

OBSERVATIONS ON A UNIQUE CUFIC GOLD COIN,
ISSUED BY AL-ÁMIR BEÁKHCAM ALLAH, ABÚ
ALI MANZOUR BEN MUSTALI, TENTH CALIPH
OF THE FATIMITE DYNASTY.

[Read at a Meeting of the Numismatic Society of London.]

THE coin which I now have the honor to exhibit was produced under the Fatimite dynasty, who traced their origin to Fatima, the favorite daughter of Mohammad, and wife of Ali; and by reason of this, in addition to the highest ecclesiastical dignity, they claimed temporal sovereignty over the professors of the Moslem creed. The Abbaside caliphs, anxious to controvert this position, strove by every available means to destroy the credit of their rival's claim: in consequence of which a war broke out between them; but the Fatimites were the victors, and for a period of 270 years they retained great authority and influence.

They wrested from the Abbasides, Africa Proper, Egypt, Syria, Diar-bekr, the two holy cities, Mecca and Medina, and Yemen.

The history of the Fatimite caliphs is one of great importance to Mohammadan nations, and to the Christian world at large. One of them Moezz-ledin-Allah, subjected Egypt and Syria, and was the founder of the city of Cairo

(972 A.C.). Another, known by his surname, Al-Hakem beâmr Allah, who ascended the throne in the year 996, was the originator of the Druze religion. It was he, who, in the year 1008, according to the Moslem historians, ordered the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to be entirely destroyed; and it was not restored until the reign of his grandson, Al-Mostanser-Billah.

The caliph to whom I beg to call your particular attention is the individual known by his surname, Al-Aâmir beâkham Allah *الامر باحكام الله*: his first name is Abu Ali Manzour *ابو علي منصور*; but this being exactly like the name of Hakem beâmr Allah *حاكم بالله* he is generally spoken of by his surname.

Ibn Khallicân mentions him by the name of Al-Aamir Al-Obaidi, on account of Obaid-Allah's having laid the foundation of the Fatimite power in Africa Proper. Sometimes he is merely spoken of by the name of Al-Aâmir. He was the son of Al-Mustali Abû'l Kasim Ahmad, who reigned from the year 487 of the Hejra, which is equal to 1094 of the Christian era, to the year 495 (1101 A.C.). Al-Mustali was the caliph who, in the year 489 (1095 A.C.), sent an army into Palestine, under the command of his vizir, Abû'l Kasim Shâhshâh, surnamed Al-Malik al-Afdal, the son of Badr al-Jamâli, Amîr al-Juyûsh; and in the year after, 490 A.H. (1096 A.C.), he took possession of Jerusalem by capitulation, after a siege of forty days, and expelled therefrom Socmân and Il-Ghâzi, the sons of Ortok. Al-Mustali, however, did not remain long in possession of the Holy City; for, in the same year, 490 A.H. (1096 A.C.), Godfrey of Bouillon, one of the principal commanders in the first crusade, accompanied by his brothers Eustace and Baldwin, commenced his march upon Jerusalem; and three

years after, 493 A.H. (1099 A.C.) the Crusaders carried that city by storm, after a siege of five weeks (July 15, 1099). Al-Mustali now sent his general, Saad ad-Dawlat, at the head of 400,000 men, for the purpose of dispossessing Godfrey of his newly-acquired territory; but Godfrey gave battle to this force in the plain of Ascalon, and obtained a most signal victory over him.

After the death of Mustali, which took place in the year 495 A.H. (1101 A.C.), Al-Aâmir was placed on the throne by the influence of Al-Afdal; and Al-Aâmir being at that time only five years of age, Al-Afdal took the direction of public affairs into his own hands. Ibn-al-Athîr (Abû'l-Hasan Ali Djézéri) relates, that a year after Al-Aâmir's accession to the throne, 496 A.H. (1102 A.C.), Al-Afdal sent Saad ad-Dawlat against the Crusaders; and the encounter took place between Ramlah and Jaffa. On this occasion, Baldwin, the king of Jerusalem, led the attack. The Crusaders fought with great fury, and the Moslem were repulsed. A curious circumstance is related respecting the cause of that general's death. Before he became governor of Beyrout (Berytus), it was predicted to him by the astrologers that he would die in consequence of a fall from his horse. The ground of that locality having thereon a vast number of loose stones, he ordered them to be removed, lest either his horse or himself should lose footing from such impediments. This caution, however, did not preserve him. After the combat with the Crusaders he (Saad ad-Dawlat) took to flight; and his horse, urged to save him from the enemy, stumbled and threw him, and he was killed in the manner which had been predicted.

The Crusaders took possession of his tent and all the baggage of the Moslem. The caliph then sent Sharaf al-Maâli, the son of Al-Afdal, at the head of a very consider-

able army, to oppose the victors. Sharaf al-Ma'ali met the Crusaders at a place called Jazour, not far from Ramlah. On this occasion the Moslem force was successful; a great number of the Crusaders were slain, and those who escaped withdrew in great confusion. So critical was Baldwin's situation, on his troops being discomfited, that he was fain to hide himself in some grass, and when the Moslem had passed he proceeded to Ramlah, where he took temporary refuge in a palace belonging to that fortress. Sharaf ad-Dawlat advanced with his army until he came to this palace, in which there were seven hundred of the principal men of the Crusaders. Baldwin, however, contrived secretly to withdraw, and proceeded to Jaffa.

During fifteen days Sharaf ad-Dawlat kept the fortress of Ramlah in a state of alarm, and after having made himself master of the palace, he had four hundred Christians killed in cold blood, and the other three hundred he sent prisoners to the caliph of Egypt.

The Moslem now fell into doubts as to what direction they should next take. Some counselled a march to Jerusalem, which city they conceived they were surely able to subdue: others thought it best to proceed to Jaffa. But whilst they were thus debating, a great number of Christian pilgrims arrived by sea, for the purpose of visiting Jerusalem; Baldwin engaged them to join him in his war against the Fatimite caliph: and thus reinforced, he proceeded to a place near Ascalon (where Sharaf ad-Dawlat had stationed his troops, who, in the natural state of things, were not strong enough now to resist the Crusaders). But the Moslem (as the Arabic author says) were favoured by God; and the Crusaders, on seeing Ascalon so well fortified, were afraid of being attacked by the Moslem at night: they therefore left Ascalon for Jaffa.

Ad-Dahabi, in relating that Baldwin, during the khaliphate of Al-A'imir, undertook his march against Egypt, goes on to say, that God frustrated the plan of Bardewil (Baldwin), and caused him to die before he even came to Al-Arish. His people, he said, cut open his body, took out the entrails, and interred them on the same spot where he expired. His body was taken to Jerusalem and buried in the Church of the Resurrection. Another historian, however, William of Tyre, is of opinion that he was buried in Golgotha at Jerusalem.

Sharaf-ad-Dawlat now returned to his father, Al-Afdal, who sent, under the direction of Tadj-al-Adjem, 3,000 horsemen to meet the enemy; he also sent a fleet, under the command of Ben Kadous, for the same purpose. The fleet anchored within sight of Jaffa, and the cavalry halted at Ascalon. Ben Kadous now claimed the assistance of Tadj-al-Adjem; but the latter, not having received distinct orders to that effect from Al-Afdal, declined complying with his request. Ben Kadous wrote to the Kadi of Ascalon, and to the principal inhabitants of that town, calling upon them to bear testimony to the refusal of Tadj-al-Adjem. They acceded to his wishes, and furnished him with a certificate, to the effect that he lay with his fleet before Jaffa twenty days, claiming the assistance of Tadj-al-Adjem, but that the latter gave him no support whatever. This certificate was sent to Al-Afdal, who thereupon dispatched an amir named Tadj-al-Molk, whom he placed at the head of the caliph's armies in Syria, with orders to reside at Ascalon.

By the end of this year, the Crusaders took possession of Jerusalem, the whole of Palestine (with the exception of Ascalon), Jaffa, Arsouf, Cæsarea, Kháyfa, Tiberias, Jordan, Laodicea, Antioch, Mesopotamia, Edessa, and Saroudj.

At that time, also, the count of St. Giles besieged Tripolis.¹

Under the reign of Al-Aâmir beâkham Allah, 506 A.H., Al-Afdal caused a canal to be dug in the province of Sharkiyah in Egypt, which is known by the name of Bakhr Abû'l Moneddja بنهر ابي المنجب. Al Afdal committed the execution of that work to a Jew, named Abû'l Moneddja, son of Isaiah اليهودى اشعيا ابن المنجب who was induced to undertake it by the solicitation of the cultivators of the soil and the other inhabitants of the province, their land being too far situate from the river. But on presenting to Al-Afdal the account of the expenditure in this affair, the latter exclaimed, "This expense is too heavy for us, that we should defray it entirely: let the canal bear the name of Abû'l Moneddja الاسم ابو المنجب وجميعه" *عرا منا هذا المال جميعه* doubtless signifying thereby that such honour would be a sufficient reward for his labours.

To give some colour probably to Al-Afdal's dissatisfaction with the Hebrew's proceedings, Abû'l Moneddja was thrown into prison, where he remained for two years, and was afterwards exiled to Alexandria.²

Although an act like this says but little for the justice of Al-Afdal, yet it is the opinion of Moslem authors that he was an able ruler and possessed superior judgment. It was to him, Ibn Khallicân says, that "Al-Aâmir was entirely indebted for his accession to the khaliphât; but Al-Afdal having the direction of public affairs in his own hands, and the prince having indulged a passion for vicious amusements, Al-Afdal, to restrain his dissolute habits, caused him

¹ V. Bibliographie des Croisades par Michaud, t. ii. p. 395-6.

² V. Silvestre de Sacy's Chrestomathie Arabe, tom. ii. p. 5 & 34.

to be confined in his palace. This treatment induced Al-Aâmir, when he became older, to plot against his vizir's life; and on the evening of Sunday, the 30th of Ramadan, 515 A.H. [Dec. 1121 A.C.], as Al-Afdal rode forth from his habitation in the imperial palace [which edifice in the time when Ibn Khallicân compiled his *Biographical Dictionary*, was known by the name of Dar al-Wakala] he was attacked by the prince's emissaries, and slain whilst proceeding towards the river." The same author states that "Al-Afdal left behind him such a quantity of wealth as was never heard of before;" the author of the *Dual-al-Mankatâ* states "that it consisted of six hundred millions of dinars (£30,000,000); 250 bushels of dirhems, all of full weight and coined in Egypt; 75,000 satin robes; 30 camel-loads of perfume boxes in Irak gold; a gold inkhorn, mounted with a precious stone, valued at 12,000 dinars; 100 gold nails, each weighing 100 dinars, ten of which were in each of his sitting-rooms, and on each nail hung a turban, ready folded and embroidered in gold: each of these turbans was of a different colour, and he selected from among them whichever he was inclined to wear. He possessed besides 500 chests of clothing for the people in his service, all of the finest stuffs which Tennis and Damietta could produce. As for the horses, slaves, mules, saddles, perfumes, ornaments for the person, and furniture, which he left behind him, God alone knew the quantity. He had, moreover, such immense flocks of sheep as to make the account of them appear incredible; the milk produced by his herds was farmed out, and in the year of his death brought in 30,000 dinars. Among his effects were found two large trunks, containing gold needles for the use of the female slaves and the other women."³

³ Ibn Khallicân's Biographical Dictionary, translated by B. Mac Guckin de Slane.

After the death of Al-Afdal, Al-Aâmir appointed for his vizir Abû Abd-Allah Mûhammad ibn Mukhtâr ibn Bâbek Al-Mamûn, who is also known by the name of Al-Mamun Al-Bataîhi; but according to Ibn Al-Mamun Ahmed ben Ali, his name was Abû Abd-Allah Mûhammad ben Abû Shujâ Fatik, with the title of As-Saïd Al-Adjall Al-Mamun. It is said that he (Fatik) was a man distinguished for his generosity, lofty spirit, and daring courage, which last quality procured him the surname of Al-Madjnoun (the Madman); but there must be some incorrectness, either in the date of Fatik's death—which, according to Ibn Khaliçân, took place 350 A.H. (961 A.C.), and would make Al-Mamun 166 years old—or in the name of Al-Mamun's father.

It was he who built at Cairo the mosque of Al-Akmar الجامع الأحمر; he also ordered a mint to be built at New Cairo, on account of that city being the principal seat of the reigning caliph. This occurred in the month of Shawal, 516 A.H. (1122 A.C.). That edifice was built on a place called Al-Kashashîn القشاشين (signifying "people who gather all they can find for the purpose of eating it") and bore the name of Ad-Dar Al-Ameriyye الدار الأميريّة ("the habitation of Aâmir").

The same author informs us that the gold pieces which were coined in this mint were made with a better alloy than those which were coined at all other places in Egypt.⁴

Al-Mamun is described by the Arabic authors to have been a friend of the learned, and an encourager of literature; he treated with great respect the celebrated Abû Bakr Al-Tortushi (Tortosa, in Spain), a doctor of the Malekite sect, noted for his extensive learning and ascetic piety, and who predicted the assassination of Al-Afdal Shâhan Shâh; and

⁴ V. Traité des Monnaies Musulmanes traduit de l'Arabe de Makrizi par S. de Sacy, p. 75.

it was for Al-Mamun that Al-Tortushi composed his work called *Siraj Al-Huda* ("Flambeau of Guidance"). It was for him also that Abû-Djafer Yousouf ben Ahmad ibn Chasdaï, a celebrated Jewish physician, who followed his profession with great success in Cairo, wrote a commentary on the works of Hippocrates, which is known as the *Commentary of Maïmuni*.⁵

Notwithstanding Al-Mamun's being so great a patron of literature, he still caused much injustice to be practised during his administration, and greatly contributed to the degradation of morals; and Abû'l Mahassan Yousouf, surnamed Djemal-ad-din, states that in the year 519 A.H. (1125-6 A.C.), the caliph therefore caused him to be put to death and his body crucified.⁶ But if we reflect upon the moral character of the caliph himself, we must have great doubts as to the purity of the caliph's motives for this deed. According to other authors, however, he was put in prison in that year, with all his brothers, and not executed before 522 A.H.

During the reign of this caliph, 504 A.H. (1110 A.C.), there came, according to Abû'l Mahassan Yousouf, a great darkness in Egypt, the air being thickly impregnated with a calcinated substance, so that the people thought the end of the world was come. It lasted from about the middle of the afternoon until the evening.

One of the principal palaces built by the caliph Al-Aâmir was that which bore the name of Al-Houdadj ("the litter").

⁵ Histoire des Médecins Juifs anciens et modernes, par E. Carmoly, p. 44.

⁶ V. مورد الطائفة الجمل الدين بن تغرى برزى

Sen rerum Ægyptiacarum Annales ab anno 971 usque ad annum 1563. Arab. Lat. published by J. D. Carlyle.

It was situated in the island of Roda, and was the abode of his favourite mistress, a Bedouine.⁷

During his reign there were several Jewish physicians of great distinction flourishing in Egypt, one named Abûl Khaïr Selama ben Rahman ibn Mobarek, well known by a satire which a certain George from Antioch wrote against him.⁸ The same doctor was allowed in the year 510 A.H. (1116 A.C.), to teach the principles of his art in public. The son of that physician, known by the name of Mobarek ben Selama, also distinguished himself by extensive medical acquirements.

The character of Al-Aâmîr, according to the description of Ad-Dahabi, is that of a most wicked person. He had no fixed principles, but acted just as his passions enticed him; and practised all kinds of injustice, impiety, pride, and cruelty without compunction.

In return for the evil which Al-Aâmîr committed, he was doomed by Providence to end his life in a similar way to that of many others who were under his sway. After a reign of thirty years and eight months, Al-Aâmîr, one day as he was taking a ride, was murdered by a party of a sect called the Bâtenites, 524 A.H. (1130 A.C.).⁹ Al-Aâmîr died without children, but left a wife in a state of pregnancy: this caused great agitation among the people, as no Imâm had died hitherto without leaving a male child, to whom he transmitted the imamate by a special declaration.

On the same day his cousin, Abûl Mamun Abd Al-Hamid, surnamed Al-Hafiz (a native of Ascalon), received the oath of fidelity from the people of Cairo as regent, and heir-pre-

⁷ V. Carlyle's *Specimens of Arabian Poetry*, from the earliest period to the extinction of the khaliphate.

⁸ E. Carmoly's *Histoire des Médecins Juifs*, p. 44.

⁹ V. Elmâcin, p. 174 and 286.

sumptive to the throne; and he engaged to act in that capacity till the delivery of Al-Aâmîr's widow: but she, however, brought forth a girl. In mentioning the name of Al-Aâmîr's successor, it may not be uninteresting to state that it was for him that Shirmâh, the Dâlamite, or Musa-an-Nasrâni (Moses the Christian) made the instrument called "the drum of the cholick" (Al-Hafiz being subject to violent attacks of that disease). This he formed out of the seven metals then known, combining them successively at the moments when each of the seven planets reached its point of culmination. It was preserved in the treasury of this dynasty till the accession of Salah-ed-din, who ordered it to be broken.¹⁰

The coin which I here produce bears on the obverse, within three circles, the following Cufic inscriptions:—

1 Area—	عال عليه	Pre-eminence upon him.
Inner circle—	لا اله الا الله	There is no (other) god but God,
	محمد (ر) رسول الله	Mohammad is the apostle of God.
	علي و . . . ا . . .	Ali is the friend of God.
Margin—	محمد (ر) رسول الله	Mohammad is the apostle of God.
	ارسله بالهدى	He has sent him with the direction

¹⁰ Ibn Khallicân, *Biogr. Dict.* translated by Bⁿ de Slane, vol. ii. page 181.

"Al Aâmir beâkheam Allah," which he received on ascending the throne (the word باحكام is here abridged). It also contains the title of امير المؤمنين "The prince of the faithful." The mode of thus inscribing the coins was adopted from Abd-Ar-Rakhman the third, surnamed Nazir-Ledin-Allah.¹²

The marginal inscription, after the words بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم "In the name of God, the most merciful and most compassionate," states that this dinar was struck at Cairo in the year *Eight*.

The name of Al-Kahirah we do not often find on the coins of the Fatimite dynasty; with the exception of the first coin, which was struck by Jawhar, the general of Moezz-ledin-Allah, in the name of his master, on his conquest of Egypt. All other coins of that dynasty were struck either at Old Cairo (which was expressed on the coins by the name of Mazr) or at Alexandria.

This coin was struck in the new mint which Al-Aâmir established in New Cairo, under the administration of his vizir Al-Mamun, in the year 516 A.H., as I have stated before. The coins issued under the Fatimites were distinguished by their full weight and the beauty of their execution; but those issued under Al-Aâmir, in his new mint at New Cairo, appear to have surpassed even those produced under his predecessors. The Cufic characters thereon are most beautifully formed, and are by far superior to the inscriptions we find on other Fatimite coins.

It was in the mint of Al-Aâmir that the dinars especially destined for new year's presents were struck. The custom

¹² Silvestre de Sacy's *Chrestomathie Arabe*, seconde édition, tom. ii. page 295.

of presenting such was also observed by those caliphs of the Fatimite dynasty who preceded Al-Aâmir. The coining of the new year's presents only took place once, after which the custom ceased, and was at length entirely abolished.

Makrizi, in his *Traité des Monnaies*, gives the following account of it as practised under Al-Aâmir:—

"On the day of the new year, every officer received leave from the vizir, and returned to his home. On his arrival he found that the caliph had sent him the present of the new year. The caliph, during the last ten days of the month, Zoo-l-Hheg'geh, gave orders that there should be struck in the mint a certain number of dinars, rubais, and round dirhems. From the newly-coined money, 360 dinars, 63 rubais, and 360 kirats were brought to the vizir: to each of his sons and his brothers 50 pieces of money of each sort were given; to each of the officers of the pen and of the sword was given a sum from 10 dinars, 10 rubais, and 10 kirats, down to 1 dinar, 1 rubai, and 1 kirat. These presents were given to the officers as a token of blessing from the caliph; the whole amount of the sum distributed by the caliph in new year's presents was 3,000 dinars."

Ibn Al-Mamun (whom Silvestre de Sacy believes to be the author surnamed Ahmed ben Ali) states further, that Al-Adjall Al-Mamun, the vizir who succeeded Al-Afdal, sent for the secretary of the department of government finance, and informed him of the sum of money which he (the vizir) intended should be coined into gold pieces, called kharouba, for the purpose of distribution on the Thursday of Lentils, known in the Christian calendar as Maundy Thursday. 20,000 kharoubas were then struck out of gold, to the value of 500 dinars. The vizir then sent to the secretary of the treasury, desiring him to deliver gold to the value of 1,000 dinars to the banker of the mint, the latter being charged with the coining operation. After the 20,000 kharoubas were coined, the vizir, Al-Adjall Al-Mamun, ordered them to be brought to his house, from

whence he sent them to the caliph, who then returned to the vizir out of that money 300 dinars.¹³

In reference to the signification of the word "kharouba," S. de Sacy has clearly shown that it is the same as the Greek *κεράτιον*, and the Arab. *كبريت*; and that the pieces of money distributed on the first day of the year, as well as those which were distributed on Maundy Thursday were the same. The word "kharoub" is the Arabic name of a plant *خرطب* which is generally known as the *Ceratonia Siliqua* "St. John's wood."¹⁴

The most curious circumstance belonging to this coin is the date of its coinage. It is stated thereon that it was struck in the year *Eight*. From the full description on the obverse, as well as on the reverse, there cannot be the least doubt that it was struck in the reign of the caliph Al-Aâmîr; and his having reigned from 495 to 524 A.H. (1101—1130 A.C.), must necessarily lead us to consider the date of the coin as incompletely expressed. My humble opinion, therefore, is to ascribe this coin to the date of 518 A.H. (1124 A.C.) *ثمان عشر وخمس مائة*; and the reason why I do not ascribe it to 498 (*ثمان عشر وأربع مائة*) is, that the coin in question differs in the beauty of its execution, and in the formation of the Cufic letters, from those which had been struck, in the same caliph's reign, in Kous, Ascalon, Tyre, Old Cairo, or Alexandria.

Al-Mamun, the vizir who succeeded Al-Afdal in office, having established (as I have stated before) a new mint at New Cairo, in the year 516 A.H. (1122 A.C.), this coin was

¹³ V. *Traité des Mon.* Mus. de Makrisi, par S. de Sacy, p. 78.

¹⁴ *Notice de quelques Monnaies Arabes, &c.*, pour servir de Supplément au *Traité des Mon.* Mus. de Makrisi, par S. de Sacy, p. 4.

probably issued there, and more pains taken with its execution on account of its being one of the first produced at that mint; and for the same reason, perhaps, the words expressing the date were abridged so as to express only "eight," instead of 518: the Arabic system of numeration, placing the smaller numbers first, and the memorable event of the mint's commencing operations being so far sufficient to record the date of this peculiar coinage as to require no further explanation. And this view receives confirmation, from the circumstance that no coin from that mint has ever been seen, to the best of my belief, of an earlier date.

On closely examining the coin, it will be seen that the margin has been cut in several places, which may also be observed on most of the Cufic coins. The reason is said to be this: it was an ancient custom among the Arab chiefs, who levied tribute from the caravans of merchants or travellers as they passed through their territory, to make the wayfarers cut off a portion from each of the pieces of money which they then had with them, in order to convince themselves of the exact number they possessed.¹⁵

This coin being, from all the researches I have made, a unique specimen, I will state, in conclusion, for the satisfaction of those I have had the honour of addressing, in what manner it came into my possession. I received it, as a present, in the year 1839, from Bakhri Bey, the secretary to the late Ibrahim Pasha, during my visit to Damascus; and therefore I entertain no doubt whatever of its being perfectly genuine.

¹⁵ V. *Mémoire sur les Monnaies d'Égypte*, par M. Samuel Bernard. *Description de l'Égypte*, tom. 16, p. 322.