M. RAMADAN ATEF MANSOUR

Fayoum University (Egypt)

RETHINKING LAVOIX’S ATTRIBUTION OF THE DÍNĀR DATED 210 AH/AD 825-826

Abstract

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

Keywords

H. Lavoix, Manṣūr b. Naṣr al-Ṭunbudī, Aghlabids
At the end of 19th century, the French scholar Henri Lavoix (Paris 1820-1892) published in his *Catalogue des monnaies musulmanes de la Bibliothèque nationale*, a *dīnār*, dated 210 AH/AD 825-826, in the name of Manṣūr. He attributed the coin to the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mun (198–218 AH/AD 813-833)\(^1\).

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

None of the following scholars paid any attention to this important remark and they continued to refer to Lavoix’ s attribution\(^5\). However Ḥasan Ḥ. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, acknowledging the remarks by Langumina and De Candia, commented about the coinage of Mansur b. Naṣr: «we do not know if it was possible for Manṣūr al-Ṭunbuḍi to strike dinars in his name when he conquered the capital of the Ifrīqiyya as we don’t have any»\(^6\).

In 1982 Muhammad Abū al- Faraj al- ‘Uš studied the dirhams with the name of Manṣūr b. Naṣr minted in Ifrīqiyya dated 210 AH., but he did not mention any dīnār\(^7\) neither Šālih b. Qurba\(^8\) in 1986.

The legends on this *dīnār* dated 210 AH (pl. 1, fig. 1)\(^9\) read:

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9. I am grateful to Francois Thierry of the Coin Cabinet of the BnF in Paris for providing me with a new image of this coin.
Historical sources and previous studies point out that Manṣūr b. Naṣr controlled al-Qayrawān in 210 AH. for 16 or 40 days, after having dismissed the Aghlabid ruler Ziyada' Allāh I (201-223 AH/AD 817-838). During this short period he was also able to mint his coinage: dinars and dirhams. This was made possible by the great skill of the employees of al-Qayrawān mint, the most important mint in the whole Ifrīqiyya.

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

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

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

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11 Cf. Lagumina, Ripostiglio di monete, cit.


13 Cf. De Candia, Monnaies aghlabites, cit.

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

1) The slogan of the Aġlabid dynasty غلب "to conquer" was removed from the top of the Reverse field and replaced by the word عدل "justice" which was the slogan of Manṣūr’s revolt aiming at achieving justice and at preventing corruption.

2) Manṣūr put his name at the bottom of the Reverse field replacing the name of the Aghlabid prince. It is interesting to note that the dirhams of Manṣūr recorded both his complete name – that is Manṣūr b. Naṣr – and his first name – Manṣūr – engraved beneath the inscriptions of the Reverse field; whilst in his dīnār his first name – Manṣūr – appears only beneath the Reverse field pointing out that he was the leader of the revolt and the ruler who ordered to strike this dīnār.

3) The word manṣūr has a double meaning: in one hand it is a personal name - Manṣūr b. Naṣr is the one who ordered to strike the dīnār; on the other hand it means also "The One Granted Victory" or "Victor" as Manṣūr b. Naṣr also defeated Ziyāda' Allāh conquering al-Qayrawān.

4) The date on the dīnār – 210 AH – corresponds to the victory that Manṣūr b. Naṣr achieved at al-Qayrawān.
All this considered we can conclude that this *dīnār*, dated 210 AH., belongs to the revolutionary Maṣūr b. Naṣr – not to the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mūn as first suggested by H. Lavoix and later repeated by other scholars. In particular the *dīnār* records the name Maṣūr beneath the Reverse field together with the known dirhams in the name of Maṣūr b. Naṣr. This *dīnār*, exactly as the dirhams of Maṣūr b. Naṣr, records the slogan “justice” above the inscriptions of the Reverse field. Maṣūr adopted this slogan during his revolt against Ziyāda' Allāh – a detail that confirms that the *dīnār* belongs to Maṣūr b. Naṣr. The date of this *dīnār* – 210 AH. – is the same date on the dirhams, when Maṣūr b. Naṣr conquered al-Qayrawān and minted coins in his name. Both these issues were meant to attest that al-Qayrawān and the Ifrīqiyya were under the control of Maṣūr b. Naṣr after having defeated the Aghlabid prince Ziyāda' Allāh. Last but not least this *dīnār* proves that Maṣūr b. Naṣr minted gold coins, an element that confirms historical chronicles mentioning that he minted coinage, not just silver issues but also gold ones, after taking over al-Qayrawān.
PLATE 1 – Dīnār in the name of Manṣūr dated 210 AH
preserved in the Coin Cabinet of the BnF (Paris)

Figure 1 – Dīnār in the name of Manṣūr dated 210 AH, with Manṣūr ‘Victorious’ at the bottom of the Reverse field and the slogan: عدل (‘adl) ‘justice’, above the Reverse field
Plate 2 – Dirham in the name of Manṣūr minted in Ifrīqiyya, dated 210 AH preserved in the National Institute for Antiquities and Arts (Tunisia), Ḥāmid al-ʿAjabī 1988 (p. 173, No. 213, Pl. 23: W. 2.77 gr.; D. 25 mm)

Figure 2 – Dirham in the name of Manṣūr minted in Ifrīqiyya, dated 210 AH