THE FĀṬIMID COINS FROM SICILY IN AL-ANDALUS: 
THE JABONERÍAS HOARD (MURCIA, SPAIN)\(^1\)

Abstract

In 2012 a gold coin hoard was recovered in the course of the archaeological activities: the excavation of an Islamic house built on the XI century in Jabonerías street, Murcia (Spain). The coins were inside a ceramic pot hidden in one wall of the house. The hoard is composed of 4 gold objects and 424 coins from northern Africa and Sicily, mostly Fāṭimid coins, and the fractions dinars from the Andalusian Party kings. The Fāṭimid coins account for 65 % of the total, and were minted in the name of al-Ḥākim, al- Zāhir y al-Mustanṣir caliphs. Most of them, 82 %, were struck in Palermo’s mint, in Sicily, when the island wasn’t under direct Fāṭimid control no longer. At that time, Sicily was under the rule of the Kalbid dynasty. The Sicilian coins abound in other Andalusian hoards dated in eleventh century -over 60 hoards with Fāṭimid coins have been recorded from Al-Andalus-, and the Sicilian issues are majority in several of them.

Keywords


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In 2012, a gold coin hoard was recovered in the course of archaeological activities taking place on Jabonerías Street, in Murcia (Spain). Murcia was the capital city of Cora of Tudmir, located in the south-eastern area of al-Andalus or Sharq al-Andalus. The coin hoard was recovered during the excavation of an Islamic house located in the ancient Islamic medina next to the wall (figure 1).

The house, which has the structure of a typical Islamic house with a courtyard, was constructed in the beginning of the 11th century. It was abandoned at the end of the same century. Some of its constructive elements were plundered, while the earth walls progressively deteriorated. The collapse was sealed by a potent deposit of silt, over which a second house was constructed during the Almohad period. The baseboards of the courtyard and northern walls were rendered with red paint and decorated with geometrical motifs. What is noteworthy is a rendering located on the courtyard wall, between the two doors that provided access to the northern hall. The motif on it must have been a Star of David or a Seal of Solomon1.

Among the collapsed remains of one of the walls of the said hall, that is, the eastern one, the remnants of a ceramic vessel were found (figure 2). Inside was a group of gold coins and four smaller objects of the same material2.

Its discovery during the archaeological excavation was key to the recovery of all the pieces, meaning that we have a group of objects that were hidden and have been entirely preserved. Its contextualization in a stratigraphic sequence provides valuable information to enable its correct interpretation. At the same time, this a very meaningful discovery, which provides relevant historical data for understanding the region of Murcia during the 11th century, and the relations between al-Andalus and other areas of the Western Mediterranean, especially the island of Sicily, as can be inferred from the numismatic analysis of the hoard3.

This hidden discovery consists of 424 gold coins, 51 of which are fragments, some of them very small ones. All the pieces correspond to dividers of the dinar, except eight coins that are dinar unities.

In this hoard, the Andalusian coin only constitutes a quarter of the total, which takes the form of a group of dinar fractions from the Taifa States, independent kingdom after the abolition of the Córdoba caliphate. It is mostly composed of foreign currency minted by North African dynasties. However, issues under the name of the Fāṭimid caliphs predominate, representing 65% of the total coins discovered. This dynasty, traditionally in conflict with the Umayyads over the control of certain

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1 The archeological context is published by M. GARCÍA RUIZ 2013.
2 There were inside four gold objects, very small and damaged, weighing 0.4 grams altogether. For a detailed description see DOMÉNECH BELDA 2013, illustrated in figure 14.
3 See DOMÉNECH BELDA 2013.
territories in Northern Africa and the control of the Western Mediterranean, minted plenty of coinage, which is frequently part of the Andalusian discoveries that date from the 11th century. A small group of North African coins has also been identified, originating from the Siŷilmasa area and making up 1.6% of the total. Finally, there is another group of pieces, mostly fragments, whose small size or poor preservation prevents their classification (figure 3).

ANDALUSIAN COINS

The Andalusian issues represents 24.7% of all the hoard. Among the Andalusian coins, there are two dinars minted in the final moments of the Córdoba caliphate, a dinar from the Hišām II period minted in the last decade of the 10th century, and another one with the name of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, which dates from the Hegira 400 or 1009-10 CE. These coins, together with a series of coins of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Hākim, are some of the oldest pieces of the hoard.

The remaining 103 coins are issues from the Taifa period, all of them fractions of the dinar. Among the coins from the Taifa States, the largest number corresponds to the Taifa of Valencia, powerful kingdom established by the Amirid dynasty. The most abundant ones are issues from ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Manṣūr, the grandchild of Almanzor, who ruled the area from the year 411 to 452 of the Hegira. This abundance of Taifa-minted coinage was circulating almost all over al-Andalus, especially in the eastern area, where it was the predominant currency during the 11th century.

The group discovered on Jabonerías Street is a good proof of that, since the Valencian issues represents 85% of all the Taifa coins in the hoard. The rest are fractions of the dinar from other Taifa kingdoms, comprising just a few coins. These are the main Taifa kingdoms from the southern and eastern half of al-Andalus: besides Valencia, there is also the neighbouring Taifa of Denia; Tortosa, Zaragoza and Calatayud in the Ebro Valley; the powerful Taifa of Toledo; and Córdoba, Granada and Sevilla in the south.

SIŶILMĀSA COINS

Seven North African dinars have also been identified in this hoard, minted by the Banū Jazrūn in Siŷilmasa. There was much tension between the Fāṭimid and Umayyads over the city of Siŷilmasa, as it was where the caravan routes regarding sub-Saharan gold were destined. In practice, as the control over this city meant control over the route for that metal, both dynasties worked hard in order to please the Berber tribes in the area. It was ruled by the Banū Midrār, with intermittent Fāṭimid
control, until the year 366 of the Hegira, when it was occupied by the Banū Jazrūn with the support of the Umayyads from Córdoba.

The Siŷilmāsa coins minted by these dynasties are little known and very scarce on the Iberian Peninsula. Banū Midrār’s coins were only reported in a hoard from Badajoz⁴, while two hoards contain Banū Jazrūn’s coinage: Cruz Conde from Córdoba⁵ and Santa Elena from Valence, the largest group of North Africa gold coins in al-Andalus⁶. To this coins, now must be joined Jabonerías hoard with seven gold pieces possibly from Siŷilmāsa⁷. As in the case of Santa Elena, they can be dated in the first half of the 11th century⁸, during the city independence period that started with the fall of the Córdoba Caliphate. This independence is clearly revealed in the monetary issues: the name of Hisam II disappeared from the currency. After that, the supply model of north African monetary gold in al-Andalus should have been modified.

**FĀṬIMID COINS**

The largest group in Jabonerías hoard is comprised by the Fāṭimid coinage. We have found coins from three different Fāṭimid caliphs: al-Ḥākim (386-411 H./ 996-1021 CE.), al-Ẓāhir (411-427 H./ 1021-1036 CE.) and al-Mustanṣir (427-487 H./ 1036-1094 CE.), whose successive governments cover almost all of the 11th century. The number of coins in each of them is different, increasing progressively from the first to the last. From the al-Ḥākim period are 6.5% of the identified coins. The number of coins issued by al-Ẓāhir caliph, even though he had a shorter reign, was triple that of his predecessor, among which are some posthumous issues. But the largest group among the whole hoard, other than the Fāṭimid coins, are the ones issued by al-Mustanṣir, with a total of 195 identified pieces.

It happens that almost 70% of the coins from this caliph belong to a certain type, from which only pieces dating from the fourth decade of the 11th century are known.

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⁴ According to A. PRIETO VIVES 1934, the treasure contained a consistent number of Banū Midrār’s coins which dates from the Hegira 315 to 354 or 927-965 CE.


⁶ As referred to by CANTO ET ALII 2005, Santa Elena hoard contained 531 gold pieces of Banū Jazrūn’s coins. There is the largest group located in al-Andalus. The full report on this very large hoard is awaited whose publication will provide a better knowledge on these issues.

⁷ There is one fragmented piece and six full pieces. All of them are dinars, weighing between 2.4 and 3.2 grams, except for one: a divider, weighing 1.1 gram. See DOMÉNECH BELDA 2013: p.15 and figure 9. These dinars, together with a two Umayyad caliphate pieces, are the only dinars of this hoard.

This is type P in the catalogue of N. D. Nicol, especially variants P1, P2 and P3, which share the same distribution of the central inscription but differ in the legend on the margins. All the coins of these types with an identified mint, as referred to by N. D. Nicol, correspond to the Ṣiqilliy a mint.

All of them are divisions of a quarter of a dinar, known as a rubāʿa weighing around one gram and mostly between 12 and 16 mm wide. The word “rubāʿa” on the coin appears in very few cases. On the contrary, the word “dinar” appears on many of them, as it was a generic term with gold issues. Their metrological characters, however, leave no doubt about their value as quarter dinar.

On the subject of chronology, many of these fractions of a dinar do not show a date. The quarter dinar of al-Mustanṣir, which are of great chronological interest due to being the latest Fāṭimid coins of the hoard, could have been rigorously dated in any of his 58 years of reign: from the Hegira 427 or 1036 CE, to the Hegira 487 or 1094 CE. However, none of the coins where the date can still be read surpasses the chronological barrier of the middle of the century. The latest date seen in the Fāṭimid coins of the hoard is the Hegira 438 or 1046-7 CE. Many of the coins belong to this year, which coincides with the moment where the local powers of the Sicily island began to consolidate and gain independence from the last Kalbī governor. Later monetary types, such as the stellate or clockface type, cannot be found in the hoard. In addition, 70% of the coins belong to a type that only date from the 1040s. Our guess is that, in the second half of that century, these coins had already travelled to al-Andalus and were added to the fractions of the dinar from the Taifa kingdoms, whose mint dates do not extend to the last quarter of the 11th century. All this suggests that these coins from al-Mustanṣir correspond to issues from the first half of his reign.

Even though these fractions of Fāṭimid dinars belong to types where the place of mintage is preserved in the marginal inscription, this information has not been preserved in all coins. It has been possible to identify 107 pieces, divided into four mints, all of them located in the Western Mediterranean: al-Mahdiya, al-Manṣūriya, Aṭarāblus (Tripoli in Libya) and Ṣiqilliy a. Miṣr does not appear, even though it was the capital of the dynasty when these coins were struck. Only 1% of the coins belong to al-Mahdiya, while Aṭarāblus is only represented by 5% of all the Fāṭimid coins of the hoard. All the coins in this mint were struck with the name of al-Ḥākim, the most represented caliph in the hoard. To al-Manṣūriya belong 12% of the coins with a known mint, while the remaining 82% were struck in Sicily (figure 4).

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9 NICOL 2006.
FĀṬIMID COINS IN AL-ANDALUS

The figures in the hoard of Murcia match closely to what has been found in other Andalusian discoveries of Fāṭimid coins. On a general level, the Fāṭimid discoveries in al-Andalus are abundant and distributed all over the southern part and the eastern side of the Iberian Peninsula, especially the Mediterranean Sea coast and the Guadalquivir Valley (figure 5), though with a different behaviour in both areas.

As in Jabonerías hoard, in al-Andalus, on a general level, the composition of the discoveries evidence that the Fāṭimid coin focuses mostly on the issues from the caliphs al-Ḥākim, al-Zāhir and al-Mustanṣir, who reigned during the 11th century. Only a few coins from the previous caliphs reached the Iberian Peninsula. The coins from the caliphs who reigned during the second half of the 10th century, al-Muʿizz y al-ʿAzīz, are scarce. It is only during the reign of the caliph al-Ḥākim (386-411 H./ 996-1021 CE.) when the number of coins preserved begins to rise significantly, especially in the larger hoards. To this caliph belongs the largest number of coins.

But there are differences between gold and silver Fāṭimid currency. Gold coins appear mostly all throughout the 11th century. There are only a few coins with a previous chronology. On the other hand, silver Fāṭimid coins have already been documented in al-Andalus early, dating from the 10th century, peaking with the coin issues from al-Hakim (386-411 H./ 996-1021 CE). However, during the reign of al-Mustansir (427-487 H./ 1036-1094 CE.), when the gold coins are riching, the Fāṭimid silver coins disappear (figure 6).

There are also some differences according to the geographical area. In the Guadalquivir Valley, silver coins disappeared even sooner, as no coins from al-Zāhir have been documented. Some of the silver found there, dates from the first decades of the 11th century, a fitna period with little coinage from the Cordoba mint (figure 7). Meanwhile, Fāṭimid coins kept on reaching Sharq al-Andalus during the first half of the 11th century: silver from al-Zāhir and gold from al-Mustanṣir (figure 8). Even though gold and silver coin discoveries are distributed between both areas, it is in Sharq al-Andalus where we find the late coins that kept on coming once they stopped reaching the Guadalquivir Valley.

10 In 1990, C. Martínez published the first work on Fāṭimid coin findings in al-Andalus, that they were eleven in total. Currently, over fifty hoards with Fāṭimid coins have been recorded in al-Andalus. Lately, the number of hoards have increased, not only for the new discovers, also for the revision of the old ones in which Fāṭimid coins did not had the proper attention or had not been identify. It is especially relevant this fact in the area of Sharq al-Andalus where along the monetary sets, an important number of isolated findings are documented. On all this, see DOMÉNECH 2004.

11 On a comparative analysis on geographic areas of these finds see DOMÉNECH 2004.

12 For an extensive analysis of the Fāṭimid gold presence in al-Andalus, geographic distribution and chronology, see DOMÉNECH 2016.
In light of this fact, we have to add that the percentages of Fāṭimid coins in the discoveries are considerably higher in the Mediterranean area, with four hoards that thoroughly exceed the 50%, for example Jabonerías (65%), Elche¹³ (83%), Begastri¹⁴ (88%), and Benidorm¹⁵ (100%). There are other ones, such as Santa Elena in Valencia, which has the largest group of Fāṭimid gold found in al-Andalus¹⁶. All this, together with the origin of the coins, is proof that Sharq al-Andalus was the gateway for all these coins. We can confirm this graphically with figure 9, which compares, with absolute figures, four gold hoards: three hoards from the Sharq in the upper area, and another one in blue in the Guadalquivir Valley, located at the bottom part of the graphic.

Regarding the denomination of coin, the quarter dinar is the most abundant one in the discoveries of Fāṭimid gold coins in al-Andalus. The presence of Fāṭimid dirham unities is very scarce and, as happened with the hoard of Jabonerías Street, the dividers of a quarter of a dinar predominate. This also happens with the silver coins, where dirham unities are very scarce. The fractions of a quarter and a half are the most documented ones. These monetary values adapted better to the economic reality of the Andalusian Taifas.

All these Fāṭimid coins, which arrived in al-Andalus, came mostly from mints located in the Western Mediterranean, especially Sicily. The percentages shown in figure 10, even though incomplete because there are many ancient hoards for which we have no data, show a tendency that is corroborated in the hoard of Jabonerías Street. The Palermo mint is without doubt the one that provided the most Fāṭimid coins to al-Andalus. The other mints had a lesser presence. The coins that came from Egypt, for example, are very scarce, even though the dynasty lived there when most of these coins were struck.

With respect to the provenance of Fāṭimid coins arrived to al-Andalus, there are differences between both metals. The most of Fāṭimid silver coinage come from al-Mansūriya, while the gold coins were minted in four different mints: al-Mahdīya, al-Mansūriya, Tarabulus, Miṣr y Siqillīya. Siqillīya is the predominant mint, far apart on al-Mansūriya, the second largest one.

This volume of Sicilians coins, especially quarters of dinars struck in 11th century, shows that the Palermo’s mint, although not directly controlled by Fāṭimid dynasty, continued minting coins with the names of Fāṭimid caliphs, unless during the whole reign of al-Mustanṣir. This fact is truly notable because the Kalbid governors, even

¹³ See DOMÉNECH 2003.
¹⁴ See DOMÉNECH 2006.
¹⁵ See DOMÉNECH 2003.
¹⁶ See CANTO, CASAS, IBRAHIM and MARTÍN 2005; and CANTO, MARTÍN and DOMÉNECH 2017.
they kept their loyalty to Fāṭimid dynasty, they wouldn’t let caliphs have direct control over the island. Between the year 1040 and 1050 Sicily was divided in independent political entities\footnote{BARIANI 2001: p.72.}, like happened in al-Andalus.

A FEW WORDS IN CONCLUSION

The abundant presence of Fāṭimid coins in the Iberian Peninsula outlines the most important phenomenon of foreign currency in al-Andalus. Fāṭimid coinage was integrated into the Andalusian monetary circulation and was treasured next to Andalusian coins. In the Andalusian hoards, most of these coins were dividers: half and quarter dirham and quarter dinar fractions, in spite of the unit dinar that was the gold currency most used in Fāṭimid Empire. These fractional dinars and dirhams should have been very valued during the 11\textsuperscript{th} century in al-Andalus because of the quality of his alloy. The quarter dinars coexisted with the dinar fractions minted by the taifa kings and were treasured next to them. As happens with Andalusian coinage, Fāṭimid coins were sometimes drilled, cut or fragmented.

The arrival of the Fāṭimid currency to al-Andalus is focused on the eleven century, mostly in the first half. The largest group comprises the issues from the caliphs al-Ḥākim (386-411 H./ 996-1021 CE.), al-Ẓāhir (411-427 H./ 1021-1036 CE.) and al-Mustanṣir (427-487 H./ 1036-1094 CE.) whose successive governments cover almost all of the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. Coins from predecessor caliphs are very scarce. Therefore, the Fāṭimid coinage in al-Andalus links with the coinage of the Taifa states. The Fāṭimid coinage are frequently displayed treasured next to some taifa coinage such as Valencia, Toledo or Zaragoza taifās.

A full view of the Fāṭimid coinage found in al-Andalus allows to quantify and to establish the extent of the presence of this coinage. A review of the hoards, from treasures to isolated pieces, reveals that were mainly distributed in two areas: the southern of the Iberian Peninsula (Gualdalquivir Valley), and the eastern side of al-Andalus, especially the Mediterranean Sea coast. The analysis of these findings enables to observe a different behaviour in both areas according to metals and chronology. The Fāṭimid silver coins disappear from the south during the reign of al-Ẓāhir (411-427 H./ 1021-1036 CE.), nevertheless they are plentiful in Sharq al-Andalus. A great deal of gold coins kept on coming into Sharq al-Andalus during the reign of al-Mustansir, when the Fatimid gold coins in the Guadalquivir Valley were very scarce. In Sharq al-Andalus we find the latest coins that arrived, once they stopped reaching the Guadalquivir Valley. This evidence suggests that Sharq al-Andalus was the gateway for the Fāṭimid monetary flow.
It should also be noted that all these Fāṭimid coins mostly came from mints located in the Western Mediterranean. A great amount of them is from Sicily where they were minted in a moment when the Fāṭimids had no longer direct control of the island and where the quarter dinar predominated. The abundant presence of Sicilian coins in al-Andalus highlights again the role of Sicily as the commercial centre of the Mediterranean, and its importance and impact not only towards the East, as shown by the Cairo Genizah documents, but also towards the West. In the Cairo Genizah documents is mentioned the settlement of Andalusian traders in Palermo, especially Jewish. This traders’ activity and the trade routes linking Sicily with the Iberian Peninsula across de Balearic Islands, may explain why the Fāṭimid currency appears with relatively frequence in al-Andalus, especially in the Mediterranean coast during the 11th century. The Jabonerías hoard in Murcia, is a good example of that relationship and makes possible to point the historical moment when these coins were hoarded.

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18 It based on information from the Cairo Genizah documents researched by O.R.Constable 1994.
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Figure 1 – Map of Spain with the location of Murcia

Figure 2 – Jabonerías hoard in the eastern wall of the northern hall
(Pictures and photographs: M. García Ruiz)
Figure 3 – Composition of the coin hoard of Jabonerías Street

Figure 4 – Fāṭimid mints in hoard of Jabonerías
Figure 5 – Places of Fāṭimid coins discoveries in al-Andalus

Figure 6 – Fāṭimid coins in al-Andalus: caliphs
Figure 7 – Fāṭimid coin in the Guadalquivir Valley

Figure 8 – Fāṭimid coin in the Sharq al-Andalus
Figure 9 – Comparison chart of four great coin hoards with Fāṭimid gold

Figure 10 – Origin of the Fāṭimid pieces found in al-Andalus