THE AYYŪBID GLASS JETONS
AND THEIR USE

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In order to understand what Ayyūbid glass jetons are, one should first explain about their predecessors, the Fāṭimid glass jetons.

Fāṭimid glass jetons have already been known to numismatists since the end of the 18th Century, when they were first described by Simone Assemanni in 1787 and by Christian Adler in 1792. Since then, several authors of reknown have studied them either perfunctorily in the course of general articles on Islamic coinage, or in special papers dealing with the glass coin-weights themselves.

The Fāṭimid jetons consist almost exclusively of glass, from al-Mahdi’s reign onward, up to that of al-Mustanṣir. Only exceptionally are one or two jetons of al-Ḥākim or al-Ẓāhir composed of opaque glass-paste. Even the very numerous specimens issued by al-Mustanṣir are mostly transparent, although the opaque jetons begin to appear more frequently. Then, after al-Mustʻali’s and al-Āmir’s time, the transparent jetons disappear and are entirely replaced by the opaque glass-paste. The glass-paste jetons, which at first, are of various and often, pleasing colours become, under al-Muntaẓar the usurper and under all the following Fāṭimid caliphs, of a pale greenish gray, light grey or yellowish white.

E. T. Rogers and Stanley Lane Poole were the first authors to notice that among the pale glass-paste jetons certain specimens do not display the name of a Fāṭimid caliph, but one can read that of a late ‘Abbāsid, either al-Mustaḍī or al-Nāṣir. In fact, Rogers read the protocol of al-Nāṣir correctly on two jetons in 1873 and Lane Poole in 1891, those of both al-Mustaḍī and al-Nāṣir on several pieces in the British Museum. But, whereas Rogers failed to comment on the attribution
of his jetons, Lane Poole had already identified correctly the names with the to late 'Abbāsid caliphs.

Casanova (Fouquet) was less fortunate in his attribution as he erroneously ascribed several jetons of al-Mustaḍī to the Fāṭimid caliph al-Mustanṣir. And this, notwithstanding the fact that the affix of al-Mustaḍī is “bi-amr-illāh”, clearly legible on the jetons, while that of al-Mustanṣir is “billāh”, both for the Fāṭimid and the ‘Abbāsid al-Mustanṣir.

The recognition, that the glass-paste jetons with the names of al-Mustaḍī and al-Nāṣir were emissions of the Ayyūbid dynasty, is due to François Viré who, in 1956 published several specimens under the correct attributions. But Marcel Jungfleisch and George Miles were aware, well before Viré’s publication, that these jetons were genuine Ayyūbid issues, even if they did not present an Ayyūbid protocol. Finally, Mme. Aimée Launois published a series of jetons of the same type in 1960 and labelled them “‘Abbāsid, contemporary with the Ayyūbids”.

We are convinced that these opaque Ayyūbid jetons of dull colour and often un-artistic calligraphy deserve a closer study than the rather perfunctory treatment they received until now. It therefore, became necessary to gather the greatest possible number of published and unpublished material available. I am greatly indebted to Dr. George C. Miles for allowing me to use the 41 unpublished jetons in the collections of the American Numismatic Society 1), and to M. Théorode Horovitz of Geneva for lending me six specimens of his collection for publication. I also included the 34 jetons in my own collection.

In the literature within my reach I have identified another 46 pieces so that the entire corpus now comprises 139 Ayyūbid jetons. To these there will, doubtless, to be added in the future, numerous other un-

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1) Dr. Miles obligingly sent me the description, weight, size and the cast of eleven of the jetons, and a summary mention of the 30 others, under his care. Of the latter I have no details, but they are all in the limits of the jetons fully described by Dr. Miles.