

## IV.

### ON MINT-CHARACTERISTICS OF ARABIC COINS.

IN studying the coins of the first two centuries of the Hijrah in a large Oriental collection, the student cannot fail to observe the striking differences in general aspect and in matters of detail which these coins present. These peculiarities are more remarkable in the early period of the Mohammadan coinage than in the later, partly because the Koofee character had not then been corrupted by excessive ornamentation nor superseded by the Naskhee, but principally because in later times coins were generally struck at capitals only, or at least at no towns but those few which were entitled to the first place in the country; whereas in the early time every province had its mint-place, and many towns smaller even than the capitals of provinces had their own coinages.

An investigation of the nature of mint-characteristics may be turned to account in several ways. The two most obvious uses of such an inquiry are (1) the determining of the mint-places of coins in which the name of the mint is illegible by reason of rubbing, oxidation, or fracture; in which cases the knowledge and recognition of the peculiarities in the calligraphy of mints would at once identify the coins: and (2) the discovery of the mint-places of deenárs (which up to the year of the Flight 199 have no localities in their inscriptions), in the absence of historical evidence.

The fine series of coins of the Amawee Khaleefehs in the British Museum affords ample materials for an investigation such as the present. Of this series I give a table

(Plate I.), comprehending all the deenárs and dirhems of this Dynasty.<sup>1</sup> The table needs little explanation. The mint-places are arranged in alphabetical order at the top, to each mint-place a column is assigned. At the side the years of the Flight are written. Consequently every dot may be referred by lines to a mint-place and to a date. In the first column these dots represent deenárs.<sup>2</sup> In all the other columns a dot stands for a dirhem.

Of all the mint-places, thirty-five in number, occurring on coins of the Amawee Khaleefehs in the British Museum, scarcely half-a-dozen are represented by a number of coins sufficient to give any definite idea of their distinctive peculiarities. But the series of dirhems of Dimashk (Damascus) and Wásit is so long and comparatively uninterrupted that the characteristics of these two mints may be laid down with certainty.

Below will be seen those letters which have in a special degree different forms on coins of the two cities.

DIMASHK	WÁSIT	DIMASHK	WÁSIT
ص <sup>3</sup>	ط in ضرب etc.	ر	س in يكن
ع <sup>4</sup>	ه or ه in هذا etc.	ق	م in بسم etc.

Besides these differences in the forms of individual letters, there are some general characteristics of Dimashk which it is most important to note. Coins of this city are

<sup>1</sup> I have not made use of the fels, in this inquiry, on account of the indistinctness, clumsiness, and scantiness of their inscriptions.

<sup>2</sup> Thirds (*thuluths*) of a deenár are represented by  $\frac{1}{3}$ ; half-deenárs (*nisfs*, vulg. *nusfs*) by  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

<sup>3</sup> This form is not decided until the year 86, and loses its character after 117.

<sup>4</sup> It is a noteworthy circumstance that on coins of Dimashk this form is always used in the words هذا and الهدى; but the Wásit form is invariably adopted in يظهر and درهم.

executed in much higher relief than those of Wásit. There is a profusion of diacritical points on coins of Dimashk as contrasted with the total absence of these points on coins of Wásit. The letters to which the Damascene engraver was especially fond of attaching diacritical points are the ب of دمشق and of ضرب, and the ض of ضرب (either above ض or before ض); he has also once (A.H. 85) dotted the ش of شريك. It must also be noticed that the characters on the coins of Dimashk are more compressed and smaller than those of Wásit.

That these peculiarities should be found throughout the whole series of coins of both cities, with scarcely a single exception (see p. 57), is indeed a remarkable fact. Great caution, however, must be exercised in the attribution of broken or rubbed coins by this method. The general aspect as well as every visible detail must be carefully taken into consideration before we arrive at a definite conclusion. There is very little chance of any difficulty in assigning a coin to Dimashk, on account of that city's decided mint-peculiarities. But the case is different with Wásit. The Wásit style can only be regarded as the best type of one common to several cities, such as El-Koofeh, Sáboor, and Ardesheer-Khurrah.

I have stated that this study of the characteristics of various mints may be turned to good account in discovering the places where deenárs were struck. We know that Damascus was the capital of the Amawee Khaleefehs; and we may reasonably conclude that the deenárs were struck there. There may be historical evidence to this effect: to search for this is not my present purpose; but, whether there be or not, the fact that the deenárs were struck at Dimashk is placed beyond a doubt by the styles of the coins themselves. On examination I have found

that every one<sup>5</sup> of the characteristics I have mentioned as peculiar to Dimashk exist also on (I believe all) the deenárs in the collection; the ض, the ڤ, the م, the frequency of diacritical points, on deenárs, are the same as those on the dirhems of Dimashk.

With regard to the م, however, I remark that a deenár of A.H. 101 has a م with its tail askew (thus <sup>6</sup>), neither horizontal as on dirhems of Wásit, nor perpendicular as on those of Dimashk. In the next year it is written thus , which, though still more unlike the Damascene style, is not identical with that of Wásit; the difference being that in the deenár the whole loop of the م is above the tail, whereas in the dirhems of Wásit the loop is half above and half below the tail. In 104 the perpendicular  was restored; but in 106  again appears, and keeps its ground to the end of the dynasty. As the perpendicular م is one of the chief characteristics of Dimashk,<sup>7</sup> we should find it difficult to reconcile its absence with the hypothesis that the deenárs were struck at that city were it not for the happy discovery of a م with its tail askew () on a dirhem of Dimashk of the year 106 and on another of 118, although in 105 and 108 the perpendicular tail occurs. Further the dirhem of Dimashk of 119 has a horizontal (but not a Wásit-)tail; and finally the tail askew was resorted to in 121, 122, 125. These variations in the dirhems of Dimashk, contemporaneous with the changes in the deenárs, instead of injuring my theory, strengthen it by new proofs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The word *يكن* does not occur on deenárs of this dynasty.

<sup>6</sup> The same form may be observed in the first three deenárs (A.H. 78-80).

<sup>7</sup> The only other instance of its use is on the solitary coin of Armeeneeyeh (A.H. 100).

<sup>8</sup> In these remarks on م I refer only to the final م of *بسم*; that in *لم* is always perpendicular on dirhems of Dimashk and on

But is it conceivable that all the gold coins in use throughout the whole length and breadth of the vast Mohammadan Empire could have been struck at Damascus alone for a century or more; that such countries as Egypt, Spain, Barbary, and Persia, had no individual gold coinages? I have carefully searched for any traces of another mint in *deenárs*, but in vain.<sup>9</sup> Either the coinage of Damascus was universal, or other countries copied exactly the Syrian style of mintage. But if they copied the *deenárs*, how is it that we do not find that *e.g.* El-Andalus copied the *dirhems* of Dimashk? I therefore conclude that all the gold coins of this dynasty were struck at Damascus, and despatched to the provinces.

Before I conclude this brief sketch of a part of a subject which I am convinced might be worked out to considerable results, I will mention some curious variations in the word **في** (also written **ف**) which generally precedes the word **سنة** in the legend of the obverse. Three forms are very remarkable:

Wásit  Er-Ray  El-Başrah 

Dimashk at first had but a puny **في**, and after the year of the Flight 80 dropped the word altogether. Wásit used the word in 97, but in 99 it had disappeared *in perpetuum*. Unfortunately there is no coin of this city for A.H. 98 in the British Museum, nor is it to be found in the works of Tornberg, Fræhn, Stickel, or Marsden. It must therefore be left undecided for the present whether the innovation took place for the first time in 98 or in 99.

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*deenárs*, the only exceptions being the first three *deenárs* (78–80) mentioned before in a note. The **م** of **درهم** varies in much the same way as that of **بسم**.

<sup>9</sup> Since writing the above I have been informed by Colonel C. Seton Guthrie that there exists in his collection a *deenár* struck at Afreekiyeh in the 2nd century of the Hijreh.

The reason for the change cannot be conjectured, no addition to the length of the legend having been made.

I have carefully avoided, in the table of coins, a mistake into which several Numismatists seem to have fallen; namely, the confusion of the three names of Balkh, Jay, and Er-Ray. This has arisen from the supposition that Jay is written with the definitive *el*, which it never is.

The woodcut below will show the resemblance between this imaginary El-Jay, and Balkh, and Er-Ray: in each case the preposition ب is prefixed.



Bi-l-Jay



Bi-Balkh



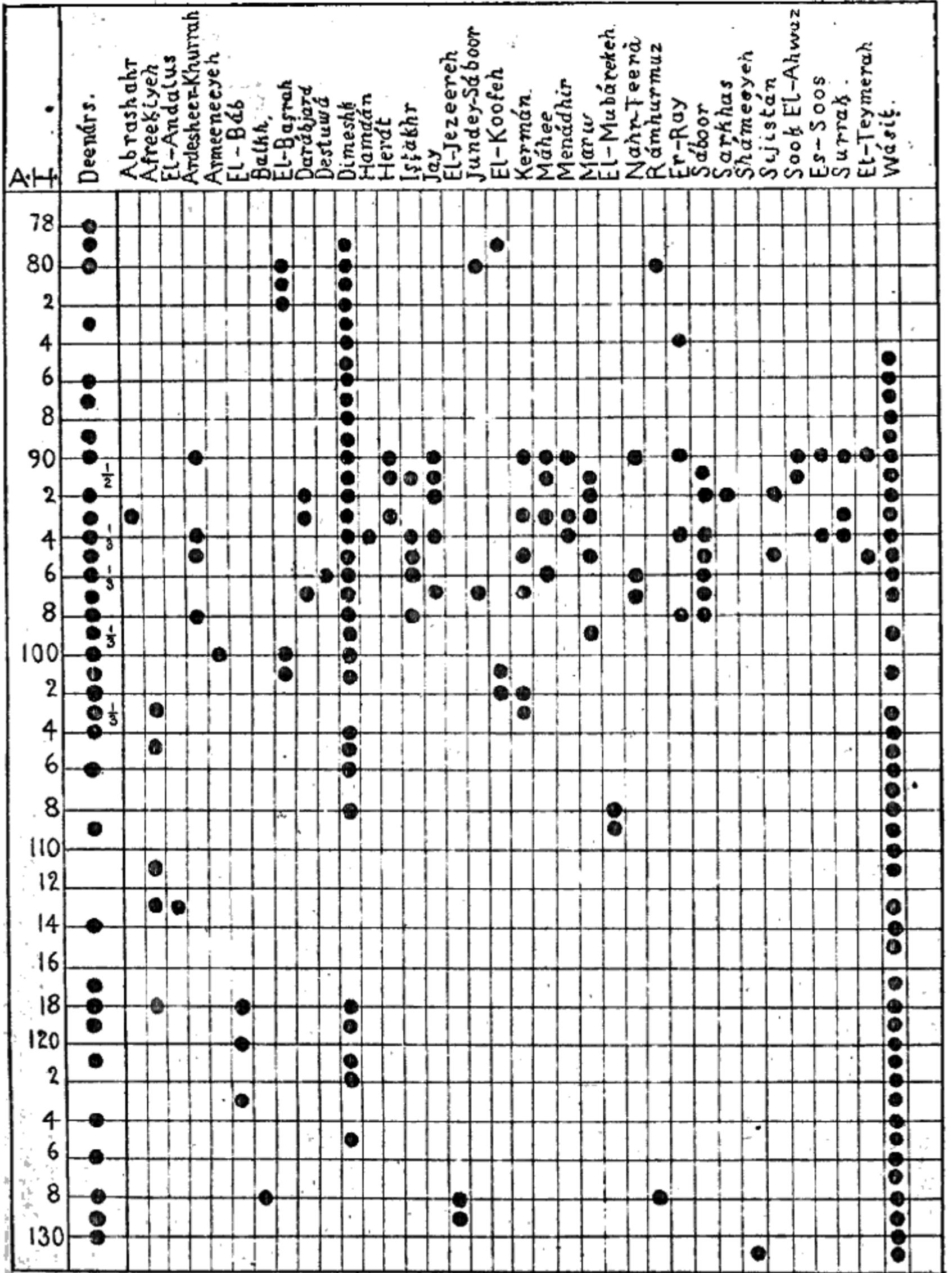
Bi-r-Ray

M. Soret in his admirable work on Mohammadan Numismatics makes this observation: "Quoi qu'il en soit, il est bon de prendre toujours note de la présence des points et de la position qu'ils occupent, parce que leur étude peut conduire à des résultats intéressants et utiles; le professeur Lindberg est le premier qui ait attiré l'attention des orientalistes sur ce sujet, qui avait complètement échappé à la clairvoyance de ses prédécesseurs" (p. 27). I have tried in vain to obtain Prof. Lindberg's essay, which might have been of considerable use to me. I make this statement in order to exculpate myself from any future charge of having followed the prevalent custom of plagiarism.

It is to be hoped that researches similar to mine may be carried on by those Oriental Numismatists who have access to the fine collections of the Continent.

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