

Who Was Named on Abbasid Coins? What Did It Mean?¹

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The earliest Islamic gold and silver coins, those of ‘Abd al-Malik, of his Umayyad successors, and of the early years of the Abbasid caliphate, were anonymous.² They were “struck in the name of God,” *bism Allāh duriba*, rather than in the name of an earthly ruler. Muslim officials first began to be named on gold and silver coins in 763AD, thirteen years after the foundation of the Abbasid caliphate. The practice then spread rapidly and widely. In the next half-century almost all silver coins included the names of officials in their inscriptions, and by the end of that time most gold coins also named some official. There followed a brief interval, from al-Ma’mūn’s entry into Baghdad in 819 until his death in 833, during which time anonymity was reinstituted at almost every mint.³ His successor al-Mu’tasim quickly reintroduced the practice of naming someone on the coinage, but on a quite different basis. During the second Abbasid period, from 833 until the Buyids ended the political power of the caliphs in 946, nomenclature on coins and in other media evolved into classical Islamic practice. The object of this paper is to describe the evolution of official nomenclature in general, especially on coins.

The generic explanations, for the occurrence of names of rulers and other officials on coins as propaganda or communication are not very helpful. There is no indication, in any of the many medieval Arabic and Persian political histories and texts on statecraft and administration, that Muslim rulers thought of using coins to address a mass audience, to win popular loyalty, or to communicate to their subjects, although very rarely there are indications that coin inscriptions addressed other rulers. Messages to the Muslims from their rulers were conveyed by proclamations sent from the center to all provincial governors and read out in the mosques on Friday, when all male Muslims were expected to be present. On that day and every Friday thereafter the names of the local hierarchy of rulers, from the caliph down to the city governor, were read in the *khuba*.⁴ The proclamations with their news and interpretations were carried by the *barīd* or caliphal post service at maximum speed. They arrived long before the arrival of coins issued in the capital, while of course no coins reflecting the new situation could be minted locally before the news arrived. By the time people saw the coins, the information on them was old news.

1 This paper is an elaboration of a presentation given at a conference at Hofstra University in 1995, somewhat revised at various times over the years when the conference papers seemed to be on the verge of being published.

2 Officials were usually named on early Islamic copper coins. The discussion in this paper has to do with gold and silver coins only. Before the invention of Islamic coinage in 77H (697AD), the Muslim silver coinage of Iran named various officials, but those coins with images were not regarded as Islamic, although today almost all coins issued by Muslims are included under the rubric “Islamic.”

3 See el-Hibri (1993) for the general course of change, which did not take place everywhere simultaneously. The coins of the northern frontier, governed by the caliph’s son al-‘Abbās, maintained the old style and system until his downfall and execution under al-Mu’tasim in 223 (838), when coinage in that region ceased for several decades.

4 Al-Tabarī (1879-1901) III, 1133-34, (1989), 222-23, describes an example of the emission of such a letter, its reception in a provincial capital, the governor’s retransmission of the letter to his subordinates in the district, and the announcement of the new situation at the subsequent Friday congregation. Although only the date of receipt of the letter is stated, comparison with events of the time suggests that it took about a week or ten days for the letter to get from the Byzantine frontier to Damascus.

Royal nomenclature on coins is, without any doubt, an expression of power and majesty; however this is not sufficient to explain the nomenclature on Abbasid coins. The caliphs were not always named on coins, and it was not only the caliphs who were named. Rather than attempt a general theory for the naming of kings on coins, this discussion will try to discover the principles specifically behind, the selection of Abbasid officials to be named on coins — and to be named on some coin issues but not on others — and how these principles were established and changed during the course of the Abbasid caliphate.

The earliest truly Islamic coins of 697 were anonymous. They named no living persons only God and his Prophet. The precious metal coinage, including gold dinars and silver dirhams, remained anonymous throughout the Umayyad caliphate, during the era of the various Khārijī, Tālibid, and Hāshimī revolutions,⁵ under the first Abbasid caliph Abū'l-Abbās and for the first nine years of the caliphate of al-Mansūr.

The first Islamic Arabic caliphal precious metal coins to name an official were silver dirhams of the mint of al-Rayy dated 145 (762-63), naming al-Mahdī Muhammad b. Amīr al-Mu'minīn,⁶ the son of the caliph al-Mansūr and governor of the province of Khurāsān.⁷ Dirhams with that date and his nomenclature are fairly common, but there are also rare dirhams of the same mint and year which are anonymous.⁸ Copper coins of al-Rayy with that date also name him, but some are without the title al-Mahdī while others have it.⁹ The numismatic evidence therefore demonstrates that it was during the course of that year that Muhammad was first allowed officially and publicly to call himself al-Mahdī. In that same year, his father, the caliph Abū Ja'far Abd Allāh, began to call himself al-Mansūr which means “He Who is Given Victory,” as a consequence of his hard-won victory over the 'Alids Muhammad and Ibrahim, the sons of 'Abd Allāh in Dhu'l-Qa'da 145 (January 863).¹⁰ In that way al-Mansūr became the first generally recognized caliph to be officially known by a *laqab* or title, although both his 'Alid enemies, who of course regarded themselves and were regarded by their adherents as caliphs, had used official *laqabs* evidently being the first Muslims to do so. The adoption of *laqabs* by al-Mansūr and his son were likely responses to the *laqabs* of the 'Alids.¹¹

The coincidence in time of these events — al-Mansūr's victory over the 'Alids, the first official adoption of *laqabs*, the initiation of dirham minting at al-Rayy, and the first naming of an Abbasid official on Islamic precious metal coins — leaves no doubt that the new coins and their new inscription were in some way part of the celebration of the victory; but if publicizing the new title was the unique motive, there are several puzzling questions that arise. al-Mahdī in the first year was named only at al-Rayy, and thereafter at a small number of mints mostly in Khurāsān. The mints of most other cities in the caliphate did not use his name. If al-Mahdī was named on coins to publicize his new *laqab*, why was he not named everywhere? And, if celebration of the victory by publication of the new *laqab* was the motive, why

5 The single exception of the revolutionary period is the dirhams of al-Kirmanī, a rebel in Khurāsān in 745, who is named in the margin of Marw dirhams dated 127. (Artuk 1982, 797-98) and 128. (Wurtzel 1978, 178-79 and number 30). He is therefore the first person to be named on Islamic precious metal coinage, but there is no evidence that his innovation was widely known or had any effect on later practice. The dirhams are extremely rare.

6 Lane-Poole (1889), 43 no. 450 = Miles (1938), no. 47B. The mint of Rayy had not issued dirhams since the time of 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'āwiya, sixteen years earlier, but had issued copper coins frequently.

7 For all the ramifications of al-Mansūr's and al-Mahdī's adoption of titles, see now Bates (2003). Muhammad had been governor since 141 (al-Tabarī (1879-1901) III, 133-34, 134-35, 136; al-Tabarī (1995), 69, 70, 72; al-Jahshiyari (1938), 127). al-Tabarī's notice, in his heading for the account of the appointment, that Muhammad was already *walī al-'ahd*, or sworn successor, is incorrect. He does not provide a report to support the assertion, nor give any other indication that Muhammad was made sworn successor, until 147 when he was put in place of the caliph's cousin 'Isā (al-Tabarī (1879-1901) III, 329-52; al-Tabarī (1990), 15-39; al-Jahshiyari (1938), 126-27), although al-Mansūr may earlier have wished to make him official successor. Muhammad was about 15 when he was appointed governor and 19 when the dirhams with his name appeared (see H. Kennedy, “al-Mahdī,” *EI2*). The real provincial administrator was his secretary Abū 'Ubayd Allāh b. Mu'āwiya, and a series of experienced officers commanded his army.

8 Known anonymous dirhams comprise one listed by Miles (1938), no. 47A; one in the collection of Tübingen University, AE8 F5; and one in a London private collection.

9 Without the title, and naming Salm b. Qutayba as Muhammad's executive officer, there is Miles (1938), no. 47D, which was unique when published but has since been confirmed by an excellent example in the British Museum, 1979.9.25.1. The only published coin that adds the title to Muhammad's previous nomenclature, and without Salm's name, or any other executive, is in the Egyptian National Library collection: Miles (1938), no. 47C = Nicol *et al.* (1982), no. 1550.

10 al-Mas'ūdī (1894), 341, states explicitly that Abū Ja'far took his *laqab* at that time and for that reason. The numismatic evidence for his son's use of his own title supports al-Mas'ūdī's statement, as do letters quoted by al-Tabarī (1879-1901) III, 208, 209, and 338, showing Abū Ja'far first without and then with his title. Modern discussions of this point include Lewis (1968); Omar (1976); Madelung, “al-Mahdī,” *EI2*; Zaman (1990); Bacharach (1993); Bates (2003).

11 Bates (2003), 284-85 *et passim*; Arjomand (1996), 493.

was al-Mansūr himself not named instead of al-Mahdī, or with him on the same coins, or on coins of other provinces? In fact, his title al-Mansūr is never used on coins.

The important aspect of this innovation for the present purpose is that the coins with al-Mahdī's name on them were issued only in his territories, at the mints al-Rayy from 145 to 155, Tabaristān in 146-48, and Kirmān, 146, as well as in Arrān and Irmīniyya, 152-55. Although the innovation of putting his name on dirhams began without any doubt as part of the public display of his new title, as part of the honor paid to him on the occasion, once the barrier against the use of names on dirhams was broken, other provincial authorities followed him in their territories. During the remainder of the first Abbasid era, that is in the reigns of al-Mahdī, al-Hādī, al-Rashīd, al-Amīn, and the first years of al-Ma'mūn, there are hundreds of names on dinars and dirhams, including the caliphs, their sons and successors, other members of the Abbasid family, governors from other powerful families, governors of no particular family at all, down to persons whose identity is otherwise unrecorded in history.

We can therefore hypothesize that in the first Abbasid era, from 145 (763) to the end of the reign of al-Ma'mūn, persons are named on coins by virtue of their territorial authority over the mints where the coins were issued. In support of this thesis, I offer the following observations pending a full study of the entire coinage.

During those reigns, at any one moment in time, the coinage was never uniform: at each mint one finds a different combination of names.

No one person was ever named on all the coinage, not even the caliph, who in fact is named perhaps half the time at best.

Although no one has yet done a prosopography of all the persons named, the vast majority of them have been identified as governors who are recorded as such in the histories of the period.

It is true that the sons and successors of the caliphs are among those named, but they are named only on the issues of territories where they were active or nominal governor. They are named on those coins because they were governors of those places, not because they were sons of the caliph or successors to the caliphate.

For example, as we have seen, al-Mahdī during his father's lifetime was named at first only on the coins of his own provinces Jibāl and Khurāsān, on dirhams, minted only at his capital, al-Rayy, starting in 145, and on coppers from Rayy and other cities in his provinces. Seven years later, from 152 to 155, his name appears also on the dirhams of Armenia and Arran. Since his name appears nowhere else, we are justified in concluding that al-Mahdī's authority was extended to the Caucasian frontier in those years.

The complex coinage of Hārūn al-Rashīd's reign provides numerous examples of the principle of territorial authority as an explanation of the names on coins, as a base for historical evidence, and in some instances as an indication of coin attribution. Early in Hārūn's reign, his brother 'Ubayd Allāh is named on the dirhams of Armenia dated from 172 to 174 (788-91). Although he has the *nasab* "son of the Commander of the Believers," he is not named as "heir to the caliphate," as is often stated when that *nasab* is used for someone on the coinage, because he was surely not indicated or even envisaged as a successor. He is named on the coins because he was appointed governor of the province in 172;¹² he is named as "son of the Commander of the Believers" as was his right in any official context, because he was a son of the caliph al-Mahdī.

Hārūn's son al-Amīn is frequently named on dirhams, most often with Ja'far, who was also wazir for Hārūn himself; however he is only named in some provinces over some spans of time (the pattern remains to be collated). His name is not on the coins because he was Hārūn's first sworn successor (*walī al-ʿahd*), nor merely because he also had the *nasab* "son of the Commander of the Believers," but because he was nominal governor of the provinces where the dirhams were struck. For example, al-Tabarī records that al-Amīn was appointed governor of Baghdad and "the two Iraqs" when his father went away to live at al-Rafīqa.¹³ There are indeed common dirhams of this period of Madīnat al-Salām (the location of the Baghdad mint) with the nomenclature "al-Amir al-Amin Muhammad b. Amir al-Mu'minin," but they

12 al-Tabarī (1879-1901) III, 607. See Nicol (1979), 101; Bacharach (1993), 109.

13 al-Tabarī (1879-1901) III, 646.

first appear with the date 179,¹⁴ whereas al-Tabarī's account puts the appointment in 180 (796-97). The dirham type, which also has the name Ja'far (b. Yaya al-Barmakī) and terminates in 186, just before the latter's arrest and execution, practically forces the redating of al-Amin's appointment to 179, and therefore may also imply that Harun had already decided to abandon Baghdad in that year, even if he had not yet selected al-Rafiqa as his new residence. It also happens that 179 is the first year in which Harun is not named on the dirhams of Baghdad, as well as the first year in his reign that the dirhams of that city become quite common instead of very rare, suggesting that the new administration took up a different minting policy. It is reported that Ja'far was given control of the mints, specifically those of Madīnat al-Salām and al-Muhammadiyya (al-Rayy, near modern Tehran), sometime after Rajab 178.¹⁵ It is plausible that Ja'far was given control of the mints of Baghdad and Rayy at the same moment that he and al-Amīn were put in charge of the two cities, and for the same reason: because al-Rashīd had decided to make his capital elsewhere and treat the two Iraqs like other provinces.

The coinage of al-Ma'mūn as second successor to al-Rashīd is much scantier and less widely distributed. The only common series with his name is from the mint of Balkh. Silver dirham coinage begins there for the first time since the Abbasid revolution in 181 (797-98).¹⁶ They have al-Amīn's name and titles, but unlike the coins of Baghdad those of Balkh add *walī 'ahd al-muslimīn*, "Recipient of the Oath of the Muslims" (indicating his designation as first successor to the caliphate) which seldom if ever occurs at Baghdad; they do not have Ja'far's name. Such dirhams were struck at Balkh in the years 181-84. Starting in 185, and until 189, the coins have the name and titles of al-Ma'mūn, identifying him as *walī walī 'ahd al-muslimīn*, a formula otherwise unrecorded, indicating his position as successor to al-Amīn. In 190 the coins have only the name of 'Alī b. 'Īsā b. Māhān, the actual governor in the city. The textual sources suggest a somewhat different chronology: al-Ma'mūn was made second successor in 182 or 183, and at the same time was made governor of Khurāsān.¹⁷ No coin evidence seems to resolve the uncertainty in the date of al-Ma'mūn's receipt of the oath as successor, but the Balkh dirhams indicate that al-Ma'mūn was not made governor until 184, when 'Alī b. 'Īsā b. Māhān was recalled to Baghdad and then sent back as governor on al-Ma'mūn's behalf. 'Alī seems to have instituted minting in al-Ma'mūn's name toward the end of 184 or the beginning of 185 (around January 801).¹⁸ At Marw, the change took another year: al-Amin is named throughout 185, and al-Ma'mūn on a very few dirhams from 186 only, followed by a period in which no dirhams were issued. Otherwise in Hārūn's reign, al-Ma'mūn is named only on a few extremely rare and problematic dirhams of Damascus and al-Rāfiqa.

The sons and successors of the caliphs, in this first period are named on coins only to the extent that they had territorial authority, not as an honor to their rank, nor to publicize their status as successor. The sons, and all other persons named on coins, used what honorific titles they may have had, but they were not named because they had those titles. It remains a question why the caliphs are named at some mints some of the time and not uniformly everywhere. One might suggest, in fact, that the caliph is named only on the coins of the mints of provinces that he controlled more or less directly, and is not named at mints under the authority of members of his family or great magnates of the realm, such as the Barmakids or the Muhallabids of North Africa. However, the entire matter still awaits a careful study.

The reign of al-Ma'mūn was a turning point in many respects: Kennedy calls it the dividing reign between the first and second Abbasid caliphates, and others agree.¹⁹ This is certainly true in monetary history: al-Ma'mūn changed the coinage in many respects, as described by el-Hibri.²⁰ Two of these several changes are important for nomenclature. al-Ma'mūn abolished the use of officials' names on the precious metal coinage, both gold dinars and silver dirhams. Neither the caliph nor anyone else was named on his reformed coinage. Secondly, al-Ma'mūn made the precious metal coinage of the entire caliphate uniform. Dinars and dirhams were henceforth alike in their inscriptions, and the coins

14 Dirhams with identical inscriptions, plus the name of the local governor, appear at al-Muhammadiyya and Kufa in the same year 179.

15 al-Jahshiyārī (1938), 204; al-Maqrīzī (1939), 47-48.

16 For the issues of Balkh in Harun's reign, see Schwarz (2002), nos. 478-530.

17 al-Tabarī (1879-1901) III, 647, puts the designation as successor in 182, but III, 652, dates it 183. See Bosworth, notes to al-Tabarī (1989), 167, 180, for citations of other texts and modern discussions of the problem.

18 al-Tabarī (1879-1901) III, 648-49, narrates the latter episode among the events of 183, but Bosworth, in his comments on al-Tabarī (1989), 171-72, notes that the historian Hamza al-Ifahānī, 165, puts Ali's recall in Jumada I, 184 (June 800). If that was the date he left Khurāsān, and his travel was leisurely, he would have been back in Baghdad toward the end of 184.

19 Kennedy (1981), 174, as well as the entire chapter "Ma'mūn: An Age of Transition," 164-75; Sourdel (1999), 93-163.

20 El-Hibri (1993), 58-83.

of all mints under his control had the same inscriptions in the same arrangement. By the end of his reign, with the exception of mints in the northern Caucasus and Ifriqiya which had not been brought into line,²¹ the caliphate had gold and silver coinage that was completely uniform and completely anonymous.

A uniform coinage was certainly advantageous, and there are arguments to be made for anonymous coinage, but fortunately for Islamic numismatists and historians, the latter feature did not last long. Almost immediately after al-Ma'mūn's death, the coinage again bore the name of the caliph al-Mu'tasim. From the second era of the Abbasid caliphate, until the Buyid takeover, only thirty-three men are named on the coins of the mints directly controlled by the center. Who were they? Why were they named?²²

First are the caliphs. al-Ma'mūn's successor al-Mu'tasim had his own name placed on all dinars and dirhams, always in the same location below the reverse center inscription, and written in the same way, al-Mu'tasim billāh. All subsequent caliphs did the same: it became established practice within the Abbasid caliphate that the caliph was to be named on all dinars and dirhams, always in the same place on the coin, and always with the same standard nomenclature.

At first sight it may seem strange that he was named on the reverse: why would he not name himself on the face of the coin, the obverse? But in fact his position is the top rank on the coins for living human beings, after God who is on the obverse, and the Prophet, who is named in the central field of the reverse. The caliph is named below, after, the Prophet. It also happens that there was an appropriate space there. Because in this new system, the caliph was *always* named, no matter who else was named with him. It became politically important to name him: the omission of the caliph's name or the naming of a different caliph, was an act of rebellion.

It was not long before the privilege of being named on the coins was extended to certain high-ranking members of court. The first such to be named was a little boy of three who was also the chosen successor to the caliphate, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Mu'tazz. He was named on the coins of al-Mutawakkil from 235 to the caliph's death in 247 (850-61). He was the first of eleven Abbasid boys and men to be named on the coins in addition to the caliph from the time of al-Mu'tasim until the arrival of the Buyids.

In contrast to the practice of the first caliphate, these successors (with the exception of some years in the caliphate of al-Mu'tamid) were named on all the coins of all mints, not just on mints in certain provinces. The naming of the successors is interesting, because it brings to our attention an office or position that is not explicitly described in the texts, although there are allusions to it. There are two kinds of successors named on the coins. One group are the *walī al-'ahd*, "recipients of the oath," or we might say sworn successors. After al-Ma'mūn, in contrast to previous practice, it was rare to swear allegiance to a future caliph (al-Ma'mūn himself did not have a *walī al-'ahd* after the death of the 'Alid al-Ridā). While every one of the first caliphs had sworn successors, usually more than one, only two caliphs in the second period had oaths sworn to their nominees as successor, al-Mutawakkil and al-Mu'tamid. It is interesting that the same person, 'Ubayd Allāh b. Yahyā b. Khāqān, was wazir in both instances, and one may suspect that these exceptions represent his attempt to revive the older practice. These two caliphs each nominated three *walī al-'ahds*, and of these six only four are named on the coins.

The rest of the sons named on the coins are not recorded to have been the recipients of an oath. There are 10 of these, three of whom were also named subsequently as *walī al-'ahd*. How can we tell the two categories apart? All *walī al-'ahds* appointed from Harun's time onward received a caliphal title simultaneously with their oath. The *walī al-'ahds* are named by their title, while the merely nominated successors do not have one and are named as Fulān or Abū Fulān, the son of the *amir al-mu'minin*. The creation of a *walī al-'ahd* seems to have been a major event of a caliph's reign that is always noted by the historians. The sons named on coins with a title are all named in the histories as *walī al-'ahd*; there is no reason to believe any *walī al-'ahd* who was named somehow failed to make the history books. The sons named on the coins are nearly all mentioned by al-Tabarī or another historian as having a special status, so it seems unlikely that they might have been made *walī al-'ahd* without anyone noticing. Finally, and clinching the argument in my opinion, two of

21 The northern frontier against the Khazars to the north and the Romans in Anatolia, was governed by al-Ma'mūn's son al-'Abbās from 213 (828) until his arrest and execution for conspiracy against al-Mu'tasim in 224 (839). Evidently al-'Abbās was powerful enough to ignore his father's general reform. Dirhams of traditional design and workmanship continued to be minted until his execution, often which minting in those provinces simply ceased for several decades.

22 The subsequent discussion summarizes the results of a work in progress by the present author, provisionally named "The Expression of Nobility."

those named without a title had poetry written for them, congratulating them and their father on their promotion and urging their father to make them *wali al-‘ahd*, thereby showing that they were not yet the recipients of the oath, and at the same time confirming that their status was a sort of preliminary selection as successor.

How do we know that the sons named without a title were successors? In fact, there is no explicit evidence proving that they were; and yet, how are we to understand the naming of these sons continuously from some date in their father’s reign, on all the coinage of the caliphate, if they were not intended as his successor? Three of them are designated on the coins first for some time by their name without a title and then by a title replacing their name, indicating that being named on the coins could be in some cases preliminary to receipt of the oath and becoming *wali al-‘ahd*.

The status of these sons seems to have been known as *imra*, the state of being an amir. They served as representatives of their fathers on official occasions and were made nominal governors of prestigious but secure provinces like the Hijaz. Nevertheless, many of those named in this way are quite obscure. Most interestingly, out of the eleven sons named as successor, only one, al-Mu‘tadid, actually succeeded directly as caliph, and he against the will of his predecessor. Some of the others succeeded later after an intervening reign, while yet others disappear from history, barely having entered it.

Why then did the caliphs bother to single out successors? The answer is that nearly all these sons can be shown to be the wards or proteges of powerful figures in the court, wazirs or warlords. This is also true of the successors named in the first period of the caliphate, successors such as Harun al-Rashid, al-Amin, and al-Ma‘mūn. The prosopography of these designated successors, who can be securely identified only from the numismatic evidence, provides in fact a key to the internal political struggles within the Abbasid court in the ninth century. One other important point: some caliphs in the second period named no successor. These in general were the stronger more independent caliphs, who did not have to cater to the demands of a dominant figure in their court.

Outside the Abbasid family, the first group in chronological order to be named were certain wazirs: a total of three in all. These were: Sā‘id b. Makhlad, wazir for al-Muwaffaq and al-Mu‘taid, who is named with the title *Dhu’l-Wizāratayn* from 270 to 272 (883-85); al-Qāsim b. ‘Ubayd Allāh, wazir for al-Mu‘taid and then for al-Muktafi, named with the latter for a few months in the year 291 (904), the year in which he died, using the title *Wali al-Dawla* (al-Qasim was the first person to have a title compounded with al-Dawla); and al-Husayn b. al-Qāsim, son of the latter, wazir for al-Muqtadir, who was named for a few months in 320 (932) with the title *‘Amīd al-Dawla*.

These three wazirs, the only ones to be named on coins, were also the only wazirs in this second period to have titles. They also all had extraordinary civil and military powers, unlike most other wazirs. In their combined powers and in their titles, they are the precursors of the amīrs al-umarā’, who also held both civil and military power, but who came from the military establishment rather than from the civil service.

This leads us to consider these amīrs al-umara’, the Commanders of Commanders, who are the last main group named on the coins of the second caliphal period. The first *amir al-umara’* was appointed in 324 (936). It was the first time that authority over the civil service had been put into the hands of a military figure in the hope that concentration of power would make it possible to raise enough money to pay the troops and deal with other problems. From that date, within the period of the present study,²³ there were six different amīrs al-umara’: the first was Ibn Rā‘iq, followed by Bajkam, Kurānkij, Ibn Rā‘iq returning, Nāsir al-Dawla the Hamdanid, al-Muzaffār Abu’l-Wafā’ Tūzūn, and Mu‘izz al-Dawla the Buyid. Mu‘izz al-Dawla had successors from his own family as *amir al-umara’*, but that period will not be considered here.

Of these six, only four, Bajkam, Nasir al-Dawla, Tūzūn, and Mu‘izz al-Dawla, were named on coins. What distinguished them from the others? As with the wazirs, there is a correlation with titles: those who had titles were named on coins, and those who were not named on coins didn’t have titles. On a more practical level, the amīrs al-umara’ who were named were those who were appointed willingly by the caliph and were regarded as his allies. The others forced the caliph to appoint them and obtained the office and the authority, but not the various honors including titles and numismatic nomenclature.

Before concluding, we can note two others named on coins, whose only commonalty is that both were brothers of amīrs al-umara: one is the Hamdanid Sayf al-Dawla, who got his title and the right to be named on coins with his

23 The office of *amir al-umara’* continued to exist in the Buyid era, held by the family member ruling in Baghdad.

brother for winning a famous victory for the caliph; the other is 'Imād al-Dawla, the head of the Buyid family, who was given the same rights and privileges as his brother Mu'izz al-Dawla, as well as Rukn al-Dawla who, however, was not named on the central coinage.

In summary, 33 people were named on coins at Baghdad and elsewhere under the control of the caliphs in the second Abbasid century. Of these, twenty-four were members of the Abbasid family, named as caliph, as sworn successor, as designated successor, or in more than one capacity. Nine other persons were named on coins of the central authorities: three wazirs and six warlords.

The non-Abbasids named on coins all had an honorific title, which almost no one else in this period possessed. In fact, the correlation between possession of an honorific title and being named on coins is almost 100% in both directions. They were also distinguished in other ways: they were given the right to be addressed by the caliph and by others in the caliph's presence by their *kunya*, "Abū (something)," "father of (someone)." The receipt of this honor was called *takniya* and it was rarely given, because only peers addressed one another by their *kunyas*: no one was allowed to call the caliph by his *kunya* or was so addressed by him, or even allowed to be so addressed in his presence, except by special permission. The importance of the *kunya* increased in this period through the ninth and tenth centuries to the point that all the sons of caliphs named on the coins in the tenth century are designated by their *kunya*, while all those named previously were designated by their *ism*. All the warlords named in the tenth century use both their title and their *kunya*. This is why the Hamdanids and Buyids are designated on coins as, for example, Nāsir al-Dawla Abū Muhammad or 'Imād al-Dawla Abū'l-Hasan: the *kunya* is as much an honor as the honorific title. Very rarely the *ism* was used along with the *kunya*, but the *ism* ceased to be used alone.

A frequent additional honor or perhaps a consistent honor for those given a title and the *kunya* was the receipt of food and drink sent by the caliph, comestibles that ostensibly came from the caliph's table. In an example from slightly outside the chronological limit of this study, but too vivid to omit, 'Adud al-Dawla received from the caliph a crystal pitcher almost, but not entirely, full of apple cider, to give the impression that a little had been drunk from it by the caliph himself. Of course a standard feature of any sort of appointment at the time was the bestowal of robes of honor. I have not attempted to collect material to show it, but presumably the robes given to magnates named on coins were more numerous and gorgeous than any others, except those of the caliphs themselves.

In all these ways, by being given an honorific title which normally only caliphs and future caliphs had; by being named on coins, as only caliphs and their successors could be after the changes put into effect by al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'tasim; by being addressed by their *kunya* as if they were the social equals of caliphs, and by dining at a facsimile of the caliph's table, these magnates were symbolically made equals, peers, virtual members of the caliph's family: they were **ennobled**, a process known as *tashrīf*.

None of those named on coins, not even the Hamdanids or Buyids, simply began to put his name on coins: all received the right to do so from the caliph along with other honors. The inscription of one's name on the coinage under the control of the central authorities was not a political weapon that a warlord could freely wield at choice, as it is sometimes depicted. The process of ennoblement, including the right to be named on coins, remained largely a prerogative of the caliph in the central regions even in the Buyid and Seljuq era, although admittedly the caliph was often constrained to act. It was because the right to be named on coins was so strictly controlled in the second Abbasid century that it became an indicator of high rank, power, and, as time went on, independent political authority.

The names discussed here are those put on the coins by the central authorities, and were used in all provinces. As we all know, in addition to the names that appeared on all coins, certain provincial governors also were named on coins of their province only: famous ones like the Tulunids and Samanids, and less remembered figures like Dhu'l-Sayfayn and Muflī al-Yūsufi. There seems to be absolutely no information in any medieval text about this: we do not know if the names were put on the coins with the permission of the central government, or unilaterally by the governors; nor can we say whether the naming of a provincial governor was regarded as an assertion of independence or merely as an honor for an especially powerful warlord. Before we can say more, it is necessary to undertake a comparative study of the historical circumstances in which each of the governors began to be named. So far they have only been studied one by one.

The “right of *sikka*” needs to be studied as an evolving concept, not one that was defined from the beginning as an intrinsic part of Muslim political thought.²⁴ In such a study, the second Abbasid caliphate will have an important place. If the haphazard nomenclature of the first Abbasid period had continued, when almost any official could be named on coins, while the caliph himself was mentioned less than half the time, the right of *sikka* would not have evolved. If al-Ma’mūn’s institution of anonymity had endured, no one would have been named on Islamic coins, and the right of *sikka* would not have evolved. It was al-Mu’tasim’s reintroduction of his own personal title in a standard form on al-Ma’mūn’s standard coin-type, and the subsequent insistence on the caliph’s right to be named on all coinage struck under his jurisdiction, that created the right of *sikka* and enabled it to be extended to the secular dynasts of later Islamic history.

Illustrations



al-Rayy 145 dirham, anonymous.
Tübingen²⁵ AE8 F5



al-Rayy 145 dirham, ordered by al-Mahdī Muhammad
b. Amīr al-Mu'minīn. ANS²⁶ 1958.222.10



Irmīniyya 153 dirham, ordered by al-Mahdī Muhammad
b. Amīr al-Mu'minīn, naming Bakkār (as deputy in Armenia
for al-Mahdī). ANS 1921.53.14



Madīnat al-Salām 179 dirham, ordered by al-Amīr al-Amīn
Muhammad b. Amīr al-Mu'minīn, naming Ja'far (as deputy
in Baghdad for al-Amīn). ANS 1917.216.170



Dimashq 185 dirham, ordered by al-Amīr al-Ma'mūn
'Abd Allāh b. Amīr al-Mu'minīn, naming Ja'far (as governor and
deputy for Damascus). ANS 1972.29.660



Samarqand 202 dirham, naming al-Ma'mūn as caliph for
God, ordered by al-Amīr al-Ridā walī 'ahd al-muslimīn
'Alī b. Mūsā b. 'Alī b. Abī Tālib (governor of al-Mashriq),
naming Dhu'l-Riyāsatayn (deputy in al-Mashriq for al-Ridā).
ANS 1917.215.73

24 Meanwhile, there is a clear discussion by Bacharach (1986), 396-400. One may add that the phrase “right of *sikka*” does not exist in the medieval texts; it seems to be an invention of modern authors. al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Tiqaqa, quoted at length by Bacharach, indicate that the privilege of being named on the coins was a right of the caliph. Subordinate rulers did not assert their own “right of *sikka*” by naming themselves along with the caliph, but by omitting the caliph’s name which would violate the caliph’s privilege and identify themselves as rebels. As the caliphate faded away, however, the caliphal privilege passed to the sultans and shahs, who took an extremely dim view of the replacement of their names within their realms by anyone else. It may be that there are discussions of the issue by post-medieval Muslim authors.

25 Forschungsstelle für islamische Numismatik, Orientalisches Seminar der Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, Germany.

26 American Numismatic Society, New York.



Madīnat al-Salām 206 dirham, anonymous.
ANS 0000.999.3422



Madīnat al-Salām 222 dīnār, al-Mu'tasim billāh.
ANS 1071.49.158



Dabīl 241 dīnār, al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh, Abū 'Abd Allāh.
ANS 1968.216.1



Surra man ra'ā 255 dirham, al-Mu'tazz billāh Amīr al-Mu'minīn,
'Abd Allāh b. Amīr al-Mu'minīn. ANS 1917.215.383



Surra man ra'ā 270 dirham, al-Mu'tamid 'alā Allāh, al-Mufawwi
ilā Allāh, Dhu'l-Wizāratayn. ANS 1972.79.554



Madīnat al-Salām 330 dirham, al-Muttaqī lillāh, Abū Mansūr
b. Amīr al-Mu'minīn, Nāsir al-Dawla Abū Muhammad.
ANS 1971.316.196



Madīnat al-Salām 333 dirham, al-Mustakfi billāh al-Khalifa,
al-Muzaffar Abū'l-Wafā'. ANS 1917.215.381



Madīnat al-Salām 334 dīnār, al-Mutī' lillāh, Mu'izz al-Dawla,
'Imād al-Dawla. ANS 1972.288.99

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