FĀṬIMID GLASS JETONS: TOKEN CURRENCY OR COIN-WEIGHTS?

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In 1961 \(^1\) and, in greater detail, in 1974-1975 \(^2\), I expressed the belief that some time during the last ten years of the reign of the Caliph al-'Aziz the Fāṭimid administration in Egypt started to use the glass coin-weights (ṣanajāt) as fiduciary currency, in order to substitute it for the non-existent copper coinage. The idea was not mine; it was directly inspired by a passing remark in an article of Marcel Jungfleisch \(^3\), and goes back to Lane Poole \(^4\). (Other, earlier authors who considered Umayyad, 'Abbāsid and the Fāṭimid glass roundels, without discrimination, as coins on purely morphological grounds, do not carry any weight.)

Both Jungfleisch and I were persuaded that the Fāṭimid jetons at the time of al-'Aziz, may have been transformed from coin-weights to token currency because of the fact that there was no copper coinage in Fāṭimid Egypt and that the number of the jetons suddenly increased enormously and remained at a high level for about a hundred years and maybe longer. Such an increase would not have been justified if the jetons remained coin-weights only.

We know from al-Maqdisī that the glass roundels of the early Fāṭimids in Ifriqiya were true coin-weights. However, they differed fundamentally from the Umayyad and 'Abbāsid coin-weights, of which they were the successors. The Umayyad and 'Abbāsid coin-

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4) Arabic Glass Coins. Num. Chron. 1872, pp. 199-211, 1 plate. Lane Poole later retracted his opinion under the influence of E. T. Rogers (Num. Chron. 1873, pp. 1-29, 1 plate). Both authors confounded 'Abbāsid, Fāṭimid and Mamlūk glass jetons and weights without discrimination.
weights almost always show the exact denomination: dinar, dirhem or fals (or the fractions of the dinar, dirhem or, for the fals the number of the qirāṭ or kharrūba).

Their legend may contain the name of the Caliph, but mostly only that of one or more high officials; even when they are anonymous, they carry the correct weight. The Fāṭimid ṣanajāt (later: jetons), on the contrary, bear the protocol of the Imām only. Exceptionally (under al-Ḥākim) there is the name of the heir, or the wazir (under al-Āmir) and once an official. They never contain the indication of the weight (with a unique exception among thousands of jetons (one “dinar” issued in Miṣr, 502 Ḥ); and the weight does not correspond with the weight indicated in the legend!).

Having been originally planned to serve as coin-weights for gold and silver, the Fāṭimid jetons belong in the dinar and dirhem system. There are no Fāṭimid coin-weights for copper fulūs, or its fractions in kharrūba or qirāṭ. This also is in contrast with the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid coin-weights among which the weights for the fals and its fractions play an important role. George Miles described the whole range of highly accurate fractions expressed in kharrūba or qirāṭ 5), starting with the lowest denomination, 9 kharrūba and ending with the maximum 36 kharrūba. My impression that 36 kharrūba is the entire fals comes from the fact that this is the highest value ever published. The copper coins themselves are of no value in the appraisal of the weight of the fals. In the series of glass coin-weights published by Miles every fraction is represented (except the 21 kharrūba) with surprisingly accurate weights and almost no deviation from the theoretical value.

It seems reasonable to object, that if the Fāṭimid jetons were meant to be the substitute token currency instead of the non-existent copper, then it should belong in the kharrūba (fals) system. This is pointed out by Mme A. Launois 6) and by Michael Bates. But given that the jetons

6) Aimée Launois: 1.) Estampilles et Poids Musulmans en Verre du Cabinet des Médailles. Cairo, 1959, pp. 28-42, pl. 4-6 2.) Catalogue des Étalons Monétaires et