EARLY 'ABBĀSID MINT OUTPUT')

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Recent research on early medieval mint output has tended to focus upon die counts in an attempt to project the total number of coins struck by a given mint in a given year. This approach is based on the assumption that one can calculate or estimate both the number of coins struck from each die or pair of dies and the total number of such dies which were used. If one knows the number of dies utilized and the number of coins produced by each die, then one can readily calculate the output of mint x in year y. This approach to early medieval mint output is perhaps best known as the result of the spirited controversy over mint output in Anglo-Saxon England2). But, there have also been several important attempts to apply the die count method to early medieval Islamic mint output3). Unfortunate-

1) The original version of this paper was presented at the British Museum-Royal Numismatic Society Symposium on the Use of Scientific Techniques for Studying the Coinage of Europe and the Mediterranean World in the Period A.D. 500-1500, London, April 6-7, 1984. I should like to thank the participants for their comments and suggestions. Special thanks are due to Mr. Nicholas Lowick, Keeper of Islamic Coins, Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum, and Dr. D. Michael Metcalf, Director of the Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford University.


3) "Early Islamic Mint Output: A Preliminary Inquiry into the Methodology and Application of the ‘Coin-Die Count’ Method Prepared by a Seminar at the
ly, these studies seem sometimes to have been overlooked by scholars who focus upon medieval Western Europe. While the die count method has much to commend it, and research on how to best employ it continues⁴), there is another approach to measuring mint output. This other approach, while much neglected, also has much to commend it.

Several years ago, Mr. Nicholas Lowick and I independently came to the conclusion that we now had a sufficient number of early ‘Abbāsid dirham hoards to begin quantifying the output of the mints represented in these hoards⁵). If the die count approach seeks to estimate the total number of coins struck by a given mint, the hoard count approach attempts to estimate comparative mint outputs. In other words, the hoard count method provides a statistical means of determining when a given early ‘Abbāsid mint was more or less productive and by approximately what degree as well as comparing the relative productivity of different early ‘Abbāsid mints.

The two approaches to mint output are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they utilize the numismatic data in different ways in order to


⁵) Unfortunately, having contributed so much to the conceptualization of this approach, Mr. Lowick found himself burdened with other commitments and was not able to pursue what we originally hoped would be a joint research project using the hoard count approach to estimate early ‘Abbāsid mint output. I should like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Lowick for his invaluable assistance, advice, and suggestions. Whatever merit this study possesses can be attributed, in large part, to Mr. Lowick.