STUDIES IN THE MONETARY HISTORY
OF THE NEAR EAST IN THE
MIDDLE AGES

The Standard of Fineness of Some Types of Dinars*

BY

ANDREW S. EHRENKREUTZ

The Mediaeval Islamic dinar has received an uneven treatment by Western economic historians. For example, it did not fare too well with Prof. R. S. Lopez who has claimed the monetary supremacy in the Middle Ages for the Byzantine solidus or nomisma.1) Prof. C. M. Cipolla, on the other hand, treated it with respect. According to this prominent scholar “through the centuries of the Middel Ages there were many types of “dollars”2) . . . the Byzantine nomisma, the Moslem dinar, the fiorino of Florence, and the ducato of Venice.”3) Elaborating his interpretation of this aspect of monetary developments in the Middle Ages, Prof. Cipolla stressed the problem of the intrinsic stability which, in his opinion, has been one of the reasons for the “international” reputation of these currencies. Whether one considers the case of the solidus or that of the fiorino and the ducato, all them displayed a remarkable intrinsic stability for a long time following their first issue.4) As for the Moslem dinar, remarked Prof. Cipolla “We can easily see that it too

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3) op. cit., p. 21.
4) op. cit., p. 23.
maintained intrinsic stability in the first two centuries of its existence. This is true for the *dinars* struck in the East. It also seems to be true for the *dinars* struck in Spain. It was only in the eleventh century that the Spanish *dinar* began to be seriously debased. 1)

Although presented as evidence in support of another idea which was the main thesis of his study, the obiter dicta of Prof. Cipolla about the *dinar* are interesting enough to justify an investigation concerning the *bonitas intrinsca* of mediaeval *dinars*. For in spite of the availability of a wealth of numismatic and textual sources the ideas of Orientalist historians and numismatists concerning the problem in question are yet to be crystallized. Such an investigation, however, cannot be undertaken without settling one fundamental question, namely: what is really meant by the term *Moslem dinar* in a discussion of this kind. Even in the above quotation from the study of Prof. Cipolla there is a reference to two types of Moslem *dinars* at least: *dinars* struck in the East, and those struck in Spain, or Spanish *dinars*. The specification in this instance is based on the difference in the place of issuance of these *dinars*. Indeed the striking of *dinars* in a number of places constituted one of the characteristic features of the minting production of Mediaeval Islam. This was carried out in several mints scattered all over the Near East. Even during the earliest period of Moslem minting production the coining of gold was accomplished in at least four areas: Egypt, 2) Syria, North Africa, and Spain. 3) It is true that beginning with Hishâm (A.D. 724-743) the Umayyad caliphs seem to have centralized the minting of gold issues 4), but this monopoly of the caliphs was abandoned by the ‘Abbasids. The striking of *dinars* by the governors of Egypt, 5) and of North Africa 6) was the first break in the shortlived monopoly of the central government. Further decentralization followed apace. Instead

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