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A Small Assemblage of Lead Sealings, Weight and Coins from the Early Islamic Period

NITZAN AMITAI-PREISS AND YOAV FARHI

THE following assemblage of six Islamic objects comprises two sealings, one weight and three coins. All contain Arabic inscriptions and are of unpublished types or from new dies of known types. Though very small and unimpressive, these objects are important to our understanding of the administration of Jund al-Urdunn and Jund Filastin during the Umayyad and Early ʿAbbasid periods. They will be discussed below by category.¹

SEALINGS

Two lead sealings are in the collection:

1. The first sealing is elliptical, measures 22–28 mm, and weighs 9.72 grams (Fig. 1).

Obv.: عبد الله هشا
م امير
المؤ [منين]

Rev.: Blank with a rivet



ʿAbd Allah Hishām commander of the faithful

This sealing has the name of the caliph Hishām son of ʿAbd al-Malik (105–125 AH/724–743 CE)² written on its obverse, while the reverse is blank with a nail-shaped rivet (13 mm long) projecting from it. This rivet helped to attach the sealing to the container of merchandise it originally sealed, perhaps some kind of

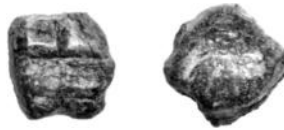
¹ These items were brought to our attention by their owner, Mr. D. Yuval. According to him, they were purchased in the late 1970s in the Bethlehem and Hebron areas. We wish to thank him for permission to study and publish them. We also thank Alter Fogel of the Department of Bible, Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev for the photographs.

² Hishām was the tenth Umayyad caliph. His long reign was marked by wars against the Byzantines. It also witnessed the end of expansion in the west, followed by the defeat of the Muslim army by the Franks in 732 CE. See Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī: *The End of Expansion: The Caliphate of Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik*, trans. K. Y. Blankinship, Albany, 1989, pp. 131–194; F. Gabrieli: Hishām, in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd ed.), Leiden, 1971, vol. 3, pp. 493–495.

wooden container. Four other lead sealings of this caliph are known,³ but ours seems to be from a different die than the other four (though only two of the four were published with photographs).

2. The second sealing is a very small lead one (bulla), probably of an *amir*, i.e., governor. It is square (10×10 mm) and weighs 1.46 grams (Fig. 2). The bulla has a perforation in the middle for the string to attach it to the object it validated. One side of the bulla has a small, unclear lump on part of its surface; the other side contains two lines:

ختة [م]
[ا لامير]



Seal [of the governor]

The first word seems to be *khāti*[*m*] (“seal”), written in *scripta defectiva* (with the *alif* omitted). One letter of the second line can be seen, but it is illegible. The line may have contained a person’s name or an administrative title. If it did contain a name, it might mean that this was a private sealing rather than an administrative one. Perhaps the title *amir* (governor) appeared in the second line of the bulla. Out of approximately two hundred known lead sealings, only one is similar to this one.⁴

WEIGHT

3. One weight, of 16 *qīrāt* (*carat*),⁵ is found in the collection. It weighs 2.94 grams and has a diameter of 16–17 mm (Fig. 3).

Obv.: ست
عشر
قيراط
Rev.: Blank



³ N. Amitai-Preiss: *The Administration of Jund al-Urdunn and Jund Filastīn during the Umayyad and Early Abbasid Periods According to Seals and Other Small Finds*, Ph.D. dissertation, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2007, pp. 120–121, nos. 11–14 (Hebrew).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136, no. 49.

⁵ A carat was originally a weight (about 0.19 gr.), and is still used to refer to weights of diamonds and other precious stones (although it has been adjusted to 0.20 gr.). It is also commonly used today as a fractional term (1/24th) for expressing the fineness of gold. A carat is a twenty-fourth part because the Roman gold solidus originally weighed 24 carats (see P. Grierson: *Numismatics*, Oxford, 1975, p. 96).

Two other 16-*qīrāt* lead weights are in the Israel Museum collection.⁶ So far we have no indication as to what they were used for. Another 16-*qīrāt* weight, this one made of olive-green glass, was excavated in an Umayyad shop at Beth-Shean (ancient Baysān).⁷ In the three examples — the two from the Israel Museum collection and the one from Beth-Shean — the number is written as *sitaht ʿashar*, whereas on the weight described here it is written as *sit ʿashar*. The latter is a mistake in Arabic. It could be claimed that the full word *sitah* was written on the seal and the *ta marbuta* is off flan and not seen on the sealing, but the previous letter, *ta*, is elongated, showing that it is the last written letter of the word.

LEAD COINS

Three lead coins are presented here. The inscriptions on all three are incomplete and thus the location of the mint is uncertain.

4. 15 mm; 4.26 gr.; axis: 9 (Fig. 4)

Obv.: لا اله
الا الله
وحدده
Rev.: محمد
رسول
الله



The first coin carries the *tawhid* (“There is no god but Allah”) on the obverse side and the phrase *Muhammad rasūl Allah* (“Muhammad [is] the messenger of Allah”) on the reverse.

⁶ N. Amitai-Preiss: Islamic Lead Coins, Weights, and Seals in the Israel Museum, *Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology* 6 (2007), pp. 14–15, 18, nos. 6–7.

⁷ E. Khamis: *Weights and Scales from the Byzantine and Umayyad Periods from Bet Shean: The Decorations and Inscriptions as Reflectors of Changes in Administration and Culture*, M.A. thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998, p. 36, and pl. 9, no. 28 (Hebrew). For more glass weights of the same type but other denominations (15, 17 and 18 *qīrāt*), see P. Balog: *Umayyad, Abbasid and Tūlūnid Glass Weights and Vessel Stamps*, New York, 1976, pp. 64–65, nos. 83–85, and p. 294, nos. 825–827.

5. 11.5–14 mm; 1.13 gr.; axis: 6 (Fig. 5)



Obv.: Variations on the first words of the *tawhid*, featuring a repetition of *alifs* and *lams*(?). Part of a marginal legend can be seen but is illegible (possibly [ضرب هذا الفلّس]).

Rev.: Line 1: [unclear]
Line 2 Part of a word; the last letter is *ba* or *ta*.
Line 3: [د] مش [ق]
Line 4: لا

This lead coin features two kinds of Arabic script, one on each side. On the obverse, part of the *tawhid* is found in ‘Abbasid thin script, while on the reverse a more angular script is found. We usually ascribe this type of script to the Umayyad period. Reading all the components of the reverse legend leads us to believe that the coin might have been minted in Dimashq (Damascus).⁸ Thus the full legend would be:

Line 1: [unclear]

Line 2: ضرب or an equivalent term meaning “manufactured”, ending with either a *ba* or a *ta*

Line 3: [D]imash[q]

The word *la* at the bottom of the coin is meaningless, unless it is part of a marginal inscription containing the *tawhid*.

6. 14–15 mm; 5.29 gr.; axis: 6 (Fig. 6)

Obv.: لا اله

الا الله

Rev.: [محمد رسول الله]
Traces of marginal inscription (?)



Lead was used as currency since early times and lead coins are known from the sixth century BCE to the Medieval period.⁹ Nevertheless, the use of lead coins was an exceptional monetary phenomenon.

⁸ For two lead coins from Dimashq, see Amitai-Preiss (n. 6 above), pp. 13–14, 16, nos. 1–2.

⁹ Y. Farhi: Lead City Coins from Roman Palestine and Some Comparable Materials, *INJ* 17 (this volume).

Several Umayyad lead coins were found at Bilad a-Shām; one was minted at Baʿalbek,¹⁰ and two at Dimashq.¹¹ Some fifty similar coins were unearthed in the area of Jund al-Urdunn in the Beth-Shean excavations, but only one has been published so far.¹²

SUMMARY

Lead, an inexpensive, soft metal, was used for many purposes. This article adds six examples of lead items related to the Early Islamic administration that were used for commerce. Five are from the Umayyad period, whereas one coin seems to have been minted using a mixture of Umayyad and ʿAbbasid dies (no. 5). All six objects (the sealings, the weight and the coins) were probably made in districts of southern Greater Syria (Bilad a-Shām) — Jund Dimashq, Jund al-Urdunn and Jund Filastin — or at least were used there.

¹⁰ N. Amitai-Preiss: Some Arab-Byzantine and Umayyad Coins from the Hebrew University Collection, *INJ* 11 (1990–91), p. 98, no. 6.

¹¹ See n. 8 above.

¹² Amitai-Preiss (n. 10 above), p. 99, no. 8.