

## THE COINS OF MUSLIM MALTA

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In 1976 an attempt was made to study the coins from the period of the Muslim occupation of Malta and Gozo surviving in the public and in certain private collections on the islands. I am grateful to Dr Anthony Luttrell for instigating and facilitating this enterprise and for providing the study of the Mdina Hoard published in the article below. The friendly interest and co-operation of the museum curators is warmly acknowledged, and special thanks are due to the private collectors who provided help and information. The following collections were examined:

National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta  
Gozo Museum  
Cathedral Museum, Mdina  
Museum of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, Rabat  
Mr. Joseph Attard  
Mr. Emanuel Azzopardi, Valletta  
Mr. Antoine Debono, Rabat  
Hon. Mr. Justice A.J. Montanaro Gauci, Valletta  
Chevalier John Sant Manduca, Mdina  
Mr. Roger Vella Bonavita, Attard  
Anonymous Collector, Valletta.

Several other collectors, among whose coins no pieces of immediate concern to the project were found, were generous with their time, and their help too is gratefully acknowledged. Outside Malta, enquiries were made at the Venerable Order of St. John of Jerusalem, St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell in London, and a gift of coins made to the British Museum in 1965 was also examined. Finally, three hoard groups of supreme interest and importance were considered: the great Mdina Hoard of gold coins, almost all melted down immediately, and surviving only in the description of Ciantar, the only substantial body of material whose Maltese provenance is authenticated beyond any doubt; a group of about 140 pieces, mostly of very base silver, the property of the National Museum; and another, similar, group, the property of a private collector. The last two, judging by their appearance and composition, are certainly hoards, which were very probably found in Malta.

No precise terminal date was set for the survey, largely because the chronology of the early Norman coinage in its low denominations is still so uncertain. Any Norman coins with Arabic inscriptions at least until the end of Roger II in 1154 were taken into account. It should perhaps be mentioned, although it is no part of the survey, that by far the greatest surviving quantity of Muslim material belonged to

the Ottoman period. Very many North African copper coins, especially from the mint of Tripoli of the eighteenth century, were seen in both public and private collections.

As the enquiry proceeded it became clear that very few of the coins examined had an assured Malta provenance (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Coins of Maltese Provenance**

<i>Metal</i>	<i>Date A.H. (A.D.)</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Collection</i>
AV	165 (781/2)	Abbasid, mintless dinar	Azzopardi
AV	288 (901)	Aghlabid, mintless dinar	National Museum= Pisani, no. 4 <sup>1</sup>
AV	313 (925/6)	Abbasid, Misr mint. dinar	ex Azzopardi
AV	386-411 (996-1020)	Fatimid	Caruana, p. 25*
AV	395 (1005)	Fatimid, quarter dinar, mint?	National Museum Pisani, no. 3
AV	392-398 (1002-1008)	Umayyads of Spain, with name Abd al-Malik	Caruana, p. 25* <sup>2</sup>
AV	ca. 430-487 (ca. 1038-1094)	Fatimid and Murabit	Mdina Hoard*
AV	479 (1086)	Murabit, Sijilmasa mint, dinar	National Museum ex Mdina Hoard
AV	501 (1107/8)	Fatimid, Alexandria mint, dinar	Azzopardi
AV	520 (1126)	Murabit, Sijilmasa mint, dinar	National Museum= Pisani, no. 2
AR	ca. 420-ca. 540 (ca. 1029-ca. 1145/6)	Fatimid and Norman	National Museum Hoard
AV	after 547 (after 1152)	Muwahhid, Fez mint, half-dinar	National Museum= Pisani, no. 1

\* These are known only through written sources and were not examined.

<sup>1</sup> S.L. Pisani, *Medagliere di Malta e Gozo dall' Epoca Fenicia all' Attuale* (Malta, 1896), pp. x-xi.

<sup>2</sup> A.A. Caruana, *Frammento Critico della Storia Fenicio-Cartaginese, Greco-Romana Bisantina, Musulmana e Normanna-Aragonese delle Isole di Malta* (Malta, 1899), 25.

For the purpose of this survey, a 'Maltese provenance' would mean that a coin had come from the soil, or had been found in circumstances suggesting that it had reached the island as a result of trading or raiding or for use as pay for the garrison, at a time roughly contemporary with its date of striking; and once there had either been lost or passed into circulation as part of the commercial life of the island. It is not, on the basis of present evidence, suggested that any Muslim coins were struck in Malta itself. But it has to be remembered that unprovenanced coins may have been brought to the island at any time up to the present day by Maltese or other travellers as curios from foreign lands, or they may have been collected by antiquarians and later dispersed.

## I

**Table 2**  
**Muslim Coins seen in Maltese Collections to around 1300**

	<i>Approximate Date-range of Coins</i>	<i>Malta</i>	<i>Sicily (Lagumina)</i>
Umayyad, pre-reform	ca. 650-700	6	—
post-reform	ca. 700-750	17	20
Abbasid, before ca. 815	750-ca. 815	5	30
Abbasid, after ca. 815	ca. 815-ca. 925	1	13
Aghlabid	ca. 865-ca. 905	14	104
Fatimid <sup>3</sup>	ca. 1000-ca. 1110	48	209
Murabit	1085-1126	2	1
Umayyads of Spain	ca. 965-975	1	1
Ghaznavid	ca. 976-997	1	—
Muwahhid	?1130-1245	10	4
Hafsid	1228-1277	2	3
Ayyubid	ca. 1170-1250	2	76
Bahri Mamluke	ca. 1250-1380	3	9

The coins seen in Malta are listed by categories in Table 2. There is considerable interest to be derived from placing alongside these the figures for the

<sup>3</sup> Not including the coins from the hoards described in sections II and III. The early Norman coins down to c.1150 number 46 in Maltese collections.

same dynasties in B. Lagumina's *Catalogo delle Monete Arabe esistenti nella Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo* (Palermo, 1892). The coins listed there are mostly from old family collections in the island of Sicily; the total number is of course greater and relatively more of them are gold and silver denominations, but dynasty by dynasty the pattern is similar to that of the Malta coins, giving support to the conclusion that the picture that emerged from the Malta survey was not seriously distorted by chance factors.

The preponderance of coins from the Aghlabid, Fatimid and early Norman periods was of course to be expected. Far less predictable was the number of Umayyad and early Abbasid coins, i.e. dating from the period before a permanent Muslim presence in Malta. The Umayyad coins are all copper, a fact which would normally be taken to indicate contact with the issuers at a personal level rather than a legacy of international trade between the prosperous merchant classes. Six of them belong to the category known as Arab-Byzantine, that is they are Arab modifications of Byzantine types, from the period before the coinage reform of the Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan which was introduced between the years 696 and 700. Three of these coins (one of Damascus, two of Homs) are to be assigned to the early 690s, and one (of Damascus) may be a decade or so earlier<sup>4</sup>. Two bear no mint-name. One post-reform Umayyad coin (ca. 700-750) bears the mint-name Tiberias. One is dated A.H. 94 (712/3) and appears to be of a type associated with North Africa<sup>5</sup>. The rest appear to be of Syrian or Palestinian origin, and no specimens of the characteristic Egyptian style were seen.

Among the six Abbasid coins all three coining metals are represented: two gold dinars, one of A.H.165 (781/2) and one of Misr mint A.H.313 (925/6); one silver dirham of Madinat al-Salam (Baghdad) dated A.H.157 (773/4); and the other three coppers, not assignable to mint or date.

Taking the Umayyad and early Abbasid (to 815/6) together, twenty-four out of twenty-six coins were copper. They were drawn from seven different collections. The fact that in Lagumina's catalogue of the Palermo collection nineteen out of the twenty Umayyad coins were copper, many of them of Syrian origin, helps to add to the picture of close contact between Syria and the islands of the central Mediterranean at this early period.

<sup>4</sup> J. Walker, *A Catalogue of the Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umayyad Coins* (British Museum, London, 1956), nos. 7-11. Walker dates the type 'c.650', but an attribution to the period 680-690 is more likely.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 289-291.

Of the Aghlabid coins, one is a gold dinar dated A.H.288 (901). All the rest are copper. In the absence of legible margins (where the date and sometimes the mint-name are to be found) many of the coins have been identified only by their style, or by the presence of the characteristic word **غلب**, or by a fragment of a name. A coin that bears the name of Muhammad II (864-874) is the earliest, and the rest are probably to be assigned to the reign of Ibrahim II (874-902).

The problems of precise attribution are even greater in the case of the Fatimid coins, where often it seems that longer inscriptions are crowded on to smaller flans, and the state of preservation is in general very poor. But the addition of the Shi'ite slogan **علي ولي الله** ('Ali is the Chosen of Allah') to the standard religious inscriptions clearly distinguishes Fatimid issues from those that preceded them. The earliest dated Fatimid coin is a gold quarter-dinar of the Caliph al-Hakim of A.H.395 (1007/8). The rest are mostly kharrubahs, or sixteenth-dirhams, tiny coins ostensibly of silver struck in Sicily<sup>6</sup>, and a few copper coins from the long reign of al-Mustansir (1035-1094). More coins of the Fatimid period are discussed below in connection with the hoards (sections II and III).

Only one coin from the far west of the Muslim world was seen: a dirham of al-Hakam II, an Umayyad Caliph of Spain, struck at Madinat al-Zahra in A.H.353 or 363 (964 or 974). To this should perhaps be added a coin recorded by Caruana: a dinar "of Abd al-Malik of the Umayyad Caliphs of Spain, who reigned from 685 till 704"<sup>7</sup>. There are two possible interpretations of this self-contradictory description. It might be a coin of Abd al-Malik, Caliph in Damascus 685-704, whose name would not have appeared on the coin. Or, more probably, it may have been a coin of the Spanish Umayyads from the years 1002 till 1008, when the mint-master and the *hajib* successively bore the name of Abd al-Malik and had it placed on the coinage. Whether the number of Spanish Umayyad coins be one or two it is a remarkably low number in view of the volume of that coinage, and the frequent appearance of Spanish coins in hoards found in eastern and north-eastern lands.

A single Ghaznavid silver coin struck by Subuktegin between 976 and 997 makes an unexplained appearance. No mint-name was legible, but it no doubt originated from the territory of modern Afghanistan or eastern Iran.

Two gold coins are recorded for the Murabit (Almoravid) dynasty of Spain and North Africa; both are in the National Museum. The first, of Abu Bakr ibn Umar, was struck in Sijilmasa, a now vanished city, deep inland in the Moroccan Sahara,

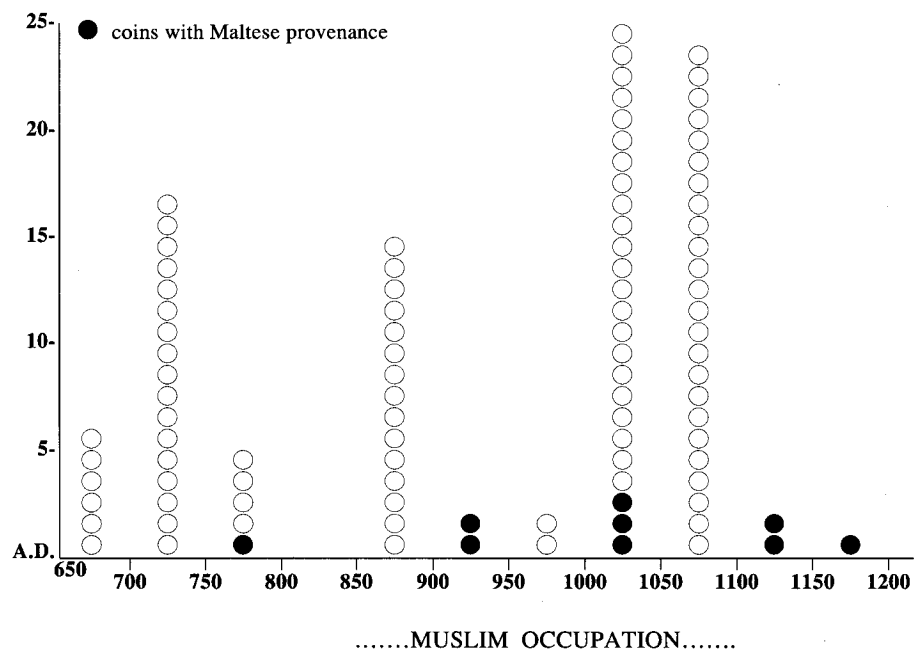
<sup>6</sup> P. Balog, 'The Silver coinage of Arabic Sicily', 1-21.

<sup>7</sup> Caruana, 25.

in A.H.479 (1086/7) and may be one of the very few specimens surviving from the Mdina hoard. The second, also of Sijilmasa, was struck by Ali ibn Yusuf in A.H.520 (1126) and must be the coin listed in Pisani's *Medagliere*, No.2, where the date is wrongly transcribed 53x(1135-1145). Like Pisani's other coins it was said to have been found in the island – "*furono trovate in paese*"<sup>8</sup>.

So few Muslim coins were seen from the two centuries following the Norman conquest (up till ca. 1300) that no conclusions can be drawn from them alone on the maintenance of contact with the Muslim world. However of the seventeen coins that survive from two full centuries it is noteworthy that twelve originated in the west of the Muslim world (10 Muwahhid/Almohade and 2 Hafsid) and five in Egypt and Syria (2 Ayyubid, 3 Mamluke), so reversing the proportions in the first three centuries covered by this survey.

**Table 3**  
Date distribution of coins listed in section I.  
Hoard coins (see II and III) are not included.



<sup>8</sup> Pisani, p. ix.

The total number of Muslim coins surviving in Malta seems remarkably low, considering the period of Muslim supremacy in the island and the exhaustiveness of the search. Certainly from such small numbers, spread over nearly five centuries (see Table 3) it would be impossible to draw well-founded conclusions about the currency of the island, or about the commercial and economic life at the time. A fuller picture would require a survey of other coinages, especially Byzantine, that may have been in circulation during the period.

Even during the period of unchallenged Muslim occupation, the number of semi-local (i.e. Aghlabid, Fatimid) coins is not great. The mere four coins surviving from the tenth century (of which three came from Spain, Egypt and Afghanistan!) might even support the proposition that the economy at that time operated without the need for coinage. But in the following century there is at last firm evidence of familiarity with the whole range of coinage – from the wealth of the gold of the Mdina Hoard to the petty coinage of the National Museum Hoard and the related hoard (see below). When Count Roger successfully attacked the island in 1091 it is recorded that he obliged the inhabitants to surrender *infinita pecunia* and to pay an annual tribute (though the form of the tribute is not known).

It was of course standard practice in the medieval Muslim world to melt down the gold and silver coin of earlier periods for re-use; in trading-in old coin for re-minting (presumably in Sicily or North Africa) the more familiar coins would have been the more acceptable (hence, perhaps, the rather surprising number of coins from far afield amongst those that have survived).

## II THE MDINA HOARD

The only substantial amount of well-authenticated Muslim coinage to have been found in Malta is the hoard of gold coins found at Mdina in 1698. The circumstances of the find are described in Anthony Luttrell's article below using unpublished documents; and the coins, of which at most only a handful have survived, are now known only from the descriptions of them given by C. Ciantar in 1771.

The total number of coins found was not stated. The total weight was given as 35 libra and 6 onze. If all the coins found had been a standard dinar in weight (4.25gm.) the total number of coins would have been slightly over 2,600.<sup>9</sup> Since Ciantar discerned three sizes among them, it may be assumed that some were

<sup>9</sup> This calculation is based on a Maltese libbra of 12 ounces, equivalent to 0.3177 kg.

quarter-dinars, which themselves had a considerable range of diameter, and that the total number may have been nearer 5,000 pieces. Ciantar's description of the coins was as follows:<sup>10</sup>

La prima contenea da una parte quefto motto, divifo nelle fequenti parole, pofto l'una fotto l'altra, e da noi diftinte con una linea: *Re – Abdalla, ed il fuo dominio – Sicurezza in Dio giufto – La strada è Iddio – Principe de' credenti*. Dall'altra parte le fequenti parole: *Ali – Non vi è Dio, che Dio – Solo non divifo – Maometto Appoftolo di Dio – Eletto da Dio*.

La feconda maniera contenea da una parte quefte voci coll'ordine medefimo: *d'onde proviene il Primato? – Il fine de'viatori? – Da Dio Principe de' credenti*. Dall'altra parte: *Non vi è Dio, che Dio – Solo non divifo – Maometto Appoftolo di Dio – Ali eletto da Dio*.

La terza maniera era così: *Iddio è Principe della Giuftizia – Il fine de'viatori – Con Dio Principe de'viatori – Con Dio Principe de'credenti*. Dall'altra parte: *Non vi è Dio, che Dio – Solo non divifo – Maometto Appoftolo di Dio – Ali eletto da Dio*.

La quarta è quefta: *Teco – Il Primato, il fine de'viatori – Da Dio Principe de'credenti*. Dall'altra parte: *Ali – Non vi è Dio, che Dio – Solo non divifo – Maometto Appoftolo di Dio – Eletto da Dio*.

La quinta: *Non v'è Dio, che Dio – Maometto Appoftolo di Dio – L'Emir Alchenchez – Figlio di Homor*. Nell'altra parte: *La ficurezza – E in – Dio – Principe de'credenti*.

La fefta qualità di dette monete non avea i caratteri impreffi, agguifa delle altre, in linea retta, ma contenea tre giri rotondi, cioè il primo nella circonferenza con quefte parole: *Maometto Appoftolo di Dio, gli abbiamo donato la poteftà, era in lui la liberazione di tutti i Dominj, a lui l'onore de'feguaci*. Il fecondo giro nel mezzo: *Ali appoggiato in Dio, ci raccoglie, e ci confegna a Dio*. Il terzo giro nel centro contenea quefte note: *Non vi è Dio, che Dio, Maometto Appoftolo di Dio*.

At first sight this seems quite insufficient for precise attributions to be made. For whereas the field inscriptions with their monotonously repetitive religious formulae are carefully recorded, Ciantar does not recognise proper names for what they are, and more regrettably does not record the marginal inscriptions, where the exact year and place of minting are to be found. However, by taking note of the standard formulae that cannot be mistaken, ('There is no god but Allah', 'Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah', 'Ali is the Chosen of Allah', etc.) together with their arrangement into lines, which Ciantar records carefully, and with the help of other

<sup>10</sup> G. Ciantar-G.-F. Abela, *Malta Illustrata*, i (Malta, 1771), 692-93.

indications, the choice of possible attributions may be considerably reduced, and in some cases a firm identification may be arrived at.

From Ciantar's translation (column A) his often wayward reading of the Arabic inscriptions have, so far as possible, been reconstructed in column B; this reconstruction has been a pointer to the coin-type proposed in column C.

A	B	C
1. <i>obv.</i> Re Abdullah, ed il suo dominio Sicurezza in Dio giusto La strada è Iddio Principe de'credenti	ملك عبد الله وولايته الأمان ( ) السييل الله أمير المؤمنين	معد عبد الله ووليه الامام أبو تميم المستنصر بالله أمير المؤمنين
<i>rev.</i> Ali Non vi è Dio, che Dio Solo non diviso Maometto Appostolo di Dio Eletto da Dio	على لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له محمد رسول الله ولي الله	على لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له محمد رسول الله ولي الله

This must be a Fatimid coin of the Caliph al-Mustansir, of the type issued, for example, from the mint of Misr (Cairo) in A.H.439 and 440 (1047/8 and 1048/9)<sup>11</sup>. Ma'add, part of the Caliph's name, is misread as Malik, 'king'. al-Imam, title of the Caliph, is misread as al-iman, 'security'. Waliyu is mistaken for wilayatuhu, 'his dominion'; and the name al-Mustansir has been read as al-safar or al-sabil, 'journey' or 'way'.

A	B	C
2. <i>obv.</i> d'onde proviene il Primato? Il fine de'viatori? Da Dio Principe de'credenti	الامام من أين تمام المسافرين بالله أمير المؤمنين	الامام معد أبو تميم المستنصر بالله أمير المؤمنين
<i>rev.</i> Non vi è Dio, che Dio Solo non diviso Maometto Appostolo di Dio Ali eletto da Dio	لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له محمد رسول الله على ولي الله	لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له محمد رسول الله على ولي الله

<sup>11</sup> S. Lane-Poole, *Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the British Museum*, iv (London, 1879), nos. 140-141.

Another coin of al-Mustansir, of the type issued in Misr, A.H.430-31 (1038/9 - 1039/40)<sup>12</sup>. In the first line Ma'add Abu has been read as min ain, 'whence?'. Tamim, part of the Caliph's name Abu Tamim, is given here, as in nos. 3 and 4, its root meaning 'completion', 'end'.

A	B	C
3.obv. Iddio è Principe della Giustizia Il fine de'viatori Con dio Principe de' Credenti	أمير العدل الله تمام المسافرين بالله أمير المؤمنين	الامام معد أبو تميم المستنصر بالله أمير المؤمنين

rev. as no. 2

Here the translator makes a different attempt to render the words of the first line: instead of seeing min ain, 'whence?', he picked out from the words Ma'add Abu the letters that seemed to form the word adl, 'justice', (معدابو عدل).

A	B	C
4.obv. Teco Il Primato, il fine de'viatori Da Dio Principe de' Credenti	معك الامام تمام المسافرين بالله أمير المؤمنين	معد الامام أبو تميم المستنصر بالله أمير المؤمنين
rev. Ali Non vi è Dio, che Dio Solo non diviso Maometto Appostolo di Dio Eletto da Dio	على لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له محمد رسول الله ولي الله	على لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له محمد رسول الله ولي الله

Another coin of al-Mustansir. The inscription is that of a coin of Misr, A.H.435 (1043/4)<sup>13</sup>, except that there the obverse legend is divided into four lines, and here into three. The type also resembles, though not in every detail, the quarter-dinar minted in Sicily in A.H.456(1064)<sup>14</sup>. The name Ma'add continues to pose a problem: a new solution is found, this time 'with thee' (teco) as though the Arabic were معك.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 127-128.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>14</sup> G. Sambon, *Repertorio generale delle monete coniate in Italia e da italiani all'estero dal secolo V al XX nuovamente classificate e descritte* (Paris, 1912), no. 823.

A	B	C
5.obv. Non v'è Dio, che Dio Maometto Appostolo di Dio L'Emir Alchenchez Figlio di Homor	لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله الأمير الجنجز ابن عمر	لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله الأمير أبو بكر ابن عمر
rev. La sicurezza E in Dio Principe de' Credenti	الأمان عند الله أمير المؤمنين	الامام عبد الله أمير المؤمنين

This coin, though the most 'foreign' of the hoard types, can be precisely and confidently identified. It is a dinar of the Murabit (Almoravid) dynasty of North Africa and Spain, issued by Abu Bakr ibn Umar at Sijilmasa (in north-west Africa) between A.H.450 and 480 (1058-1087)<sup>15</sup>. 'Homor' in the obverse represents Umar, and the characteristic Murabit reverse al-Imam Abdallah differs from Cianzar's reading 'Security rests in Allah' only by two crucial letters. Only the mysterious Alchenchez cannot be unmasked. Could Cianzar be proposing Chingiz/Genghiz (Khan)?

A coin of this type dated A.H.479 (1086/7) is preserved in the National Museum, and surely must be one of the few specimens to have survived the melting down of the hoard.

A	B	C
6.obv. (...in tre giri rotondi) I. Maometto Appostolo di Dio, gli abbiamo donato la potestà, era in lui la liberazione di tutti i Dominj, a lui l'onore di seguaci.	محمد رسول الله ارسله بالهدى ودين الحق ليظهره على الدين كله ولو كره المشركون	
II. Ali appoggiato in Dio, ci raccoglie, e ci consegna a Dio.	وعلى أفضل الوصيين وزير خير المرسلين	

<sup>15</sup> H. Hazard, *The Numismatic History of Late Medieval North-Africa = American Numismatic Society: Numismatic Studies*, No. 8 (New York, 1952), nos. 26-51.

A	B	C
III. Non vi e Dio, che Dio, Maometto Appostolo di Dio.		لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله

No satisfactory explanation of Ciantar's translation of the first and second marginal inscriptions can be offered, and since only the obverse of the coin is given, the proper name (which would have appeared on the reverse) is absent. But on the evidence of the third inscription alone (which Ciantar is unlikely to have mistaken) the range of possibilities for the issuer of this coin is reduced to two: either the Caliph al-Mustansir, who issued this type as a dinar in Egypt and Syria from about 1048, and as a quarter-dinar, with the legend slightly differently arranged, in Sicily somewhat later; or, less likely, (because the date-range of the hoard would then be so extended) the Caliph al-Mu'izz, 952-975.

So the composition of the hoard, so far as it can be reconstructed from Ciantar's description, would therefore be as follows:

<b>FATIMID</b>			
al-Mustansir	Misr (Egypt) mint	1038-1040	=var.2
al-Mustansir	Misr	1043	=var.4
	(?or Sicily	1064?)	
al-Mustansir	Misr	1047-1049	=var.1
al-Mustansir	Egypt, Syria or Sicily	1048-1064	=var.6
<b>MURABIT</b>			
Abu Bakr b.Umar	Sijilmasa	1058-87	=var.5

There is no indication of the proportions in which each type is represented, nor any information on the relative wear of the different types. It would appear that, contrary to what is normal, the latest coins represented in the hoard were those that had travelled furthest.

Any remarks about the owners of hoards and the circumstances of their deposit are seldom more than speculation, and never more so than in this case. A town-centre deposit may suggest a hasty burial, perhaps by a wealthy businessman safe-guarding his working capital. It would be normal to expect the deposit of a hoard to have occurred shortly (?2-3 years) after the date of the latest coin. The last known date for the striking of the Murabit type (var.5) is 1087, so that a deposit of ca.1091 would be plausible. It is tempting, therefore, to link the burial of the hoard with the upheaval caused by the arrival of Count Roger in Malta in the year 1091.

### III THE NATIONAL MUSEUM HOARD AND A RELATED HOARD

After the elusive evidence of the Mdina Hoard it is re-assuring to turn to two groups of coins which can without doubt be said to represent the kind of coinage which circulated in Malta at the end of the Muslim period and the beginning of the Norman period. The first group is in the National Museum and has recently been recognised as the 1908 gift of Dr Alfredo Caruana Gatt. Its status as a hoard (or part of the hoard) rests, not on any information about its finding, but on the uniform appearance of the coins and their homogeneous nature. The second group belongs to a private collector, and again must unquestionably be a hoard, or part of a hoard, though no details of its finding are known.

The two groups are very similar in composition, containing a range of coins from the 1030s to about the second quarter of the 12th century. Most of the coins are extremely worn. The metal is silver, varying from good quality (in the earlier issues) to very debased (in the later issues). The type of coins represented were known to have circulated in Sicily, but had no role in the wider commerce of the Mediterranean.

The outline description that follows attempts to show the range of types, but some of the numismatic details (weight, size, variants in legends, etc.) are not available. As more hoard evidence is brought to light from both Sicily and Malta it should become clearer whether these two hoards have a particular Maltese character, or whether they exactly mirror the pattern of coinage circulating in Sicily at the time<sup>16</sup>.

The coins have been grouped into three main categories, though future finds may eventually make it necessary to alter the dividing lines: A.true Fatimid issues; B.coins of 'debased Fatimid' style, continuing the religious inscriptions and general appearance of late Fatimid coinage, but crude and almost illegible, and apparently containing no Caliphs' names; C.miscellaneous groups of the early Norman period.

NM=National Museum hoard      PC=Private collector's hoard

<sup>16</sup> For a hoard of very similar composition found in Sicily see Travaini, 'Le prime monete...', listed in the Bibliography.

## A. FATIMID coins

## (i) Abu 'l-Hasan Ali al-Zahir, 1020-1035

	<i>obv.</i>	<i>rev.</i>	
	الامام	على	
margin:			
	الله	أبو الحسن	أمير المؤمنين
			الظاهر لا عزاز دين الله
			NM 15 specimens PC 7 specimens
silver, average weight (of 15 weighed) 0.29 gm. Marginal inscription reconstructed by reference to Balog, <i>Silver Coinage</i> , no. 21.			Plate 1

## (ii) Abu Tamim Ma'add al-MUSTANSIR, 1035-1094

	الامام	الله	
	معد	الصمد	
border of dots.			
silver, av. wt (of 2) 0.27 gm			NM 2, PC 1 Plate 2

## (iii) probably al-MUSTANSIR

	الله	الله	
	أحد	الحمد	
border of dots			
silver, av. wt (of 10) 0.25 gm			NM 10, PC 5 Plate 3

## (iv) probably al-MUSTANSIR

	الله	الله	
	أحد	أحد	
border of dots			
silver, av. wt (of 17) 0.20 gm			NM 17, PC 19 Plate 4

All the coins were in the range 9-10 mm diameter. The diminishing weight of varieties (i) to (iv) is noteworthy; this may be a result of progressive lessening of the silver content.

## B. 'DEBASED FATIMID' coins

This section contains coins that cannot be considered official Fatimid issues. The inscriptions seem to be copied from various earlier issues (Plate 5): many are bungled and contracted versions of 'Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah' with (perhaps) 'There is no god but Allah' above and below (Plate 6, 7). They appear in considerable numbers in Sicilian collections, and form about one third of the American Numismatic Society hoard from Sicily. To the eye they appear to be made of billon or copper, and are described as copper in Spinelli's standard work; but they follow on, though in debased form, from the silver kharrubah, or one-sixteenth dirham. A typical specimen was analysed by X-ray fluorescence and was found to contain 15% silver and 85% copper.

Of 53 specimens weighed, the weight-range was from 0.40 to 0.13 gm, with an average of 0.24. The diameters were 9-10 mm.

## C. Coins of the NORMAN PERIOD

	<i>obv.</i>	<i>rev.</i>	
(i)	a line of three annulets, within a circle	as obv.	
	margin: illegible		Plate 8

Average weight (of 13) 0.28. These coins have been included under the heading 'Norman' on the rather unsatisfactory grounds that they seem to show a newly-designed, rather than a Fatimid-derived, type. NM 10, PC 13

(ii)	two intersecting triangles, with central annulet	as obv.	
	no margins?		NM 2, PC 9



- (iii) central star,  
sometimes with  
annulets on either  
side; above: لله below:  
الملك
- in centre: المؤمنين  
above: star  
below: T

as Spinelli, *Monete cufiche*, Table IV, nos.1-8. NM 9, PC 4

- (iv) ارجار
- annulet in circle,  
with uncertain  
pattern or letters  
around
- border of dots NM 1, PC 4

These coins bear the name Roger (perhaps preceded by the definite article).

The contents of the two hoards may be summarised as follows:

	<i>NM hoard</i>	<i>PC hoard</i>
A. Fatimid		
var. (i)	15	7
(ii)	2	1
(iii)	10	5
(iv)	17	19
B. Debased Fatimid	63	59
C. Norman Period		
(i)	10	13
(ii)	2	9
(iii)	9	4
(iv)	1	4
Doubtful	5	17
TOTAL	134	138

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1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8

