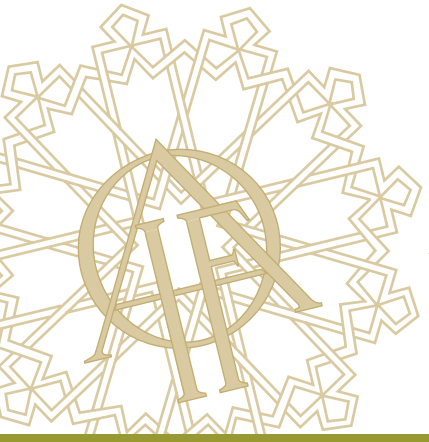
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Coinage and their Visual Messages in the Age of the Sultanate. The Case of Egypt and Syria

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JERE L. BACHARACH & SHERIF ANWAR

Coinage and their Visual Messages in the Age of the Sultanate

The Case of Egypt and Syria

> "The study of coin designs, however, provides a very particular insight which is not available from other art forms, because the nature of their production allows them to be securely dated in a way which creates a continuous sequence of designs throughout the period from the introduction of coinage into the area [the Hellenistic world of the Middle East] until the advent of Islam."[1]

Our goal is to identify and interpret significant changes in the designs, script and other visual elements on gold and occasionally silver Islamic coins stuck in Egypt and when appropriate Syria beginning with those minted from the Fatimid era to the end of Ottoman suzerainty in A.D. 1914. For each chronological period we will emphasize interpretations that, in most cases, are not dependent on the ability of the user of the coin or, for that matter the reader of this article, to read the engraved text in Arabic script. Had our paper been devoted to the coinage of any pre-Islamic society as reflected in the opening quotation, there would be no need to justify the use of coinage for the study of the visual messages as a statement of sovereignty rather than textual ones. Sadly, this is not the case for Islamic studies.[2] With few exceptions, Islamic coins are noted for the absence of human or animal images, significant designs and

1. Cribb, "Coin Designs", p. 48.

2. The volume quoted above devoted to the art of Central Asia and India inadvertently summed up the situation when the study ended with the advent of Islam, implying that the value of coinage as a source for art historical studies had also ended. With few exceptions Islamic coins are not included or illustrated in scholarly works on Islamic epigraphy or calligraphy. Two exceptions are Cribb, "Coin Designs" and Welch, *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World*. Sheila S. Blair's study of Islamic inscriptions presents a far more complex case where she states that the topic along with inscriptions on paper and other written surfaces demands separate studies. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, p. 15.

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symbols.[3] There is Arabic script, which can be rendered as beautiful writing or calligraphy, but when appearing on coinage is perceived as an undifferentiated marker of Islam whose symbolic value has remained unchanged since the last part of the first/seventh century.[4] Ironically, one of the most critical comments on the value of Islamic numismatics for art history was written by George C. Miles, for many years the most important scholar in the field of Islamic numismatics. Commenting upon the appearance of the all-epigraphic coinage in 77/696 after a number of experiments with various symbols and human figures, Miles wrote:

> "What a misfortunate really, from our point of view, that ʿAbd al-Malik was not persuaded to accept this design [the *mihrab* and *ʿanazah* ed.], or something like it, as the model for his reform! Change or bigotry rejected the experiment. In place of the endless series of monotonous purely epigraphic coins which persisted almost without interruption in all parts of the Islamic world down to recent times, we might have had a treasure-house of constantly varying iconography reflecting the regional development of Muslim ritual art through the centuries."[5]

Introduction and Immediate Background

This investigation of coinage as a source for the visual messages during the age of the sultanates rests on a number of assumptions. First, when a significant change is introduced, someone was responsible for the decision. While it is often impossible to prove that the ruling authority was directly responsible, ultimately he must have been and thus these changes must have met his approval. Therefore the resulting coinage with its new style, script or inscription represents the official position of the issuing authority and the sultan is listed as the initiator. The second is that "meaning" must be put in a context drawing upon political, economic, monetary, artistic and/or religious developments. Unfortunately the contemporary or even later historical narratives rarely comment upon these changes let alone their "meaning." A third assumption is that because of its monetary role, most Muslim coinages that were successful in the market as

3. "Inscriptions are ubiquitous on Islamic coins. Most coins issued in the Islamic lands are exclusively epigraphic. Pictures, images and other symbols are the exception rather than the rule." Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, p. 15. The figural coinage of Anatolia and northern Syria struck only during the 6th-7th Centuries / 12th-13th Centuries are studied in Spengler (1992). Ayyubid coinage with figures and animals are analyzed in Balog, The Coinage of the Ayyubids. There are Muslim commemorative coins and special issues that include human and animal figures and the most thorough study of this type of Islamic numismatic evidence is Ilisch, "Munzgeschenke und Geschenkmunzen". The first article devoted entirely to Arabic calligraphy is Heidemann, "Calligraphy on Islamic Coins".

4. We place ourselves among those scholars who believe that the choice of a script often, but not always, carries a political and/or religious message. Bierman, *Writing Signs* and Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art*. Earlier versions of some of their arguments can be found in Tabbaa, "The Transformation of Arabic Writing" and Bierman, "Inscribing the City", p. 107. For a criticism of this approach see Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, p. 57-59. A rejoinder to Blair by Tabbaa can be found in his review of Blair's book in *Ars Orientalis* 29, 1999, p. 181.

5. Miles, "The Mihrab and 'Anazah", p. 171.

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with virtually all other coinages tended to resist significant or numerous changes as their users expected new issues to be similar to older ones, although this was not always the case. Finally, for this study we examined only gold and silver issues since copper coinage, when minted, was intended for local or regional markets and, often, was not considered legal Muslim tender.

Background: Fatimid Coinage

Beginning in A.H. 297 / A.D. 910 dinars of high quality began to appear in North Africa issued by the new Šiʿī Ismāʿīlī ruler ʿUbayd Allāh al-Mahdī (297-322 / 909-934). This Fatimid coinage, ultimately issued in al-Qayrawan, al-Muhammadiyya, al-Mahdiyya, and Siljilmasa, was inscribed with his name as Imam and Caliph [*Amīr al-mūʾminīn*]. The coinage included three to five lines of horizontal Kufic inscriptions on the obverse and four or five on the reverse but with only one marginal circular legend on each side.[6] These dinars looked enough like the preceding high quality Aghlabid Sunni dinars and even close enough to the Abbasid style initiated by Caliph al-Maʾmūn (198-218/813-833) that these new Fatimid dinars could be confused with circulating Sunni issues although the messages engraved on each of them were radically different.[7]

The Fatimid ruler al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh (341-365/953-975) changed the layout of the inscriptions and created a visually distinct coinage. Beginning in 343/955 in al-Mansuriyya the majority of al-Muʿizz's coinage was composed of three concentric circles of inscriptions in Kufic script carrying Šīʿī messages.[8] The center was either blank or a raised dot. This new style coinage was then introduced into Egypt [mint of Miṣr] from 358/969 and Greater Syria [mints of Dimašq, Filasṭīn, and Ṭabariyya] as that area came under Fatimid control.[9] The choice of this particular layout and its continued usage was not an arbitrary decision as it had a very specific Ismāʿīlī meaning.[10] The center symbolized the ultimate truth known only to the Caliph-Imam. In this semiotic reading of the coin, all *mūʾminūn*, or Believers in the Šīʿī sense, that is, those in the inner circle had to be Muslims but not all Muslims, the outer circle or circles, were *mūʾminūn*. Even the ordering of the inscriptions paralleled this sense of hierarchy as one moved from the general—mint/date formula or Sura 9:33 acceptable to all Muslims on the outer circle to messages meaningful to Šīʿī in the inner circle[s].[11] This interpretation coincides with the Fatimid reading of the Qur'an where there were two levels of

6. Norman D. Nicol's corpus of Fatimid coins (Nicol, *A Corpus of Fatimid Coins*) details the different coin types minted in the name of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs and will be the primary resource for the foreseeable future for anyone interested in Fatimid coinage. His work supersedes that of Miles, *Fatimid Coins* and other catalogues which were the standard references.

7. The gold and silver issues of Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Šīʿī lack the names of the Fatimid Imam/Caliph are even closer in layout to circulating Abbasid coinage. Nicol, *A Corpus of Fatimid Coins*, p. 1-18.

8. The older "Abbasid" style coinage continued to be minted in Sijilmasa. Anwar & Bacharach, "Shi'ism and the early dinars".

9. The best introduction to the history of monetary developments in Egypt is Warren C. Schultz, "The Monetary history of Egypt".

10. Bierman, *Writing Signs*, p. 62-70 and Bierman, "Inscribing the City" , p. 107.

11. Bierman, *Writing Signs*, p. 69.

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understanding, an outer or *ẓāhir*, which all Muslims understood and an inner or *bāṭin* known only to those properly initiated.[12]



Figure 1. Early style Fatimid dinar, al-Manṣūr billāh, al-Manṣūriyya, 340 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 1826 / reg. 1313); Fatimid "bullseye" style dinar, al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh, Miṣr, Šaʿbān 359. (Dār al-Kutub cat. 1834 / reg. 1332). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

The new coinage also created a challenge to those who wished to read the inscriptions. When a coinage has a central field with horizontal lines, a sense of left and right, top and bottom is created. Since circular marginal inscriptions on most Muslim coins begin at or near the top

12. Ibn Qāḍī Nuʿmān, *Daʿā'im al-Islām*, p. 12 and translation p. 14.

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of a coin in a counterclockwise direction, it is easy to determine where the circular inscription starts. With the concentric circle Fatimid style coin, there is no obvious visual clue where each inscription begins. This relative difficulty was another way of enhancing the sense that those with full knowledge knew. In any case, the Fatimid Šīʿī coinage was visually so distinct from Abbasid Sunni issues that it was easy to distinguish the two.[13] Layout which originally carried a very specific religious message soon became a general visual marker for high quality gold coins minted by the Fatimids. In this case the high degree of purity was more important in the market than any theoretical religious message and, as indicated above, they were very easy to differentiate from those minted by Sunni dynasties to either the East or West.

Here it is critical to remember that coinage was and is overwhelmingly a medium of exchange. Members of society, traders and merchants, had to be willing to accept gold dinars and silver dirhams for goods and services. If the stamped metal did not meet that function, the coinage tended to be rejected or to have a very limited circulation. Even when a coinage is well established, as happened with the high quality Fatimid dinars, and the general layout became relatively frozen, not all issues fit the dominant form. For example, a number of different styles were minted after 401/1011 with the most radical one from 490/1097 when Naskh, not Kufic script, was used on a Fatimid dinar, but this was a unique, not a sustained case.[14]

A sustained change in the Fatimid style of coinage took place during the reign of al-Mustaʿlī (487-95/1094-1101) whereby the obverse center inscription consisted of two lines with the title *al-Imām* followed by his name [*ism* – Aḥmad] while the reverse had in two lines *ʿālin ġāyah* [exceptionally high]. Most Islamic numismatists consider this innovation very important initiating a style that dominated the production of dinars into the Ayyubid period.[15]

Al-Mustaʿlī's son and successor al-Āmir (495-524 / 1101-1130) continued the same style only replacing his father's name [*ism*] with his own. According to an Ayyubid historical source, Ibn Baʿrah, al-Amīr sought to make his dinars as pure as possible and, based on specific gravity tests of the coins' purity, he was successful as most of his dinars were virtually 100% gold.[16] But unless one looks very carefully it is very difficult to distinguish the dinars of al-Āmir from those of his father and the succeeding Fatimids, which were minted in this style. Thus, when the Ayyubid al-Malik al-Kāmil (615-635 / 1218-1238) announced that his dinars would be as fine as those of the Fatimid al-Āmir, what he really meant was that they would be like those from the reign of al-Mustaʿlī. It is the fiscal rather than the role of dinars as carriers of new politico-religious messages that is the key to understanding the monetary policies of Saladin, the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty.

13. If the edict by the Abbasid Caliph al-Qā'im (422-67/1031-1075) in AH 427 prohibiting the use of *Maġribī* [Fatimid] dinars in Abbasid lands [Baġdād] referred to actual coins, then it is easy to understand how it could have been enforced. Ibn al-Aṯīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Ta'rīḫ*, p. 168.

14. Balog, "Apparition prématurée de l'écriture Naskhy", p. 181-185.

15. Kazan, *The Coinage of Islam*, p. 45. Private correspondence from Michael L. Bates, 17 March 2001.

16. Ibn Ba'rah, *Kašf al-asrār*, p. 49.

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Figure 2. Fatimd "bullseye" style dinar, al-Mustaʿlī billāh, Miṣr, 491 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2145 / reg. 1601); Fatimid "bullseye" style dinar, al-Amīr bi-Aḥkam Allāh, al-Iskandariyya, 497 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2146 / reg. 1611). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

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The Era of Saladin and his Direct Heirs

Al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf (Saladin) (567-89 / 1171-1193) brought an end to Fatimid Šīʿī rule in Egypt in 567/1171 in his capacity as vassal for the Zangid Nūr al-Dīn (541-69 / 1146-1174). The inscriptions on his Egyptian dinars acknowledged the over lordship of both the Zangid ruler and the Abbasid caliph.[17] With Nūr al-Dīn's death in 569/1174, Saladin put his own name on the coinage rather than that of Nūr al-Dīn's son. But for all the political history, which can be reconstructed from the inscriptional data, the dinars continued the layout of the preceding dynasty. We assume Saladin continued to mint Fatimid concentric circle style dinars so that his gold issues would be readily accepted as payment and in the market since they "looked right" and were of high quality. Saladin's son, al-Azīz ʿUṭmān (589-95 / 1193-98) and then his grandson, al-Manṣūr Muḥammad (595-96 / 1198-1200) continued to mint their dinars in the Fatimid.[18] In this case, continuity of design and script was dictated by monetary and economic considerations, not political or religious policies.

Late Fatimid silver dating from the reign of al-Mustaʿlī on was noted for their small flans on which incomplete inscriptions were struck. Reconstructing a complete inscription indicates that the layout paralleled that of the Fatimid dinar in terms of concentric circles and a text in the center. They were called back dirhams and Saladin continued to mint this style silver when he came to power.[19] He then initiated a number of changes in the layout of the dirham.

New style dirhams were minted in Cairo under Saladin from 585/1189 copying Ayyubid Damascus silver pieces from 575/1179 with a square-in-circle layout using Kufic script and flans significantly larger than "black" dirham issues.[20] Although both Damascus and Cairene dirhams now resembled earlier square-in-circle style dinars of the North African Almohads, there is no reason to assume Saladin was imitating a Maġrabī gold coin with his silver issues for either Egypt or Syria.[21] However, for whatever reason the square-in-circle design was chosen, its initial appearance carried political and religious messages. The new layout enabled a user to distinguish easily a Sunni Ayyubid issue from a Šīʿī Fatimid one. What does not seem apparent is how a user or tax official could distinguish Egyptian dirhams from those of Damascus. This became even more complicated when square-in-circle dirhams were also struck in Hamah and Homs, although in limited number.[22] In contrast in 579/1183 when Saladin took Aleppo from the previous Zangid ruler, he introduced another new style. This

17. The basic resource for the study of Ayyubid numismatics is Balog, The Coinage of the Ayyubids. Even al-Maqrizi noted the new inscriptions although his text does not make it clear that the layout had not changed. Al-Maqrīzī, *Šuḏūr al-ʿuqūd*, p. 143-144.
18. Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyubids*, p. 104-115.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 63, 73-74.
20. Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyubids*, p. 74, 78 ff.
21. We agree with Michael Broome who questioned this interpretation. Broome, "Questions Raised", p. 84-85.
22. Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyubids*, p. 85-86.

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time it was in the form of a six-pointed star within a circle. It was easy to distinguish these new style dirhams from both earlier Zangid dirhams and even dirhams struck by Saladin in other parts of Bilad al-Sham and Egypt. If these particular designs carried "meaning" in addition to being an easy way to distinguish the products of one Ayyubid set of mints [Cairo, Damascus, etc.] from another [Aleppo] and from all previous silver issues, memory of that symbolism has been lost.



Figure 3. Fatimid "bullseye" style dinar, al-Ḥāfiẓ li-Dīn Allāh, Miṣr, 528 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2246 / reg. 1695); Ayyubid "bullseye" style dinar, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin), al-Iskandariyya, 579 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2267 / reg. 1753). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

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Figure 4. Ayyubid square in a circle style dirham, Salah al-Din, Dimashq, 582 (Dar al-Kutub cat. 2309 / 1778); Ayyubid six-pointed star style dirham, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Halab, 585 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2297 / reg. 1173. Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

Saladin's son al-ʿAzīz ʿUṯmān (Egypt: 589-592 / 1193-1195) introduced Naskh script on his Damascus square-in-circle dirhams from 593/1197 but not on the dirhams or dinars of the Cairo mint. Here script distinguished two mints since both had the same square-in-circle layout.[23] In this case it is not possible to argue that the use of Naskh was a marker of Sunni Islam or sultanic power since it was used on silver before gold, on coins from one mint but not others, and not by the ruler who had established Sunni rule in place of that of Fatimid Ismāʿīlī

23. *Ibid.*, p. 111-112.

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Šīʿītes. These examples from the early years of Ayyubid rule illustrate the dangers of offering a unilateral interpretation for changes in script or coin design since some innovations in the layout and script on Ayyubid coins appear to have been made for maintaining the acceptance of the new coinage in the market and others as a way of distinguishing the products of one mint from another.

The Ayyubid al-ʿĀdil and his Successors

With the death of Saladin's grandson in 596/1200 leadership of the family and rule over Egypt shifted to Saladin's brother al-ʿĀdil I (596-615 / 1200-1218). This branch of the Ayyubid family had no direct ties to Fatimid Egypt and, thus, was in a stronger position to assert their own identity as a Sunni dynasty. Specifically, in 596/1200, al-ʿĀdil introduced in both Cairo and Alexandria a gold coinage whose design was very different from that of the Ayyubid concentric circle which, of course, was of Fatimid origin. Al-ʿĀdil 's new dinars had on each side a single marginal inscription and multi-lined central legends with inscriptions in Kufic. The layout of the central field could have evoked associations with pre-Fatimid Sunni gold if anyone remembered them as well as with dinars from other more eastern parts of the Sunni world.[24] Here design made a political statement that primacy within the Ayyubid world was with a different branch of the famille rather than the direct descendants of Saladin. During the same era Egyptian silver continued the square-in-circle layout with Kufic inscriptions, while dirhams struck in Damascus underwent major design changes identified as festooned double trefoil and festooned six-pointed star ensuring that they were visually distinct from other Ayyubid silver issues including those of Cairo.[25] The Damascus issues also continued to be inscribed in Naskh while the silver coins of Egypt were in Kufic so the silver coinage struck in the two mints were now distinct in terms of both layout and script.[26]

24. Although Balog sees this coinage as a revival of a type issued by the Fatimid al-Mustanṣir and his successors, there is a significant visual difference between them in addition to the obvious changes in the content of the inscriptions. The Fatimid model included a broad empty circular zone between the marginal inscription and the central field. Thus, it would be easy to distinguish the two even without reading a single inscription. Steve Album believes the type is very similar to the AH 402-411 types of al-Hakim, as well as similar types of al-Ẓāhir and al-Mustanṣir. Steve Album. Private correspondence. 4 Feb. 2001. Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyubids*, p. 116-123.

25. Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyubids*, p. 125-126.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 125-134.

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Figure 5. Ayyubid Abbasid Kufic style dinar, al-ʿĀdil Abū Bakr I dinar al-Qāhira, 607 (Dār al-Kutub cat 2347/ 1815). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

The one major development for the remaining years of Ayyubid rule in Egypt is the expanded and sustained use of Naskh script for gold, silver, and copper coins, the last metal appearing in Egypt in significant quantities for the first time after many centuries. Naskh had been used in isolated cases on earlier Egyptian issues and on a sustained basis in other parts of the Islamic world, but not in this manner on coins stuck in Egypt. Therefore, did the introduction of Naskh carry ideological and/or political messages, as has been argued it for its appearance and use in Syria and Egypt on buildings as the vehicle for transmitting a public text, or was it merely a way of distinguishing otherwise similar coinage and had no ideological value?[27] As will be detailed below, it appears to be the latter case.

Al-ʿĀdil's successor was his son al-Malik al-Kāmil (615-35/1218-38), whose first dinars and dirhams looked like his father's except for the obvious changes in names and dates.[28] According to a number of Arab chronicles, a series of monetary changes were inaugurated by al-Kāmil beginning in Ḏū-l-Qaʿda 622 / November 1225.[29] The texts refer to the Ayyubid ruler ordering the minting of Egyptian copper coins and there are numismatic examples minted in the name of al-Kāmil and the Abbasid caliph al-Ẓāhir (622-623 / 1225-26) supporting the medieval accounts.[30] The inscriptions on the new copper issues were engraved in Naskh.

According to the numismatist Paul Balog, "The second part of al-Kāmil's monetary reform, concerning the silver coinage of Egypt, was a colossal fraud. In spite of the sultan's protestations that the new 'round' dirham contained a much higher proportion of fine silver than

27. Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art*, p. 71-72.
28. For data on all al-Malik al-Kāmil issues see Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyubids*, p. 147-158.
29. A summary of the Arabic sources can be found in Rabie, *The Financial System*, p. 181.
30. Balog, The Coinage of the Ayyubids, p. 159-160.

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the unpopular, customary, crude manufactured 'black' dirhams, the new issue contained about the same percentage as the one abandoned. The difference between the old and new Egyptian silver currency was purely superficial. This fraudulent pseudo-reform passed undetected until modern times, when it was discovered during a series of chemical tests carried out by the present author."[31] On the other hand if al-Kāmil was trying to deceive the populace that he had instituted a better silver coinage, he didn't give clear visual clues on the coins that would have made it easy to distinguish his dirhams from earlier issues.

There was a shift from Kufic script to Naskh on the gold and silver coins but it wasn't done in one dramatic step. The small global dirhams from Cairo for AH 622 in the name of the Abbasid Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Din Allāh (575-622 / 1180-1225) were inscribed in Kufic, those for AH 623, in the name of the Caliph al-Ẓāhir had a margin in Kufic but the center field was inscribed in Naskh, and, finally, all dirhams from AH 624, which are in the name of the Caliph al-Mustanṣir are only in Naskh. However, the surviving dirhams were struck on flans of such irregular shape and small size, that only the most careful of scholars or users of these coins would note the differences in script and, by extension, be able to place these pieces in a chronological order.[32] Thus, if the initial use of Naskh on Egyptian dirhams by al-Malik al-Kāmil was meant to signal a significant message, it isn't obvious who would have seen it or understood what it meant.

As for Ayyubid dinars struck from AH 624 in the name of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustanṣir, Naskh script was used. If this decision by al-Kāmil to change scripts is related to a specific historical event there are no clues in the historical narratives as to what it could have been. What is clear is that once this combination of a new script and post-Fatimid style Ayyubid dinar were combined during the latter part of al-Kāmil's reign, it became the model for virtually every other Ayyubid gold coin and those of the first Mamluks into the reign of Baybars (658-676 / 1260-1277).

Using the visible data from dinars and dirhams struck in Egypt from the end of al-Kāmil's reign into the first years of the Mamluk sultan Baybars the gold and silver issues look the same. Collectors, curators and scholars are quick to point out the differences in terms of the inscribed names and other details, but with one major exception to be noted below it is difficult and time consuming to identify the dinars and dirhams of a late Ayyubid sultan from those of the first Mamluk sultans. Therefore, numismatic changes in terms of visual messages on dinars did not signal the shift from Ayyubid to Mamluk any more than the earlier pieces under Saladin signally the end of the Fatimids and the establishment of a new Sunni dynasty.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

32. As noted above dirhams from Damascus were already being struck on the larger flans, in *Nasḫ* and in the square-in-the circle style even before al-Malik al-Kāmil's "reform," so this didn't mark a change.

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Figure 6. Ayyubid Abbasid Kufic style dinar, al-Malik al-Kāmil, al-Iskandariyya, 619 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2385/ reg. 1853); Ayyubid Nasḫī style dinar, al-Malik al-Kāmil, al-Iskandariyya, 629 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2387/1861). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

Mamluk Coinage: Baybars to Barsbāy

As indicated above, the initial coinage of Baybars, the effective founder of Mamluk rule in Egypt and Syria, was clearly dependent on the traditions established by al-Malik al-Kāmil. His dinars, whose individual weights varied so greatly that they could be considered stamped pieces of gold, were inscribed with multiple horizontal lines in Naskh with an accompanying

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marginal legend. But Baybars did institute changes that warrant identifying his coinage as the beginning of a new style. These Mamluk dinars were struck through the reign of Barquq (784-91 / 1382-89 and 791-801 / 1390-1399) up to the reign of Barsbāy (825-41 / 1422-37). The most important visual development was expanding the size of the Naskh script so that it had the appearance of Thuluth. The result was that the center inscription filled the available space squeezing the marginal legends off the flan. The few times circular inscriptions appeared they were incomplete and hard to read. What was created was a Mamluk style dinar. The obverse included titles such as *al-sultan* and *al-malik*, the sultan's *nisba* such as *al-Ẓāhir* , *al-Nāṣir*, etc., his *ism* such as Lağin, Ḥasan, etc., his *nasab* which meant *ibn* or son of his father, the name of the mint and the date. Often five and even six lines of text filled the struck flan. The reverse of these Mamluk dinars contained the modern version of the *šahāda* [*lā ilāha illā Allāh, Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*] followed by parts of Surah IX: 33 which were first introduced in 77/797 on dinars by the Umayyad ʿAbd al-Malik. Since the range of weights varied so greatly, these struck pieces of gold had to be traded by weight and never by number. Specialists in Mamluk coinage can distinguish the dinars of one Mamluk from another because the sultan's name is inscribed on a line in the center of the coin but for those who used these dinars for monetary exchanges, they probably all looked alike.

The layout of Mamluk silver followed a similar development in that Baybars, after a brief period, dropped the Ayyubid square-in-circle design for a style that looked like that of his dinars. In a visual sense, the circulating gold and silver coinage paralleled the use of script as a vehicle for the Mamluk public text. Inscriptions were being given a prominent place on the outside of Mamluk buildings rendered in an elegant, large Thuluth script. The specific messages included elaborate tutelary information, dedicatory data and pious phrases. Some viewers of either the Mamluk public text or their numismatic equivalents could pick out isolated words such as *al-sulṭān* or phrases such as *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* but it is unlikely they would have been able to read the whole text without great difficulty. Legibility was secondary to monumentality in terms of the inscriptions on both building and coins and therefore the choice of script was significant. Irrespective of the political history of the Bahri and early Circassian/Burji Mamluk sultans and the tradition of both medieval and modern writers to treat the Bahri and first Circassian coinages as separate, there is no obvious break in the visual numismatic tradition between the two political periods. As a sign of discontinuities in the power of the Bahri sultans versus the initial Circassian rulers, numismatics is of no help.

A second innovation introduced by Baybars and continued by his son Baraka Ḫān (676-678/1277-1280) was the inclusion of a lion on their dinars and dirhams.[33] Baybars could have introduced the lion because it represented his specific rule through a visual symbol. Perhaps Baraka Ḫān saw the lion as a family heraldic device and continued its usage on those grounds. For our purposes the lion is the equivalent of a pre-Islamic Central Asian tamgha, that is, a device

33. The specific appearance of the lion on the coinage by Baybars and his son is discussed by Heidemann, "Dinars by Baybars", p. 35-37. Al-Maqrīzī noted the appearance of a heraldic device on Baybars coinage. Al-Maqrīzī, *Šuḏūr al-ʿuqūd*, p. 147.

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Figure 7. Mamlūk dirham with lion, al-Ẓāhir Baybars, dinar al-Iskandariyya, xx2 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2518 / reg. 1985); Mamlūk dirham with lion, Baraka Qan, dirham, Dimašq, 678 (Dār al-Kutub, 2553 / reg. 2018). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

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Figure 8. Mamlūk dinar, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalā'ūn, Dimašq, [7]38 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2596 / reg. 2057); Mamlūk dinar, al-Ẓāhir Barqūq, Dinar, al-Qāhira, 786 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2845 / reg. 2275). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

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which is included to indicate the family associated with it.[34] Speculating, it is also possible that religious leaders eventually convinced Baraka Qan's successors that gold and silver as *šarīʿa* recognized currencies were to be composed only of geometric designs, lines and script. These members of the ulama could have argued that in Mamluk lands since the time of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik *šarīʿa* based Islamic coinage fit the preceding criteria and that a lion or any other non-calligraphic heraldic device on dinars and dirhams should not be included on legally recognized coinage.[35] Whatever the argument used including the possible concern on the part of Mamluk sultans that a specific image such as an animal on the gold or silver coinage could become a "family" sign, it was effective since images rarely appeared on Mamluk dinars and dirhams. While Mamluk coinage has been used extensively by scholars for studying Mamluk heraldic devices, what is only occasionally noted is that the numismatic evidence is almost exclusively from copper pieces and for that reason this study does not analyze them.[36]

From Faraǧ to the Ottomans: The Emergence of the *Ašrafī* and the *Niṣf*

Mamluk lands faced a severe financial crisis during the first decades of the 9th/15th century and, it appears, that confidence in the circulating dinars and dirhams declined significantly.[37] As the demand for foreign gold increased as reflected in the listing of prices in Egypt and Syria in Venetian ducats rather than dinars, the relative value of the heavier Muslim dinars declined. Facing this monetary crisis, the Sultan Faraǧ or those who advised him must have believed that one cause was the failure of Muslims to strike a gold coin whose weight matched that of the *šarīʿa* based miṯqāl of 4.25 grams and whose origins could be traced to the introduction of the all-epigraphic dinars by the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik in 77/697. Sultan al-Nāṣir Faraǧ responded to this challenge by issuing a new style dinar whose design was radically different from that of the dinars which had been in circulation from the days of Baybars and was known as the *al-Nāṣiri*.

34. Heidemann, "Dinars by Baybars", p. 36-37.

35. The dangers of generalizing for all of Islamic from geographic and chronologically specific examples is demonstrated by the appearance of a wide range of pictorial devices including a lion, a hawk, fish and a seated man on the silver coinage of the 8th/14th century Rasulids of Yemen. Album, "Rasulid Images,". There are also two exceptions for Mamluk coinage. There are a series of dirhams minted during the reign of Barsbāy in the 830's and Jaqmaq for AH 845, which include a chalice. Balog, *The Coinage of the Mamluk Sultans*, p. 315-316 & 323. Matsson, "Silver dirhem", p. 26-28.

36. The fundamental work on Mamluk coinage is Balog, The Coinage of the Mamluk Sultans. For his discussion of heraldic devices see pages 24-38. For a general discussion of Mamluk heraldic devices on copper coins see Allan, "Mamluk Sultanic Heraldry". We concur with his conclusion that the blazon of the ruling sultan from the end of Lajin's reign (d. 698/1299) onwards consisted exclusively of an inscribed shield, although we are not certain how to categorize the appearance of a chalice [*sāqī*] on the silver issues of Barsbāy and Ǧaqmāq. Allan, "Mamluk Sultanic Heraldry", p. 108. Two exceptions are the appearance of a cup or *sāqī* on some of the dirhams issued by the Circassian Mamluk sultans al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ and Ǧaqmāq.

37. An overview of both the gold and silver issues struck during the Circassian era can be found in Bacharach, "Circassian Monetary Policy" and Bacharach, "The Dinar versus the Ducat".

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Figure 9. Mamlūk al-Nāṣirī style dinar, al-Nāṣir Faraj, al-Qāhira, 814 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2879/ reg. 2312). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

These *Nāṣiri* dinars were distinct from earlier Mamluk gold coinage in terms of the layout of the inscriptions and their relationship to a theoretical Muslim weight standard. The reverse field was divided into three zones with Farağ's name in the top third, some of his titles in the middle, and his father's name in the bottom. Visually the layout of the coins paralleled the all-calligraphic three-field layout or shield design associated with Mamluk sultans as a heraldic device or blazon beginning with the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalā'ūn (709-741/1310-1341) and found on many of their buildings as well as their copper coinage. The new design was a visual signal that these *al-Nāṣiri* dinars were struck according to the canonical weight of the *miṯqāl* (4.25 grams) and, in theory, could be traded by number rather than by weight. Unfortunately Farağ had neither the gold resources nor the political power to make his attempted monetary reform work.

The Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ (815-24 / 1412-21) issued two new coin types for his dinars in addition to the old style large flan, multiply lines of Thuluth gold coins in his attempt to deal with the influx of the ducats and the loss of confidence in the Egyptian markets with Muslim dinars. One of his new style issues had the word *miṯqāl* inscribed in the center of the reverse and was to weigh a *miṯqāl*. Based upon the limited number of specimens known and the disappearance of the coinage with his reign, this attempt to create a new coinage competitive with the circulating European gold failed. Al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ's second new type was much closer to Farağ's *al-Nāṣiri* dinars as it was divided into three sections separated by two straight lines. The weight of these new style dinars was close to that of the circulating Venetian ducats but, again, due to the absence of significant gold bullion to mint large quantities of the new style dinars, they did not change the domination of the Mamluk markets by European gold. On the other hand, the new designs introduced by Farağ and al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ did signal that new monetary policies were being undertaken.

Mamluk production of the three of types of gold coins—the relatively large all-calligraphic dinars of irregular weight, the dinars which were to weigh a *miṯqāl*, and the lighter dinars of

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al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ—all ended with the reign of al-Ašraf Barsbāy when, beginning in AH 829, he issued a new style gold coin known as the *ašrafī*.[38] Had either al-Nāṣir Faraǧ or al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ succeeded in the market place with their new coinage then their new design would have established itself as the model for succeeding sultans. Their monetary policy failed because they lacked the gold bullion needed to meet the challenge of the European gold currencies.



Figure 10. Mamlūk al-Nāṣirī style dinar, al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ, dinar, al-Qāhira, 815 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2882 / reg. 2317); Mamlūk miṭqāl style dinar, al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ, al-Qāhira, 821 (Dār al-Kutub 2883 / reg. 2318).
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38. Details of this reform can be found in Bacharach, "The Dinar versus the Ducat", p. 88-89.

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Figure 11. Mamlūk al-Ašrafī style dinar, al-Ašraf Barsbāy, al-Qāhira, 829 (Dār al-Kutub cat.2897 / reg. 4764); Mamlūk al-Ašrafī style dinar, al-Qanṣūh al-Ġūrī, al-Qāhira, 909 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 3102 / reg. 4482).
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Barsbāy, unlike his predecessors, had the gold resources to flood the market with *ašrafī*. The bullion for his new gold issues came from his successful raid on Cyprus in 829/1426 and his ransoming two years later for an exceptionally large sum of gold the Cypriot king. By minting large quantities of *ašrafī* dinars, which weighed slightly less than the ducat but were to be traded with the ducat on an equal basis, Barsbāy was able to have his new coinage dominate the market. It became the standard in weight and design for all dinars for the rest of the Mamluk period. The success of Barsbāy's action is also reflected in that the generic name

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for all these Circassian Mamluk dinars and even some of the early Ottoman gold pieces was *ašrafī* irrespective of the name of the reigning sultan.[39]

To ensure that there was no confusion between his new coinage and that of the *Nāṣirī* layout, Barsbāy instituted changes in the design. In theory the earlier obverse three-field design associated with Mamluk calligraphic blazons used on buildings and the *Nāṣirī* style gold coins was replaced by a four-field design on the obverse. The reverse carried in multi-lines the Prophetic Mission statement from Sura 9:33 as it was still being used almost 800 years after it was first introduced. However, the size of the flan for Barsbāy's new gold coinage and that of his Circassian successors was so small that most *ašrafī* dinars only had room for three lines of text creating the false impression that they were similar to the blazons. To prevent this technical problem from creating an association with the earlier *Nāṣirī* dinars, both observe and reverse fields were separated by a series of cables which looked like "Z's" or "S's" depending on their direction. Thus the cable design made the *ašrafī* visually different from all its predecessors. In this case the specific design elements were added by Barsbāy to distinguish his new coinage from older issues.

The history of design changes for dirhams is more complex.[40] Syria was richer in silver resources than Egypt enabling the Mamluk governor Nawruz to issue in 815/1412 a new Muslim silver coin. The new coin was significantly smaller than the earlier Mamluk dirhams. Stylistically it looked like its immediate predecessors except that in the center was inscribed the word *niṣf* or half referring to it weighing half the traditional silver dirham weight. In 817/1414, al-Muʾayyad Šayḫ the Mamluk sultan in Cairo, defeated Nawruz and returned to Egypt with large quantities of silver as booty. The resulting bullion was struck as a new Egyptian silver coinage modeled on the *niṣf* but known as the *Muʾayyadī* or *maydānī*. Design changes were also introduced which made the *Muʾayyadī* visually distinct from earlier Mamluk dirhams. They continued to be struck on small flans.

Succeeding sultans continued changing the design and even the weight of the *niṣf*, often with the name of the reigning sultan set in a circle or more complex design such as lozenge, pentalobe, hexalobe and octolobe. The changing geometric layout of the dirhams from 815/1412 until the Ottoman conquest of 923/1517 permitted mint masters and money exchangers to distinguish the various coins without having to read the inscriptions. For most who used the silver coinage in the market, they all looked about the same. Therefore, these stylistic changes appear to have been motivated by the concerns of the mint to distinguish the issues of various sultans, not other issues.

39. For an example of the study of Ašrafī for art historical purposes see Heidemann, "Gold Ashrafi", p. 33-34. Both the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq-Qoyunlu adopted Ašrafī style dinars indicating that the monetary world of this currency was greater than Mamluk lands.

40. Bacharach, "Circassian Monetary Policy", p. 272-278.

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Figure 12. Mamlūk dirham, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, Dimašq, 732 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2614 / reg. 4195); Mamlūk maydānī style dirham, al-Ašraf Barsbāy, Ḥalab, ND (Dār al-Kutub cat. 2931 / reg. 2348). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

Ottoman Coinage

Our understanding of monetary developments in the Ottoman Empire has been significantly enhanced by Sevket Pamuk's ground breaking study *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, which was the first systematic, empire wide study of Ottoman coinage within the context of monetary developments.[41] Drawing extensively on the Ottoman archives and, to a lesser degree, numismatic evidence, Pamuk covered over six centuries of changes. He created

41. Pamuk, *A Monetary History*.

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a periodization which "also coincides, to a large extent, with the broad trends in economic history during these six centuries."[42]

A different periodization is created using Ottoman numismatic evidence in terms of the visual messages carried by the Ottoman silver and gold issues for the mints of Egypt and Greater Syria for the centuries from the conquests of Selim I (918-926 / 1512-1520) to the unilateral act by the British on 18 Dec. 1914 when they declared Egypt was no longer a part of the Ottoman Empire. The coinage of the Egypt from 1517 to 1914, in most cases, and that of Greater Syria looked like that of the Ottoman capital and the visual messages neither reflected the periodization created by Pamuk nor the political changes taking place within Egypt and to a lesser degree Syria.[43]

The first Ottoman coinage, the silver akce, dating to the early 8th/14th century, were small and tended to weigh slightly more than one gram and had a diameter ranging from 11 to 13 mm. The obverse included the name of the sultan while the reverse often included the phrase "may his rule be perpetuated." Unlike the silver coinage which had circulated in Egypt and Greater Syria, the Ottoman akce lacked verses from the Qur'ān. The layout almost meant that while specialists in Ottoman numismatics can distinguish an akce of Sultan Bayezid I from one of Sultan Murad Khan I, they all look aliked for those who used them in the market. An exception was the coinage of Suleyman Chelebi (801-13 / 1402-11) which included for the first time a form of the tughra, which was to become a common visual symbol of Ottoman rule centuries later, but was not picked up by his immediate successors. Finally, available hoard data from the 9th/15th century does not indicate that the silver coins of the Ottomans and the Mamluks circulated in the territories of the other. Therefore we can conclude that an observant merchant or money changer could distinguish Ottoman from the Egyptian and Syrian post al-Mu'ayyad Šayḫ Mamluk silver coins without too much trouble.

Pamuk's second period begins with the introduction of an Ottoman gold coinage in 882/1479. Sultan Mehmet II Fatih (2nd reign: 855-886/1451-1481) did not immediately order the minting of a new Ottoman gold coinage once he controlled his new imperial capital and the gold and silver mines of the Balkans but ordered the minting of imitations of ducats and florins which may have been also undertaken by his predecessors as early as 830/1425.[44] The hesitancy on the part of Sultan Mehmet to strike his own gold issues may reflect his concern that such a coinage would not be accepted in the international markets or even local ones where Italian pieces and Mamluk *ašrafī* were available. It was only with the conclusion of the AD 1463-1479 war with Venice that the sultan ordered the striking of Ottoman gold called a *sulṭānī* or *haene-i sultaniye* whose weight, size and fineness were based upon the circulating ducats and, in our opinion, the Mamluk *ašrafī* as well. More important for this study, the new Ottoman *sulṭānī* were visually different from any of the earlier circulating gold pieces.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

43. This study will only cover the first years of Ottoman rule since the gold and silver issues after the reign of Selim I from Syria and Egypt looked exactly like those that minted in the Ottoman capital and many other Ottoman mints and the visual messages only reaffirmed their identity as part of the Ottoman Empire.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 60. For a different view see Tabakoglu, "Gold Money", p. 79-114.

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Figure 13. Mamlūk al-Ašrafī style dinar, al-Ašraf Barsbāy, dinar, al-Qāhira, 829 (Dār al-Kutub cat.2897 / reg. 4764); Ottoman sultani style gold coin, Selim I, Kostantaniye, 918 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 3476/ reg. 2502). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

In comparing the two gold coins above it is easy to differentiate them without being able to read the script. The lines of text engraved on the Mamluk *ašrafī* are separated by horizontal rigid cables in an "s" or "z" pattern on both sides of the gold coin. The new Ottoman gold lacks these cables. The text on Ottoman *sulṭānī* is laid out in a series of parallel horizontal lines. Therefore it is not necessary to read the text to distinguish the new Ottoman gold from those struck in Mamluk Egypt and Syria. If one read the texts, the Ottoman obverse field included "Sultan Mehmed son of Murad, Lord, May his victory be glorious; struck in

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Konstaniye, year 882." The general obverse formula on Ottoman gold coins of "Sultan so-in-so son of the Sultan" was carried forward until the 10th/17th century. The initial reverse carried the inscription "Striker of the glittering, Master of might and victorious of land and sea." Later *sulṭānī* changed the reverse inscription to "Sultan of the two lands and Lord of the two seas, the Sultan son of the Sultan" but only a careful observer of the coinage would note the difference between the two inscriptions. Again, what is remarkable is the absence of Qur'anic references which had been included on almost all dinars since 77/697. Unfortunately neither medieval sources nor modern scholarship has discussed this decision not to include Qur'anic material on Ottoman coinage. However, since the original akces lacked Qur'anic verses, it is not surprising that later coins continued this earlier tradition.

The conquests by Selim I (918-926/1512-1520) of Mamluk lands in Syria and Egypt in 922/1516 and 923/1517 respectively offered the Ottoman sultan the opportunity to impose his own currency, the *sulṭānī*, on these lands or to copy the existing Mamluk *ašrafī* dinars. He did both.[45] The dominate gold coinage struck during the reign of Selim I in Syria and Egypt was the *sulṭānī* and it looked exactly like the gold coins struck in other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Unlike any previous set of new rulers, the Ottomans came to Egypt and Syria with a well- developed and widely used system of gold and silver coins and by minting the same style coins in their newly conquered lands integrated these conquered Arab-speaking territories into the existing Ottoman monetary zone. Unless the holder of a *sulṭānī* minted during the reign of Selim I or his immediate successors was to look very carefully that individual could not tell, based on visual clues, if the coin was minted in Konstantiye, Halab, Dimashq or Misr but would know it was not Mamluk. Only by reading the inscriptions would one know which mint struck the coin.

Numismatic and textual evidence prove that Selim I did experiment with a gold coinage that, superficially, could be considered a continuation of the Mamluk *ašrafī*. The Yepi Kredi Bank contains an undated gold coin in the name of Selim I struck in Damascus.[46] The style is classical Mamluk *ašrafī* with cables dividing the text on both the obverse and reverse. Its weight and diameter reinforces the visual message that it could have been circulated as if it was another Mamluk dinar whose inscription was hard to read. However, if one did read the inscriptions it would be immediately apparent that this coin was not Mamluk because its text was exactly the same as that found on the circulating Ottoman *sulṭānī*. Without additional examples, particularly dated ones, it is impossible to draw definite conclusions but it is possible that with his conquest of Syria in 922/1516 Selim I wished to stabilize the money markets of Syria by minting a gold coin which could be confused with the earlier gold coins until his rule over Egypt and Syria was consolidated.

45. The most complete survey of Selim's coinage is Damali, *History of Ottoman Coins*, p. 335-424. The earlier standard volume was Olcer, *Ottoman Coinage*.
46. Damali, *History of Ottoman Coins*,, p. 372-373.

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Figure 14. Reverse, Ottoman sultani style gold coin, Selim I, Miṣr, 923 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 3477 / reg. 4542); reverse, Ottoman al-Ašrafi style gold coin, Selim I, Miṣr, 923 (Dār al-Kutub cat. 3479 / reg. 4541). Reproduced with the permission of the Egyptian National Library.

Selim had two types of Ottoman gold coins struck in Egypt where the mint name was changed from the classic "al-Qāhira" to "Miṣr," implying both the regional administrative capital and the whole country. One style was the classical Ottoman *sulṭānī* which continued to be struck into the reigns of his successors so that only specialists in Ottoman coins who can read the inscriptions can distinguish the Egyptian gold of Selim from those of Suleyman and later sultans. The second type only appeared for the Muslim years 923 and 924 and had a superficial link to the Mamluk ašrafī.[47] The reverse has the classic Mamluk cable pattern but the obverse does not. The holder of the coin only had to turn it over to see that the cables were not found on both sides and therefore the coin couldn't be Mamluk. If this wasn't enough, the obverse field included a six-pointed star while the reverse included a design labeled the Seal of Solomon.[48] Finally, the inscriptions follow the Ottoman model and have no relation to the words found on Mamluk coins. What is not clear is why Selim ordered these Mamluk-style coins struck. Were these coins tied to the political policies of Khair Beg who ruled Egypt as governor after Selim returned to his capital? Since their average weight was less than that of the Ottoman style gold coins, was this a way that administrators, mint masters, and, eventually, money changers, could distinguish a lighter Ottoman piece from a slightly heavier one? Unfortunately, there are more questions than answers but after 924/1518 the Mamluk style coinage disappeared.

47. A few studies have focused on the coins struck in Egypt by Selim I and these include the following: Bierman, "The Beginning of Ottoman Coinage in Egypt," ; El-Mahdi, "Coins struck in Egypt"; and Nicol, "The Post-Ottoman Conquest of Egypt". In Arabic research should start with Al-Ṣāwī, *Al-Nuqūd al-Mutadāwlah*.
48. Damali offers an extensive discussion of all these symbols. Damali, *History of Ottoman Coins*, p. 58-60.

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It is only with the reign of Muṣṭafā II (1106-1115/1695-1703) that a new style Ottoman gold coinage circulated widely. This coinage was noted for the inclusion of the Ottoman tughra on the obverse along with extensive inscriptions on both the obverse and reverse. The following reign of Aḥmad III (1115-1143/1703-1730) was marked by the appearance of gold coins in which the tughra appeared alone on the obverse and only the mint and date on the reverse. These elegant coins may reflect Aḥmad's own interest and skills as a calligrapher. For the purposes of this study these changes, as artistic and beautiful as they are, reinforced the image that Egypt and Syria were part of the Ottoman Empire and only those who could read mint names could distinguish Egyptian pieces from those struck in other parts of the Empire. Only the British action in AD 1914 and World War I brought this pattern to an end.

Conclusions

The first step in using numismatics as a source of visual messages is to identify when a particular visual development took on a life of its own and was sustained over time and space. The "beginning" of this new trend is not necessarily the same as the first appearance of that visual form or style of writing as demonstrated above in the cases of the first use of *Nasḫ* script by the Fatimids and the appearance of a Mamluk heraldic device by Baybars. Sometimes these changes carried significant political and religious messages as with ʿAbd al-Malik's all-epigraphic coinage the earliest Fatimid concentric circle style, but at other times such as al-Malik al-Kāmil's introduction of *Nasḫ* script, they did not. Applying one interpretation for all coinage is as dangerous as doing the same for all inscribed ceramics or buildings with Qur'anic inscriptions.[49]

When a new visual form is established in terms of script or layout succeeding inscribed numismatic texts will differ in content from the coinage inaugurating the innovation, if only by date. There may be other differences such as the name of new rulers or different mints but from the point of view of those who exchange the coinage, those specimens that "look" alike, are treated as a single coinage. On the other hand, having a dominant form does not mean that contemporaneous coins with other designs were not minted and in circulation anymore then postulating that only one type of ceramic was manufactured in a time/space continuum. When the data on visual numismatic changes are collected it becomes possible to map chronological and geographical zones in which an innovation is established, sustained, and ends as with any other subject of art historical research.

As with many artistic productions coins can be organized in a number of ways. With accurate databases, it is possible to identify from the inscribed numismatic texts the names of political leaders, when and where the coinage was struck and even their religious identity

49. For example, inscribed bowls from the 9th century Abbasid heartland, the 12th century Persian speaking world, and the 14th century Mamluk Empire would never be treated as one undifferentiated category of ceramic bowls with epigraphy. In fact, by grouping inscriptions on ceramics in three chronological subsections, Blair lays the foundations for the type of approach suggested. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, p. 148-163.

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such as Sunni or Shi'ite. These data can be combined with information from chronicles and other narrative sources. With this approach grouping coins by dynasty is the easiest form of organization so that dinars with texts in concentric circles naming Fatimid caliph/imams are labeled Fatimid and separated from similar style Ayyubid issues which name Abbasid caliphs but are grouped with other Ayyubid issues.

Looking at this same coinage as a transmitter of visual messages in the Age of the Sultanates, then late Fatimid and early Ayyubid dinars present a single unit whose chronological boundaries do not coincide with political changes. The visual messages do not signal political and religious changes in the leadership of Egypt and parts of Syria. It is only with the reign of the Ayyubid al-'Ādil that a clear visual break with the Fatimid era is made and it is only during the reign of al-Malik al-Kāmil that a new visual style is established. Again, political divisions are meaningless as the new design is carried forward into the Bahri Mamluk period, that is, through the first four Bahri sultans into the sultanate of Baybars. Baybars laid the foundation for a new style, slightly modified by the Qala'unids, but continued past the reign of the founder of the Circassian period, Barquq. Once again political divisions and numismatic evidence based upon visual criteria do not match.

Beginning with Faraj, a transition period emerges using the visual layout of the coins as the organizing factor with the reign of Barsbay finally establishing the new *Ashrafi* style dinar with the new dirham layout established slightly earlier than his reign. Obviously these changes do not coincide with any of the standard divisions based upon political history. It is even possible to write about a transition period following the Ottoman conquest of Mamluk lands with some of the first gold coins from Damascus and Egypt looking like the Mamluk *Ašrafī* but these were few and most remaining specimens represent styles developed earlier in the Ottoman Empire. In this case the fact that the Ottomans had a well-established gold and silver coinage of their own was the critical factor but the fact that Ottomans even minted some *Ašrafī* style dinars indicates that they wanted local Egyptian and Syrian merchants to accept their coinage as rapidly as possible.

In all these cases the market or monetary role of the currency was far more important, initially, then their specific political messages, which, while inscribed on the coins were not signaled by visual clues. Over time a new style of coinage in terms of its visual appearance was created by the ruling sultans and it became the new standard. In summary, the visual messages carried on the gold and silver coinages of Egypt and Syria during the Age of the Sultanates are not a guide to the political changes taking place.

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