

Early Arab Coins of TunisiaThe Hafsid - AH 627-982 (1230-1574 AD)by M.L. TarizzoHistorical Background

At the beginning of the 7th century of the Hijra (13th century AD) most of northwestern Africa - the Maghreb - was nominally subject to the the Almohad Caliph whose power however was being undermined by Christian pressure in the Iberian peninsula and by unrest in North Africa. The tendency of the Maghreb to divide into three parts, noted throughout most of its recorded history, was evident also under the Almohads and eventually three Berber dynasties became established, the Hafsids in the east, in Ifriqiyah, the 'Abd-al-Wadids in the central part and the Marinids in the west.

IN AH 604/1206 AD the Almohad Caliph Muhammad al-Nasir had appointed as Governor of Ifriqiyah, abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahid, son of abu Hafs 'Umar, one of the early supporters of 'Abd al-Mumin, the first Almohad Caliph. 'Abd al-Wahid established his capital in Tunis and was succeeded in 618/1222 by his elder son abu Faris who was deposed in 625/1228 by his own brother abu Zakariya Yahya (1)*. The latter gradually severed his ties with the Almohads and is considered to be the founder of the Hafsid dynasty. The period of transition stretched over several years but historical evidence points to 627/1230 as the beginning of independent Hafsid rule, and the coins of the Hafsid style but with the names of al-Mahdi and of 'Abd al-Mumin are assigned to this period.

The Hafsids considered themselves as the spiritual heirs and successors of the Almohads and soon became the most influential of the western islamic dynasties of their period, expanding their control westwards and forcing the 'Abd-al-Wadids to pay tribute.

Abu Zakariya Yahya was succeeded by his son Muhammad (2)* who assumed the Caliphal title of Amir al-Mu'minin and the name of al-Mustansir. Following the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 656/1258 and the collapse of the eastern Caliphate, al-Mustansir was recognised as Caliph by the Sharif of Mecca and Medina in 657/1259 and possibly by the Mamluks of Egypt in 658/1260. This reunification of the Caliphate was of short duration and the 'Abbasid Caliphate was reestablished in 659/1261 in Cairo by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars who set up an 'Abbasid who alsoand confusingly took the name al-Mustansir.

When the house of Anjou came to power in Sicily in 663/1265, the Hafsid al-Mustansir held back the tribute which the previous rulers of Ifriqiyah had paid to the Normans and the Hohenstaufens, and which had contributed to a relative balance of power in the region. In an attempt to assert his rights Charles I of Anjou King of Sicily, enlisted the help of his brother Louis IX of France and the fleet and troops which had been assembled for the Eighth Crusade were diverted to North Africa, where they landed near Carthage in 669/1270.

* The numbers given in brackets after the names of the rulers are those of Table 1 and Fig. 1.

This expedition came to an abrupt end, short of a decisive victory, when Louis IX died of the plague in Carthage in 669/1270. However, Charles of Anjou obtained the payment of a heavier tribute together with trade and settlement rights for the Christians, in recognition of al-Mustansir's right to control the region.

Al-Mustansir's death was followed by a period of unrest until Khalid (8), Hafsids ruler of Bougie in the west reunited under his rule all the Hafsids possessions in 709/1309. The control exercised by the central power gradually declined and a growing role was again played by nomad Arabs; different parts of the region being under the intermittent rule of various Hafsids contestants. Moving in from the south-east, abu Yahya Zakariya (11) occupied Tunis, executed Khalid and proclaimed himself Caliph. He was in turn chased to the south by Abu Bakr (10) who moved in from the west. Abu Bakr restored order with the help of the Marinids and of the Bani Solaim from the south.

Following the death of Abu Bakr in 747/1346, further revolts led to another intervention by the Marinids who occupied Tunis in 748/1347 and came to control the entire Maghreb, as the Almohads had before them. Separate Hafsids rule over eastern and central Maghreb was eventually restored by Ahmad (17), a Hafsids prince established in Bougie and Constantine, who in 772/1370 occupied Tunis with the help of the Ottoman sultan and reigned there till 796/1394. His son 'Abd al-'Aziz (19) was followed by Muhammad (20) and by 'Uthman (21) during whose long reign Hafsids rule was consolidated in the face of persistent conflicts on the western border. Active trade was established with the East, with the Italian republics and with Aragon. After 'Uthman, there was a rapid succession of Hafsids rulers and again unrest and gradual decline of the central power under the pressure of rebel nomads and in parallel with the strengthening of the Ottoman Empire

By 900/1495 the littoral towns of the "Barbary coast" had become practically autonomous republics living off piracy at sea with the more or less open support of the Ottomans. Around 916/1510 the Hafsids Caliph Muhammad (25) came to terms with Khayr al-Din Barbarossa and appointed him Governor of Djerba, thus recognising his de -facto independence. However, Khayr al-Din moved from Djerba to Algiers where his brother Aruj had established a principality. From there and with the help of the Ottomans, he occupied Tunis in 941 proclaiming the sovereignty of the Ottomans. Muhammad, the Hafsids ruler, fled to Spain where he enlisted the help of the Emperor Charles V who personally led a fleet carrying Spanish, German, Portuguese and Genoese soldiers and occupied Tunis in 942/1535.

Muhammad was reinstated, but as a vassal seconded by a Spanish Governor and was obliged to pay an annual tribute of 12,000 ducats. With the help of the Genoese Admiral Andrea Doria, he again took control over most of the coastal area but the interior, including Kairouan, remained under the control of nomad Arabs. In 948/1542 Muhammad was deposed by his son Ahmad (27) who tried to play off Spaniards and Ottomans against each other. During his reign, Dragut, an independent corsair operating out of Mahdia, was appointed Ottoman Governor of Tripoli and occupied Gafsa and Kairouan. The ruler of Algiers, Uluji Ali, moved east, chased out the Hafsids ruler and placed a Governor in Tunis in 977/1569.

In the meantime, Spain and Venice had allied themselves against the Ottomans. John of Austria, brother of Philip II of Spain, occupied Tunis again in 981/1573 and installed there the Hafsids Muhammad (28) brother of Ahmad. However, shortly afterwards the Ottomans led by Sinan Pasha and with the help of local rulers from the south and the west reoccupied Tunis. The last of the Hafsids was taken prisoner to Istanbul and Tunisia became an Ottoman protectorate for the next three centuries.

Fig. 1. Hafsids genealogy (adapted from Hazard)

Only rulers of the eastern Maghreb are included, identified by Hazard's serial numbers

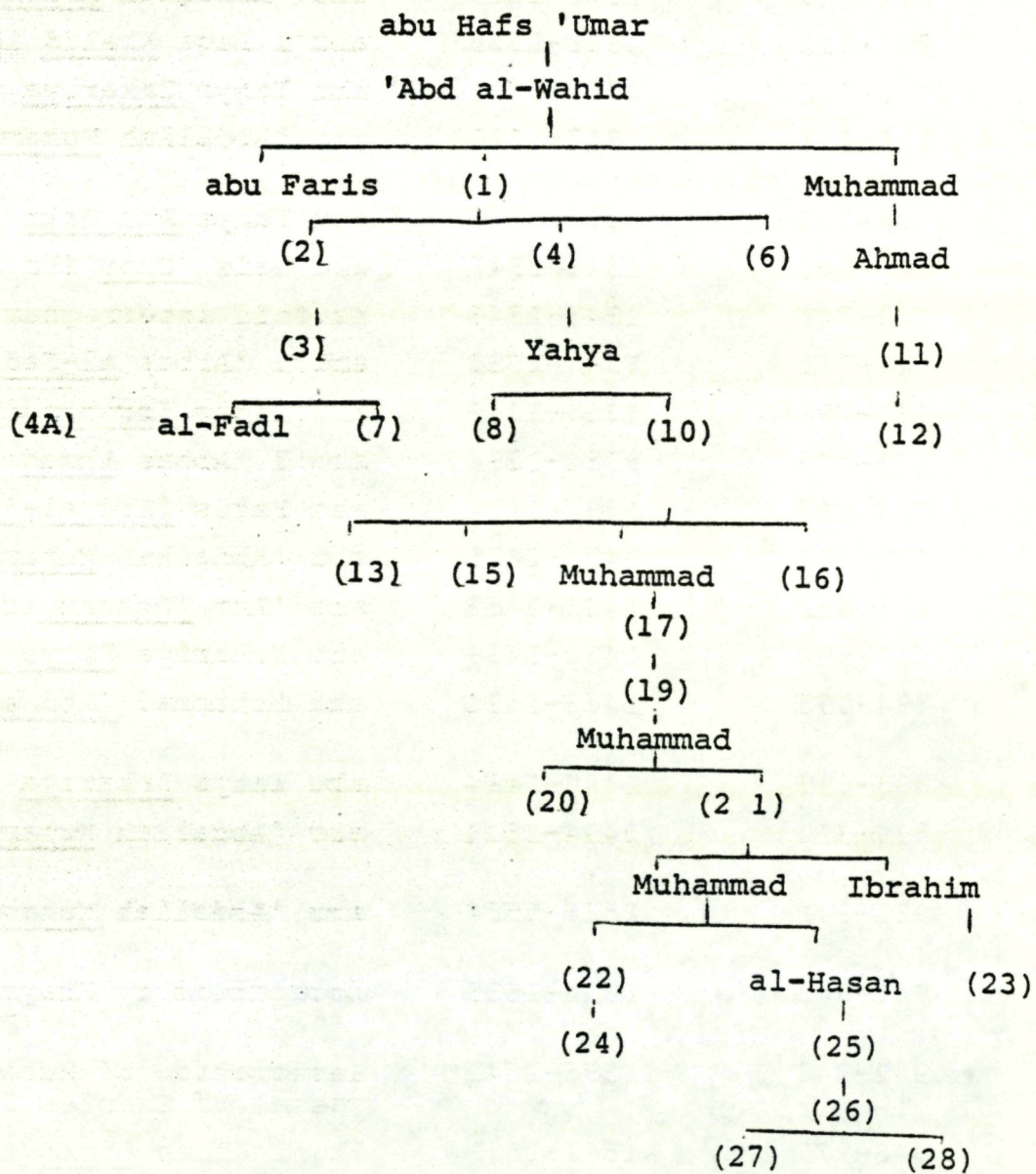


Table 1. Hafsid Rulers of Tunisia (adapted from Hazard)

Hazard No.	Date		<u>Name</u>
	AH	AD	
1	627-647	1230-1249	abu Zakariya <u>Yahya</u> ibn 'Abd al-Wahid
2	647-675	1249-1277	abu 'Abdallah <u>Muhammad</u> ibn Yahya
3	675-678	1277-1279	abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Muhammad
4	677-681	1279-1283	abu Ishaq <u>Ibrahim</u> ibn Yahya
4A	681-683	1282-1284	Ahmad ibn Marzuq, pretending to be abu'l 'Abbas al-Fadl
6	683-694	1284-1295	abu Hafs <u>'Umar</u> ibn Yahya
7	694-709	1295-1309	abu 'Abdallah <u>Muhammad</u> ibn Yahya
8	709-711	1309-1311	abu'l Baqa <u>Khalid</u> ibn Yahya
11	711-717	1311-1318	abu Yahya <u>Zakariya</u> ibn Ahmad
12	717-723	1317-1323	abu 'Abdallah <u>Muhammad</u> ibn <u>Zakariya</u>
10	718-747	1318-1346	abu Yahya <u>Abu Bakr</u> ibn Yahya
13	747-748	1346-1347	abu Hafs <u>'Umar</u> ibn Abu Bakr
-	748-749	1347-1348	Marinid interregnum
15	749-751	1348-1350	abu'l 'Abbas <u>al-Fadl</u> ibn Abu Bakr
16	751-770	1350-1369	abu Ishaq <u>Ibrahim</u> ibn Abu Bakr
17	755-796	1354-1394	abu'l 'Abbas <u>Ahmad</u> ibn Muhammad
19	796-837	1394-1434	abu Faris <u>'Abd al-'Aziz</u> ibn Ahmad
20	837-839	1434-1435	abu 'Abdallah <u>Muhammad</u> ibn Muhammad
21	839-893	1435-1488	abu 'Amr <u>'Uthman</u> ibn Muhammad
22	893-894	1488-1489	abu Zakariya <u>Yahya</u> ibn Muhammad
23	894-895	1489-1490	abu Muhammad <u>'Abd al-Mumin</u> ibn <u>Ibrahim</u>
24	895-899	1490-1494	abu Yahya <u>Zakariya</u> ibn Yahya
25	899-932	1494-1526	abu 'Abdallah <u>Muhammad</u> ibn <u>al-Hasan</u>
26	932-941	1526-1534	abu 'Abdallah <u>Muhammad</u> ibn <u>Muhammad</u>
-	941-942	1534-1535	occupation by Khayr al-Din Barbarossa
26	942-948	1535-1542	Restoration of Muhammad as vassal of Charles I of Spain
27	948-977	1542-1569	abu'l Abbas <u>Ahmad</u> ibn Muhammad
-	977-981	1569-1573	Ottoman interregnum
28	981-982	1573-1574	abu 'Abdallah <u>Muhammad</u> ibn <u>Muhammad</u> , vassal of Philip II of Spain

(1) H.W. Hazard The Numismatic History of Late Medieval North Africa ANS Numismatic Studies No. 8 New York 1952.

General Description of the Coins

The majority of the Hafsid coins which have been preserved are gold coins, possibly due to the intrinsic value and to the fact that gold was readily available for minting from trade connections with lands south of the Sahara. Numismatic and historical evidence in respect of the rare silver and copper coins is limited to two periods only; between AH 647 and 711 (1249-1311AD) and from AH 948/1542 AD to the end of the period of Hafsid rule, the latter series already showing Ottoman influence. No coins are known to have been struck by the numerous independent rulers who controlled different parts of the region in the period between 893/1488 and the end of the Hafsid rule.

Gold Coins

The Hafsid coins are similar to those struck by the Almohads (see ONS Information Sheet No. 18, July 1977). Their legends are partially within a square inscribed in a circle, and partially in the four segments. Unlike the Almohad coins in which the square consists of two continuous lines, the square on the Hafsid coins typically has 3 lines, two solid ones and a beaded one in between.

With the exception of one double dinar of Ahmed (17) and of Marinid coins struck in Tunis during this period, all central legends consist of three lines. The script used is normally a cursive Naskhi, but ornamental Kufi has been used in some cases. The legends in the segments usually follow a constant sequence, starting at the top, and following anti-clockwise in the left, bottom and right segments. None of the gold coins bear any date and their attribution depends solely on the legends which, apart from the early coins of this series, always give the name of the Amir, his antecedents and his descendants, and usually his titles.

Double dinars, dinars, half, quarter and eighth dinars are known, the denominations being determined by their weight. Many of the coins omit the name of the mint. This paper includes those coins without mint-names but issued by the Hafsid rulers of Tunisia. Tunis is the commonest mint name found but coins are also known from Qafsah, al-Hamma, Tuzar and Mahdiah (see Table 2). Coins struck by Hafsid rulers outside Tunisia are not dealt with here but are known from the mints of Bijayah, Tilimsan, Jaza'ir, Qusantinah, Biskirah, Tanas, Sabtah, Sijimasah and Tarabulus and from the Spanish mints of Ishbiliyah and Gharnatah.

When present the mint name is almost always on the reverse, beneath the legend inside the square, usually in small characters. Of the coins described here, only the double dinar issued by Ibrahim (16) at Gafsa and the double dinars issued in Tunis by the Marinids have the mint-name on the obverse.

Taken as a whole, these coins show a certain uniformity in the disposition and contents of the legends, after the changes which took place during the reign of abu Zakariya Yahya (1), founder of the dynasty, and which reflect his gradual breaking away from the Almohad influence and tradition.

Starting in 634/1226, the name of the Amir appears in the reverse segments of the coins issued by Yahya. His coins also show the name of the Almohad Caliph 'Abd al-Mumin in the central legend of the reverse up to 640/1242. From 640/1242 onwards the name of the Almohad Caliph is replaced by religious legends.

For the rest of the series the basic arrangement of the legends is as follows, with some minor variations:

Obverse, field: religious legends, including invocation to al-Mahdi

Obverse segments: religious legends, including the "bismillah" and the "kalimah", with minor variations in their wording

Reverse, field: name of the Amir

Reverse segments: religious legends and the names and titles of the Amir

Examples of Typical Religious Legends

Double Dinar

Obverse field	Thanks be to God the might and the strength are in God al-Mahdi is the vicar of God	الشكر لله والجور والقوة بالله المهدي خليفته الله
Obverse segments	In the name of God the merciful the compassionate God bless our lord Muhammad there is no god but God Muhammad is the apostle of God	بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم صلى الله على سيدنا محمد لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله

Dinar

Obverse field	Thanks be to God al-Mahdi is the vicar of God	الشكر لله المهدي خليفته
Obverse segments	Your God is one there is no god but He the merciful and compassionate	الهكم الله واحد لا اله الا هو الرحمن الرحيم

Table 2. Hafsid Gold Coins assumed to originate from the area now called Tunisia

		Denominations 2d, d, ½d, ¼d, ⅛d, 1/8 dinar				
		Weight 4.7, 2.3, 1.2, 0.6, 0.3 grams				
(1)	Yahya	First Series 627-634 In the name of 'Abd al Mumin as amir al-muminin.	x		x	
		2nd Series 634-640 Yahya's name added as amir al-ajal	x	x		
		3rd Series 640-647 Omitting 'Abd al Mumin amir al-muminin	x	x	x	
(2)	Muhammad	First Series 647-650 as amir al-ajal		x	x	x
		2nd Series 650-675 as amir al-muminin, al-Mustansir bi'Allah al-Mansur bi'fadl Allah	x	x		
(3)	Yahya	al-Wathiq bi-Allah al-Muayad bi-fadl Allah	x	x		
(4)	Ibrahim	as amir al-ajal, al-Mujahid fi sabil Allah	x			
(4A)	Ahmad Marzuq, imposter, pretending to be al-Fadl and using his name	al-Mansur bi-fadl Allah al-Qaim bi-haq Allah			T	
(6)	'Umar	al-Mustansir bi-Allah al-Muayad bi-nasr Allah		T	T	
(7)	Muhammad	al-Mustansir bi-Allah al-Mansur bi-fadl Allah			xT	
(8)	Khalid	al-Nasir li-din Allah al-Mansur bi-fadl Allah	x			
(10)	Abu Bakr	al-Mutawakil 'ala Allah al-Muayad bi-nasr Allah	xQ	x	x	
(11)	Zakariya	al-Qaim bi-nasr Allah al-Mansur bi-fadl Allah	x	x		
(12)	Muhammad	...al-Mujahid... (rest illegible)	x			
(13)	'Umar	al-Nasir li-din Allah al-Mansur bi-fadl Allah	x			x
-	Marinid interregnum. No names, no titles. Ziyamid type inscriptions on 5 horizontal lines in central square on obverse and reverse				T	
(15)	al-Fadl	al-Mutawakil 'ala Allah al-Muayad bi-nasr Allah		T		x

Mints: x = no mint, T = Tunis, Q = Qafsah, H = al-Hammah, M = Mahdiyah, Tz = Tuzar

Table 2. (Continued)

		Denominations 2d d, ½d, ¼d, ⅛d, ⅙d dinar				
		Weight 4.7, 2.3, 1.2, 0.6, 0.3 grams				
(16)	Ibrahim al-Mustansir bi-Allah al-Mansur bi-fadl Allah					xQ
(17)	Ahmad al-Mutawakil 'ala Allah al-Muayad bi-nasr Allah (H-609: Marinid influence legends in central squares on 5 horizontal lines)					x
(19)	'Abd al-'Aziz al-Mutawakil 'ala Allah al-Muayad bi-nasr Allah al-Mujahid fi sabil Allah					QTH, xTQM, x
(20)	Muhammad al-Mustansir bi-Allah al-Muayad bi-nasr Allah					x
(21)	'Uthman al-Mutawakil 'ala Allah wahdihi					xTz x x
(25)	Muhammad al-Mutawakil 'ala.... (rest illegible)					x x
(26)	Nuhammad (mostly illegible)...al-sultan...					x

Table 3. Hafsid gold coins from mints excluded from this paper

Ruler	Double dinars	Dinars
(1) Yahya	Bijayah Tilimsan Jaza'ir Sabtah Sijilmasah Ishbilyah	
(2) Muhammad	Bijayah	Bijayah
(6) Uthman	Bijayah	
(6A) Yahya (*)	no mint Bijayah	
(10) Abu Bakr	Bijayah Qusantinah	
(15) al-Fadl	Bijayah Tarabulus	
(15A) 'Abd al-Rahman (X)	Qusantinah	
(15B) Muhammad (*)	no mint	
(16) Ibrahim	Bijayah Tarabulus	
(19) 'Abd al-'Aziz	Bijayah Qusantinah Biskirah Tarabulus	

Table 3. (Continued)

Ruler	Double Dinars	Dinars
(20A) 'Ali (*)	Bijayah	
(21) 'Uthman	Tilimsan	
	Jaza'ir	
	Qusantinah	
	Tanas	
	Tarabulus	Tarabulus

- (*) Amir at Bijayah
- (X) Amir at Qusantinah

2. Silver Coins

Anonymous square silver dirhams are known, similar to those of the Almohads, but with the legends in ornamented Kufi script. Some of these coins have the mint-name "Tunis" beneath the reverse legend and were probably struck by the Hafsid between AH 650 and 711. Their size is 25 x 29 mm for the double dirham and 14 x 16 for the dirham; their weight is approximately 3.5 and 1.7 grams respectively.

The legends are:

Obverse	There is no god but God	لا اله الا الله
	the whole commandment unto God	الامر كله لله
	there is no strength but in God	لا تقوا الا بالله
Reverse	Allah is our Lord	الله ربنا
	Muhammad is our prophet	محمد رسولنا
	al-Mahdi our leader	المهدي امامنا

The only Hafsid ruler to whom silver coins can be attributed is Ahmad (27). No gold coins issued by him are known, and his silver and copper coins (see below) reflect the Ottoman influence. The silver coins are dated, in numerals, and the recorded dates range from 952 to 964 AH (1545-1557 AD).. All these coins have "Tunis" as mint-name. Their legends are as follows:-

Square double dirham 956 AH (1549 AD)

Obverse	There is no god but God; Muhammad is the apostle of God; the commandment whole unto God; there is no strength in God; al-Mahdi is the vicar of God	لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله لا تقوا الا بالله باله المهدي خليفة الله
Reverse	At the command power servant of God	عن امر عزة عبد الله المتوكل
	'ala Allah our prince	علي الله مولانا
	the Sultan Ahmad illustrious may	السلطان احمد عز
	year (9) 56	سنة ٥٦
	his victory be; struck in Tunis	نصره ضرب في تونس

Square dirhams Recorded dates (9)52, (9)54, (9)55, (9)58,
961, 964 AH (1545-1557 AD)

Obverse	And whoever relies upon God then he is his sufficiency verily God is attaining his commandment	ومن يتوكل على الله فهو حسبه ان الله بالغ امره عن امره لا تاع السطان احمد عز نصره صرب سنه
Reverse	At the command of our prince the Sultan Ahmad illustrious may his victory be; struck the year (date) Tunis	تونس

3. Copper Coins

Rare copper coins of this period attributed to Ahmad are known to exist. Their diameter is 15 to 18 mm and their weight approximately 2.5 grams. They have legends on two or three lines surrounded by arabesques.

Type 1.

Obverse	bi-amr Allah Tunis	بامر الله تونس
Reverse	abu al-'Abbas Ahmad. May his victory be illustrious	ابو العباس احمد عز نصره

Type 2

Obverse	Illustrious may his victory be; struck in Tunis	عز نصره صرب بتونس
Reverse	abu al-'Abbas Ahmad	ابو العباس احمد