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Rare Mule Dinar in the Name of the Abbasid Caliph al-Qahir bi-llah  
Minted in Sana'a in 314 A.H.

درهم هجيني نادر باسم الخليفة العباسي القاهر بالله ضرب صنعاً سنة ٣١٤هـ

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**Abstract:**

Since the fourth century A.H., Yemen has become virtually independent of Baghdad. It slipped out of the Abbasid control into the hands of local rulers. One of these rulers was a member of the Yufriids 'Banu Yu'fir', that held power between 225 AH / 839 AD till 393 AH / 972 AD and whose center of power was Sana'a. Coinciding with a part of that period, the caliphate in Baghdad was under the power of caliph al-Qahir bi'llah (320-322 AH / 932-943 AD). This research presents a study of a rare dinar which represents a specimen that holds the date of minting that dates back to the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir but under the name of al-Qahir. Therefore, this specimen is considered as a mule dinar.

**Keywords:** Mule Dinar, Al-Qahir bi'llah, Al-Muqtadir bi'llah, Sana'a, Dies.

الملخص:

منذ القرن الرابع الهجري، بدأت اليمن بالاستقلال عن سيطرة الخلافة العباسية في بغداد، حيث خرجت عن السيطرة العباسية، لتصبح في أيدي الحكام المحليين، أحد هؤلاء الحكام كان

من جماعة "بنو يعفر"، التي تولت السلطة بين ٢٢٥هـ / ٨٣٩م حتى ٣٩٣هـ / ٩٧٢م والتي كان مركز سلطتها صنعاء، ويتزامن مع جزء من تلك الفترة، فترة حكم الخليفة القاهر بالله (٣٢٠-٣٢٢ هـ / ٩٣٢-٩٤٣ م) في بغداد، ويقدم هذا البحث دراسة لدينار نادر يحمل تاريخ سك يعود الى عهد الخليفة العباسي المقتدر بالله بينما يحمل اسم الخليفة العباسي القاهر بالله، لذلك، يعتبر هذا الدينار بمثابة دينار هجين.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** دينار هجين، القاهر بالله، المقتدر بالله، صنعاء، قالب ضرب.

## Introduction;

Arabia Felix is a highly civilized relatively fertile land in the South West of the Arabian Peninsula, boarding the Indian Ocean and extending around the commercially important hinter land of the Red Sea<sup>1</sup>.

Under the Abbasid reign of Yemen, the Abbasids proceeded with the policy of the Umayyad's with respect to Yemen. Frequently, a member of the highest Abbasid caliph was sent to serve as a governor. Since the fourth century A.H., Yemen has become virtually independent of Baghdad. Its ruler during most of this period was Ishaq Ibrahim (311-371 A.H. / 923-981 A.D.), who paid nominal alliance to the caliph in Baghdad and in return received token alliance as a matter of form from many of the various self-proclaimed amirs who established themselves in Yemen<sup>2</sup>. Thus, Yemen slipped out of the Abbasid control into the hands of local rulers.

One of these amirs was a member of the Yufirids 'Banu Yu'fir', that was a local Islamic dynasty that held power between 225 A.H. / 839 A.D. till 393 A.H. / 1003 A.D.<sup>3</sup> and whose center of power was Sana'a<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Goussous (Nagef.), *Tarawnah (Khalaf): Coinage of the Ancient and Islamic World*, Arab Bank, Jordan 1991, p.32.

<sup>2</sup> Shamma (Samir): *A Hoard of Fourth Century Dinars from Yemen*, ANSMN, Vol.17, New York 1971, p.235.

<sup>3</sup> Abu Khalil (Shawky): *Atlas al-Tarikh al-Araby al-Islamy, Dar Al-Fikr*, Damascus 2005, p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> Sana'a: *The largest city in Yemen, founded at the base of Jabal Nugum.*; Al-Hamawī, (Yāqūt ibn-'Abdullah al-Rūmī): *Muj'am al-Buldan*, Edited by Fared Abdel Aziz al-Gondi, Vol. 3, Second Edition, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Elmiya, Beirut 1979, pp. 425-436.

The lieutenants of the caliph had long exercised hereditary and almost regal sway and finally seized altogether to be content with their various titles, aspiring to the claim absolute sovereignty of the dominance they governed<sup>1</sup>.

Coinciding with a part of that period, the caliphate in Baghdad was under the power of caliph al-Qahir bi'llah (320-322 A.H. / 932-943 A.D.). Then, Abū Mansoūr Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Mu'tadid was the nineteenth caliph of the Abbasid caliphate for the first time in Muharram 317 A.H. / 929 A.D. and for the second time in Shawwal 320 A.H. / 932 A.D.<sup>2</sup> Al-Mu'tadid held position in the caliphate until Jumada al-Awwal 322 A.H. / 934 A.D. after which he was blinded and cast into prison<sup>3</sup>.

As aforementioned, some of the amirs of Yemen were satisfied enough to be granted some titles even without inscribing them on the coins minted in Yemen. In 320 A.H. / 932 A.D., since the Imam followed was named Saif Ullah 'the Sword of God', the new prince claimed the title of Saif al-Khalifa 'the Sword of the Caliph' and adopted a red flag bearing a representation of the double bladed sword as his badge; a design which has to the present day been retained by the succeeding princes who have reigned in Sana'a<sup>4</sup>.

### Descriptive Study;

From the beginning of the third AH /ninth AD century, dinars began to be minted in Sana'a. These dinars weighed around 2.93 grams<sup>5</sup>. Concerning the weight; the Abbasids struck special coins in Yemen, using local weights standards for gold and silver, invariably lighter than contemporary standard of Abbasid coinage<sup>6</sup>. Also, the coins were minted with the same general prototype prototype of the coins of the Abbasid caliphate<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> **Playfair (Captain):** *A History of Arab Felix or Yemen from the Commencement of the Christian Era to the Present Time, British Settlement of Aden*, Education Society's Press, Bombay, 1859, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> **Al-Suyuti (Abu al-Fadl Abdel Rahman):** *Tarikh al-Khulafa*, Dar Ibn Hazm, First Publication, 2002, p.281.

<sup>3</sup> **Ibn al-Athir (Abu al-Hassan Ali):** *al-Kamil fit-Tarikh*, part 7, Beirut 1986, p.96.

<sup>4</sup> **Playfair:** *A History of Arab Felix*, p.85.

<sup>5</sup> **Peli (Audrey), al-Jandari (Abdel Aziz):** *Islamic Coins, National Museum of Sanaa, from the 1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century to the 7<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> Century*, Centre Francaise d'Archeologie et de Sciences Sociales, Sana 2011, pp. 23-45.

<sup>6</sup> **Stephen Album:** *A Checklist of Islamic Coins, Third Edition, published by Stephen Album*, Santa Rosa, p.117.

<sup>7</sup> **Ramdan, (Atef M.):** *Al-Nkoud Al-Islamiya wa Ahmyataha Fe Marefat Al-Tarikh wal Asar wal Hadarah al-Islamiya, First Edition*, Zaharaa El-Sharq Publishing, Cairo 2008, p.99.

A worth mentioning feature is that while sometimes the name of the governor or the amir was minted on the coins<sup>1</sup>, the Ya'furid amirs never placed their names on the coinage, despite being the actual rulers in Sana'a during this era<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the coins minted in Sana'a during this era came typically of the same prototype of the Abbasid coins holding only the name of the Abbasid caliph without the name of the amir as follows:

The inscriptions of the Abbasid dinar of al-Qahir billah struck in Sana'a in 320 A.H.<sup>3</sup> are found to be within a linear circle around both the obverse and reverse margins, with double circular field legends. Legends are recorded in kufic epigraphy, as follows:

Obv		Rev
Field, within double circle	لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له	الله محمد رسول الله القاهر بالله
Margin, within circle	بسم الله ضرب هذا الدينير بصنعاء سنة عشرين وثلاثمائة	﴿لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ﴾ بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ ﴿﴾
		
Pl.1: Abbasid dinar of al-Qahir bi-llah, minted in Sana'a in 320 A.H.W.1.90 gr.D.19 mm. Ref. Bikhazi 125.- Sotheby's, April 19, 1994,No.351.- Album, Price list,112,No.10.-Al-Khrijy 184.- Bernardi 276Ei.		

<sup>1</sup>- **Ramdan**; *Al-Nkoud Al-Islamiya*, p.99.

<sup>2</sup>- **Stephen Album**: *A Checklist of Islamic Coins*, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup>- Abbasid dinar of al-Qahir billah, minted in Sana'a in 320 A.H., W.1.90 gr., D.19 mm.; **Ref. Ref. Bikhazi 125. Sotheby's**, April 19, 1994, No.351.; **Album**; Price list, 112, No.10.; **Al-Khrijy**.184.; **Bernardi**.; 276Ei.

**Obv.:**

**Field:** Legends are recorded in three lines of Arabic inscriptions surrounded by a circle that holds the first kalimah: ‘There is no deity except Allah alone, He has no equal’.

**Margin:** The mint and date formula along with part of the basmalla are found as follows: ‘In the name of Allah, this dinar was struck in Sana’a in the year 320’.

**Rev.:**

**Field:** It consists of four lines as follows: ‘Allah – Muhammad the Messenger of God – al-Qahir billah’.

The marginal legend states ‘To God is the will before and after and on that day believers shall rejoice in God’s victory’.

With the same inscriptions of the former dinar, comes another extremely rare dinar<sup>1</sup> that is also minted in Sana’a under the name of the Abbasid caliph al-Qahir bi-llah, but it bears the date 314 A.H. in the marginal inscriptions of the obverse, as follows:

	Obv.	Rev.
Field, within double circle	لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له	الله محمد رسول الله القاهر بالله
Margin, within circle	بسم الله ضرب هذا الدينير بصنعاء سنة أربع عشرة وثلاث	﴿لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدِ وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ﴾
		
	Pl.2: Abbasid dinar of al-Qahir bi-llah, minted in Sana’a in 314 A.H.W.2.00 gr.D.18.5 mm. Ref. Sotheby's, April 19, 1994,No.344.- Album, Price list,110,No.11.- Bernardi 276Ei.	

<sup>1</sup> Abbasid dinar of al-Qahir billah, minted in Sana’a in 314 A.H.W.2.00 gr.D.18.5 mm.; **Ref. Sotheby's**, April 19, 1994, No. 344.; **Album**, Price list, 110, No.11.; **Bernardi**. 276Ei.





What is really remarkable about this specimen is that it holds the name of the Abbasid caliph al-Qahir billah who ruled between (320 – 322 A.H. / 932 – 934 A.D.), but with the date of minting 314 A.H., which dates back to the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir billah<sup>1</sup>, who was the predecessor of al-Qahir billah, as he ruled between 290 – 320 A.H. / 908 – 932 A.D.<sup>2</sup>.

As an example of the coins of al-Muqtadir billah minted in Sana'a, the dinar<sup>3</sup> holds the same inscriptions of the former specimen with the date 314 A.H., but with the precise name of the contemporaneous Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir, as follows:

	Obv.	Rev.
Field, within double circle	لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له	الله محمد رسول الله المقتدر بالله
Margin, within circle	بسم الله ضرب هذا الدينير بصنعاء سنة أربع عشرة وثلث	﴿لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدُ وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ﴾ بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ ﴿﴾

<sup>1</sup> **Al-Muqtadir bi-llah:** His name is Abul-Fadl Jaf'ar ibn Ahmed, he came to the throne at the age of thirteen, in 295 A.H./908 A.D., until he was killed in Shawal 320 A.H./ November 932 A.D.; **Ibn al-Athir:** *al-Kamil fel Tarikh*, part 7, pp.73-74.

<sup>2</sup> **Ibn Kathir (Emad al-Din Ismail):** *al-Bidaya wa 'l-Nihaya*, Edited by Abdullah al-Turkey, First Publishing, Part 15, Dar Hajr, 1998, p.60.

<sup>3</sup> Abbasid dinar of al-Muqtadir billah, minted in Sana'a in 314 A.H.W.2.00 gr.D.18 mm.; **Ref. SICA 10**, 261-262.; **Al-Khrijy**.176.; **Bernardi**. 241Ei.



PI.3: Abbasid dinar of al-Muqtadir billah, minted in Sana'a in 314 A.H.W.2.00 gr.D.18 mm. Ref. SICA 10,261-262.-Al-Khrijy 176.- Bernardi 241Ei-

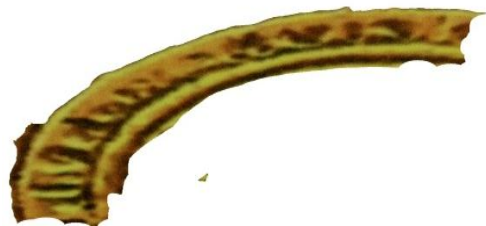


FIG.1: The Date of Mint on the Dinar of al-Qahir bi-llah



FIG.2: The Date of Mint on the Dinar of al-Muqtadir bi-llah

### Case Study;

As aforementioned, the dinar under study represents a specimen that holds the date of minting that dates back to the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir but under the name of al-Qahir. Thus, it is one of the coins known as mule coins.

A mule coin is a coin struck at the mint from mismatched official dies<sup>1</sup>; which means that the two dies are completely different with no connection in between<sup>2</sup>.

The hypotheses concerning the mule coins in general vary in either that these coins were accidental as a result of an incorrect combination of two different dies, or that they might have been officially and intentionally minted.

As for the coins which were struck under the names of caliphs or rulers after their death, they do not go under the classification of mule coins as they

<sup>1</sup> **Daftar (Nahed):** *Al-Maskukat al-Hajiniya, Zahera ghareba fe al-Maskukat al-Abasiya al-Madruba bi-Madinat al-Salam*, Numismatics Journal, Issue No. 8/9, Faculty of Arts, Baghdad University 1978, p.18.

<sup>2</sup> **Ramdan;** *Al-Nkoud Al-Islamiya*, p.650.

were minted intentionally as a connection to some specific circumstances that vary from one region to another<sup>1</sup>.

With regard to the cause that led to the appearance of these mule coins, it is that dies might have been engraved at the central office and distributed to the provincial mints<sup>2</sup> or it might come as a result of preserving many old dies in the mint, as the old dies can be kept if they are in good condition specially if the coins' prototype was the same during different rulers<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, in some other cases, two different dies from two different periods for one mint were combined on a coin, which indicates that the old dies were kept in the mint for a long time<sup>4</sup>.

The mule dinar under study shows a coupled or dual featured minted coin, with the preceding obverse die dating back to al-Muqtadir billah being combined with the reverse holding the name of al-Qahir billah.

### Conclusion;

The specimen under study combines an obverse and a reverse from two distinct and distinguishable series of dinars with al-Qahir's name on the field of the reverse and the date 314 AH that dates back to al-Muqtadir's period on the marginal inscriptions of the obverse, forming one unique mule.

Due to this unique combination in form, it is considered as one of the mule coins prototypes that were struck as a result of an incorrect combination of a new die with another one that had erroneously remained in use. Thus, it might have been accidentally minted by a confused mint employee. Another possible hypothesis to be put into consideration is that this dinar was minted in

<sup>1</sup> **Desouky (Ahmed):** *Al-Tagawouzat ala Sekka wal-Kawaleb al-Islamiya fe do'o namazeg lam yashbek nashraha*, derasa asarya fanya, PHD dissertation, Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University. P. 122.

<sup>2</sup> **Bates (Michael):** *The Coinage of Syria under the Umayyads, 692-750 A.D. The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham During the Umayyad Period*, 24-29 October 1987, Edited by Adnan Bakhit, Rober Schick, Amman 1989, p.14.

<sup>3</sup> **Ramdan;** *Al-Nkoud Al-Islamiya*, p. 650.

<sup>4</sup> **Daftar;** *Al-Maskukat al-Hajiniya*, p.25.



two different dies intentionally. These unofficial mules are very common and teach us nothing about the chronology of the official coinage.

As for comparing the dinar under study (PI.2), with the other two dinars of both al-Qahir bi-llah (PI.1) and al-Muqtadir bi-llah (PI.3), in terms of size and weight, they are found to be in the same average measures. Besides, the Kufic script used in the inscriptions of the specimen under study is remarkably sophisticated which distinguished the coins of this era.

However, regarding the date of mint, by comparing the date of the dinar under study (PI.2), with the dinar of al- Muqtadir bi-llah (PI.3), it is obvious that the date of mint (FIG.1) on the specimen under study is typically the same as the date of the dinar of al-Muqtadir bi-llah (FIG.2), as the last word of the date in hundreds came incomplete as “thuluth”, unlike the way it was struck on al-Qahir’s coins as it came complete as “thultheen”. Therefore, it is conclusive evidence that the mule dinar was undoubtedly struck from two separate and distinct dies.

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