana) dating between 106 and 125 H., not one contained a single Sasanian drachm or pre-reform Umayyad dirham for that matter [Table III: hoards 1-7/1-4]. But, as later hoards will tell, these coins were not extinct; they were simply removed from circulation until ca. 126 H.⁵⁶ Thus, at the very same time when Damascus began to seriously falter in its dirham production starting with the mid-100s and collapsed by 127 H., the old silver coinage that was apparently available in the area, but hoarded, remained deactivated from the monetary market.⁵⁷

It would be a logical assumption to make that had there been a demand for silver coinage in the Near East – Syria in particular – the caliph would have emitted more dirhams at Damascus or released the old hoarded silver coins. The same rule of supply and demand would have applied to the hoarded old silver coins by private individuals. However, none of this happened. Indeed, the very fact that only one mint – Damascus – in all of Greater Syria (including al-'Awāṣim or the Arab frontier region with Byzantium in southeastern Anatolia) issued silver coins strongly suggests that the state or anyone else did not deem the production of more dirhams in the region a necessity. Surely, the Umayyad caliph would have found silver in whatever form to strike dirhams, had there been a need for it. Apparently, gold and

⁵⁶ R.K. KOVALEV, "Circulation of Dirhams From the Mint of Damascus (Dimashq) in the First Four Centuries of Islam" (forthcoming). These drachms were most probably those that were brought to Syria by the Sasanians when they occupied this Byzantine-held region in 610-29 CE. It is probably this silver that the Arabs levied as taxes on the locals just after their conquest of Syria in 636 CE. – requiring the payment of *dīnārs* "who possessed gold" and dirhams "who possessed silver;" see, al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, pt. 1, tr. P.K. Hitti (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), 191. Also see Morony, "Syria Under the Persians 610-629," 87-95.

⁵⁷ It needs to be observed that the reactivation of these coins in the monetary economy of the central Islamic lands after ca. 126 H. was most probably connected with the need for coinage of all types to pay troops involved in the 'Abbāsīd Revolution.

copped coinage was sufficient for the running of the monetary economy in Bilād al-Shām during the period in question, and whatever quantity of dirhams struck at Damascus was adequate for the purposes that they served. In this connection, it can be proposed that silver coinage in Greater Syria was largely minted for merchants, particularly the long-distance traders who operated between the gold Syria-al-Jazīra zone and the silver al-‘Irāq zone and those areas further east. Seeing that Damascus was the political center of the caliphate, the seat of the caliph, and center of his court, dirhams may well have been needed to pay visiting merchants from the east. Copper and gold coins would have sufficed the local traders or those operating in Bilād al-Shām. In this regard, quite telling about the nature of monetary circulation in Syria are the numismatic finds from the archaeological excavations of Antioch carried out in 1932-39, which unearthed some 10,000 medieval Islamic coins, almost all of which (indeed perhaps all) were fulūs.⁵⁸ Evidently, dirhams were not only a rarity in this important urban commercial center of Syria but rarely, if ever, used as everyday local currency.

That coins were struck at times specifically for merchants is known in the written record: al-Ḥajjāj, the governor of al-‘Irāq, allowed dirhams to be minted (“out of the good metal obtained from spurious coin [most probably mostly Sasanian drachms – RKK], alloyed silver, and counterfeit coin”) for merchants and “others” at the mint of Wāsiṭ.⁵⁹ To be sure, it is logical that merchants would gravitate towards royal courts for at least three reasons. For one, the court usually held huge purchasing power in the form of easily transferrable wealth – coins. Second, there was always demand at court for various everyday commodities and luxuries amongst the royals, their administrators, and attendants. Third, whether on campaign or at home, courts were invariably accompanied by soldier who needed weapons, armor, clothing, provisions, riding animals, and numerous other necessities and luxuries. Whether caliph or governor, the head of the court had to pay their entourages and did so through the issue of coins.⁶⁰ The concentrated, localized demand for various goods and services at court and its great purchasing power would have attracted merchants to carry their goods there and exchange them for coins. In this way, dirhams could well have been minted at court either specifically to pay merchants for their merchandise or as payments to their attendants and army (as it appears to have occurred in 100 H. with the mint of Damascus) who, in turn, forwarded them to merchants in exchange for their goods.

⁵⁸ I shall like to thank Dr. Alan M. Stahl, Curator of Numismatics, Firestone Library, RBSC, Princeton University, for kindly informing me about this collection.

⁵⁹ al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, pt. 2, 266.

⁶⁰ For arguments and examples concerning the issue of coins to pay soldiers, see Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs*, 69ff.

Choice of metal to strike coins most probably depended on the metallic zone where they were minted, but at times also on the metal that was available at hand. For instance, when Qutayba ibn Muslim conquered Paykand/Bikand (the “city of merchants”) near Bukhārā in Soġd in 87 H., he took as booty huge quantities of silver and gold in the form of vessels and enormous idols containing gold and silver. From this metal, he ordered the production of coins, which yielded 150,000 *mithqāls* (660 kilograms of gold) or *dīnārs*.⁶¹ Thus, although operating in the traditional silver monetary zone of central Asia, the coins Qutayba ordered to be struck were gold (presumably alloyed with silver, i.e., electrum) because this was the metal that was immediately available. Significantly, when in nearby Marw, Muslim soldiers (who were apparently issued these coins) used them to purchase arms, armor, clothing, riding animals, and horses at astronomical prices set in the traditional for the area silver currency, e.g., coat of mail up to 700 dirhams, spears worth 50 to 70 dirhams, and a shield 50–60 dirhams.⁶² As with the agencies that issued coins, on occasion merchants had no choice of the types of coins they had to accept for their goods. However, when struck under normative circumstances (for instance at Damascus, not on some campaign) and provided that various types of bullions were available, the choice of metal would have been that of the monetary zone within which they were issued. Had there been a need to strike dirhams in substantive quantities and regularly at Damascus, as opposed to *dīnārs* and *fulūs*, there is little reason to believe that the caliphs would not have done so. Situated well within the gold-copper zone during the Umayyad era, Syria had little need for silver coins for its larger monetary economy and those that were already available in its lands or treasuries were apparently adequate for its needs. Here it would be apt to observe that during the early caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–193 H.) Greater Syria was still taxed exclusively (raisins aside) in gold: 1,440,000–1,576,000 *dīnārs* combined from Damascus, Qinnasrīn, al-‘Awāṣim, Hīmṣ, Jordan, and Palestine.⁶³ Damascus, as the other areas, was most probably supplied with gold from the mines in Arabia, Yamān,⁶⁴ and Egypt

⁶¹ al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation*, tr. M. Hinds, vol. 23 [*An Annotated Translation* [The Zenith of the Marwānid House] (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 137; Narshakhī, *The History of Bukhara*, tr. R.N. Frye (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954), 45; Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs*, 70.

⁶² Narshakhī, *The History of Bukhara*, 46 and Ibn A‘tham in al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 23, p. 137, n. 470.

⁶³ Ṣāleḥ Aḥmad el-‘Alī, “Miscellanea: A New Version of Ibn al-Muṭarrif’s List of Revenues in the Early Times of Hārūn al-Rashīd,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 14 (1971): 310.

⁶⁴ Gold mines were known and exploited during the sixth through the ninth centuries in Arabia at such mines as ma‘dīn banū Sulaym, Qabalīya, Juhayna, al-‘Ablā’, al-‘Aqīq, al-Najādī, and al-Ḍarīy. Aside from possessing large reserves of these metals and exploiting them during the time in question, most of the mines lay along important commercial and pilgrimage routes of Arabia, e.g., Darb Zubayda

(Nubia in particular⁶⁵): in addition to Syria, these regions were also taxed in *dīnārs*.⁶⁶ Overall, it will be argued that whatever dirhams that were minted at Damascus were most probably struck for long-distance commercial purposes and issued from the silver forwarded to the city in the form of taxes, booty, or gift to the caliph or *bayt al-māl*, most probably coming from the east, Wāsiṭ in particular.

Like Damascus, Wāsiṭ had no local silver mines for the striking of its dirhams. Unlike Damascus, however, this city lay within the silver zone of al-ʿIrāq. It was also situated on the Tigris that connected it to several key urban centers of the region such as al-Madāʾin (the old Persian capital city of Ctesiphon in Iraq), al-Kūfa, and al-Baṣra, the latter of which tied Wāsiṭ to al-Ahwāz, the Persian Gulf, Fāris, ʿUmān, al-Yamāma, al-Baḥrayn, and beyond. By way of these cities and regions that lay inside the former Sasanian silver zone, Wāsiṭ accessed the metal for the striking of its masses of dirhams and, in doing so, continue the tradition of emitting silver coins in the old Persian east. The question that remains is why Wāsiṭ, not some other nearby city, came to act as the key mint for al-ʿIrāq? The answer is found in the position the city held as the main Syrian garrison outpost in the eastern province, a site that produced mass quantities of dirhams to pay the troops and had access to great volumes of silver for their minting.⁶⁷ Indeed, during the Umayyad era, silver gravitated here in various forms through the numerous campaigns launched east into Transoxiana, Farḡanā, and India. Perhaps the best example that can be mentioned from the written sources that reflects this are Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim's raids into al-Sīnd in the early eighth century C.E. Just during this campaign there he was able to plunder an

road linking Mecca with al-Kūfa; al-Yamāma lay on road to a mine; Ḥijāzi – al-ʿIrāqi pilgrimage road; Ayla – Mecca road; al-ʿAblāʾ and al-ʿAqīq of Yemen – Mecca – Syria (“Spice Road”). In this way, the precious metals had easy avenues for their diffusion to other area of the caliphate, Syria included. See G.W. Heck, “Gold Mining in Arabia and the Rise of the Islamic State,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42:3 (1999): 364-95. Also see M.G. Morony, “The Late Sasanian Economic Impact on the Arabian Peninsula,” *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān/The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 1 (2001-2002): 25-37.

⁶⁵ Gold reserves were available in the Nubian mines of Wādī al-ʿAllāqī and others near by; gold began to come into the Arab world as soon as Egypt was annexed in 31 H. and it is know that by the mid-ninth century CE. the Arab governor of Egypt received tribute from these tribes in the form of gold ore in the amount of 400 *mīthqāls* or 1875 kilograms annually; see, G.I. Dzhaparidze, “Rudniki blagorodnykh metallov na blizhnem i srednem Vostoke v VIII-X vv.,” in G.F. Girs and E.A. Davidovich, eds., *Blizhniĭ i sredniĭ Vostok. Tovarno-denezhnye otnosheniia pri feodalizme* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 83; Yaʿqūbī, *Les Pays – Yaʿqūbī*, *Les Pays/Kitāb al-buldān*, tr. G. Wiet (Cairo: l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1937), 190.

⁶⁶ el-ʿAlī, “Miscellanea,” 309-10.

⁶⁷ For Wāsiṭ and its importance to the Umayyads, see O. GRABAR, “Al-Mushatta, Baghdād, and Wāsiṭ,” in J. Kritzeck and R. Bayly Winder, eds., *The World of Islam. Studies in Honour of Philip K. Hitti* (London: Macmillan, 1959), 105-6; S. Mondher, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. XI (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 165-8; LINDER WELIN, “Wāsiṭ,” 130-1.

equivalent of 120 million dirhams worth of loot, much of which appears to have come from a Buddhist sanctuary “The House of Gold” in al-Multān. This sum he passed over to the governor of al-‘Irāq, al-Ḥajjāj.⁶⁸ On his death in 95 H., the latter left 100 million dīnārs and 17 million dirhams (according to another account 200 million dirhams) in the State Treasury (*bayt al-māl*) of Wāsiṭ, all of which were then transferred to Caliph al-Walīd I (86-96 H.), who was in Dayr Murrān (in the Ghūṭa outside of Damascus), and subsequently melted down at the mint (although not necessarily reminted), presumably in Damascus.⁶⁹ Whether or not this was the normal way silver entered Syria during this mid-Umayyad era,⁷⁰ its availability there did not necessarily lead to the immediate production of dirhams; interestingly, Figure I shows no significant escalation in dirham production at Damascus in 95-96 H. when Wāsiṭ’s *bayt al-māl* was forwarded to the caliph. But, of course, it is quite possible that this was the silver that was used for the mass striking of dirhams at Damascus in 100 H., or just after Wāsiṭ ceased to be the seat of the governor in 97 H. and its mint was shut in 100 H.

Overall, while neither Damascus nor Wāsiṭ had any local silver mines, the latter was situated within the silver zone and had immediate and voluminous supply of this metal for the striking of dirhams. Damascus, situated within the traditional Byzantine gold zone had little need to emit dirhams in any notable quantities, since these coins were most probably of secondary importance to the larger regional monetary markets and the economy as a whole, perhaps aside from serving the needs of cross-regional merchants. Altogether, with the functioning of one mint at Damascus in all of Greater Syria, the paucity and irregularity of its output particularly in the 100s-120s H., and the general monolithic coin stock that circulated in the region (local and limited to the central Islamic lands), it is difficult to see how Syria came to merge with the silver zone of the eastern Islamic lands during the Umayyad era.

* * *

Beginning to strike dirhams at Damascus as early as 132 H. under Caliph al-Saffāḥ, the ‘Abbāsids were responsible for the production of 8.6% of all Damascus dirhams, a rather miserable sum, particularly when considering that this dynasty controlled the city for four times longer than the Umayyad. These dirhams were emitted

⁶⁸ al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, pt. 2, 222-3; Ibn Khurdādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa’l-Mamālik/Liber viarum et regnorum*, tr., M. J. de Goeje [Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, IV], 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 56.

⁶⁹ *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, 202-3.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of problems with the study of revenue collection and transfer of funds to the caliph from the provinces, see Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs*, 75.

mostly (81.4%) in the years 199-235 H. (40.7%), 238-251 H. (20%), and 308-327 H. (20.7%). Quite striking is the near total absence of emissions during the first half century of ‘Abbāsīd rule when only 6.7% of all dirhams minted at Damascus by the dynasty were coined. All in all, under the ‘Abbāsīds Damascus was clearly a secondary mint, one that produced few dirhams and did so very erratically. More or less the same picture is drawn for the Ikhshīdīds, who issued their “official” dirhams at the mint in 331-358 H. While they struck a very nominal number of these coins in absolute volumes (1.6% of the total Damascus issues), considering that they minted these dirhams for a period of less than three decades, in relative terms to the Abbāsīds, the Ikhshīdīds coined a comparatively larger quantity of these coins. Some thoughts for why this was the case will be offered below.

The marginal position the mint at Damascus held under the ‘Abbāsīds and Ikhshīdīds can again be explained by the absence of local silver mines and the removal of *bayt al-māl* from the city, leading to the termination in the flow of tax and booty revenue in the form of silver. Nonetheless, it will be argued that the most salient reason for the great paucity and irregularity of dirham production at the mint can be connected with the retention of the traditional bimetallic gold-copper monetary economy in Syria until the 280s H. It must be observed that while the al-Jazīra region entered the silver zone relatively early, it did so very tentatively. There, dirhams came to be struck at such mints as Ḥarrān, al-Mawṣil, and al-Jazīra in the pre-101 H. era, although not regularly or in any notable quantities. After closure in 96 H., al-Jazīra again struck some dirhams in 126-132 H. as a result of Marwān II’s transfer of the capital from Damascus to Ḥarrān, but then terminated with the death of this caliph. It was only in the early 180s/late 190s H. and then the 250s-260s H. that the al-Jazīra region again witnessed some activity: al-Rāfiqa starting in 183 H.; al-Raqqā in 199 H.; Naṣībīn in the 250s H.; and, al-Mawṣil in the 260s H.).

The situation in al-‘Awāṣīm and Syria, however, was quite different: there were no dirham mints there at all other than Damascus until the 280s H., when three additional mints came to strike the coins in the two regions – Ḥalab in Syria and al-Maṣṣīṣa and Ṭarsūs in eastern Anatolia. Probably not coincidentally, that same decade witnessed three other mints issuing dirhams in al-Jazīra (Āmid, Ḥarrān, and Ra’s al-‘Ayn). The 290s H. saw the addition of Filastīn (Palestine), although this mint issued some coins in 263 H., and Ḥimṣ in Syria. In 300 H. Anṭākiyya began to strike dirhams in eastern Anatolia and Ṭabariyya in Palestine started to operate in 315 H. In this way, while al-Jazīra entered the eastern silver zone already in the pre-101 H. era, although not very firmly until the 180s H. (if not the 250s-260s H.⁷¹), it continued to

⁷¹ To better determine when upper Mesopotamia joined in the silver zone, it would be necessary to first ascertain the extent and depth of its place in it – something that can be done through the study the relative volumes and regularity in the production of dirhams at its mints, a subject that will be left

develop as a mint within this sphere in the following decades as more mints in the region began to strike dirhams. However, areas west of it – Syria and eastern Anatolia – evidently lay outside of the silver zone until the 280s H. Before then, Damascus was the sole mint to emit dirhams in this area and when it did, very few of them were struck and quite irregularly. Again, it can be suggested that these coins were issued by the mint of Damascus mainly at the request of interregional merchants operating between Syria and silver-zone areas to its east.

The entrance of Syria and eastern Anatolia into the silver zone in the 280s-290s H. seems to be reflected in the production of dirhams at Damascus. In Figure III it can be seen that with the mid-280s H. there is an apparent incline in the emission of these coins at the mint. Indeed, between the 280s and the late 330s H. Damascus issued more than a third (ca. 37%) of all the coins struck by the Abbāsids and the Ikhshīdids at the mint. This interval of 55 years represents a quarter of the two centuries of minting at Damascus – 132-339 H. Thus, at the very same time when other dirham mints began to operate in Syria, Palestine, and eastern Anatolia, Damascus experienced a mild renaissance in its production of the coins. Where silver came from to be struck into these dirhams remains a question to be answered. In the same way, the reason why this western-most region of the Near East entered the silver zone then and not before is a question that is best left for another study.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, several salient findings and larger observations will be underscored. First, this study has examined 159 dirham hoards with Damascus issues deposited across a wide area of Afro-Eurasia between the early years of the first and the early years of the fourth centuries H. Together, these hoards contained at least 1822 dirhams minted at Damascus sometime during the first four centuries of Islam, issued by the Umayyad, ‘Abbāsīd, and Ikhshīdīd dynasties. Using the “hoard-count” method of estimating mint emissions, which provides data on the relative (not absolute) mint output, it has been determined that the mint of Damascus underwent a period of significant activity only during the Umayyad era, a time when it served as the capital of the caliphate. But, even during this period, the mint actively produced the coins on a relatively large scale and regularly only in the years spanning 79 to 100 H. or some two decades following the dirham reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik. Subsequently, Damascus produced coins in lower volumes and less regularly until the mint collapsed in 127 H. or when the city ceased to be the capital of the Islamic world.

for another inquiry.

Not possessing local silver mines and bereft of revenue transfers from the provinces, after 127 H. the dirham mint of Damascus was at best marginal in the production of these coins through the ‘Abbāsīd and Ikhshīdīd eras. However, perhaps the most important reason why Damascus issued so few dirhams in absolute terms (*vis-à-vis* Wāsiṭ) and relative terms to itself (*vis-à-vis* pre-100 H., 101-127 H., and post-Umayyad eras) has to do with Greater Syria’s exclusion from the silver monetary zone that lay to its east – the territories of the old Sasanian Empire of al-‘Irāq and further eastwards. Indeed, it was only in the 280s-290s H. that Syria seems to have begun to enter the silver zone, but it did so only slowly and feebly, as dirhams came to be struck only a few other mints that became operative from the 280s to the 310s H. While the dirhams output of Damascus witnessed an escalation during this period, it was negligible when compared to the production of these coins at the mint during the Umayyad era.

Taken as a whole, until the 280s H. the mint at Damascus most probably struck dirhams mainly for its cross-regional commerce with the silver-zone to its east. Otherwise, Syria’s monetary economy was based on the copper-gold standard that it inherited and retained from the pre-Islamic/early Byzantine tradition of this bimetallic currency. The relative paucity and irregularity in the production of dirhams at the mint of Damascus for much of the early Muslim era thus does not bespeak the city’s poverty. Nor does it speak of the unavailability of silver for the striking of these coins, at least not for nearly all of the Umayyad era when Damascus was the capital of the Islamic civilization. It was largely Greater Syria’s copper-gold metallic zone that marginalized the production of silver coinage for its regional monetary economy.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the above conclusions could not have been reached at using any other method for estimating dirham mint production other than the “hoard-count” approach. What is more, having established the salient patterns of dirham production at the mint of Damascus, it is possible to discuss the circulation patterns of these coins across Afro-Eurasia using the same technique. Again, only this methodology can shed light on the important questions of where and when these coins circulated: no collection or museum corpus or coin checklist can offer such information. Thus, looking ahead, since Damascus was one of the only Near Eastern mints to strike dirhams (although not always regularly) during the course of most of the Umayyad, all of the ‘Abbāsīd, and Ikhshīdīd eras, these coins can serve as proxies to address the question of Near Eastern dirham circulation in context of a prolonged chronological framework that spans some three centuries. These coins can also shed light on the export and circulation of Damascus dirhams in regions outside of the caliphate, mainly in Northern Europe. These issues will be the subjects of a forthcoming study.⁷²

⁷² KOVALEV, “Circulation of Dirhams From the Mint of Damascus.”