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THE STANDING CALIPH COINS FOUND IN MAREA/PHILOXENITE, EGYPT

ABSTRACT: Archaeological research in Marea/Philoxenite has been conducted since 2000 by the Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Warsaw, in cooperation with the Archaeological Museum in Kraków. The work is mainly carried out on the site of one of the largest Christian basilicas in Egypt and in some parts of the city. According to the research, the peak development of the city was during the Byzantine period. It was one of the most important centres on the road leading from Alexandria to the sanctuary of Saint Menas at Abu Mina. So far, more than 9,000 coins have been recorded at the site, of which late Roman *minimi* dominate. Among the finds are two copper coins with a standing caliph effigy struck before the monetary reform of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān in 696/7. Due to the names on the coins and the die links, the coins may have been struck in Qinnasrīn and Damascus. The first coin was found during research in the 2004 season on the limestone floor in room no. 8 behind the south-western corner of the Great Basilica. The second was found during the 2021 season of excavation in the south-western urban district, in trench N1 in the church aisle.

KEYWORDS: Marea, Philoxenite, Egypt, Standing Caliph, Early Islamic period

Marea/Philoxenite is located on the coast of Lake Mareotis, approximately 50 km from Alexandria (Pl. 1). The identification of the city has been a contentious issue for many years. Mahmoud El-Falaki, who created a map of Alexandria and its environs in the 19th century, used the name Marea at the time (cf. El-Falaki 1872). On the other hand, Mieczysław Rodziewicz (1983, 2010), based on historical sources, identified the city as Philoxenite (cf. Grossmann 2003; Szymańska and Babraj 2010; Wipszycka 2012; Derda 2020, 61-62; Jaworski 2023, 37). It was one of the most important centres and a transshipment port in the Byzantine period on the road leading from Alexandria to the sanctuary of Saint Menas at Abu Mina. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the site was known for its wine and amphorae production. The remains of a large pottery kiln have been identified under the apse of one of the largest basilicas in Egypt located in the northern part of this city. Previous research has identified particular structures in the centre, such as xenodochia, baths, latrines, tombs and churches. The city presumably functioned until the mid-8th to 9th century (Babraj and Szymańska 2008, 2013; Gwiazda, Derda and Barański 2022; Gwiazda 2023; Jaworski 2023, 37).

Archaeological research in Marea/Philoxenite has been conducted since 2000 by the Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology at Warsaw University. The Great Basilica is studied by archaeologists from the Archaeological Museum in Kraków. Research within it has been ongoing for nearly 20 years. So far, it has been possible to excavate layers in the main part of the basilica, many surrounding utility rooms, as well as in tombs and canals. An older church, possibly dating to the 4th or 5th century, has also been discovered within the basilica. Work has also been undertaken on coastal moles (cf. Babraj and Szymańska 2013; Babraj 2018; Babraj, Drzymuchowska and Tarara 2020, 11-34; Derda 2020, 62-63). The University of Warsaw has been conducting research in specific parts of the city since 2019, enabling the reconstruction of the centre's building plan and the main streets. Excavations have been carried out in various structures, including churches, tombs, baths and latrines (cf. Gwiazda and Pawlikowska-Gwiazda 2017; Derda, Gwiazda and Pawlikowska-Gwiazda 2020; Derda et al. 2020; Gwiazda and Derda 2021; Gwiazda, Derda and Barański 2022; Gwiazda 2023).

Research devoted to numismatic issues has been conducted since 2020 under the supervision of P. Jaworski. Coins, both those from older seasons and those discovered on the site during the ongoing archaeological research, are being continuously cleaned, identified and documented photographically by a team of numismatists and a conservator (P. Jaworski, S. Jellonek, M. Mozyrski,

W. Weker, B. Zajac). Unfortunately, due to the salinity of Lake Mareotis and the coastal areas, the state of preservation of many coins is very poor. Some of them have no metal core and the images are often preserved only on the corrosion. For this reason, the identification of finds can sometimes be a significant challenge (Jaworski 2023, 38).

For now, more than 9,000 coins have been recorded at the site, of which late Roman *minimi* dominate (ca. 50%). A small number of finds come from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, while a larger number consists of cast blanks (ca. 20%) and Byzantine coins (ca. 20%), mostly struck in Alexandria. Among the finds is a small group of Arab-Byzantine coins struck after the Arab conquest of Syria and Egypt in the 630s-640s, as well as Umayyad coins, which were introduced after the monetary reform of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (AH 65-86/AD 685-705) in 696/7 (Jaworski 2023, Fig. 1).

Among the finds are two copper coins of the Standing Caliph type from Syrian mints (Pl. 2). Tony Goodwin has distinguished three categories of Arab-Byzantine coinage, namely Pseudo-Byzantine, Umayyad Imperial Image and Standing Caliph (Goodwin 2001, 92; Goodwin and Gyselen 2015, 12; cf. Goodwin 2018), although this division has not gained unequivocal support among scholars. Another general reference to this type of coinage is Byzantine-Arab transitional coinage. In this general group, only the Standing Caliph type coinage has never raised any questions in terms of terminology (Schulze and Oddy 2012; cf. Foss 2008, 60-74). Arab-Byzantine coins were minted in Syria after the Arabs conquered the area in AD 636. Initially, Byzantine coins were still in circulation for some time. Over time, imitations began to be introduced. Pseudo-Byzantine coins can be dated to between the 640s and 670s. Umayyad Imperial Image coins are also based on Byzantine coins; however, they are distinguished by new types of legends in Greek and Arabic. They are dated from the 670s to the early 690s (Treadwell 2000; Goodwin 2010, 35; 2012, 89). Coins of the Standing Caliph type were struck in at least 19 mints. Due to new hitherto unknown coins with mint names, the number of mints may have increased, although one should also beware of forgeries (cf. Goodwin 2018, 51, 114; Goodwin 2017b; Schulze 2017a; Schulze and Schulze 2010, 331-332). On the other hand, questions are rightly raised in the articles: Can we believe what is written on the coins? (Schulze 2015; Schulze 2017a). Research on the die study of this type of coin shows various connections, about which more will be described below. In addition, a hypothesis has been put forward regarding the functioning of semi-official mints (cf. SICA I, 85, fn. 30; Schulze 2015, 131-132). The chronology of Standing Caliph type coins

spans from the late 680s to the late 690s. However, it should be noted that dates relating to the years 74-77 AH (693-697 AD) have appeared on *dīnārs*. Therefore, their minting dates could be narrowed down to these years. 'Abd al-Malik, after the death of his rival Ibn al-Zubayr in 73 AH (692-693), wanted to consolidate Syria. At that time, it is believed that the first short and experimental monetary reform was carried out, resulting in a centralised monetary system with Standing Caliph coins. Nevertheless, it is conjectured that some of the first copper coins of this type may have appeared somewhat earlier than 693 (Treadwell 2000, 1, 14; Foss 2008, 67; Schulze and Schulze 2010, 332, 335; Goodwin and Gyselen 2015, 24-25; cf. Goodwin 2018, 82-88).

On the obverse of the coins, there is the figure of a standing caliph holding a sword identified with 'Abd al-Malik. On the reverse, there is a symbol which has been interpreted so far as a cross on the steps, the Greek letter Φ as a mark of value, a globe on a field, a knobbed staff or a Roman monumental column surmounted by a globe. One hypothesis relates to the ideology, the religious symbol of Islam of the time (Walker 1956, xxii-xxiv, xxxi-xxxvii; Foss 2008, 67, 69, 74; Heidemann 2010, 29-34; Schulze 2010; Goodwin and Gyselen 2015, 26; Goodwin 2017a; Goodwin 2018, 25-37). The various images from the different mints had their own style and the accompanying legends were written in Arabic. The coins usually bore the name of the mint, although this is not a consistent rule. Also known are specimens without such references attributed to the mints at al-Jazira and Amman (Schindel 2013; Schulze 2015, 128; Schulze and Schulze 2010).

The first coin of a Standing Caliph type from Marea from the season 2004 is in a very poor state of preservation; however, due to its style, images and legend fragments, it is likely to have been struck in *jund* Qinnasrīn. Coins were issued there by several mints including Anṭākiya, Ḥalab, Qinnasrīn, Qūrus, Jibrīn, Tanūkh, Sarmīn, Ma'arrat Misrīn and Manbij (SICA I 608-686; Schulze 2023, 163). On the reverse of the Marea coin, there was probably a reference to *allāh* instead of one of the names of the known mints. A puzzling sign was placed next to the steps on the left, which was also pointed out by T. Goodwin (2018, 73, 36-37, no. 411) and I. Schulze (2023, 147). For this reason, the last author also raised the question of how the legend on this type of coin should be correctly read. According to her, the sign bears no resemblance to an Arabic letter, which on the one hand is true; however, can we rule out that this sign may originally have been a letter that was misspelled? Given the position, could it not be the Arabic letter و (*wāw*) referring to the word واف (wāfin), meaning full value,

found in the right field on this type of coin? But our symbol does not look like this letter. Or does it not at first glance resemble γ (*lā*), which, perhaps because of the word before the symbol, was in fact an unfinished piece of *shahāda* اللّٰهُ ([*il*] *lā allāh*)? However, this would be a repetition of the legend that is probably on the coin (cf. Schulze 2023, 147, Fig. 13, for comparison of legends on coins f and h). Coming back to the mint, based on the die study, the coin could have been struck in Qinnasrīn (Schulze 2023, 147-148). Furthermore, this could also be indicated by style or details, such as the image of the symbol on the steps known from other coins of this mint (cf. Walker 1956, xxxiv; SICA I 657-671; Foss 2008, 76-77). Moreover, based on the images and known issues, our coin was also struck with the same dies as the published coins in Schulze's article.

In recent years, die studies on coins from various mints have been quite dynamic and indicate various interesting links. W. Schulze has given an abbreviated list of individual die links including coins from Ḥalab, Qinnasrīn and Qūrus, Ḥalab and Ḥims, or Manbij and Ma'arrat Misrīn (Schulze 2017a, 137-138; 2017b, 142-145, 149). Die-study research was also conducted by I. Schulze, who succeeded in linking coins – *inter alia* – from Ḥalab, Anṭākiya, Tanūkh and Ḥimṣ (Schulze 2020, 2023). On the basis of analyses of individual coins and links, W. Schulze suggests the following: "... that in *jund* Qinnasrīn larger mints, namely Ḥalab and Qinnasrīn, struck coins for and in the name of other places." He also speculates on the possibility of production at only one mint (Schulze 2017a, 137-138; 2017b, 149; cf. the same opinion in Schulze 2023, 157). In the opinion of T. Goodwin, mints in *jund* Qinnasrīn minted coins in great haste. Hence, all possibilities were used with production at different mints, borrowing or using a die, gem or seal engraver. Therefore, various links but also sometimes carelessly made coins may result (Goodwin 2010; Schulze 2017a, 139). C. Foss points to the rapid production of coins in this region due to military activity, which may have resulted in the poor quality of these coins (Foss 2008, 76-77).

The coin was found during research in the 2004 season in the Great Basilica in the room behind the south-western corner. In this campaign, research was carried out in the north wing of the transept, including the kiln discovered under the apse and the side chapel of the church, as well as in rooms 7-11 in the south-western corner. A Standing Caliph type of coin was found on the limestone floor in room no. 8. According to the survey report, there were more than 100 coins there. Coins recorded from this room include a *dodecanummia* struck in Alexandria, an Arab-Byzantine coin in IIAN type, as well as *fulūs* from the Umayyad period. In addition to these, among the objects discovered are more

than 30 handles for lamps from a *polycandelon* that once illuminated the basilica and two weights. The room, measuring 2.7m x 2.5m, has been interpreted as an exchange office where pilgrims from various countries may have exchanged money on arrival at Marea (Szymańska and Babraj 2005a, 52-54; 2005b, 177).

The second coin is from Damascus, then-capital of the Arabs in Syria, and is in a better state of preservation than the first coin. The images on the obverse and reverse are accompanied by *shahāda*: *lā ilāh illā allāh waḥdahu muhammad rasūl allāh* (“there is no God but Allah alone, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”). To the left of the symbol is the name of the mint شق (dimashq) written downwards retrograde; however, it was usually placed to the right of the symbol on the steps (cf. SICA I 706-715; Schulze 2010, 4). Unfortunately, the legends on both sides of the coin are blundered. In addition, there are specific instances of particular words or missing letters, for example, the letter د (dāl) in the name *dimashq* is missing. Such features, characteristic of coins with this mint name, have already been highlighted by other researchers (SICA I 707-715; Schulze 2010, 3; cf. Walker 1956, 86). Moreover, the name of this mint written to the left is much less common. However, another detail present on our coin is worth noting, namely to the right of the symbol on the steps. This is another word that is not present on coins with the name of this mint. The word واف (wāfin) is not found on coins with a reference to *dimashq*. Furthermore, let us emphasise once again that the name of this mint appears mostly on the right side and not, as in this case, on the left. Among the words considered and analysed were Halab, Sarmīn, Baalbek, names of mints, considering also the prefix bi- and keeping in mind the words درب (darb), meaning struck, or *lillāh*, meaning for God. Perhaps there is an error on the part of the engraver. Unfortunately, to date, there is no certainty as to what the word is. After looking through basic catalogues and various studies, no similar comparison has so far been found.

And here again, die study yields interesting results. I. Schulze has linked the coins with the name of the Damascus mint to issues from the mint of Filastin. She, therefore, connects the production of these coins to the irregular mint. Furthermore, it may also have a relationship with the “Pseudo-Damascus” mint. In the next section, the article also presents links between coins referencing Damascus and Hims (cf. Schulze 2010, 4-6). Therefore, the question must be asked whether our coin was indeed struck at the Damascus mint. In addition, it should be emphasised that from Marea we have other *fulūs* from the Damascus mint (cf. Malarczyk 2008, 154, Cat. 87).

The coin was found during the 2021 season of excavation in the south-western urban district, in trench N1, sector 1. In the trench, the remains of the church were discovered. Sector 1 is adjacent to the church entrance. The filling consisted of rubble made up of limestone pseudo-ashlars, fragments of wall painting with figural and geometric motifs and mosaic fragments. The pot-sherds found are dated from the 6th century AD (Gwiazda, Derda and Barański 2022, 355-366). Our coin was found in the church aisle.

In view of the ongoing research on die studies, perhaps the sentence quoted by I. Schulze is a good summary: "Never believe at first glance in the mint name which is written on an early Umayyad coin" (Schulze 2015, 131). Despite the name on the coin and the die links, there is no absolute certainty that our coins were struck at the Damascus and Qinnasrīn mints. It is possible that they were minted in other centres due to the various factors highlighted by T. Goodwin.

The new finds extend our knowledge of the coins recorded in Egypt and, therefore, reflect the monetary circulation in the late 7th and 8th centuries. In the case of the Marea/Philoxenite coins, it should be noted that both Arab-Byzantine and Umayyad issues were found in contexts with Byzantine coins, which confirms their common circulation (cf. Jaworski 2023, 41, 44). Unfortunately, a large number of the coins from various sites in Egypt still remain unpublished. On the other hand, published material is not always accompanied by photographs, which makes it difficult to verify descriptions in catalogues (cf. Metlich and Schindel 2004, 12; Noeske 2000). Hopefully, new publications of numismatic material from various sites will be able to deepen our analysis in the future. Overall, the coins from Marea/Philoxenite will be published in a future comprehensive monograph on coin finds from this site.

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No. inv. MA 99/04/14

Marea, Basilica, room no. 8, behind the south-western corner; coin find from 2004

'Abd al-Malik (AH 65-86/AD 685-705), AE fals, Qinnasrīn (?), 2.69g, 17mm, 6h; Pl. 2: 1

Obverse: Standing caliph with sword; around clockwise from 1h (?),

[لَعْبُ اللَّهِ عَبْدٌ الْمَلِكُ [amīr al-mu'minīn], “for the servant of God, ‘Abd al-Malik, commander of the believers”).

Reverse: Symbol on four steps; around *shahāda*, clockwise from 12h, لا إله إلا الله وحده محمد رسول الله (lā ilāh illā [allāh wāhdahu muhammad] rasūl allāh, “there is no God but Allah alone, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”), الله (allāh) in upwards to left (?), واف (wāf, “full value”) downwards to the right (?).

References: Schulze 2023, 147, Fig. 13, Nos. f and h

No. inv. M210432

Marea, South-western urban district, N1, sector 1, in the church aisle; coin find from 2021

‘Abd al-Malik (AH 65-86/AD 685-705), AE fals, Damascus, 1.97g, 20mm, 1h; Pl. 2: 2

Obverse: Standing caliph with sword; around *shahāda*, clockwise from 1h, لا إله إلا الله وحده محمد رسول الله (lā ilāh illā allāh [wāhdahu muhammad] rasūl allāh, “there is no God but Allah alone, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”).

Reverse: Symbol on four steps; around *shahāda*, clockwise from 1h, لا إله إلا الله وحده محمد رسول الله (lā ilāh illā allāh wāhdahu muhammad rasūl allāh, “there is no God but Allah alone, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”), دم شق (dimashq) downward retrograde to left, some word (?) to the right.

References: - ; cf. SICA I 705-715

Abbreviations

SICA I – Album S. and Goodwin T. 2002. *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean. Volume 1: The Pre-Islamic Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period.* Oxford.

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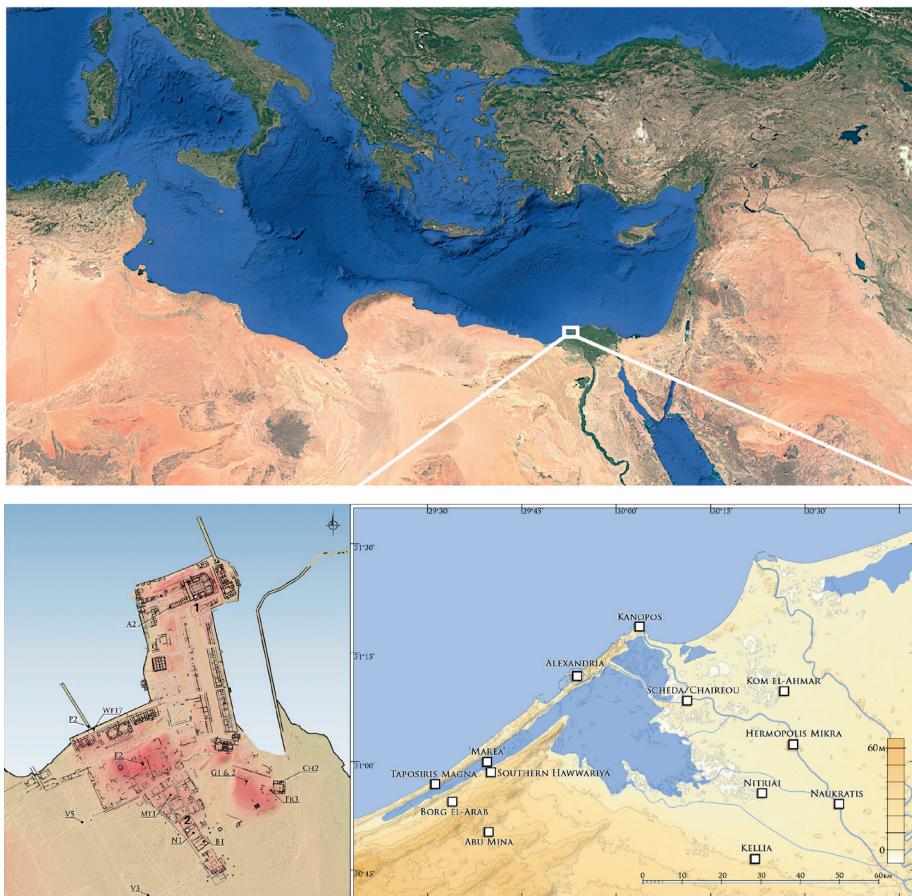
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PLATE 1



1

Pl. 1 – Overview map of the eastern Mediterranean basin showing the location of the Mareotis region, followed by a detailed map of the Mareotis region indicating the most important archaeological sites; extent of the lake as in late antiquity (University of Warsaw Marea Archaeological Project | drawing J. Kaniszewski) and plan of Marea/Philoxenite with marked standing caliph coin finds: 1. Basilica, room no. 8, behind the south-western corner; 2. South-western urban district, N1, sector 1, in the church aisle (plan by University of Warsaw Marea Archaeological Project | drawing M. Gwiazda, M. Łuba, and A.B. Kutiak)

PLATE 2



1



2

Pl. 2: 1 – Fals of 'Abd al-Malik (AH 65-86/AD 685-705), AE,
Qinnasrīn (?) (Photo by P. Jaworski) Scale 2:1

Pl. 2: 2 – Fals of 'Abd al-Malik (AH 65-86/AD 685-705), AE,
Damascus (Photo by P. Jaworski) Scale 2:1