

Early Arab Coins of Tunisia

The Fatimids of Ifriqiyah and their successors up to the establishment of Hafsid rule - 296-625 AH (909-1228 A.D)

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Historical BackgroundThe Fatimids of Ifriqiyah, 296-362 AH (909-973 AD)

The Fatimids claimed to be the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and took their dynastic name from Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet and wife of 'Ali, his cousin and fourth Caliph. They were part of the Shi'ite branch of Islam, which recognises the descendants of 'Ali as the only legitimate successors to Muhammad and to the Caliphate. The founder of the dynasty, 'Ubaid Allah, came originally from Salamiyah in Syria, where the Isma'ili movement had arisen in opposition to the Abbasid Caliphs. The Isma'ilis consider Ima'il, and not his brother Musa, as the seventh Imam or "Leader" and, in contrast to the Shi'ite sects recognizing a succession of twelve Imams, they consider Isma'il as the last of the "declared" Imams, before the advent of the Mahdi, the "guided one".

About 280 AH (893 AD) one of 'Ubaid Allah's followers, Abu 'Abd Allah, finding the Kotama pilgrims receptive to his preaching, joined them when they returned from Mecca to Kabylia, a mountainous region to the west of Ifriqiyah which the Aghlabids had never entirely managed to control. Led by Abu 'Abd Allah, the Kotama intensified their harassing of the Aghlabids, taking advantage of weakness and sedition amongst the border garrisons. Seeing the successes of his followers in the Maghreb, 'Ubaid Allah left Syria for the west. Escaping detection by keeping south of the area controlled by the Aghlabids and their allies, he reached Sijilmassa, in western Maghreb, in 292 AH (905 AD), but was eventually detained. In 296 AH (909 AD), Abu 'Abd Allah obtained a decisive victory over the Aghlabids and occupied Kairouan, the seat of their government. He then moved westward, defeating all opposition, liberated 'Ubaid Allah and led him to Kairouan to proclaim himself early in 297 AH (910 AD) the Mahdi, the Rightful Caliph, the Imam, thus breaking the unity of the Caliphate which up to then had been maintained at the religious if not at the political level. Abu 'Abd Allah was involved in 298 AH (911 AD) in an attempt to overthrow 'Ubaid Allah and was executed. This sparked off a series of abortive rebellions among his original followers in southwestern Ifriqiyah, Tripoli and Sicily.

The establishment of Fatimid rule in Ifriqiyah was for 'Ubaid Allah only a beginning toward the attainment of his ultimate objective of overthrowing the Abbasid Caliphate. In 301 AH (913 AD) and again in 307 AH (919 AD) he sent expeditions against Egypt, led by his son Abu-l-Qasim. After initial successes and the occupation of Alexandria they were forced to return to Ifriqiyah. In 310 AH (922 AD) 'Ubaid Allah turned to the west and brought under his control most of the Maghreb, including the regions of Fez and Sijilmassa, up to the limits of the region controlled by the Sunnite 'Umayyads of Spain, who had established in 300AH (912 AD) an independent Caliphate in Cordoba in opposition to the Abbasid Caliphs.

During these military campaigns, the town of al-Mahdiyyah was founded on the eastern coast of Ifriqiyah, and the seat of the government was moved there from Kairouan in 309 AH (921 AD), reflecting both the growing attention given to sea trade and sea power, and the main direction of the Fatimid expansion.

'Ubaid Allah was succeeded by his son Abu-l-Qasim al-Qaim who continued his father's policies. Another expedition was sent to Egypt, with the same results and during his reign Berber corsairs started to raid the northern coast of the Mediterranean.

The cost of these forays resulted in heavy taxation which eventually produced open rebellion in the shape of a revival of Kharijism. The opposition first manifested itself in the south where it was repressed, but the dissidents led by Abu Yazid, moved to the west of Ifriqiyah from where they invaded the northern and central parts of Ifriqiyah and, with the help of the orthodox Sunnite population, occupied Kairouan. By 334 AH (945 AD) only al-Mahdiyyah remained in the hands of the Fatimids and the town itself was under siege for several months. Eventually the Fatimids under al-Qaim's son Isma'il defeated the poorly organised rebel bands, thus putting an end to Kharijism and asserting the supremacy of the sedentary Berbers over the nomads who had traditionally opposed them. Taking the name of al-Mansur, the "made Victorious" Isma'il re-established Fatimid rule over Ifriqiyah and territories further west. To celebrate his victory, in 337 AH (948 AD) he gave the name of Al-Mansuriyah to the new town which he had founded on the site of the old Berber Sabra, next to Kairouan, while the latter was still in rebel hands.

Under the next ruler, al-Mu'izz, Fatimid control was extended in the west as far as Tangier and Ceuta. In the east, a successful campaign was finally launched against Egypt which was conquered in 358 AH (969 AD). A new capital, al-Qahira (Cairo) was founded there in 362 (972 AD), near the old provincial capital of al-Fustat, and in the same year the Fatimid Caliph moved there the seat of his government, appointing as governor of Ifriqiyah Bulukkin Yusuf abu-l-Fatuh ibn Ziri, a Sanhajid Berber from central Maghreb.

The Zirid Period 362-543 AH (973-1148 AD)

The transfer of the Fatimid government and the advent of the Zirids, who established their capital at Kairouan, was marked by unrest and revolts, including one in Kairouan itself in 369 AH (979 AD) led by 'Abd Allah, a descendant of the Aghlabids. Yusuf's successor, his son abu-l-Qasim al-Mansur, 373-386 AH (984-996 AD), consolidated his control over the region, put down a Fatimid inspired revolt of the Kotamas and thereby ensured that the Sanhajids became the most powerful Berber tribe in eastern Maghreb. During this period of Zirid rule, Ifriqiyah prospered, agriculture was developed and taxes were reduced. However, under abu Manad Badis, 386-406 AH (996-1016 AD), difficulties developed over relations with the Hammadids, a separate branch of the family who under Hammad, uncle of the Zirid ruler seceded in 405 AH (1014 AD) and took control of the region to the west of Ifriqiyah. Badis tried without success to obtain the support of the Caliph in Cairo but his enemies were aided instead, in order to prevent the Zirid rulers from becoming too strong and independent.

The point of rupture with the Fatimid Caliphate was reached in 441 AH (1049 AD) when abu Tamin al-Mu'izz, 406-454 AH (1016-1062 AD) proclaimed his allegiance to the Sunni Abbasid Caliphs of Baghdad. In retaliation the following year, the Fatimid Caliph of Cairo unleashed against the Zirids the Banu Hilal, a troublesome tribe from western Egypt. They invaded Ifriqiyah destroying everything on their path, at first with the help of the Hammadids who were however eventually forced by the invaders to withdraw to the west. The entire region was ravaged, agricultural developments were destroyed, nomadism reintroduced with plunder becoming a way of life. The period of instability and insecurity thus started was to last for almost two centuries while most of the region was controlled by a succession of local rulers with shifting allegiances.

On the basis of the very limited numismatic evidence, it appears that the Zirids remained in control of the towns of Kairouan and of al-Mahdiyyah for a few years at least and that in 449 AH (1057 AD) their zone of influence included Sfax. The coins also indicate that in the same year 449 the Zirids recanted and again proclaimed the supremacy of the Fatimid Caliph, possibly in an attempt to obtain his help against the invaders.

No historical evidence has been found of such contacts between Zirids and Fatimids and the region under Zirid control continued to be limited to al-Mahdiyyah itself with, at times, the towns of Kairouan, Sousse, Sfax, Tunis and Gabés, all occasionally also under the rule of more or less independent Berber or Arab chieftains. The interior remained under the control of the nomad tribes.

The Zirids were soon faced with another danger, this time from the sea. Taking advantage of the crumbling Arab power, the Normans had started the conquest of Sicily, from their bases in southern Italy. They occupied Pantelleria in 481 AH (1088 AD) and by 484 AH (1091 AD) had ousted the Arabs from the whole of Sicily. Led by Roger II, the Normans then obtained a first foothold in North Africa on the island of Djerba in 519 AH (1125 AD) and gradually extended their control to most of the eastern coast of Ifriqiyah. They finally took al-Mahdiyyah, Sfax and Sousse - all that remained of the Zirid territory - in 543 AH (1148 AD) and the last of the Zirids, abu Yahya al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, was obliged to escape into exile by sea from al-Mahdiyyah.

The Period of Almohad and Almoravid Influence 543-625 AH (1148-1228 AD)

The Norman occupation of the eastern coast of Ifriqiyah was of short duration. A new movement, that of the Almohads or "Unitarians", had emerged in western Maghreb under 'Abd al-Mumin who had rebelled against the Almoravids and proclaimed himself Caliph, establishing his capital in Marrakesh. The Almohads rapidly extended their control to the entire Maghreb re-establishing Moslem rule and Berber supremacy over the whole of Ifriqiyah. Tunis was taken by the Almohads in 555 AH (1159 AD) and al-Mahdiyyah, the last Norman stronghold, in 556AH (1160AD).

In 580 AH (1184 AD), Almoravids from the Balearic Islands, led by the two Banu Ghanyah Brothers 'Ali and Yahya, landed on the northern coast of the Maghreb and from there, with the support of the Abbasid Caliph and of the Banu Sulayim Arabs from Tripoli, occupied most of Ifriqiyah. Yahya set up an independent government at Gabés and occupied Tunis in 599 AH (1203 AD) but the pressure from the west was overwhelming and Almohad authority was soon re-established over the entire region.

In 604 AH (1207 AD) abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahid - son of 'Umar ibn Hafis who had been one of the original supporters of 'Abd al-Mumin - was appointed Governor of Ifriqiyah by the fourth Almohad Caliph, Muhammad al-Nasir ibn Yaqub, and established his capital in Tunis. His son Faris succeeded him in 618 AH (1221 AD) but was deposed by his own brother abu Zakariah Yahya in 625 AH (1228 AD). Abu Zakariah gradually broke his links with the Almohad Caliphate and set up an independent Hafsids state in Tunis, which was to last until the Ottoman protectorate began in 982 AH (1574 AD).

Description of the Coins

Fatimid Coins of Ifriqiyah 296-459 AH (909-1067 AD)

Only coins minted within the region corresponding to what is today known as Tunisia are considered here. This series includes coins issued by the Zirid governors after the transfer of the Fatimid Caliphate to Cairo in 362 AH, with the exception of those of the period between 439 and 449 AH which, because of their differences and historical significance are described separately. "Mintless" Fatimid coins dated after 362 AH and not otherwise attributable to Ifriqiyah are not included. A summary of relevant data is given in Table 1.1.

Both gold and silver coins are known, but no copper coins of this period have been described. The series is typical of the classical Arab period with legends in Kufic script. Apart from some fractional gold coins, all have a circular marginal legend on each side, surrounding other horizontal or circular legends, and are characterized by the presence of concentric circles separating the legends. Coins of different rulers usually differ not only in their wording but also in the arrangement of legends and circles.

The size and weight of the gold coins are similar to those of the early post-reform coins, but there is a tendency for dinars to become slightly larger and thinner toward the end of this period, possibly so that longer inscriptions could be better accommodated; their weight however remains the same, at a little less than 4.2 grams. Fractional dinars are basically similar, but their legends are somewhat simpler and their size and weight show more variation. Silver "dirhams" are less common than gold coins and tend to be scarcer for later rulers. They are similar to gold coins in general appearance but show a certain variation in size and weight.

Four mint-names occur on coins of this series, Al-Qayrawan (Kairouan), al-Mahdiah (Mahdia), al-Mansuriyah (situated next to Kairouan) and, on a single coin dated 414 AH, Zwila (a suburb of Mahdia). According to recorded dates, Fatimid gold dinars were minted in Kairouan only until 306 AH. When the seat of the government was moved to the newly founded al-Mahdiah, coins were minted there from 311 to 459 AH and in al-Mansuriyah from 338 to 438 AH, the period of prominence of this other Fatimid centre. In addition to the early issues, the name of Kairouan appears on two dinars dated 333 AH and 335 AH. The first, similar in general appearance to Fatimid coins but with different legends, was struck during the occupation of Kairouan by Abu Yazid and his followers. The coin dated 335 AH was posthumously issued in the name of the Amir al-Qaim by his successor al-Mu'izz, who refused to assume the title of Imam and to strike coins in his own name before putting an end to the Kharijite rebellion. This re-appearance of Kairouan as a Fatimid mint might well have represented a way of marking the restoration of Fatimid control over the city and the appearance of al-Mansuriyah as a new mint shortly afterwards emphasizes the importance again given to the region of Kairouan, hitherto somewhat neglected in favour of Mahdia.

Fractional gold coins from al-Mahdiah are dated from 316 AH to 412 AH or 450 AH, a questionable date, and those from al-Mansuriyah from 340 to 436 AH.

Silver coins struck in Kairouan are known, dated 296, 308 and 332 AH. Silver coins from al-Mahdiah are dated from 316 to 401 AH and those from Al-Mansuriyah from 352 to 376 AH with one additional but doubtful coin of 432 AH.

The relationship in value between the dinar and the dirham, originally 1:10, had gradually increased to about 1:16 under al-Mu'izz. Under al-Hakim it rose to 1:26 in 395 AH and to 1:34 in 397 AH. During his reign, new dirhams of heavier weight were issued and their relationship to the dinar was brought back to 1:16.

Accepting the usual convention that the obverse of the coin is the side with the first part of the "kalimah" (the statement of Moslem faith or "Muhammadan symbol"), almost all coins of this period have the "second symbol" (Koran IX,33) in the marginal legend of the obverse, and the "bismillah" (the mint and date formula) in the marginal legend of the reverse. One exception is provided by the early issues of al-Qaim on which the bismillah, placed as a circular legend on the reverse, is surrounded by another religious legend (Koran VI,115). The early coins issued by al-Mansur on his own name in 336-337 AH also differ in having the "second symbol" on the reverse and the bismillah on the obverse. From 338 AH all personal names and titles are on the reverse. Additional religious legends appear on the first coins of this series issued by abu 'Abd Allah - on which there are no personal names or titles - and on the coin of al-Mu'izz.

There are some differences in the form in which names and titles are given on the coins issued by various rulers, but all coins issued after the advent of the Mahdi show the honorary title or "lakab" of the ruler, the title "Amir al-Muminin", Commander of the Believers and, with the exception of the fractional gold of al-Tahar, the title "al-Imam", the Leader.

The term "'Abd Allah" on the coins of al-Mahdi could be considered as an epithet, "Slave of God", but might also refer to his proper name, 'Ubad Allah, which has the same origin. 'Abd Allah also appears on the coins of al-Mansur. After the transfer of the seat of the Caliphate to Cairo, the formula "Slave of God and His favourite" is used before the name of the Caliph on coins issued in the name of al-'Aziz, al-Hakim and al-Zahir. The formula used for the title may be "Billah" (with, by God), "bi amr Allah" (by the commandment of God", "la din Allah" (by the faith of God) or "li'izaz din Allah" (by the power of the faith of God). Finally, on the coins minted in Ifriqiyah by the Zirid Governors in the name of the Caliph, one name or letter is to be found in the central field of the reverse.

General Description of Fatimid Coins of Ifriqiyah.

Standard Legends

1. Kalimah (the "word" or "Muhammad symbol")

- 1a There is no god but God
- 1b who has no associate
- 2a Muhammad is the Apostle of God
- 2b 'Ali is the favourite of God

لا اله الا الله
و حدة لا شريك له
محمد رسول الله
على ولي الله

2. Koran IX 33 (the "second symbol")

Muhammad is the prophet of God sent with guidance and the religion of truth, to make it prevail over every other religion, averse although idolaters may be

محمد رسول الله ارسله
بالهدى و ذم بين
الحق ليظاهرة على
الذين كلفه و لو
كرة المشركون

Mint Names

- Kairouan (al-Qayrawan)
- Mahdia (al-Mahdiyyah)
- Mansuriya (al-Mansuriyah)
- Zwila

القيروان
المهدية
المصورية
زويلة

Typical Coins Issued by each Ruler

The asterisk (*) refers to the standard legends given above.

abu 'Abd al-Shi'i 296-297 AH (909-910 AD)

Similar in appearance to Aghlabid coins. Classical Kufic script. No circles. One marginal legend on each side. Central legends in 3 or 5 horizontal lines.

- Obv. Circular legend ?
- Central, line 1,2,3 (Kalimah 1a, 1b) *
- ornament below
- Rev. Circular legend (bismillah)
- Central line 1 ?
- 2 ?
- 3 Glory
- 4 to God
- 5 master of the world

الحمد
لله
رب العالمين

2nd Type: Similar but legends changed.

Obv.	Circular legend	(Koran IX,33)	*
	Central, Line 1	The glory	العز
	2,3,4	(kalimah 1a, 1b)	*
	5	is a proof of God	حجه الله
Rev.	Circular legend	(bismillah)	*
	Central, line 2,3,4	(kalimah 2a)	*
	1,5	May the enemies of god be scattered	تفرق اعدا الله

abu Muhammad 'Ubaid Allah al-Mahdi billah 297-322 AH (910-934 AD)

Similar to above, but circular legends between 2 circles.

Obv.	Circular legend	(Koran IX, 33)	*
	Central, line 2,3,4	(kalimah 1a, 1b)	*
	1	'Abd Allah	عبد الله
	5	Amir al-Muminin	*
Rev.	Circular legend	(bismillah)	*
	Central, line 2,3,4	(kalimah 2a)	*
	1,5	al-Imam / billah	*

abu al-Qasim Muhammad al-Qaim billah, 322-334 AH (934-946 AD)

Obverse similar to coins of al-Mahdi. Reverse with two circular legends. Central legend in 5 lines. No circles on reverse. Script more ornamental with appearance of "floral" letters.

Gold Coins

Obv.	Circular legend	(Koran IX,33)	*
	Central, line 3,4	(kalimah 1a, 1b)	*
	1,2	Muhammad/abu al-Qasim	محمد / ابو القاسم
	5	al-Mahdi billah	*
Rev.	Outer circular legend	(Koran VI,115) The words of thy Lord are perfect in truth and justice; there is none who can change His words: He both heareth and knoweth	و تمت كلمات ربك صدقاً وعدلاً لا مبدل لكلماته وهو السميع والعليم
	Inner circular legend	(bismillah)	*
	Central, line 3,4	(kalimah 2a)	*
	1	al-Imam	*
	2	al-Qaim bi amr Allah	القائم بأمر الله
	5	Amir al-Muminin	*

Silver coins

Obv. As on gold coins

Rev. As on gold coins but without outer circular legend. Remaining circular legend inscribed within 2 circles.

abu Yazid, rebel issue of 333 AH (945 AD)

Similar to the coins of al-Qaim, but 2 circles on reverse as well.

Obv. Circular legend	(bismillah)	بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ ضَرْبٌ	*
Central, line 3,4	(kalimah 1a, 1b)		

1	Our Lord is God
2	all government is God's
5	The Truth, the manifest One

ربنا الله
لا حكم الا لله
الحق المبين

Rev. Outer circular legend (Koran IX,33) *

Inner circular legend (Koran VII, 156) Those who believe in Him, and honour Him, and assist Him, and follow the light which has been sent down with Him, shall be happy

فالذين امنوا به و
عزروه و نصروه و
اتبعوا النور الذي
انزل معه اوليك
هم المفلحون

Central, line 2,3,4,	(kalimah 2a)	*
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1	Glory be to God
5	Seal of the Prophets

العزة لله
خاتم النبيين

abu Zahir Isma'il al-Mansur billah, 334-341 AH (946-953 AD)

1st type (335 AH): As the coins of al-Qaim and issued in his name.

2nd type (336-337 AH) In his own name. On each side one circular legend and central legends in 4 lines. Three concentric circles surrounding the legends, with annulus between the two inner circles.

Obv. Circular legend	(bismillah, with month)	*
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Central, line 2,3	(kalimah 1a)	*
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1	al-Imam
4	al-Mansurbillah

المنصور بالله

Rev. Circular legend	(Koran IX,33)	*
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Central, line 2,3	(kalimah 2a)	*
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1	Isma'il
4	Amir al-Muminin

اسماعيل

3rd type (338-341 AH): Design similar to 2nd type.

Obv. Circular legend	(Koran IX,33)	*
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Central line 1,2,3	(kalimah 1a,1b,2a)	*
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Rev. Circular legend	(bismillah, without month)	*
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Central, line 1	'Abd Allah
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2	Isma'il al-Imam
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عبد الله
اسماعيل الامام

3rd type (Continued)

3 al-Mansur billah
4 Amir al-Muminin

المنصور بالله

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abu Tamim Ma'add al-Mu'iss ladin Allah, 341-365 AH (953-975 AD)

Three circular legends delimited by four circles with a point in centre. Fractional dinars similar but one less legend and circle.

Obv. Outer legend (Koran IX,33) *
Middle legend and 'Ali is the most distinguished of the agents and minister of the best of the messengers

و عن افضل الو
صيين و وزير
خير المرسلين

Inner legend (kalimah 1a,1b) *

Rev. Outer legend (bismillah) *

Middle The Imam Ma'add summons all men to the profession of the unity of the eternal God

علا امام محمد
لتو خير الاله
الصمد

Inner al-Mu'izz ladin Allah Amir al-Muminin

المعز لادين الله امير
المومنين

abu Mansur Nizar al-'Aziz billah, 365-386 AH (976-996 AD)

Two concentric circular legends each between two circles: a fifth circle around a point in the middle. An annulus each side of inner legend.

Obv. Outer circular legend (Koran IX,33) *
Inner circular legend (kalimah 1a,2a,2b) *

Rev. Outer circular legend (bismillah) *

Inner circular legend Slave of God and His favourite Nizar al-Imam al-'Aziz billah Amir al-Muminin

عبد الله و وليه
نزار الامام
العزير بالله امير
المومنين

abu 'Ali al-Mansural-Hakim bi amr Allah, 386-411 AH (996-1021 AD)

1st type: Two concentric legends between circles with annulus between. Central legend in 2 horizontal lines.

Obv. Outer circular legend (Koran IX,33) *
Inner circular legend (kalimah 1a,1b) *
Central, line 1,2 (Kalimah 2a,2b) *

Rev. Outer circular legend (Bismillah) *

Inner circular legend Slave of God and His favourite al-Mansur abu 'Ali al-Imam

عبد الله و وليه
المنصور ابو
علي لامام

1st type: (Continued)

Central, line 1	al-Hakim bi amr Allah
2	Amir al-Muminin

الحاكم بامر الله
*

2nd Type: (posthumous): One circular legend, central legend in 4 horizontal lines. Three circles delimiting the legends, with annulus between the two inner circles.

Obv. Circular legend	(Koran IX,33)	*
Central, line 1,2,3,4	(kalimah 1a,1b,2a,2b)	*
Rev. Circular legend	(bismillah)	*

Central line 1	Slave of God and His favourite al-I	عبد الله و وليه الا
2	mam al-Hakim by the commandment of God A-	مام لحاكم بامر الله ا
3	mir al-Muminin and slave of the	مير المؤمنين و عبد الر
4	most merciful guardian of the faith of the moslems	حيم و لي عهد المسلمين

1/2 Dinar: Three horizontal lines on each side surrounded by double circle.

Obv. Central, line 1,2,3	(kalimah 1a,2a,2b)	*
Rev. Central, line 1	al-Mansur	المنصور
2	abu al-Imam	ابو الامام
3	Amir al-Muminin	*

abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Zahir li'izaz din Allah, 411-427 AH (1021-1036 AD)

Similar to 1st type of al-Hakim except for:

Rev. Inner circular legend	Slave of God and His favourite abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Imam	عبد الله و وليه ابو الحسن علي الامام
Central, line 1	al-Zahir li 'izaz din	الظاهر لا عزاز دين
2	Allah Amir al-Muminin	الله امير المؤمنين

1/2 Dinar: One circular legend between circles and one central legend in 3 lines.

Obv. Circular legend	(Koran IX,33)	*
Central, line 1,2,3	(kalimah 1a,2a,2b)	*
Rev. Circular legend	(bismillah)	*
Central, line 1	al-Zahir	الظاهر
2	li 'Izaz din Allah	لا عزاز دين الله
3	Amir al-Muminin	*

abu Tamim Ma'add al-Mustansir billah, 427-487 AH (1036-1094 AD)

Similar to 2nd type of al-Hakim, but central legends in 3 or 4 lines.

Obv. Circular legend	(Koran IX,33)	*
Central, line 1,2,3,4	(kalimah 1a,1b,2a,2b)	*
	line 2, with kalimah 1b, may be missing).	

Rev. Circular legend	(bismillah)	*
Central, line 1	al-Imam	*
2	Ma'add abu Tamim	*
3	al-Mustansir billah	المستنصر بالله
4	Amir al-Muminin	*
(line 2 may be missing)		

Independent Zirid coins, 439-449 AH (1047-1057 AD)

The Zirid governors of the eastern Maghreb continued to issue coins in the name of the Fatimid Caliphs till 438 AH, but in 439 and 440 AH two minor but significant changes occurred, al-Mahdiyyah disappeared as a mint name and, instead of al-Mansuriyah, the old Berber name of Sabrah was used, a clear indication of dissent from Fatimid conformity.

These first changes were soon followed by more drastic ones. On coins dated from 441 to 449 AH the name of the Caliph and the Shi'ite formulas disappear and are replaced by Sunnite legends, in accordance with the proclaimed allegiance to the Abbasid Caliph. Kairouan now replaces Sabrah as the mint and its importance as a centre of orthodoxy is stressed by the formula used. In 441 AH the relationship of the dinar to the dirham was fixed at 1:35. Dinars of this type were minted toward the end of this period in al-Mahdiyyah - which curiously enough retained its name - and in Sfax, after the Banu Hilal invasion had rendered the control of the interior by the Zirids precarious.

The coins of true Fatimid type minted in al-Mahdiyyah from 449 AH to 459 AH are included in the preceding section. A summary of available data on the independent Zirid coins is given in Table 1.2. The coins correspond to the following general description:-

439-440 AH (1047-1048 AD)

Similar to earlier coins issued in Ifriqiyah in the name of al-Mustansir except for mint-name, Sabrah صبره

441-449 AH (1049-1057 AD)

Arrangement of legends and circles similar to above

Obv. Circular legend	(Koran XXXIII, 44) Oh, thou prophet, we have sent thee as a witness and a herald of good tidings and a warner and a summoner to God	يا ايها النبي انا ارسلناك شهيدا و مبشرا و نذيرا و داعيا الى الله
Central line, 1,2,3	(kalimah 1a,1b,2a)	*
Rev. Circular legend	(bismillah, but: ...in the city of the power of Islam, al-Qayrawan....)	*
Central, line 1	(Koran III, 79) and whoever desires other	... بعد يده عز الاسلام والقير وان
2	than Islam as a faith	و من يتبع غير الاسلام دينا
3	that it will not be accepted from Him	قلن يقبل منه

Other mint names: al-Mahdiyah
Safaqus (Sfax)

المهديّة
مد يده سفا قس

Coins issued by Local Rulers

Apart from those issued by the Zirids, very few coins have been described for the period of instability between the ill-fated attempt of the Zirids to break away from Fatimid sovereignty and the establishment of Hafsid rule.

The fact that so few coins have survived suggests either that few were minted, or that those which were issued were soon melted down, or both. The interruption of the traditional trade with Africa south of the Sahara probably produced a shortage of bullion quite apart from the lack of adequate infrastructures for striking and issuing the coins. Continual changes in allegiances would discredit the coins in circulation and the limited range of effective control exercised by local chieftains would discourage trade. Finally, those coins which were in circulation in the region during this period were probably withdrawn by the Almohads when they occupied Ifriqiyah, and the metal used for their newly reformed coinage.

The few coins which have been described are listed in Table 1.3 and correspond to the following description:-

Hammu ibn Malil, Berber governor of Sfax, 451-493 AH (1059-1100 AD)

One gold dinar dated 461 AH, similar in appearance to Fatimid coins of that period. On each side, one circular legend and 3 horizontal lines. In contrast to Fatimid coins, the central legend of the reverse has the religious quotation used by the independent Zirids (Koran III, 79) and no personal names are given.

Obv. Circular legend	(Koran IX,33)	*
Central, line 1,2,3	(kalimah 1a,1b,2a)	*
Rev. Circular legend	(bismillah) (mint name): Safaqus (Sfax)	*
Central line, 1	(Koran, III,79)	
	and whoever desires other	
2	than Islam as a faith	
3	that it will not be accepted from Him	

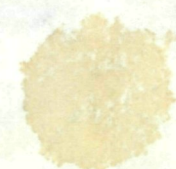
سفا قس
و من يتبع غير
الاسلام دينا
فلن يقبل منه

Rashid ibn Rashid, Arab governor of Gabes, 5xx-554 AH (115x-1159 AD)

One gold dinar dated 551 AH; appearance similar to above, but legends different. Same religious legend as on independent Zirid coins (Koran, III,79) but no "second symbol" (Koran IX,33). Name of the governor given on the obverse, below the kalimah. The bismillah also shows some variations from the usual formula: "al-Rahman" added after "In the name of God", and "'am" instead of "sanah" in the date.

Obv. Circular legend	(Koran III,79 - see above - but continuing further):
	and in the next life he shall be of those who perish

و هو في الآخرة
من التأسرين



Central, line 1,2	(kalimah 1a,1b)	*
3	al-Amir al-Rashid	الامير الرشيد
4	ibn Rashid	بن رشيد
Rev. Circular legend	(bismillah), reading: بقبس علم ضرب	بسم الله الرحمن ضرب
Central, line 1	al-Imam	*
2	slave	عبد
3	of God	الله
4	Amir al-Muminin	*

Norman Coins

During their relatively short presence in Ifriqiyah, the Normans issued coins similar to the Fatimid pieces then in circulation, with legends naming the Norman Princes crudely written in Arabic. Only a few of these coins have been described.

Roger II

One gold dinar dated 543 AH. Legends arranged within four concentric circles delimiting the two circular legends, with narrow amulus between second and third circle; central legend in two lines.

Obv. Outer circular legend	Struck by commandment of the king extolled, Roger, exultant by God, in the town of al-Mahdiyyah in the year 543	ضرب بامر الملك المعظم رجار المعترز بالله بمدينه المهريه سنة ثلث و اربعين خمسمائه
Inner circular legend	Praise to God the True one praise as He is meriting and deserving	الحمد لله حق حمده كما هو اهله ومستحقه
Central legend, line 1	the King	الملك
2	Roger	رجار
Rev. Circular legends as on the obverse		
Central legend, line 1	exultant	المعترز
2	by God	بالله

William I

One gold dinar dated 549 AH, similar to above.

Obv. Outer circular legend	Struck by commandment of the leader, by commandment of God, king William in the town of al-Mahdiyyah in the year 549	صرت بامر الهادي يامر الله الملك غليالم بمدينه المهريه سنة تسع و اربعين خمسمائه
Inner circular legend	as on coin of Roger II	
Central legend, line 1	the king	الملك
2	William	غليالم

Rev. Circular legends as on obverse

المهادي

Central legend, line 1 the leader

2 by commandment of God

بامر الله

Coins Issued in Ifriqiyah by the Almohads

In 541 AH the Almohads introduced in North Africa and in Spain significant changes in the traditional Arab coinage which had followed practically the same pattern since the 'Umayyad reform of ca. 76 AH. The new Almohad dinar maintained a diameter of between 19 and 22mm, but its weight was reduced to 3.4 grams. The legends were arranged within a square inscribed in a circle thus producing four peripheral segments which were also utilized for legends. A square silver dirham was introduced and instead of Kufic a cursive Naskhi script adopted for all coins. The legends were also changed, the traditional "symbols" and the quotations from the Koran being replaced by dedications to the Mahdi and by more complete names of the ruler, and of his heir. The "bismillah" itself disappeared and the mint-name, when given, was added in small characters at the bottom of the legends in the square, the date being omitted altogether.

From the point of view of Tunisian history and numismatics, a significant event was the first appearance of the name of Tunis on coins, with two dinars minted there between the conquest of the town by the Almohads in 555 AH and 563 AH; the first in the name of the Almohad Caliph 'Abd al-Mu'min, and the second in the name of the Caliph Yusuf, before he assumed the title of Amir al-Muminin. It is likely that many of the numerous mintless Almohad dinars of this period were struck in eastern Maghreb, and it may be assumed that only coins conforming to the new standards were in circulation there during the period of Almohad supremacy. With regard to silver coins, a relatively large number of anonymous square dirhams exist from Tunis. Apart from those with legends in ornamented Kufic, which was not used by the Almohads, their differentiation from later Hafsid coins of similar appearance is difficult. On one of these square dirhams which cannot definitely be attributed, the mint of Jarbah (Djerba) can be read.

Gold Coins

Central double square within marginal double line, the inner continuous and the outer dotted.

abu Mohammad 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn Ali, 524-558 AH (1130-1163 AD)

Obv. Central legend in 3 lines 1 There is no god but

لا اله الا

2 God Muhammad

الله محمد

3 is the Apostle of God

رسول الله

bottom line, small characters Tunis

تونس

segments: top In the name of the merciful the compassionate

left God bless Muhammad

bottom and his family the noble

right the pure ones

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
صلى الله على محمد
واله الطيبين
الطاهرين

Rev. Central legend in 3 lines

line 1 The Mahdi Imam

2 of the community upright

3 in the commandment of God

bottom line, small characters: Tunis

المهدي امام
الامة القاسم
بامر الله
تونس

segments: top abu Muhammad 'Abd
 left al-Mu'min ibn 'Ali
 bottom Commander of the believers
 right praise to God Lord of all created beings
abu Yaqub Yusuf I ibn 'Abd al-Mu'min 558-563 AH (1163-1184 AD) as Amir

ايو محمد عبد
 المؤمن بن علي
 امير المؤمنين
 الامور لله رب العالمين

Obv. Central legend in 4 lines

line 1 In the name of the merciful the compassionate
 2 there is no God but God
 3 Muhammad is the Apostle of God
 4 the Mahdi Imam of the community

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 لا اله الا الله
 محمد رسول الله
 المهدي امام الامة
 تونس
 اله واحد
 لا اله الا هو
 الرحمن الرحيم
 و الهكم

bottom line, small characters: Tunis

segments: left God the only one
 bottom there is no god but He
 right the merciful the compassionate
 top and the sovereign

Rev. Central legend in 4 lines

line 1 upright in the commandment of God
 2 the Kaliph abu Muhammad
 3 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn 'Ali
 4 Commander of the believers

القائم بامر الله
 الخليفة ابو محمد
 عبد المؤمن بن علي
 امير المؤمنين
 ابو يعقوب
 يوسف بن
 امير المؤمنين
 الامير الاجل

segments: left abu Yaqub
 bottom Yusuf son of
 right commander of the believers
 top the highest commander

Silver Coins

Anonymous square dirhams in Naskhi script, with Tunis or Djerba as mint-names, and no date.

Obv. Legend in 3 horizontal lines

Line 1 There is no God but God
 2 the whole commandment is unto God
 3 there is no strength but from God

لا اله الا الله
 الامر كله لله
 لا قوة الا بالله

Rev. Legend in 3 horizontal lines

Line 1 God is our Lord
 2 Muhammad our Apostle
 3 the Mahdi our Imam

الله ربنا
 محمد رسولا
 المهدي امامنا

Mint-names:

beneath legend of obverse or of reverse Tunis تونس
 beneath legend of reverse Djerba جربة
 Pertinent data on the above coins are given in Table 1.4

Table 1. Synopsis of coins from Ifriqiyah, 296-625 AH (909-1228 AD)

1.1 Fatimid Coins, 296-459 AH (909-1067 AD)

Ruler	Diameter in mm	Weight in g	Mint places and recorded dates (AH)	
a. <u>Gold Dinars</u>				
abu 'Abd Allah	18.5-20	4.12-4.18	Kairouan	297
			mintless	296
10-Mahdi	18-23	4.0-4.20	Kairouan	300, 301, 303-306
			Mahdia	311, 315-318, 320, 321
			mintless	297, 314, 318, 322
al-Qaim	17-20	4.0-4.20	Mahdia	323, 324 - 334
			mintless	327
abu Yazid (rebel)	19	4.18	Kairouan	333
al-Mansur	18-23	3.85-4.18 (3.15)	Kairouan	335
			Mahdia	336, 337, 339, 340
			Mansuriya	338-341
al-Mu'izz	17-23	3.10-4.20	Mahdia	353, 360, 364, 365
			Mansuriya	342-347, 351-357, 359-363, 365
			mintless	352, 357, 360, xxx
al-'Aziz	19-21	2.90-4.20	Mahdia	366, 367, 369-372, 374, 375, 377, 378, 380, 381, 383, 384
			Mansuriya	367, 368, 370, 371, 374-386
al-Hakim	21-24	4.0-4.17	Mahdia	392, 396, 399, 401, 404, 405 407, 408, 411, 412
			Mansuriya	387, 396, 404, 408, 410
			mintless	389
al-Zahir	21-25	3.62-4.35	Mahdia	415, 417, 419, 420, 422, 424 426, 429
			Mansuriya	412, 414, 416, 419-421, 422 424-429, xxx
			Zwila	414
al-Mustansir	21-27	3.90-4.36	Mahdia	436, 437, 449-451, 453-457, 459
			Mansuriyah	430-436, 438, 4x4, 43x, xx6, xxx
			mintless	xxx
b. <u>Gold ½ Dinars</u>				
abu 'Abd Allah	12	1.0	mintless	297
			Kairouan	3½0
al-Mahdi	13-15	1.0-1.05	Mahdia	316
			mintless	301, 311?, xxx
al-Qaim	13-16.5	1.0-1.05	Mahdia	330?
			mintless	325, 328

Ruler	Diameter in mm	Weight in g	Mint places and recorded dates (AH)
b. Gold $\frac{1}{4}$ Dinars (Continued)			
al-Mansur	10-17	1.0-1.45	Mahdia 337,338,341 Mansuriya 340,341
al-Mu'izz	14.5-16	0.99-1.10	Mahdia 34x,360,361,363,364 Mansuriya 351,352,361-364 mintless 354,xxx
al-'Aziz	-	-	-
al-Hakim	11-13	0.63-1.04	Mahdia 388,390,392,411,412,xxx Mansuriya 410,xxx mintless xxx
al-Zahir	11.5-13	0.82-0.97	Mansuriya 419,423,429,xx9,xxx Mahdia Rahi'I 420 mintless no date
al-Mustansir	12-16	0.80-1.19	Mahdia 450?,4xx Mansuriya 432?,436-438 mintless xxx
c. Silver dirhams and fractions			
abu 'Abd Allah	17	1.36	Kairovan 296 Kairovan 308
al-Mahdi	16.5	1.30-1.45 2.50	Mahdia 316,318 mintless xxx
al-Qaim	15-18	0.39,0.91, 1.35-1.75	Kairovan 331 Mahdia 323,325,327,328-332 mintless xxx
al-Mansur	15-20	1.05-1.50	Mahdia 335 mintless 334,339?
al-Mu'izz	18-21	1.11-1.50 2.57-2.70	Mahdia 343,350,352,356,357,359,xxx Mansuriya 352,354-361,363-365,xxx
al-'Aziz	15-21	0.73,1.23- 1.43	Mahdia 367,370,371,374,375,377, 379-381,383,xxx Mansuriya 366,368,369,376,36x,xxx mintless 375,xxx
al-Hakim	10.5, 17.5-23.5	0.24,1.35- 1.79,4.40- 4.77	Mahdia 401 Mansuriya xxx mintless 394,xxx
al-Zahir	-	-	-
al-Mustansir		1.30	Mansuriya 432?

1.2 Independent Zirid Coins, 439-449 AH (1047-1057 AD)

	Diameter in mm	Weight in g	Mint places and recorded dates (AH)	
a. <u>Gold Dinars</u>	20-24.5	3.97-4.25	Sabrah	439,440
			Kairouan	441,442,444-446,448
			Mahdia	446,447
			Sfax	449
b. <u>Gold $\frac{1}{4}$ Dinar</u>	13	0.80-1.02	Kairouan	443
c. <u>Silver Dirham</u>	13	1.17	mintless	xxx

1.3 Coins Issued by Local Rulers

Date	Ruler	Metal	Diameter in mm	Weight in g	Mint
461 AH (1069 AD)	Hammu ibn Malil Berber Chieftain	gold			Sfax
551 AH (1156 AD)	Rashid ibn Rashid Arab Chieftain	gold			Gabès
543 AH (1148 AD)	Roger II Norman King	gold	22	4.15	Mahdia
549 AH (1157 AD)	William I Norman King	gold	21	4.14	Mahdia

1.4 Almohad Coins, 555-625 AH (1160-1228AD)

Caliph	Dates	Metal	Diameter in mm	Weight in g	Mint
'Abd al-Mumin	524-558AH(1130-1163AD)	gold			Tunis
Yusuf	558-580AH(1163-1184AD)	gold			Tunis
anonymous	-	silver	15x15 square	1.40	Tunis
anonymous	-	silver	square		Djerba

Table 2 Chronology of Ifriqiyah between 296 and 625 AH (909-1228 AH)

AH	AD	
296	909	Occupation of Kairouan by abu 'Abd Allah al-Shi'i and end of the Aghlabid dynasty
297	910	Establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate
333	944	Kharijite revolt and occupation of Kairouan
362	972	Transfer of the Fatimid Caliphate from Mahdia to Cairo. Ifriqiyah ruled by Zirid governors

Table 2 (Continued)

AH	AD	
441	1049	Proclamation by the Zirid governor of allegiance to the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad
442	1050	Invasion of Ifriqiyah by the Banu Hilal
543	1148	Occupation of Mahdia by the Normans and end of the Zirid period
556	1160	Occupation of Mahdia by the Almohads and end of the Norman presence in Ifriqiyah
625	1228	Establishment of independent Hafsid government in Tunis

Fatimid Caliphs, to 487 AH (1094 AD)

297-322	909- 934	abu Muhammad 'Ubaid Allah al-Mahdi billah
322-334	934- 946	abu al-Qasim al-Qaim billah
334-341	946- 953	abu Zahir Isma'il al-Mansur billah
341-365	953- 975	abu Tamim Ma'add al-Mu'izz ladin Allah
365-386	976- 996	abu Mansur Nizar al-'Aziz billah
386-411	996-1021	abu 'Ali al-Mansur al-Hakim bi amr Allah
411-427	1021-1036	abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Zahir li 'izaz din Allah
427-487	1036-1094	abu Tamim Ma'add al-Mustansir billah

Zirid Governors

362-373	973- 984	Yusuf abu al-Futuh al-Sanhaj
373-386	984- 996	abu al-Qasim al-Mansur
386-406	996-1016	abu Munad Badis
406-454	1016-1062	abu Tamim al-Mu'izz ibn Badis
454-501	1062-1108	abu Yaha Tamim ibn al-Mu'izz
501-509	1108-1116	abu Tahir Yahya ibn Tamim
509-515	1116-1121	abu al-Futuh 'Ali ibn Yahya
515-543	1121-1148	abu Yahya al-Hasan ibn 'Ali

Almohad (Muwahhid) Caliphs to 629 AH (1232 AD)

524-558	1130-1163	abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Mumin ibn 'Ali
558-580	1163-1184	abu Yaqub Yusuf I ibn 'Abd al-Mumin
580-595	1184-1199	abu Yusuf Yaqub ibn Yusuf I al-Mansur
595-610	1199-1213	abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad al-Nasir ibn Yaqub
610-620	1213-1224	abu Yaqub Yusuf II al-Mustansir ibn Muhammad
620-621	1224	abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahid al-Makhlu ibn Yusuf I
621-624	1224-1227	abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah al-Adil ibn Yaqub
624-629	1227-1232	abu al-Ula Idris I ibn Yaqub