ARABIC DINĀRS STRUCK BY THE CRUSADERS
A CASE OF IGNORANCE OR OF ECONOMIC SUBVERSION*

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The phenomenon of gold coins struck by the Crusaders in imitation of contemporary Arabic dinārs has attracted the attention of several generations of numismatists. There exist many publications containing interesting discussions about the historical background of the appearance and circulation of these sarracenati, as well as meticulous descriptions of surviving specimens preserved in various numismatic collections¹). Although the authors of these contributions have succeeded in correlating textual and numismatic evidence, they have traditionally neglected certain basic historical questions concerning the function of the gold coinage of the Crusaders and the impact of its circulation on the monetary situation in the Mediaeval Mediterranean area. More recently, however, there have appeared two publications in which treatment of the coinage in question is different from the traditional approach of the numismatists. In one of them, entitled "Monnaies à legendes arabes de l'Orient Latin", Paul Balog and Jacques Yvon²) propose the following interpretation of the role of the gold coins in the monetary system of the Crusaders. "A côté d'une monnaie locale, émise par chaque principauté ou chaque fief, il existe une monnaie de valeur, internationale, dirons-nous, capable d'être le moyen d'échange

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¹) For bibliographical details concerning these publications, see Paul Balog et Jacques Yvon, "Monnaies à legendes arabes de l'Orient Latin", Revue Numismatique, 6e série, 1, 1958, p. 133, n. 1.

²) Ibid., p. 133-168.
par excellence dans les transactions de cette partie de l'Orient médi-
terranéen" 1). In the other contribution, entitled "Back to Gold, 1252", Robert S. Lopez 2) considers the gold coinage of the Crusaders as an abortive, typological forerunner of the Genoese gold coins 3). In the present paper I wish to communicate additional evidence concerning the gold coins of the Crusaders. It is my belief that a proper interpretation of this evidence permits one to attribute to this coinage a more significant historical function than has so far been suggested.

Before presenting this new evidence, I wish to provide a background to my discussion by stating certain well established facts about the monetary pattern which confronted the Crusaders upon the establishment of their regime in the Near East. To begin with, one must remember that Christian leaders responsible for the administrative and fiscal organization of the Frankish kingdom in the Near East originated from the countries of Western Europe, the coinage system of which had been for many centuries based on silver. On the other hand, it is obvious that in establishing their regime in Syria, the Crusaders had to align their monetary concepts and practices with the conditions existing in that part of the Mediterranean world. As it has been discussed by Carlo M. Cipolla, since the end of the seventh century of the Christian era the Mediterranean area had been dominated by two strong coins that enjoyed a predominant international prestige: the Muslim dinār and the Byzantine nomisma 4). The international success of these "dollars of the Middle Ages" 5) was achieved through their high unitary value, their intrinsic stability, and because of the powerful economic assets,

1) Ibid., p. 138.
3) Ibid., p. 228; Cl. Cahen in his "Notes sur l'Histoire des Croisades et de l'Orient Latin. III. Orient Latin et Commerce du Levant", Bulletin de la Faculté des Lettres de Strasbourg, 29e année, 8, 1951, p. 337, conceded that the gold coinage of the Crusaders should be regarded "comme quelque chose de plus important qu'une curiosité locale, explicable par des besoins locaux".