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Short Communication

A Standing Caliph Dinar Dated 73 AH: New Evidence for the Beginning of the Series

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Abstract

During the reign of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (65–86 AH/685–705 AD), the Umayyad state experienced significant political, economic, and religious changes that affected its institutions and administration. Among the most important developments was the transformation of Islamic coinage during the early stages of monetary reform. Coins played a central role in these changes, serving not only as a medium of economic exchange but also as a means of expressing caliphal authority and sovereignty, as well as the political and religious identity of the state.

Introduction

The Standing Caliph type was one of the most important coin issues of this period. It marked a significant stage in the development of Islamic coinage and the gradual transition from imitations of Byzantine types to coins bearing images and inscriptions that reflected the political and religious identity of the Umayyad state. The introduction and dating of this type have attracted considerable attention among scholars of Islamic numismatics, particularly in light of the known dated specimens and the historical accounts concerning Umayyad–Byzantine relations and the circumstances of ʿAbd al-Malik's monetary reforms [1].

Islamic coins continue to provide valuable evidence for the study of Islamic history and civilization. Newly discovered coin hoards and individual finds often reveal archaeological and historical evidence that may offer previously unknown information. Such discoveries are particularly important when they include rare or unique specimens with no known parallels in museums or private collections. Their study contributes to Islamic numismatics and helps document contemporary historical events and support related historical accounts Plate 1.



Plate 1: A Standing Caliph dinar dated 73 AH, preserved in the collection of Yahya Jaʿfar, Dubai. Weight: 4.35 g; diameter: 19 mm.

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In this context, a previously unknown Standing Caliph dinar dated 73 AH has recently come to light. The coin is preserved in the collection of Mr. Yahya Jaʿfar in UAE (Plate 1, Figs. 1–2, weight: 4.35 g; diameter: 19 mm). Its significance lies in the fact that, according to the evidence presented in this study, it is the earliest known dated specimen of the series. Before its discovery, the earliest known specimen was dated 74 AH and was published by the American numismatist George C. Miles in 1967 [2].

The Standing Caliph dinar series, (dated 74 [3], 75 [4], 76 [5], 77 [6] AH) has attracted considerable scholarly interest because of the questions its dates and varieties raise concerning the beginnings of Islamic monetary reform and the political and religious changes that took place during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān.

This study publishes and examines the dinar dated 73 AH from the collection of Mr. Yahya Jaʿfar in UAE, comparing it with the previously known specimens of the Standing Caliph type. The coin provides new numismatic evidence suggesting that the issue of this type began in 73 AH/692 AD, rather than in 74 AH, the date of the earliest previously known and published specimens. Its significance is further strengthened by the fact that its date corresponds to the period following the death of ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (17 Jumādā II, 73 AH / 2 November 692 AD) [7] and the consolidation of the caliphate under ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān.

The dinar was carefully examined through visual inspection and chemical analysis, which confirmed its authenticity. A detailed comparison was also conducted between the dinar dated 73 AH and the previously known Standing Caliph dinars. The comparison reveals close similarities in the depiction of the caliph, his standing posture, the details of his attire, and the Arabic inscriptions, with only minor variations in certain decorative elements of his clothing Figure 1.



Figure 1: Line drawing of the reverse inscriptions of the dinar dated 73 AH, highlighting the minting date.

These similarities do not exclude variations across the different years of issue. The dinars dated 74–77 AH, as well as the newly identified dinar dated 73 AH, display variations in certain elements from one year to another. These differences can be understood in light of the production of new dies and the work of different die engravers, who maintained the general representation of the caliph, his appearance, and his posture, while introducing variations in the execution of details and Arabic inscriptions [8].

The importance of the dinar dated 73 AH is not limited to extending the known chronological sequence of the Standing Caliph dinar series. It also provides an opportunity to reassess the historical accounts concerning the circumstances surrounding the introduction of this type. This study argues that the date is consistent with its interpretation of Arabic and Byzantine historical sources, which associate the introduction of the type with the period following the death of Ibn al-Zubayr and the consolidation of the caliphate under ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān in 73 AH/692 AD, a period referred to in some historical accounts as the "Year of Unity" (ʿĀm al-Jamāʿa) [9]. This was followed by the dispatch of new gold dinars to the Byzantine emperor Justinian II (685–695 AD) as part of the annual tribute paid at the end of the year [10].

The study suggests that the new gold coins rejected by the Byzantine emperor Justinian II, according to the account of Theophanes, were Standing Caliph dinars rather than imitations of the Byzantine coinage of Heraclius and his two sons, commonly known as the Shahāda type. Theophanes described these coins as a new type that had not been minted before [11], a description consistent with the changes introduced by ʿAbd al-Malik ibn

Marwān to the images Figure 2, inscriptions, and symbols appearing on gold dinars. Furthermore, a comparison between the account of Theophanes and the text attributed to Anastasius of Sinai indicates that the cross represented a Roman symbol whose continued appearance on their coins the Arabs rejected because of its association with the Christian religious identity of the Byzantine Empire, as well as its established place in the design of the circulating gold dinar [12]. Accordingly, the removal of the cross from the Standing Caliph type was not merely a change in design but can also be understood within the broader context of the political and religious developments that shaped Umayyad–Byzantine relations [13].



Figure 2: Detail showing the minting date.

On this basis, it is likely that the production of Standing Caliph dinars and copper fulūs began around the same time, during the period of political reunification following the death of Ibn al-Zubayr in 73 AH. Both denominations present a complete representation of the caliph, together with the symbols and titles of his authority. The study also places this date within a broader development involving the appearance of Arab rulers' portraits on Umayyad coinage. The image of ʿAbd al-Malik appeared on gold dinars and copper fulūs, while the portrait of his brother, Bishr ibn Marwān, appeared on Arab-Sasanian silver dirhams struck in Basra in 73 AH and subsequently in Kufa [14].

These images may be interpreted as evidence of a policy adopted by the Umayyad state to use coinage as a means of political communication and to restore the authority and prestige of the Umayyad caliphate throughout its territories. This policy is reflected in the Standing Caliph dinars, in the copper fulūs of the same type struck in more than eighteen cities across Syria, and in the portrait dirhams of Bishr ibn Marwān issued in Iraq [15].

Conclusion

Thus, the significance of the dinar dated 73 AH extends beyond its addition to the known specimens of the Standing Caliph type. It provides important numismatic evidence that allows us to reconsider the date of the first issue of this type and to better understand the political and religious circumstances surrounding its introduction. The coin also offers an opportunity to reassess the historical accounts concerning the monetary reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, particularly those relating to Umayyad–Byzantine relations. This discovery therefore makes an important contribution to the study of early Umayyad coinage and highlights the value of new numismatic evidence in developing a more complete understanding of the evolution of Islamic coinage during this significant period of Umayyad history.

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2. Miles (1967) The Earliest Arab Gold Coinage, no. 14; Pervin T. Nasir, *Rare Coins in the National Museum of Pakistan* (Karachi: National Museum of Pakistan, 1997), no. 55.

3. The dinar is preserved in the National Museum of Pakistan (NM 1957.1036; diameter: 18.7 mm; weight: 4.39 g). See Miles, "The Earliest Arab Gold Coinage," 212, no. 14, pl. XLVI, fig. 2; John Walker, *A Catalogue of Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum,* vol. 2, *Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umaiyad Coins* (London: British Museum, 1956), vi, xxxi, lv, pl. XLVI, fig. 2.

4. Two specimens of dinars dated 75AH are known. The first is preserved in the American Numismatic Society, Robert W. Morris Collection (diameter: 21 mm; weight: 4.46 g). See Miles, "The Earliest Arab Gold Coinage," 212, no. 15, pl. XLVI, fig. 3, and pl. XLVII, fig. 10 (enlarged). The second is preserved in the collection of Dr. Nayef Al-Qassous in Jordan. See Nayef Al-Qassous, *Umayyad Coinage in Bilād al-Shām* (Amman, 1996), 48, pl. 22.

5. The dinar is preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (diameter: 20 mm; weight: 4.48 g). See W. Tiesenhausen, *Monnaies des khalifes orientaux* (St. Petersburg, 1873), no. 62; Henri Lavoix, *Catalogue des monnaies musulmanes de la Bibliothèque nationale*, vol. 1, *Khalifes orientaux* (Paris, 1887), no. 1677 (55 bis); Walker, *A Catalogue of Muhammadan Coins*, 2:42, no. P. 13, pl. VIII; Miles, "The Earliest Arab Gold Coinage," 213, nos. 16-17, pl. XLVI, figs. 4-5.

6. Several specimens dated 77AH are known, including one published by J. G. Stickel from the Grossherzogliches Orientalisches Münzkabinett zu Jena (diameter: 20 mm; weight: 4.45 g), reportedly now preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. See Johann Gustav Stickel, *Handbuch zur morgenländischen Münzkunde* (Leipzig, 1870), pl. II, no. 34. Another specimen is preserved in the British Museum. See Walker, *A Catalogue of Muhammadan Coins,* 2:43; Miles, "The Earliest Arab Gold Coinage," 213-214, nos. 18-19, pl. XLVI, fig. 6; Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean,* 1, no. 705.

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