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FRÉDÉRIC BAUDEN

THE ISLAMIC COINAGE OF CYRENAICA (BARQA) FROM THE ARAB CONQUEST
UP TO THE ADVENT OF THE FATIMIDS

ABSTRACT - The Arab conquest of Cyrenaica began in 22/642 and was completed a few months later. Its conqueror, 'Amr b. al-Āṣ, negotiated an agreement with the inhabitants and the local Berbers, the Lawāta, according to which they would pay a yearly tribute of 13000 dinars. Until the conquest and in the decades that immediately followed it, the inhabitants of Cyrenaica had paid for their goods with the coinage produced by the Byzantines (the Muslims' predecessors). Our knowledge of the coinage of Barqa/Cyrenaica in the period that follows until the emergence of the Fatimid dynasty at the end of the third/ninth century, is almost nonexistent. A perusal of the repertoires and catalogs yields a meagre harvest of three coins bearing the mint name Barqa (two fals from the Umayyad period and one dirham from the Abbasid period). This lack of coins leads us to see Barqa as a city of little importance and activity during the first three centuries AH, an image that is contradicted by the depiction of the city in literary and archaeological sources. Over the last decade, several coins struck in Barqa have surfaced on the market and in collections, as well as during excavations. In some cases, it appears that coins were wrongly catalogued because the inscriptions did not enable us to interpret the name of the mint with certainty. In this study, I examine some twelve coins and present the most complete survey of the coinage of Barqa from the Arab conquest to the rise of the Fatimids.

*Introduction*¹

In this volume, which is mainly dedicated to the study of coinage in Cyrenaica in Antiquity, an article devoted to the numismatic issue in the early Islamic period can only highlight the deficiencies of our field. In fact, our knowledge of coinage, be it the circulation of money or the local strikes, in the region during the first three centuries of Islamic rule is not nearly as well documented as that of previous periods. This impression is conveyed and strengthened by the number of studies presented during the conference and published here. A similar level of analysis is impossible for the early Islamic coinage of Cyrenaica, as current knowledge of the circulation of Islamic coins and local types is little more than nothing. Nevertheless, the situation is not desperate and it can certainly be improved, if not transfigured. In this article I aim to document the coinage of Barqa/Cyrenaica, referred to as Barqa in the Islamic sources, on the basis of specimens that either were recently identified as having been struck in Barqa or have lately appeared on the market. The impetus for this study was a coin that Michele Asolati kindly asked me to identify among other Islamic coins found in the area of Cyrene a few years ago². It turns out that this well preserved specimen

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to the various people who shared reproductions of several of the coins illustrated in this article as well as information regarding these coins and others: Lutz Ilisch (Tübingen, Forschungsstelle für islamische Numismatik), Tony Goodwin, Stephen Giles, and David Tranbarger.

² ASOLATI, BAUDEN 2010.

clearly shows that it was minted in Barqa, though this coin had so far been attributed in the literature to either Ramla/al-Ramla in Palestine or Raqqa/al-Raqqa in Syria. This aroused my interest in the history of this mint in the early Islamic period. Since then, I have identified new coins that drove me to broaden my study on Barqa as a mint in the period up to the advent of the Fatimids, i.e., up to the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, the results of which are presented in the forthcoming pages.

1. *The coinage of Barqa: A terra incognita*

In a recent study on the nature of Arab rule in North Africa from the perspective of the archaeological evidence, Corisande Fenwick stated:

North Africa has played little part in recent scholarship on the Arab conquests and subsequent transformation of the early medieval Mediterranean. It would be unfair to cast the blame on scholars of the broader Mediterranean when scholars of North Africa only recently turned their attention to the fifth to ninth centuries, the so-called “siècles obscurs” or “dark ages”³.

When we speak of Cyrenaica, in particular from the point of view of Islamic numismatics and for the period covering the Arab conquest up to the beginning of the fourth/tenth c., we are certainly in the darkest of the dark ages. A picture is worth a thousand words and the following table, based on the data provided by the classical directories of mints in Islam, is helpful to grasp the kind of desolate land we are in. These reference works are based on secondary literature that details specific coin-types and, consequently, reflects the state of our knowledge on a given mint.

	UMAYYADS	ABBASIDS
Von Zambaur		2
Diler	1	1

Table 1. Coins minted in Barqa in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods according to the repertoires of mints in Islam (von Zambaur; Diler).

Von Zambaur’s quite dated *Die Münzprägungen des Islams* only refers to three coins but two are identical⁴. The first one, for which two specimens are mentioned, is a dirham struck in 170 (786-787) in the name of the Abbasid caliph al-Hādī (see coin no. 9 below)⁵, while the second is an undated fals (see no. 4 below)⁶. In the recent update published by the late Diler, only two additional coins are listed for the period pre-ceding the beginning of the fourth/tenth c., both are fals, and one corresponds to the coin already listed by von Zambaur⁷. From this, it can be inferred that we know of

³ FENWICK 2013, p. 9.

⁴ VON ZAMBAUR 1968, p. 71.

⁵ VON ZAMBAUR 1968, p. 71 quotes, for the first specimen, CODRINGTON 1902, p. 269, who in turn refers to TIESENHAUSEN 1873, p. 121, no. 1100 (where other specimens are detailed), and, for the second specimen, SORET 1865, p. 79, no. 109.

⁶ VON ZAMBAUR 1968, p. 71, quotes LAVOIX 1887, p. 421, no. 1558.

⁷ For the first, DILER 2009, p. 267, refers to GOODWIN 2003, p. 6, while for the second he quotes

only three coins minted in Barqa.

Beside these reference works, the numismatist can also search for new specimens or coin-types in corpuses and *sylloge* that were published during the last decades, but the harvest is disappointing. For instance, in his 1956 corpus of pre- and post-reform coinage in the Umayyad period, Walker only mentioned the bronze coin from the *Cabinet des médailles* in Paris already listed by von Zambaur⁸; he stated:

Barce had coins in classical times, the earliest dating from the last quarter of the sixth, and ceasing in the early part of the third century B.C. Apart from this solitary specimen of Muḥammadan coinage no other instances of mint activity are known there⁹.

In another essential tool, Lowick's type corpus of the early Abbasid coinage (until 217/833), Barqa does not even appear as a mint¹⁰. This broad survey of the literature confirms the impression that the coinage in Barqa/Cyrenaica during the first three centuries of Islamic rule is close to nil¹¹. The imbalance noted in the history of coinage between Barqa/Cyrenaica and its neighboring regions (Egypt and Ifrīqiyya/Tunisia) proves either that the area is a desert in every sense of the word for numismatists or that its coinage is under-researched. The aim of the present study is to demonstrate that we ought to favor the second opinion. The reasons that lay behind this disregard can be identified with certainty in the following elements.

Firstly, Barqa/Cyrenaica was never the center of a local powerful dynasty, like adjacent Egypt and Ifrīqiyya/Tunisia; the impact of this can be appreciated at several levels. While the capitals of Egypt and Ifrīqiyya/Tunisia were quickly transformed into regional centers, generating the emergence of local histories glorifying the merits of those cities and the region where they were built and developed, Barqa/Cyrenaica became and remained a major thoroughfare, but nothing more. Even if some celebrities are recorded in the biographical dictionaries, like Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Barqī, i.e., from Barqa (d. 270/883-884), who authored a *History* (*Ta'riḥ*)¹², the city of Barqa never became a major intellectual center. This situation has resulted in a lack of information such that what we know of Barqa is in no way comparable to what we know of the adjacent regions. The historical details from Barqa/Cyrenaica that have been found usually relate to local events that called for the attention of Egyptian or Tunisian rulers¹³. Our knowledge of the administrative history of the area is thus very limited. In this respect, we must stress that Barqa/Cyrenaica was dependent on either Egypt or Ifrīqiyya/Tunisia: when governors or prefects were nominated, it was by a governor who resided in Cairo or

SHAMMA 1998, p. 177 (= LAVOIX 1887, p. 421, no. 1558).

⁸ WALKER 1956, p. 235, no. p. 125.

⁹ WALKER 1956, p. LXXIV.

¹⁰ LOWICK [1999].

¹¹ The same assessment is valid for the neighboring Tripolitania.

¹² The family was among the clients (*mawālī*) of the Banū Zuhra. Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Barqī had also two brothers named Muḥammad and 'Abd al-Raḥīm. The three brothers, who transmitted The Military Campaigns [of the Prophet] (*al-Mağāzī*) from 'Abd al-Malik b. Hišām, were in fact Egyptians. If they were known as al-Barqī, it is because they traded from Egypt to Barqa. IBN YŪNUS 2000, p. 453; IBN MĀKULĀ 1962, vol. 1, pp. 480-481.

¹³ For works that deal with the history of Barqa/Cyrenaica in detail, see 'ABBĀS 1967; MIFTĀH 1978; THIRY 1995. See also STUCCHI 1993.

in Kairouan¹⁴. Moreover, the sources seldom make reference to the names of local administrators and, when they do, it is not always clear when the people indicated in the sources were designated, for how long, and if they remained in Barqa or later resettled in Ifrīqiyya/Tunisia. A perusal of these sources yields poor results; only a dozen names are attested from the Arab conquest until the Fatimid takeover of the region in 301/914, and these periods are far from being clearly delineated, as the following table shows¹⁵.

YEAR	NAME	NOTES	BIBLIOGRAPHY
46/666-667-52/672 or 56/675-676	Ruwayfi' b. Tābit al-Anṣārī	Designated governor (<i>amīr</i>) of Barqa by Maslama b. Maḥlad al-Anṣārī, the governor of Egypt; died in function in Barqa in 52/672 or 56/675-676; buried there	IBN YŪNUS 2000, pp. 182-183; AL-ḌAHABĪ 1990-2000, vol. 4, pp. 17, 51, 206
?-76/695-696	Talīd, the client (<i>maw-lā</i>) of 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān	Ruled Barqa (<i>kāna 'alā Barqa</i>) until Zuhayr b. Qays al-Balawī was killed there by the Byzantines in 76/695-696	IBN YŪNUS 2000, p. 191
76/695-696-?	Fahd b. Kaḫīr al-Ma'āfirī	Replaced Talīd as governor (<i>wāli</i>).	IBN YŪNUS 2000, p. 191
between 105/724 and 125/743	Zāhir b. Qays b. Zuhayr al-Balawī	Governor (<i>wāli</i>) of Barqa during the caliphate of Hiṣām; buried there.	IBN MĀKŪLĀ 1962, vol. 4, p. 158
138/755-756 or after-?	'Iyād b. Jurayba b. Sa'd al-Kalbī	Governor (<i>wāli</i>) of Barqa	IBN YŪNUS 2000, p. 386
around 140/757-758	Ibn Diyās ¹⁶	Governor (<i>wāli</i>) of Cyrenaica (Anṭābulus); headed for Egypt to present the truce the inhabitants concluded with 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ after the conquest to Yazīd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥaḍramī (deputy judge of al-Fuṣṭāṭ in 140/757 until his death the same year)	IBN 'ABD AL-ḤAKAM 1922, p. 170

¹⁴ According to THIRY 1995, p. 155, Barqa/Cyrenaica became part of the Egyptian province upon its conquest and passed to the control of the governors of Ifrīqiyya at an undetermined date before returning to Egypt at the end of the second/eighth c. For this, he relies on AL-RAQĪQ 1990, p. 139, who states that after the death of Rawḥ b. Ḥātim al-Muhallabī (174/790-791; the governor of Ifrīqiyya), Barqa was detached from the province of Ifrīqiyya (*'uzilat Barqa min 'amal Ifrīqiyya*). The data presented in the following table shows that this statement must be taken with caution, as in the middle of the second/eighth c. one governor, Ibn Diyās, was a Copt who depended on the Egyptian governor and another, 'Abd al-Salām b. 'Abd Allāh al-Saybānī, was appointed from Egypt.

¹⁵ In his history of Libya, 'ABBĀS 1967, pp. 55-57, errs in his outline of the succession of several governors. The reliance on the primary sources helped me to draw a somewhat different picture.

¹⁶ Not Ibn Dayyās as in BRUNING 2014, p. 142, fn. 67, because according to AL-QĀSIM B. SALLĀM 1989, p. 235, fn. 2, he was a Copt (*naṣrānī min anbāṭ Miṣr qibṭī*, «A Christian who was part of the peasants of Egypt. A Copt»). His name thus derives from Coptic ΔΙΟC. See HASITZKA 2007, s.v.

148/765-766-?	‘Abd al-Salām b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Hubayra al-Saybānī	Designated governor (<i>amīr</i>) of Barqa by Yazīd b. Ḥātim, the governor of Egypt.	AL-KINDĪ 1912, p. 116
after 171/787-788-?	Qabīša b. Rawḥ b. Ḥātim al-Muhallabī	Designated governor (<i>wāṭī</i>) by his father once Qabīša joined him in Kairouan	AL-RAQĪQ 1990, p. 139
?-227/841-842	Muḥammad b. ‘Abdawayh b. Jabala	Governor (<i>‘āmil</i>) of Barqa when a revolt ousted him in 227/841-842	AL-YA‘QŪBĪ 1883, vol. 2, p. 586; CRONE 1998, p. 8.
?-257/870-871	Muḥammad b. Harṭama b. Ay‘an	Governor (<i>‘āmil</i>) of Barqa until 257/870-871 when the army garrisoned there expelled him	AL-YA‘QŪBĪ 1883, vol. 2, p. 623
257/870-871-?	Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā al-Ṣa‘īdī	Was governor of Barqa when the province fell under the control of Ibn Ṭūlūn in 257/870-871	IBN SA‘ĪD 1953, p. 80
?-261/874-875	Muḥammad b. Farrūḥ al-Fargānī	Nominated governor (<i>amīr</i>) of Barqa by Ibn Ṭūlūn until the population drove him out in 261/874-875	AL-BALAWĪ 1939, p. 70
261/874-875-?	Šu‘ba b. Ḥarkām	Was appointed (<i>istaḥlafahu ‘alā</i>) over the city by the general who crushed the rebellion mentioned above	AL-BALAWĪ 1939, p. 72
297/909-910-301/913-914	Aḥmad b. Šāliḥ	Designated governor of Barqa by the Abbasid governor of Egypt, Takīn ¹⁷	AL-KINDĪ 1912, p. 268

Table 2. Names of the governors/administrators of Barqa identified in the sources.

Secondly, even though archaeological studies, the main provider of numismatic material, have focused on the region for more than a century, only a few coins from the Islamic period have been excavated (see below, table 3). Moreover, the coins are usually mentioned in the literature with few details and seldom published and even more rarely reproduced. Excavations at Islamic sites in Cyrenaica were carried out in Ajdabiya/Ajdābiyya, Tocra/Tūkra, El Merj/Barqa, Benghazi/Binḡāzī, and Tolmaita/Ṭulmayṭa¹⁸.

¹⁷ With this governor (301/914), the list ends; the region fell under the control of the Fatimids. The first governor designated by the new ruling power was a certain Abū Madyan, mentioned for the first time by al-Kindī in 304/916-917 (AL-KINDĪ 1912, p. 116). In this source, the name is corrupted (*aty madyny*), and the editor suggests that this could be the tekonym (*kunya*) of this person. In that case, it could be read, as proposed here, Abū Madyan.

¹⁸ For a general survey of the Islamic sites excavated, see HUTT 1971-1972. For a presentation of the excavations carried out in Libya in general, including Barqa/Cyrenaica, see KING 1989. For the results yielded by excavations at sites that corresponded to ancient ports, see HARDY-GUILBERT, LEBRUN-PROTIÈRE 2010. For Ajdabiya, see ABDUSSAID 1964; BLAKE, HUTT, WHITEHOUSE 1970-1971; WHITEHOUSE 1971-1972; WHITEHOUSE 1972-1973; LOWICK 1971-1972, DONALDSON 1975-1976, RILEY 1982; BONGIANINO

Kennet, who excavated 438 coins (of which 436 were Byzantine, the remaining two dating from the Ottoman period) in Tolmaita, pictured the situation as follows:

It could be said that the archaeological evidence for medieval occupation of Tolmaita is frustratingly elusive and does not mirror the frequent mentions of Tolmaita by medieval Arab geographers¹⁹.

Kennet stresses that the fact that not a single post-Heraclius coin was discovered on the site despite the finding of numerous medieval pottery shards is all the more surprising and even disturbing. In 2000, Buzaian, who wrote about the results yielded by the excavations at Tocra, concluded, after mentioning the two Islamic coins found on the site, that «in general, Islamic coins are rare in Cyrenaica»²⁰. This statement, which perfectly reflects the situation described at the beginning of this article, is hardly belied by the findings made in the course of excavations at sites where an Islamic settlement is less obvious, like in Cyrene. In a 2010 article, M. Asolati and I studied Islamic coins that had presumably been found in Cyrene, Baggara, and, further south, El Mechili/al-Maḥīlī, out of any archaeological context (most of them were surface findings). For the period considered here, it appears that thirteen coins (gold, silver, bronze) were identified and the variety of authorities by which they were struck testifies to the circulation of those coins over great distances in some cases, and confirms the economic role played by the region as a major crossroads for trade between North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the East²¹. Nevertheless, only one Abbasid fals minted locally could be identified, once again strengthening the impression that local minting remained an exception, something that hardly stands in comparison with events in the rest of the Islamic world at the same time.

Thirdly, even if archaeology is helpful and our knowledge of the public collections in Europe and elsewhere is excellent, the fact remains that scholars who work in the field of Islamic numismatics have never tackled the issue of coinage in the region. More attention has been paid to the coinage of any and all periods in Egypt, the Maghreb and al-Andalus²².

The almost total absence of local coinage for Barqa/Cyrenaica is all the more surprising given its position, not only as a halfway point between the Maghreb and Egypt, but also as the crossroads of routes coming from south of the Sahara²³. These itineraries ensured the transportation of various goods, most of them precious, like gold, ivory,

2015. For Tocra, see JONES 1983; BUZAIAN 2000. For El Meṭj, see ABDUSSAID 1971; DORE 1990; DORE 1991; DORE 1992; DORE, ROWAN, DAVISON 1993. For Benghazi, see REECE 1977. For Tolmaita, see LITTLE 1990; KENNET 1991.

¹⁹ KENNET 1991, p. 84.

²⁰ BUZAIAN 2000, p. 95.

²¹ See ASOLATI, BAUDEN 2010. Since then, the pictures of two additional coins presumably found in Cyrene were submitted to me by M. Asolati. The first one is a post-reform Umayyad fals (WALKER 1956, p. 221, no. 712) and the second one is an Umayyad dirham struck in Wāsiṭ in 107/725-726 (WALKER 1956, p. 195, no. 554).

²² For recent contributions on Islamic coinage in Cyrenaica and Tripolitana, see 'ABD AL-LATĪF 2000 (study of a hoard discovered near Tripoli in 1982); GHODHBANE 2012 (study of a fals struck at Tripoli in the year 100/718-719).

²³ For the itineraries, see the maps attached to THIRY 1995.

SITE	COIN FINDINGS	BIBLIOGRAPHY
Ajdabiya/Ajdābiyya	1 Abbasid (?) bronze coin (late 2 nd -3 rd /8 th -9 th c.) in the name of two governors, 'Amr and Muḥammad 1 Aghlabid copper of Muḥammad I (r. 226-242/841-856) or Muḥammad II (r. 250-261/863-875)	LOWICK 1971-1972, p. 5
Benghazi/Bingāzī	1 fals with worn Kufic inscription (2 nd -3 rd /8 th -9 th c.) 1 Fatimid silver fractional dirham of al-Mu'izz (r. 341-365/953-975) 3 silver fractional dirhams (Egypt or Tripoli, 5 th /11 th c.) 13 Ottoman coins	REECE 1977, pp. 231-232; KING 1989, p. 196
Cyrene	1 Umayyad dinar of al-Walīd I (r. 86-96/705-715) dated 91/709-710	WANIS 1991
	3 Umayyad fals 4 Abbasid fals (2 nd -3 rd /8 th -9 th c.); 1 Abbasid dirham (4 th /10 th c.) 1 fractional Idrisid dirham of Idrīs II (r. 192-213/808-828) 2 Aghlabid dinars of Ziyādat Allāh I (r. 201-223/817-838) and Ibrāhīm II (r. 261-289/874-902); 1 Aghlabid fractional dirham of Ibrāhīm II 1 Fatimid dinar of al-'Azīz (r. 365-386/975-996); 1 Fatimid dirham of al-'Āḍid (r. 555-567/1160-1171) 1 Mamluk dirham of Īnāl (r. 857-865/1453-1461) 5 Ottoman silver coins (13 th /19 th c.); 9 Ottoman copper coins (13 th /19 th c.); 1 Ottoman nickel coin (13 th /19 th c.)	ASOLATI, BAUDEN 2010
	1 Umayyad fals; 1 Umayyad dirham struck at Wāsiṭ in 107/725-726	unpublished (see footnote 21)
El Mechili/al-Maḥīlī	1 Abbasid fals (2 nd -3 rd /8 th -9 th c.) 1 Fatimid fractional dinar of al-Ḥākīm (r. 386-411/996-1021)	ASOLATI, BAUDEN 2010, pp. 54, 57
El Merj/Barqa	some gold dinars found in 1936	ABDUSSAID 1971, p. 124
	23 copper coins, most of which are illegible. 2 could be Abbasid or Fatimid; 1 Ottoman	DORE 1991, p. 97
Tocra/Tūkra	2 Umayyad fals, one overstruck on a Byzantine coin ²⁴	BENTAHER 1994, pp. 234-235; BUZAIAN 2000, p. 95
Tolmaita/Tulmayṭa	a hoard of 50 dinars found in 1968 ²⁵	HARDY-GUILBERT, LEBRUN-PROTIÈRE 2010, p. 90
	2 Ottoman copper coins	KENNET 1991, p. 83

Table 3. Coin findings in Barqa/Cyrenaica (found on the surface or in an archaeological context; all periods)²⁶.

²⁴ Although not identified by the two authors quoted, it appears that the overstruck specimen was made from a coin struck in Palestine (see ILISCH 1993, no. 1).

²⁵ Before sending this article to print, Michele Asolati shared with me the pictures of two dinars that are apparently part of a group of 50 similar coins reportedly preserved at the Museum of Cyrene. The two coins correspond to dinars struck by the Aghlabid ruler Aḥmad (r. 242-9/856-63), the first one in 245 and the second in 249. If it is confirmed that this group of 50 dinars correspond with the hoard found in Tolmaita/Tulmayṭa and that they are all of the same nature, it may be surmised that all the dinars are in fact Aghlabids.

²⁶ This table was established on the basis of coin findings mentioned in excavation reports and articles.

and slaves, that were conveyed from Barqa, by land or sea, to various parts of the Islamic world and beyond the Mediterranean. The interaction with the sub-Saharan area is indeed attested since the first/seventh c. and the field work carried out by Mattingly in recent years shows, thanks to radiocarbon dating, that the mosque of Zuwīla is probably the most ancient in Libya and one of the most ancient in North Africa (670-778)²⁷. Tolmeita served as the access to the sea, at least for the summer season. In a description of the region in a sixth/twelfth-century source, Barqa is wrongly identified as a port but the text provides a useful information about the capacities of Tolmeita; according to the author, it states that it could accommodate 100 boats²⁸. In such conditions, one wonders why almost no local coin has been registered so far between the Islamic conquest and the rise of the Fatimid rule in the region at the beginning of the fourth/tenth c. The following survey proves that the situation is far from being as desperate as it may currently seem.

2. *The coinage of Barqa: The evidence*

The chronological frame of this survey takes as a starting point the conquest of the region and stops with the expansion of the Fatimids towards the East, during the first half of the fourth/tenth c.²⁹. The reason the upper limit is fixed to the fourth/tenth c. is justified by the fact that Fatimid coinage has been the subject of numerous studies over the last decades, including an excellent survey by Doug Nicol³⁰ with some additions published a few years later³¹. It is certainly not less interesting, but in comparison with the preceding centuries there is little left to be studied. Furthermore, the Fatimids were the first to unite the Maghreb and Egypt: Cyrenaica thus became part of an empire and remained connected to Egypt for several centuries. This situation generated developments that were quite different from those experienced by the region during the previous three centuries.

The area itself roughly corresponds to the territory of Cyrenaica, i.e., the whole peninsula and the adjacent territories located between the Gulf of Bomba and that of the Great Syrtis. Nowadays Barqa corresponds to the city of El Merj. However, the name of the city of Barqa, an old Roman site (Barcé) that was, already at the time of the Islamic conquest, the capital of the Pentapolis, quickly prevailed over Anṭābulus (the Arabic rendering of Pentapolis) to refer to both the city and the region itself³². This is reflected by the coinage produced in the region, as we will see.

²⁷ MATTINGLY, STERRY, EDWARDS 2015.

²⁸ ANONYMOUS 2014, p. 451.

²⁹ The first Fatimid coins struck in Barqa are dated from the reign of al-Mu'izz (r. 341-365/953-975), starting from the year 347/958-960 (half dirham, see MORTON, EDEN 2016, no. 124; MORTON, EDEN 2015, no. 119), which predates by one year the first coin mentioned by NICOL 2006, p. 41, no. 265.

³⁰ NICOL 2006.

³¹ NICOL 2010.

³² BLAKE, HUTT, WHITEHOUSE 1971, p. 106. Barqa was still associated with Anṭābulus by three third/tenth-century Muslim historians. See DORE 1994, p. 267. Anṭābulus resurfaced as a mint name under the Fatimids. Two coins were minted in Anṭābulus, but it remains to be established if the coins were minted in Barqa or in somewhere else. In at least one case, we know that the specimen was struck by a rebel at Barqa. See NICOL 2006, pp. 132 (no. 892), 257 (no. 1699a).

The survey that follows is chronological with undated coins organized on the basis of paleographical and stylistic comparisons with similar coin-types in the adjacent regions.

a. *The Umayyad period*

The coinage of the Umayyad period is traditionally divided into two periods: the one that preceded ‘Abd al-Malik’s reform and the one that followed it. The first period is represented in Barqa/Cyrenaica by a few coins probably minted in Palestine³³. Though the region, like Syria, used Byzantine coinage before the Islamic conquest, and though coins struck by Mūsá b. Nuṣayr (ca 80-85/699-704) on the Byzantine model are attested in Tripoli/Ṭarābulus³⁴, it does not seem that local imitations were produced in Barqa before the appearance of the post-reform coinage at the end of the first/beginning of the eighth c.³⁵. The name of one governor is nevertheless attested in the sources³⁶.

It is only with the second period that we start to see local coinage appearing with Barqa as a mint name.

1. Umayyad post-reform fals, around 90/710.



Private collection (Tony Goodwin), mm 18, g 3,01, h 12 (GOODWIN 2003, p. 6; LEMBERG 2013, p. 21).

This coin was made from a blank that was cut. Considering the paleography and the legends, it offers some similarity to a specimen attributed to North Africa on the basis of the formula found on the reverse (“praise be to God”; *al-ḥamd li-llāh*) and dateable to the end of the first/beginning of the eighth c. (around 90/710)³⁷.



The legend on the obverse is written in the same way (final *mām* on first line, final *hā*’ on second line). Another coin presenting the legend *bi-sm Allāh* (“in the name of God”) on the obverse and the legend *li-zakāt Allāh* (“for the alms of God”) is also thought to have been struck in North Africa³⁸. As for the legend on the reverse, it

³³ See table 3.

³⁴ WALKER 1956, pp. 59-60.

³⁵ MILES 1958, pp. 472-473, reached the same conclusion for Egypt.

³⁶ Ruwayfi’ who died in Barqa as governor (see table 2).

³⁷ WALKER 1956, pp. LXVIII and 224, no. 734.

³⁸ WALKER 1956, p. 225, no. 738.

echoes a coin struck in Tangiers/Ṭanġa around the 80s/early 700 where the word *fals* seems to appear for the first time in North Africa³⁹.

2. Umayyad post-reform fals, in the name of ‘Abd al-Malik, Barqa, around 100/720.



Margin (☪; starts at 11h)
 مما [امر به الا] مير [عبد الملك]



beaded circle



Margin (☪; starts at 10h)
 ضرب [هذا] الفلس

Private collection (Stephen Giles), mm 24, g 4,19, h 7.

The palm or palm tree appears on the obverse of several mints: Damascus/Dimašq, Nisibe/Nuṣaybīn, Ramla/al-Ramla, Tangiers/Ṭanġa, Tiberias/Ṭabariyya⁴⁰. On this coin, it is clearly a tree with a peculiar characteristic: it is placed above three steps (reminiscent of the modified cross of the pre-reform Umayyad coinage?) and flanked by two crescents with pellets. The shape of the tree evokes a similar design found on a fals of Tiberias/Ṭabariyya, where it is placed above two steps⁴¹. The paleography, the design, and the nature of the legends suggest that it may date to the very beginning of the second/early eighth c. On the basis of the sources the name of the governor (*al-amīr*) does not tally with any of those listed in table 2.

3. Umayyad post-reform fals, in the name of ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Bišr/Busr, Barqa, after 100/720.



pointillated circle

[مما] امر به
 عبيد
 الله بن
 بشر



ضرب
 هذا
 الفلس*
 ببرقة

Private collection (David Tranbarger), mm 17, g 3,57, h 3.

³⁹ WALKER 1956, pp. 62-63, no. P28.

⁴⁰ WALKER 1956, pp. 249-252 (nos. 816-Th.15, 828, B.47), 255-259 (nos. 848-P131, 855-78), 269 (nos. 896-P.133), 270-271 (nos. 900, Ox.7, and B.53), 285 (no. P.145).

⁴¹ WALKER 1956, p. 269 (no. 896).

The presence of the stars, typical of the post-reform Umayyad coinage, the archaic handwriting, and the nature of the reverse legend can be compared with a coin from an adjacent area as it was struck in Tripoli/Aṭrābulus. This specimen was minted in 100/718-719, 120/737-738, and 130/747-748 respectively⁴².



Zeno, #143318

The obverse provides the name of the governor with a formula (*mimmā amara bi-hi*) already used in Ifrīqiyya between 97/715-716 and 99/717-718⁴³. The reading proposed, ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Bišr, is not definitive, at least for the second part of the name (in the first part, two strokes are clearly visible, thus confirming the reading ‘Ubayd): the last name can equally be read Busr (Bašīr must be discarded: even though the space between the *sīn* and the *nā*’ is large, it is obviously devoid of any stroke). None of the two possibilities however is confirmed by the literary sources, at least for a person who would have administered Barqa, as is confirmed by table 2. Nevertheless, an ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Busr is registered as a transmitter of the second generation who was from Homs/Ḥimṣ⁴⁴. A ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Bišr al-Ḥaṭ‘amī is also attested as a transmitter of the second generation who reported a tradition in which the Prophet stated that Constantinople would be conquered⁴⁵. But none are known to have played an administrative role, beyond their roles as transmitters.

4. Umayyad post-reform fals, Barqa, around 120/738.



two intersected squares inside
a linear circle with 8 pointed stars

لا اله ا
لا الله و
حده



linear rectangle

محمد
رسول
الله

Margin (U; starts at 1h)

بسم الله ضرب هذا الفلوس ببرقة

Paris, mm 20, g 4,70 (LAVOIX 1887, p. 421, no. 1558; SHAMMA 1998, p. 177).

⁴² WALKER 1956, pp. 230-231 (nos. 750-751); GHODHBANE 2012.

⁴³ WALKER 1956, p. 231 (no. P.123).

⁴⁴ IBN ḤAĠAR AL-‘ASQALĀNĪ 1996, vol. 3, p. 6. If he belonged to the second generation, he would still have been alive at the beginning of the second/eighth c.

⁴⁵ IBN AL-AṬĪR 1994, vol. 2, p. 389.

This coin, of which only one specimen is known, was catalogued by Lavoix as belonging to the Abbasid period⁴⁶. It must, however, be dated to the late Umayyad period because it tallies almost perfectly with a fals struck at Mosul/al-Mawṣil by the local governor al-Walīd b. Talīd who administered the city between 114/732 and 121/738.



Padova, Museo Bottacin (Ravazzano 16.6(8)).

It is hard not to see the influence of one coin on the other as they both share the same design (two intersecting squares on the obverse; a rectangle on the reverse), the same legends and their disposition on both sides. The only exception regards the presence of stars in the spaces between the octagram and the outer circle. It can hardly be a coincidence and although no element helps to decide which coin inspired the other, it is fair to speculate that the coin struck in Barqa must certainly be dated after the Mosul coin.

5. Umayyad post-reform fals, Anṭābulus, around 120/738.



linear circle
fruit

Margin (U; starts at ʔh)
illegible legend



linear circle

با
نطا
بلس

Margin (U; starts at 5h)
[ضبا]رب هذا الفليس

Cyrene, surface finding (unpublished), mm 15, g?, h 8.

This coin can be compared with a fals minted in Tiberias/Ṭabariyya around 120/738⁴⁷. In this case, it presents a fruit like a grape on the obverse, with the first part of the *šāhada* around it and, on the reverse, the name of the mint surrounded by the second part of the *šāhada*.

⁴⁶ This explains why it was rejected in WALKER 1956.



Padova, Museo Bottacin (Ravazzano 16.15(13)).

Here, the coin has some fruit in a circle on the obverse with some illegible marginal inscription, while the reverse is occupied by the name of the mint with the marginal inscription indicating that the fals was struck there. The fruit can hardly be identified (the coin was not cleaned) but it looks round and is topped by some tips. The fifth/eleventh c. geographer al-Bakrī pinpointed that Cyrenaica was renowned for its walnuts, oranges, dates, lemons, and quinces that were exported to other regions around the Mediterranean⁴⁸. Unfortunately, any attempt to identify any of these fruits with the object represented on the coin remains purely conjectural.

As for the name of the mint, it was engraved in such a stylized way that its decipherment is a challenge for the numismatist. As seen in this drawing, the word was split into three parts ordered on three levels.



The *alifs* have the same height as the surrounding, lower, letters, which complicates the reading. However, the reconstruction proposed makes sense. As already stressed, Anṭābulus (for Pentapolis) was used to designate Cyrenaica in general, a function that the name of the city of Barqa came to play later on.

6. Umayyad post-reform fals, in the name of Abū Naṣr, Anṭābulus, and Barqa, around 132/750.



linear circle

بانطا
بلس

Margin (∪; starts at 1h)
linear circle

مما امر بـ[به ابو نـ]صر



linear circle

ببر
قة

Margin (∪; starts at 12h)

ضرب [هذا الـ]فلس

Tübingen (unpublished), no. 2011-X-X, mm 16, g 3,75, h 1. Another specimen is also reported in a private collection (Sicily).

⁴⁷ ILISCH 1993, p. 34, nos. 360-364.

⁴⁸ THIRY 1995, p. 483.

This coin is attested by two specimens that fortunately help to decipher the marginal legends. It is interesting as both sides indicate that it was struck in Barqa, which is located in Anṭābulus, i.e., in the Pentapolis region or Cyrenaica. The name of the governor is not attested in the literary sources (see table 2) and thus is not helpful to date the coin precisely. Nevertheless, the coin can be compared with similar types in Egypt. Several fals were struck in Atribis/Atrīb, Alexandria/al-Iskandariyya, al-Fuṣṭāt and Fayyūm/al-Fayyūm under ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, who was the finance director in 131-132/749-750.



Zeno, #117905 (Fuṣṭāt/Miṣr)

All four coins are similar as they present the same kind of legends and distribution. The obverse has the word Miṣr (Egypt) in the center with the name of the caliph, Marwān, in the margin, while the reverse shows the name of the mint in the center surrounded by the name of the financial director, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān⁴⁹. Though the name of the caliph is not mentioned on our coin, the parallelism suggests a connection through an echo of form. Our coin should thus be dated shortly afterwards.

b. *Transitional period*

7. Fals of Abū al-Ḥaṭṭāb ‘Abd al-A‘lā b. Samḥ al-Ma‘āfirī (r. 140-143/757-761) (?), Barqa.



عبد
*
[الاعلى]

فلوس
*
برقة

Private collection (Stephen Giles), mm 13, g 1,77, h 11.

This crude coin bears a personal name on the obverse. The second part of the name is partly off-flan. The second part of the name starts with the sequence of letters *alif-lām-alif* and the beginning of a letter almost invisible below the six-pointed star. This combination of letters may correspond to the solution proposed here: ‘Abd al-A‘lā. As for the reverse, the first word is clearly *fulūs* while the second word below is read here Barqa though the first letter of the word is rather faint on the coin (it looks more like (ر)ف⁵⁰). Consequently, the attribution to the mint of Barqa remains dubious until we identify another, better preserved specimen. Should this reading be confirmed, the

⁴⁹ WALKER 1956, pp. 227 (ANS.37), 230 (Kh.9), 275 (P.140-909), 276 (no. P141); MILES 1958, pp. 477-480.

⁵⁰ Notwithstanding, it is impossible to read this Raqqa, as the name of this Syrian city is always written

coin can be linked to the events that took place in the region during the transitional period that witnessed the rise of the Abbasid creed and the consecutive overthrow of the Umayyad caliphate. In Tripolitania and western North Africa Ḥārīḡism, the first dissent movement in Islam, started to spread in 126/743-744. Taking advantage of the support of the Berber tribes, the movement provoked several rebellions that put the Umayyad governors in a difficult position. The Ibādītes, a branch of Ḥārīḡism, elected Abū al-Ḥaṭṭāb ‘Abd al-A‘lā b. Samḥ al-Ma‘āfirī as their new chief in 140/757-758. ‘Abd al-A‘lā managed to extend his power over several Berber tribes, and this helped him control a vast territory from Ifrīqiyya/Tunisia to Barqa/Cyrenaica. He remained in power until the year 143/760-761, when his armies were defeated by the governor of Egypt⁵¹. Hence, this coin could have been issued in the three years during which Barqa/Cyrenaica passed under the yoke of the chief of the Ibādīs.

c. *Abbasid period*

8. Fals struck during the reign of caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136-158/754-775) by Yazīd b. Ḥātim b. Qabiṣa al-Muhallabī (governor of Ifrīqiyya, 154-170/771-787), Barqa, 158/774-775.



لا اله الا
الله وحده
لا شريك له
المهلب

Margin (U; starts at 2h)

ضرب هذا الفلّس سنة ثمان وخمسين ومئة



beaded circle

محمد
رسول
الله
يزيد

Margin (U; starts at 5h)

بسم الله [...] ببرقة

Tübingen, 2003-16-304, mm 20, g 3,03, h 10.

This fals bears the name of Yazīd b. Ḥātim al-Muhallabī who was governor of Egypt between 144/762 and 152/769 before being designated governor of Ifrīqiyya in 154/771. It was during his governorship of Egypt that Barqa/Cyrenaica was integrated into the province of Egypt. As such, he nominated a local governor (see table 2). In receiving his new appointment, he was asked to pacify Tripolitania and the province of Ifrīqiyya after a Ḥārīḡī uprising that had led to the killing of his

in Arabic with the definite article (al-Raqqā). As for the inscription *fulūs* with a mint name, one coin can be cited as evidence that this expression was used around the same period: it is a fals struck in Tiberias/al-Ṭabariyya around 120/737-738. The obverse reads: *bism Allāh fulūs Ṭabariyya*. See WALKER 1956, p. 266, no. 885. For the dating see ILISCH 1993, p. 34, nos. 357-359.

⁵¹ THIRY 1995, pp. 147-153.

predecessor⁵². This coin shows that in 158/774-775 Barqa was under his control and that the region was again dependent on the governor of Ifrīqiyya. It can be compared to two fals struck by Yazīd al-Muhallabī in Ifrīqiyya in 162 (the reading of the unit is uncertain) and 163 (the tens are not clear on the preserved specimen) where Yazīd's name features on the reverse of the first and al-Muhallab on the second⁵³.

9. Dirham in the name of caliph al-Hādī (r. 169-170/785-786) with Hārūn as heir, Ifrīqiyya with Barqa (?), 170/785-786.



linear circle

لا اله الا
الله وحده
لا شريك له

Margin (ﻯ; starts at 1h)

بسم الله ضرب هذا الدرهم بافريقية سنة سبعين ومئة



double linear circle, five annulets (o)

بر
الخليفة الهادي
مما امر به هرون
ولي عهد المسلمين
قة

Margin (ﻯ; starts at 2h), linear circle

Quran LXI, 9

Stephen Album Rare Coins, Sale 9, lot 15 (lot no. 96204), mm?, g 2,77. Also Stephen Album Rare Coins, Sale 10, lot 381 (lot no. 99417), mm?, g 2,70; Baldwin's Auctions, Auction 26 (9 May 2001), lot no. 1658, mm?, g 2,74; Shams Eshragh 2010, p. 178 (nos. 968 and 974)⁵⁴.

This coin-type has been known to numismatists since the nineteenth c. While the reading of the inscriptions is not problematic at all, the two syllables placed above and below the central legend on the reverse have led to several interpretations.



detail of the two syllables at the top and the bottom of the reverse

Tiesenhausen read them as follows: *ك/مر* and referred to a dirham of the same caliph struck at Madīnat al-Salām where only the syllable *بر* is featured. According to him, this was an abbreviation for *بركة* (*baraka*) and therefore he saw the same word written fully in the coin-type under discussion⁵⁵. Shams Eshragh rather proposed the

⁵² THIRY 1995, pp. 154-155.

⁵³ LOWICK [1999], pp. 302-303 (nos. 28 and 29).

⁵⁴ For other specimens in ancient repositories, see TIESENHAUSEN 1873, p. 121, no. 1100.

⁵⁵ TIESENHAUSEN 1873, p. 121, no. 1100 and p. 118, no. 1080.

reading *مز / يز*, for Yazīd/Mazīd, who should be identified with Yazīd b. Ḥātim⁵⁶. It is true that several coins struck at Ifrīqiyya under Yazīd b. Ḥātim al-Muhallabī's governorship present his name Yazīd, though it is never split into two parts as here, at the top and the bottom of the reverse field⁵⁷. Lowick lists several other readings for similar coins struck by the same mint during the years 169/785-786 and 170/786-787 but offers no solution for the two syllables⁵⁸. Soret was the first to propose to read the word Barqa⁵⁹. More recently, Lemberg, who ignored Soret's reading, tackled this issue on the basis of an information provided by Stephen Album who also suggested the reading Barqa⁶⁰. Lemberg supports this interpretation by providing evidence of the possibility that two mint names might appear on contemporary Abbasid dirhams, one for the province and the other for the city⁶¹. In Lemberg's view, the fact that personal names are also split into two parts strengthens and even fully justifies the reading of Barqa. The enlargement of the two syllables seems to substantiate the hypothesis made by Soret in the mid-nineteenth c. and recently revisited by Lemberg. It is more difficult to follow the latter when he tries to explain that this type implies a transfer of the treasury and mint from Kairouan/al-Qayrawān to Barqa by Yazīd b. Ḥātim's successor, his brother Rawḥ and that this transfer was linked to an 'Alid pretender who took refuge in Walīla (Morocco)⁶². Lemberg relies on the fact that Barqa was not a regular mint before (he was not aware of the coin-types that are detailed above, save for no. 1). Moreover, the sources do not corroborate a correspondence between Yazīd b. Ḥātim's death and a period of uncertainty. On the contrary, they state that his immediate successors ruled the country peacefully⁶³.

10. Half dirham struck during the reign of caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 189-218/813-833), by governor Ṭāhir, Barqa, 211/826-827.



لا اله الا
الله وحده
لا شريك له
طاهر



beaded circle

ل . ا
محمد
رسول
الله
بنح

⁵⁶ SHAMS ESHRAGH 2010, p. 178 (nos. 968 and 974).

⁵⁷ LOWICK [1999], p. 68, no. 177 and *passim*.

⁵⁸ LOWICK [1999], pp. 72-75 (nos. 315-337).

⁵⁹ SORET 1865, p. 79, no. 109.

⁶⁰ LEMBERG 2013.

⁶¹ He refers to two dirhams, dated 168/784-785 and 169/785-786, where the mint name in the marginal legend is Hārūnābād and the name of the province at the top of the reverse is Armīniyya and another dirham dated 277/890-891 with Barda'a and Armīniyya as the mint names. LEMBERG 2013, p. 129.

⁶² LEMBERG 2013, p. 131.

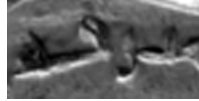
⁶³ THIRY 1995, p. 155.

Margin (U; starts at 1h)
ضرب هذا الدرهم بيرة سنة احدى عشر ومئتين

Margin (U; starts at 1h)
بسم الله 9 Quran XLI,

Baldwin's, Islamic Coin Auction 27 (10 December 2014), lot no. 520, mm?, g 1,48, h 7.

This half dirham recently appeared on the market and is considered a unique specimen. The reading of the mint name leaves little doubt, as the enlargement demonstrates.



Detail of the mint name (marginal legend of the obverse)

The name of the governor, Ṭāhir, is not mentioned in the sources (see table 2). The name Ṭāhir appears on dirhams struck at al-Fustāṭ (Egypt) in 201/816-817 and 204/819-820⁶⁴, but another person can most likely be identified with the one mentioned on our coin. In 211/826, 'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir was sent to Egypt by al-Ma'mūn to put down the rebellion of 'Ubayd Allāh b. al-Sarī, a mission that he successfully led. He remained in his position as governor of the province, which he pacified, for the next seventeen months, until 212/827⁶⁵. The half dirham was struck in Barqa at precisely the same time. If this is indeed the same person⁶⁶, it would indicate that the region of Barqa/Cyrenaica was again controlled from Egypt. A confirmation of this can be seen in the fact that four years after this coin was struck, Barqa witnessed a new revolt that was crushed on al-Ma'mūn order⁶⁷. Of course, from 184/800 the province of Ifrīqiyya was controlled by the Aghlabid governors and Barqa/Cyrenaica was only administered by Egypt.

The symbols that are visible above the field resemble a pair of polo sticks flanking a pellet. This same design can be seen on dirhams struck at al-Muḥammadiyya (Jibāl) in 182/798-799, 183/799-800, and 186/802-803⁶⁸.

11. Fals in the name of caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232-247/847-861), with governor Ġa'far and finance director Sa'd, Barqa, 240/854-855.



double linear circle

لا اله الا
الله وحده
لا شريك له
جعفر



beaded circle

المتوكل
محمد
رسول
الله
سعد

⁶⁴ LOWICK [1999], pp. 88-89, nos. 189-190.

⁶⁵ KENNEDY 1998, pp. 81-82.

⁶⁶ In such a case, he would have used the name of his father, who was the eponym of the dynasty of governors of Ḥurāsān that came to be known as the Ṭāhirids.

⁶⁷ THIRY 1995, p. 171.

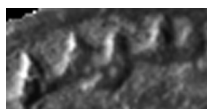
⁶⁸ LOWICK [1999], respectively pp. 206-207, nos. 1762-1767, pp. 210-211, nos. 1796, 1802-1803, 1813, pp. 214-215, no. 1853.

Margin (U; starts at h 1)

بسم الله ضرب هذا الفلاس ببرقة سنة اربعين ومئتين

Cyrene, 19 mm, 1.89 g, 5h (ASOLATI, BAUDEN 2010, p. 51, no. 4). Also ASOLATI, BAUDEN 2010, pp. 51-52, no. 5, mm 20, g 1,43; Cordoba (unpublished)⁶⁹, mm 19, g 2,56; Tübingen (unpublished), no. 2008-12-37, mm 20, g 1,23, h 12; Tübingen (unpublished), no. 271 H4, mm 22, g 1,99, h 12 (ILISCH 1993, p. 16, no. 111); Tübingen, no. 91-22-2, mm 20, g 1,78, h 7 (ILISCH 1993, p. 16, no. 112); Tübingen, no. 91-23-1, mm 22, g 1,86, h 5 (ILISCH 1993, p. 16, no. 113); Tübingen, no. 91-23-2, mm 19, g 1,39, h 7 (ILISCH 1993, p. 16, no. 114); Tübingen, no. 92-35-1, mm 21, g 2,10, h 2 (ILISCH 1993, p. 16, no. 115); Tübingen, no. 91-23-3, mm 19, g 1,79, h 9 (ILISCH 1993, p. 16, no. 116); London (LANE-POOLE 1875, p. 220, nos. 154-155)⁷⁰.

This type has been known since the end of the nineteenth c. when Lane-Poole published the first specimen. Unfortunately, the marginal legends did not enable him to decipher the date or the mint. Since several items were collected and entered the Tübingen cabinet, Ilisch was able to decipher most of the central inscriptions, which helped him to date the coin to al-Mutawakkil's reign. Because all these specimens were worn, the mint name remained difficult to decipher. Ilisch was inclined to read it al-Ramla, which is the reason he integrated them in the volume of the *Sylloge* devoted to Palestine. Notwithstanding, he expressed doubts about this attribution by adding a question mark after the mint name. As he confessed to me, no specimen of this coin ever surfaced in Palestine, an element that casts doubt on the identification of the mint name with al-Ramla. Thanks to the well-preserved specimen found in Cyrene that Michele Asolati submitted to my scrutiny, I was able to sort out the problem of the mint name, a result that was shared in our 2010 study⁷¹.



Detail of the mint name (marginal legend of the obverse)

The fals shows an innovation that concerns the position of the caliph's title (*laqab*) as it takes place at the top of the reverse field rather than at the bottom, as it had been usual for the last few decades, mainly on gold and silver coins. By contrast, the name of an administrator (probably the finance director), Sa'd, occupies the bottom of the field while the name of the governor, Ğa'far, can be found at the same place on the obverse. The presence of these two names, each corresponding to a definite administrative function, demonstrates that Barqa had become a major commercial center and even probably the most western outpost of the territories still under the full control of the Abbasids. This view is corroborated by a contemporary source, the historian al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897), who reports that on the orders of al-Mutawakkil the city of Barqa underwent several military engineering works on the city wall, its gates, and the building of a trench⁷².

⁶⁹ This coin was found in Cordoba but its present location remains unknown. The finding was communicated to Lutz Ilisch, whom I thank for sharing this piece of information with me, via Tawfiq Ibrahim in an email dated 18 April 2001.

⁷⁰ See also BRESCH 2008, pp. 112-113.

⁷¹ ASOLATI, BAUDEN 2010, p. 51, no. 4.

⁷² DORE 1994, p. 268; THIRY 1995, p. 299.

12. Fals in the name of caliph al-Muntaṣir (r. 247-248/861-863) with governor Maḥmūd b. al-Rabīʿ, 247/861-862.



double circle

لا اله الا
الله وحده
لا شريك له
المنتصر بالله



linear circle
(beaded; linear)

محمود
محمد
رسول
الله
بن الربيع

Margin (U; starts at 1h)

ضرب هذا الفلّس [ببرقة سنة سبع واربعين ومائتين]

Tübingen (unpublished), no. 2003-16-305, mm 23, g 2,00, h 3. Also Tübingen, no. AM 7 A2, mm 22, g 2,38, h 9 (ILISCH 1993, p. 16, no. 117, attributed to al-Ramla and Maḥmūd read Muḥammad); Paris, no. 1583, mm 21, g 3,1 (LAVOIX 1887, p. 434, no. 1583, attributed to al-Raḡqa and Maḥmūd read Muḥammad); SHAMMA 1998, p. 159, no. 24 (attributed to al-Raḡqa and Maḥmūd read Muḥammad).

For a long time this fals was attributed to the mint of al-Raḡqa because the few available specimens did not allow us to decipher the mint name. A new specimen now in Tübingen raises all doubt about the attribution and helps us to correctly interpret the first part of the name of the governor on the reverse. It was struck during the reign of al-Muntaṣir, who remained on the throne for only six months. Unlike the preceding fals, the name of the caliph is positioned at the bottom of the field on the obverse. The top and bottom of the reverse field is occupied by the full name of the governor who was responsible for this type, a certain Maḥmūd b. al-Rabīʿ, a person who does not appear in the sources (see table 2)⁷³. The date (at least the unit and the ten) is only visible on the Paris specimen. Given that al-Muntaṣir ascended the throne on 4 Šawwāl 247/11 December 861, i.e., three months before the end of the Muslim year, we know that this coin was minted as soon as the news of the caliph's succession reached the region.

With this coin, we conclude our survey of the coinage of Barqa. In subsequent years (257/870-871), Barqa came under the rule of the Tulunids⁷⁴. Coins do not seem to have been minted in Barqa under their rule. At the turn of the third/ninth c., the Fatimids,

⁷³ An homonym, who was a companion of the Prophet, is attested.

⁷⁴ Two events demonstrate that Barqa/Cyrenaica was under Ibn Ṭūlūn's control. The first occurred in 261/874-875, when the inhabitants of Barqa ousted the governor. Ibn Ṭūlūn sent an army who managed to take control of the city. The second happened in 265/878-879. Ibn Ṭūlūn's son, al-ʿAbbās took advantage of the absence of his father, who was campaigning in Syria, to rebel. He left Egypt with an army and the treasury and headed for Barqa where he stayed until his defeat in 268/882. THIRY 1995, pp. 160 and 173.

a Shiite dynasty, established themselves in Ifrīqiyya. They managed to take control of the whole of Ifrīqiyya in 296/909 and soon looked East. As early as 302/914, their army headed for Egypt. They did not succeed in taking over the country but Barqa/Cyrenaica nevertheless fell under their yoke⁷⁵. In the future, they united the whole region, from Ifrīqiyya to Egypt, and fostered the commercial development of the area. The minting of coins in Barqa resumed under their control⁷⁶. This time coins were made of gold, and as such are testimony to the success of their enterprise and the new chapter they opened.

3. Conclusion

The first three centuries of Islamic coinage in Barqa/Cyrenaica can now be pictured more clearly. Our knowledge of this coinage was hitherto limited to three coin-types (two fals and one dirham; respectively nos. 1, 6, and 9), which did not match the significance of the region and the city in the local and global context as evidenced by the archaeological findings. In numismatic terms, excavations have yielded, with the exception of one specimen (no. 11), only coins minted in other regions (Syria for the Umayyads, Syria and Iraq for the Abbasids, Maghreb for the Idrisids, and Ifrīqiyya/Tunisia for the Aghlabids). This survey enables us to correct the way Barqa/Cyrenaica has been pictured up to this point. It was definitely a regional center with its own mint whose activity seems to begin in the late first/early eighth c.

The activity of that mint can also be described as a rather prolific one compared to adjacent mints like Tripoli/Atrābulus. The distribution of the material over the two periods, post-reform Umayyad and early Abbasid, shows beyond doubt the regularity of the production. Each period is represented by an equal number of coin-types too (6 Umayyads and 5 Abbasids). The coins of the Umayyad period are all bronze while silver coins made their appearance under the Abbasids. Under the latter, Barqa became a major regional center, a position strengthened by its maritime access and the fact that it was at the crossroad of the desert routes. Nevertheless, it never enjoyed an autonomous status similar to the one in Ifrīqiyya or Egypt during the third/ninth c. In fact, even though Barqa was administered by a governor, his nomination apparently always depended upon his counterpart in Egypt or Ifrīqiyya. The coinage produced locally was thus meant to meet the daily needs of the population. Whenever larger amounts were negotiated, they relied on dinars and dirhams struck in the adjacent regions or even further afield.

The survey of the coins also provides several names of authorities (governors and/or financial supervisors) who do not appear in the literary sources. These include, in chronological order, ‘Abd al-Malik, ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Busr/Biṣr, Abū Naṣr, Ṭāhir, Ğa‘far, Sa‘d, Maḥmūd b. al-Rabī’. These should be inserted accordingly in table 2. Numismatics confirms, once again, its importance for the study of history.

⁷⁵ THIRY 1995, pp. 184-185.

⁷⁶ See above, footnote 29.



1 (x2)



2 (x1,5)



3 (x2)



4 (x1,5)



5 (x2)



6 (x2)



7 (x2)



8 (x1,5)



9 (x1,5)



10 (x2)



11 (x2)



12 (x2)



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