

THE OTTOMAN COINAGE OF TILIMSĀN

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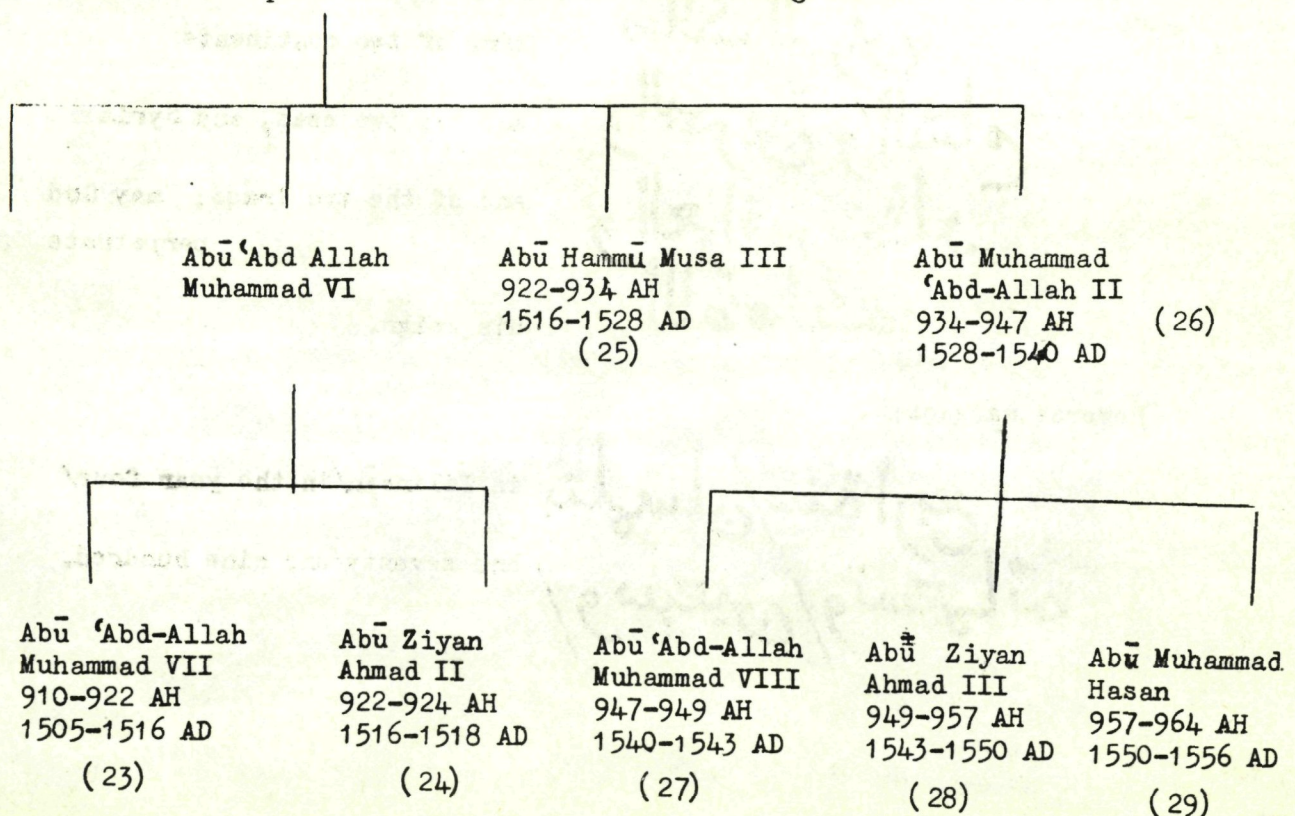
INTRODUCTION

As their power grew, the osmanli sultans struck coins in some towns remote from their metropolis. The products of these provincial mints normally conform to the pattern laid down by the central authorities so that the appearance at Tilimsan on the western limits of the Ottoman Empire, of a very unorthodox type of coinage deserves some attention.

The paper deals with only the coins for which the attribution is beyond any doubt. It will not therefore cover the Ziyamid coins bearing the name of Suleyman and tentatively ascribed by Hazard (1) to the tenth Ottoman Sultan.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In AH 637/1236 AD a Berber named Yaghmurasan established in Tilimsan the Ziyamid dynasty (named after Ziyān, an ancestor of Yaghmurasan). The Maririds of Morocco held the town between 737 and 749/1337 and 1348 and the Hafsidis of Tunisia between 753 and 760/1352-1359 but the Ziyamidis were the predominate power over some three centuries, providing 29 rulers. The last decade of this period was marked by a slow decay of the dynasty and Tilimsan's importance faded as the Spanish took Oran in 915/1509 and the Ottomans Algiers in 922/1516. When the Ziyamid ruler Abu-'Abd-allah Muhammad VII died in the latter year, his chosen successor Abu-Ziyan Ahmad II was ousted, with Spanish assistance, by Abu-Hammu Musa III. Ahmad called on the Ottomans for help and Arij Barbarossa removed Musa, killed Ahmad but was then killed himself when the Spanish intervened in 924/1518 and set Musa's brother Abu-Muhammad 'Abd-allah II on the Ziyamid throne. He was followed by his son Abu-'Abd-Allah Muhammad VIII who was temporarily displaced by Khair-al-din Barbarossa, then Ottoman governor of Algiers, in favour of Abu-Ziyan Ahmad III. In 957/1550 Ottoman influence again intervened to appoint Abu-Muhammad Hasan, as the Ziyamid ruler but in 964/1556 the pretence was abandoned and he was replaced by an Ottoman Agha. Hasan fled to the comparative safety of Spanish Oran but died of the plague shortly afterwards. His son moved to Spain and became a christian taking the name of Carlos.



The Last Ziyamid Rulers



DESCRIPTION OF THE COINS

The Ottoman coinage of Tilimsān is solely of gold and was struck in the names of three successive rulers of the dynasty of Osman, viz. Selīm II, Murad III and Mehmet III.

- a) In the name of Selīm II (11th Ottoman Sultan : 974-982/1566-1574) - 1 specimen reported by Kocaer (2), Edhem (3) and Artuk (4). (Fig. 1).  
Obverse field : in a double square enclosed in a double circle :

صاحب النصر	possessor of the victory
والعدل و.....	and justice and .....(?)
السلطان	the Sultan
سليم بن	Selīm, son
السلطان سليمان	of the Sultan Suleymān.

Obverse margin : in the four segments between the square and the circle :

خمس عشر / قراط /	Fifteen qirats
عز نصره / ٩٧٤	may his victory be strengthened/974.

On the second line of this field, Kocaer and Artuk read: سامان which is meaningless. I favour the reading: خاقان : Khaqan.

Reverse field: in a double square enclosed in a double circle:

مالك البرين	king of two continents
والبحرين والشام	and the two seas, and Syria
والعراقين خلد	and of the two Irāqs; may God
الله ملكه	perpetuate
	his reign.

Reverse margins:

بتلمسان / سنة اربع	in Tilimsān/in the year four/
/ وسبعين / وتسعمائة /	and seventy/and nine hundred.



b) In the name of Murad III (12th Sultan: 982-1003/1574-1595)

One specimen described by Schaendlinger in the München Staatliche Münzsammlung dated 978 (5).  
 One specimen illustrated by Ölçer (6) with the date 983.  
 One specimen reported by S. Lane-Poole (7) of the year 988.  
 Two specimens described by Soret (8) dated 989 and 995. This author quotes a similar undated coin reported by Moeller who ascribed it to the Moroccan Sharifs.  
 One specimen from the Copenhagen Cabinet published by S. Lane-Poole (9).  
 Two specimens in the American Numismatic Society collection dated 995 and 99.. (10).  
 One specimen in the author's collection with the date 995 (Fig.2).

Obverse field: in a double square enclosed in a double circle:

صاحب

possessor of

.....  
السلطان

..... (?)  
the sultan

مراد بن

Murād son of

السلطان سليم

the Sultan Selīm.

Obverse margin

عام / ..... /

In the year/.....

وتسعين / وتسعمائة

and ninety / and ninehundred.

Reverse field: similar to the previous coin.

Reverse margins as the obverse margin but with the units readable:

خمس

five

On the second line of the obverse field Lane-Poole originally read:

العدل المويذ but then changed it to: العدل المستقيم

"The Just Assisted (by God) ? . Though not very satisfactory, no better reading has so far come to the attention of the author. Soret's suggestion

of العبد المومنين seems grammatically incorrect.

c) In the name of Mehmet III (13th Sultan: 1003-1012/1595-1603).

One specimen in the A.N.S. collection (10) dated 1013 (sic !.....)  
 Another in the author's collection : date erased. (Fig.3)



c) (Continued)

Obverse field: in a double square enclosed in a circle

صاحب النصر .....	possessor of the victory
.....	..... (?)
السلطان محمد بن السلطان مراد	the sultan Mehmet son of the sultan Murad.

Reverse margin:

..... / عام	in the year /...../
..... / عشر	ten/.....

Reverse field: similar to the previous coins.

Reverse margin:

..... / عام	Ditto
..... / عشر	

far no-one has provided a convincing reading of the 2 lines of the obverse field left uninterpreted.

COMMENTARY

Thus dating 10 years after the Ottoman conquest we see appearing in Tilimsān between the years 974 and 1012 AH an Ottoman coinage very different in style that struck in Turkey or even in a similarly distant provincial mint like Algiers. These coins are distinguished by their unusual Maghribi calligraphy and the type has a family likeness to the coins previously issued from this mint by the Ziyānids. This peculiarity is probably due to the use of local die engravers accustomed to the earlier style of dies.



COMMENTARY (Continued)

There are other local peculiarities worth noting. Apart from the solitary piece of Selīm II, the coins do not show the sultan's accession date as is the rule but follow the example of Algiers in displaying the actual date. Earlier Ziyānid coins were undated. The use of "Ceam" instead of "sanah" for the word year, is a well-attested practice in North Africa on for example, the gold coins of the Almoravids or the contemporary coinage of the Hasani Sharifs of Morocco where the two words are used concurrently.

The use of the title "Khagan" on the coin of Selīm II if that is the correct reading of the legend, is apparently the earliest occurrence on an Ottoman coin. The so-called "Formula B" of Lane-Poole is not recorded in the British Museum Catalogue earlier than Murad III. The same piece bears the denomination of 15 qirats and Sauvāire (11) defines the qirat as 1/20th of a dinar. The view could therefore be advanced that this issue was made of debased gold and was current for 15 rather than the normal 20 qirats. In that case it would represent the only known instance of a coin indicating its real rather than its theoretical value.

All these points indicate the isolation of Tilimsān from the Ottoman world and this is emphasised by the minting in 1013 of a coin bearing the name of a ruler who died in 1012. What is perhaps more puzzling is the sudden cessation of minting after that date. Could this be due to the rising influence of Algiers eclipsing Tilimsān and removing the need for a mint? Hopefully new finds will provide an answer to the problem.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

