

**Per Enzo.**  
**Studi in memoria**  
**di Vincenzo Matera**

a cura di  
**Lidia Capo e Antonio Ciaralli**

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## The mint of Ta‘izz in Rasulid times\*

by Arianna D’Ottone

The Rasulid coinage consists principally of light silver dirhams<sup>1</sup> – described in contemporary sources as 5/8<sup>th</sup> of a *qafla*<sup>2</sup>. Copper coins of the first two reigns (al-Mansūr ‘Umar, 626-647/1229-1249 and al-Muzaffar Yūsuf, 647-694/1249-1295) are relatively common<sup>3</sup>. But there were also some very rare gold dinars, designed after the *mu‘minī* dinars and dirhams of the Almohads (524-668/1130-1269)<sup>4</sup>. Moreover the coinage of the Rasulid singles itself

\* I would like to dedicate this paper to the memory of my colleague and friend Enzo (Vincenzo) Matera confident that he would have been interested in it. This is the text of a speech given on 11 March 2011 in Paris, at the occasion of the *journée d’étude* “Taez et son territoire au Moyen Âge” of the *Laboratoire Islam Médiéval* (UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée) – with the support of CEFAS (*Centre Français d’Archéologie et de Sciences Sociales de Sanaa*) and of the Conseil scientifique de l’Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. I thank Françoise Mischeau and Eric Vallet for their kind invitation. I am very grateful to Luke Treadwell and Lutz Ilisch for their suggestions. I am still working on the subject, cataloguing and studying the Arabic literary sources and the specimens in the collections of *The British Museum* (London) and the *Forschungsstelle für islamische Numismatik* (Tübingen). My future contribution, entitled: *The mint of Ta‘izz and Tha‘bāt in Rasulid Times through Literary Sources and Numismatic Evidence*, will appear in the volume: *Ta‘izz, Capital of Yemen (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century)*, edited by N. Sadek and E. Vallet, Oxford, BAR/Archaeopress (Society for Arabian Studies Monographs) [forthcoming].

<sup>1</sup> To a standard of about 1.85g; see Album, *Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 19982, p. 58 and Album, *Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 20112, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> For Rasulid sources mentioning *qaflas*, see *Nūr al-ma‘ārifī nuzūm*, p. 13, footnote 111; Smith, *A Medieval Administrative*, p. 47. The Yemeni *qafla* (pl. *qifāl*) was a unit of weight (literally: «a coin with the correct weight», see de Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, II, p. 791b), not a coin, corresponding to 16 *kharrūbas* or *qirāṭs*. The *qafla* appears to have weighed slightly under three grams (2.97g) during the Rasulid period: see Lowick, *The Mint of Ṣan‘ā’*, p. 304a, and Lowick, *The Mansūrī*, pp. 121-138 and plate 19.

<sup>3</sup> See Album, *Checklist*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> See Besc, *L'intrigant «carré dans le cercle»*, p. 246. According to Besc, the spreading and the adoption of the Almohad’s coin style in the eastern part of the Islamic world, should be explained in the light of economic and political reasons, see *ibidem*, p. 251. Unfortunately she does

out from the medieval Islamic coinages for the use of pictorial devices<sup>5</sup>: fishes and chalices, peacocks and scimitars, facing seated men and riding horse-men, birds, etc.

The number of published museum collections, as well as the continuous offer in the trade of previously unknown coins<sup>6</sup>, expands the data on which previous hypotheses were made – sometimes substantially, and this gives new evidence for the understanding of the Yemeni numismatic context. This paper is dedicated in particular to the mint of Ta'izz<sup>7</sup> in Rasulid times. I will limit myself to consider here just some aspects of the matter, quite vast, the investigation of which leads to new questions and opens many perspectives of research. Here I only aim at reconsidering the numismatic literature<sup>8</sup>, as well as some Arabic sources.

In Ayyubid times, Ta'izz was a town-treasury where «*amwāl ġamī' al-Yaman maknūza bi-hi*» – all the wealth of the Yemen was kept<sup>9</sup>, and – rather than a geological description – this is probably what Ibn al-Muġāwir (7<sup>th</sup> /13<sup>th</sup> century) meant when he wrote that Ta'izz was a *tall/ġabal al-ḍahab* – a hill/mountain of gold. With the accession to power of the Rasulid dynasty, Ta'izz lost its function of Treasury-town<sup>10</sup> and became the political capital of the dynasty, even though sources record the constant moves of the sultans between Ta'izz and Zabīd<sup>11</sup> – a town «fondamentalement partagée entre les serviteurs du sultan et des élites urbaines lettrées ou marchandes», a symbol of the alle-

not discuss in detail the case of the Rasulid coins and, sadly, throughout the article, that counts a number of erroneous transcriptions, the name of the successor of the Mahdi Ibn Tūmart, 'Abd al-Mu'min – see Lévi-Provencal, *'Abd al-Mu'min*, pp. 78a-80a – is misspelled. Lowick already pointed out the case of the coins minted in Ṣan'a' during the 12<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century, which show strong resemblances with contemporary Persian issues: see Lowick, *The Mint of Ṣan'a'*, p. 308. It would be interesting to investigate the economic and political context that made the Yemenite coinage so sensitive (as far as the geometrical patterns, the type of script, etc. are concerned) to the influence of the issues of other regions.

<sup>5</sup> See Prideaux, *Coins of the Bener Rasool Dynasty*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> As Stephen Album noted: «Substantial additions have appeared at auction, especially in the Spink-Taisei (Zürich) catalogs 1986-1991»: Album, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins*, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> See Smith, *Ta'izz*, p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to the bibliographical references cited in this contribution, it is worth mentioning here the following publications: Artuk, *İstanbul arkeoloji Müzeleri*, pp. 291-298; Barakāt, *Al-naqd fī-l-Yaman*, pp. 3027a-3042a; Bates, *A Guide to the Bibliography*, pp. 14-16; Casanova, *Dinars inédits*, pp. 200-220 and pl. V; Popp, Puin, Wilski, *Ottoman Coins*, pp. 251-266 [*non vidi*].

<sup>9</sup> See Ibn al-Muġāwir, *Ṣifat bilād al-Yaman / Descriptio Arabiae Meridionalis*, 1, p. 156 and tabula VI, p. 157; Smith, *A Traveler*, pp. 169-170 and plate 6, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> «This treasury was supplied by four major shipments of revenues from Aden»: Sadek, *Ta'izz*, p. 309. According to D.M. Varisco, the citadel of al-Dumluwa became the Rasulid treasury: see Varisco, *Texts and Pretexts*, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> See Sadek, *Ta'izz*, p. 310. E. Vallet suggests a complex interaction between Ta'izz and Zabīd: «Ces deux espaces se complétaient et se prolongeaient, leur association renvoyant ainsi à l'existence d'un réel équilibre entre les deux capitales de la dynastie. (...) Que les deux villes principales du royaume, Ta'izz et Zabīd, aient été alors présentées comme complémentaires ne signifie pas pour autant qu'elles aient eu les mêmes fonctions dans la construction de l'État rasūlīde»: E. Vallet, *La vigne et le palmier*, pp. 60-61. On the political significance of the legend of a dirham minted in Zabīd in 664, at the time of al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf, see al-Zaylī, *Al-maġzā al-'aqadī*, pp. 182-199.

giance between the suzerains and the important families of learned religious men<sup>12</sup>.

The mint of Ta'izz was active since Ziyadid times<sup>13</sup>. It was previously believed that the first coin struck there was an Ayyubid dirham, dated 594/1197<sup>14</sup>. In fact, this date can be moved back by almost two centuries, since the discovery of a dinar of al-Muẓaffar b. 'Alī (circa 370-435/980-1044), dated 405/1014-1015<sup>15</sup>. Therefore the mint of Ta'izz struck coins from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century of Hiġra (11<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> C.E.): its last known issue is a dirham of the Zaydī imām al-Mu'ayyad Muḥammad, dated 1041/1631-1632.

### 1. Ta'izz issues in Rasulid times

The first Rasulid coin minted in Ta'izz was a *fals*, struck at the time of the founder of the dynasty – al-Malik al-Manṣūr Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar b. 'Alī b. Rasūl (626-647/1229-1249). It is dated 628, the year in which Nūr al-Dīn 'Umar besieged and captured Ta'izz. The coin, however, bears just the name of the head of the Ayyubid dynasty at Cairo, al-Kāmil Muḥammad<sup>16</sup>.

Despite al-Khazraġī's assertion that al-Manṣūr started to strike coins in his name alone, in 630 H., no such examples are known so far<sup>17</sup>. Until 634, all coins struck under the authority of al-Manṣūr bear only the name of an

<sup>12</sup> See Vallet, *La vigne et le palmier*, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> See Diler, *Islamic Mints*, 1, pp. 394-396. On the Ziyadid coinage, see Peli, *A History of the Ziyadids*, pp. 251-264.

<sup>14</sup> «The earliest coin struck in Ta'izz which has been traced is one dated 594/1197-8»: Smith, *The Yemenite Settlement of Tha'bāt*, pp. 119-134 and 4 plates: p. 124, footnote 27; see also Balog, *Dirhems ayoubites inédites du Yémen*, pp. 347-355 and 1 plate: p. 349. For the Ayyubid coins struck in Ta'izz, see Balog, *The Coinage of the Ayyūbids*, pp. 284-292. The fact that a Ziyadid gold coin precedes an Ayyubid dirham is coherent with what is known for other Yemenite mints, gold issues being the main output until Ayyubid times. The absence in the region of a developed system of issues in silver and copper until the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century suggests that the output of the Yemenite mints was destined mainly for tax payments; see Lowick *The Mint of Ṣan'ā'*, p. 303.

<sup>15</sup> «al-Muzaffar had formerly been considered a Najjahid, but new evidence makes it plain that he was a later Ziyadid, in whose nominal service the Najjahid rose. This is the earliest known coin of the mint of Ta'izz, by more than a century and is believed unique»: Album, *Price List*, p. 2, n°. 32. Another specimen (or the same?) was offered at auction in 1986, see *Münzen und Medaillen A.G.*, p. 10, n° 39: «This coin represents the earliest testimony for the mint of Ta'izz, which is otherwise recorded as minting place from the Ayyubid period onwards». The caliph's name on the field of the reverse of the 405 specimen is still al-Ṭā'ī' (363-381/974-991), whilst it should have been al-Qādir (381-422/991-1031). Such emissions find parallels in the Samanid coinage, on which the name of the deposed Caliph al-Mustakfī appears instead of the name of al-Muṭṭī': see Treadwell, *Shāhānshāh and al-Malik*, pp. 332-333. The many and different elements, which link the numismatic and cultural lives of the Yemeni region and of Iran, are a fertile and interesting field of research, see Ansari, Schmidtke, *Mu'tazilism in Rayy*, pp. 57-100. For another Yemenite example of the mention on coins of a name of the head of the Ḥamzīs – Aḥmad al-Mutawakkil – fifty years after his death, see Stern, *Some unrecognized Dirhems of the Zaidīs*, pp. 180-188.

<sup>16</sup> See Nützel, *Münzen der Rasuliden*, p. 110, n° 1 (Nützel, *Coins of the Rasulids*, translated and augmented by A. Kinzelbach, p. 34).

<sup>17</sup> See al-Khazaraġī quoted by Porter, *The Rasulid Sultan*, p. 39.

Ayyubid: either a local ruler (al-Mas‘ūd, posthumously in 627, and then, from 627 to 631, his son al-‘Ādil Abū Bakr)<sup>18</sup> or the already mentioned al-Kāmil Muḥammad. This coinage is conventionally classified as “Ayyubid”, because it lacks the name of the *de facto* Rasulid amir. During this eight-year interval, from 626 to 634, both silver dirhams and copper *fulūs*, were produced<sup>19</sup>.

Smith suggested that, up to the year 632, when Nūr al-Dīn ‘Umar received an official ‘Abbasid certificate, declared an independent Rasulid state in Yemen and named himself as al-Malik al-Manṣūr, «the Rasulids were content to do so [strike “Ayyubid” coins in Yemen] as long as they could make no claim to *de jure* independence from the Ayyubids. However, after their diploma of legitimacy and declaration of independence in 632/1234-35, the striking of “Ayyubid” coins could not be tolerated»<sup>20</sup>. But was there a mint in which new Rasulid dies were first made, or was the delay in making of dies for the new dynasty the same for all the Rasulid mints<sup>21</sup>?

The first official Rasulid coin struck in Ta‘izz is believed to be a dirham of al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf (647-694/1249-1295), dated 649/1251-1252<sup>22</sup>. A specimen in the collection of Nicolas Siouffi (1829-1901) was described in 1880<sup>23</sup>.

Coins struck in Ta‘izz at the time of al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf, the second Rasulid sultan under whom the city became effectively the political capital of the dynasty, show the name of the mint not just as “Ta‘izz” but also as “*ḥiṣn Ta‘izz*”<sup>24</sup>. The designation of the mint as “*ḥiṣn Ta‘izz*” appears regularly on the coins from 650/1252-1253, until at least 664/1265-1266. Further researches

<sup>18</sup> On the problems raised by the coins bearing the name of al-‘Ādil Abū Bakr, see Smith, *Some Medieval*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>19</sup> Album, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins*, p. X. For the silver coins, see Spink-Taisei (Zurich)-Auction Catalogue (1988): n° 146; for the copper coins, see Nützel, *Coins of the Rasulids*, p. 36 n° 3, and Album, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins*, plate 2, n° 47.

<sup>20</sup> See Smith, *Some Medieval*, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> See Rispling, *Islamic Imitations*, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> See Nützel, *Münzen der Rasuliden*, p. 120, n° 19 (Nützel, *Coins of the Rasulids*, p. 44). Nützel does not give the diameter nor the weight of this coin, only reporting the description given by the collector. No updating is added by Kinzelbach.

<sup>23</sup> Nicolas Siouffi was born in Damascus in an Arab Christian family. In 1865, when he was assistant dragoman at the French consulate in Beyrut, he became a French citizen. In November 1873 Siouffi arrived in Baghdad to become French Vice Consul in Mossul. He published a number of studies devoted to various subjects. It is enough to recall here his *Études sur la religion des soubbas; Mağmū‘ al-kitābāt al-muḥarrara fī abniya‘ madīna‘* (*Notes historiques et explicatives sur les inscriptions de la ville de Mossoul*); for Siouffi’s publications on numismatics, see Mayer, *Bibliography of Moslem Numismatic*, pp. 87-88 and Mayer, *Bibliography of Moslem Numismatics, Second edition*, pp. 212-213, nn. 1646-1649. Siouffi’s name does not appear in *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, edited by Pouillon, but is mentioned by Huart, *L’Islamisme*, p. 193. On Siouffi’s French citizenship, see «Bulletin des lois de l’empire français», 26 (nos 1131 à 1175), p. 893. The *Cabinet des Médailles* in Paris seems to have incorporated the Siouffi collection.

<sup>24</sup> Already al-Muğāwir in his description of the fortress of Ta‘izz (*ṣifa‘ ḥiṣn Ta‘izz*) wrote: «*wa laysa fī ḡamī‘ al-Yaman as‘ad‘ minhu ḥiṣn‘ li-annahū sarīr al-mulk wa ḥiṣn al-mulūk*» («There is no fortress in the whole of the Yemen more auspicious than this, because it is the seat of rule and the fortress of rulers»); Ibn al-Muğāwir, *Ṣifat bilād al-Yaman*, 1, p. 156; Smith, *A Traveler*, p. 169.

in the numismatic material, and in documentary and literary sources, will be necessary to determine if both names appear on contemporary issues, for how long the name of “*ḥiṣn Ta'izz*” was used for the mint, and whether this name indicates a change in the activity of the mint, or in the characteristics of the coins (weight, diameter, fineness).

Another decisive change in the Rasulid coinage was introduced during the reign of al-Muḡāhid (721-764/1321-1363) with the introduction of the pictorial dirham<sup>25</sup>. One of the distinctive images of the mint of Ta'izz is the figure of a facing seated man<sup>26</sup>. Prideaux noticed that one of the three Tha'bāt coins found in the Broach Hoard<sup>27</sup> was engraved with the same seated man. In addition, Smith noticed that no coins had been struck in Ta'izz<sup>28</sup> in the years 750-777/1349-1376<sup>29</sup>, and therefore made the hypothesis that the mint had moved from Ta'izz to Tha'bāt<sup>30</sup>, a settlement 3 Km to the east of Ta'izz<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> «That is an essential which makes Rasulid coinage pre-eminently interesting for Muhamadan numismatic history. Apart from the pictorial copper coins of the Seljuqs, Ortokids, Ayyubid et al., there are some early silver coins with pictures too, e.g. Seljuq dirhams showing a fighting horseman or a lion with a rising sun, Mamluk dirhams with a lion etc. They are, however, coins of non-Arabic conquerors, copying the pictures and the pictorial styling from alien – Byzantine or other non-Islamic – examples. For the first time we find in Rasulid coinage dirhams of a Arabic-Muhamadan state with pictures which differ totally by style and by objects portrayed from the mentioned above earlier coins, fulus and darahim»: Nützel (translated by A. Kinzelbach), *Coins of the Rasulids*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>26</sup> Another type employed in the issues of Ta'izz is a riding horseman, see Darley-Doran, *Examples of Islamic Coinage*, pp. 182-183 and pp. 201-203: p. 202.

<sup>27</sup> The Broach (Bharoch) hoard was found in Gujarat in 1882, in a brass pot and consisted of: 448 gold coins, some gold coin-fragments and a small ingot, as well as about 1.200 silver coins and pieces – dating from 1260-1382 AD (with the exception of two 12<sup>th</sup> century examples), see Digby, *The Broach Coin-Hoard*, pp. 129-138. The first notice on the find was given by Codrington, *On a Hoard*, pp. 339-370. Among the silver pieces were 217 coins which Codrington was not able to attribute to a dynasty. Some coins of this lot were sent to Prideaux for examination. On the Rasulid coins in the Broach Hoard, see Prideaux, *Coins of the Bener*. For an evaluation of the hoard as evidence of the import of currency across the Arabian sea during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, see Digby, *The Broach Coin-Hoard* – who seems, however, not to be aware of Prideaux's contribution which is missing in his bibliographical references. For the Rasulid activity in the Indian Ocean, see Vallet, *Yemeni "Oceanic policy"*, pp. 289-296. Consistent is the bibliography on the Arabic trade in the Indian Ocean, I will limit myself to cite here: Goitein, *From the Mediterranean*, pp. 181-197; Di Meglio, *Arab Trade*, pp. 105-135; Lo, *Chinese Shipping*, pp. 167-176; Yajima, *Yemen and the Indian Ocean Trade*, pp. 119-144; Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant*.

<sup>28</sup> From 751 to 784 no coins are known to be struck in Ta'izz except a dirham of the rebel Nūr al-Dīn Muḡammad b. Miḡā'il, see Album, *Price List*, n. 77 (July 1991), n<sup>o</sup>. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Smith cites four coins minted in Tha'bāt: two dated 764/1363-1334; one 765 and one 769, see Smith, *The Yemenite Settlement*, p. 124. Among the coins, minted in Tha'bāt, in the BM collection there are specimens dated: 750, 764, 765, 769 (x2). As for Ta'izz, Smith points out an unpublished specimen in the BM dated 777, see Smith, *The Yemenite Settlement*, p. 133 footnote 29.

<sup>30</sup> «Perhaps we can hazard the guess that it was the policy of the new sultan, al-Afḡal, when he came to power in 764/1363, to have one of the Rasūlid mints moved to Tha'bāt from Ta'izz. With our present knowledge, it seems that this arrangement continued until at the earliest 769/1367-1368. By 777/1375-1376, however, before al-Afḡal's death, the mint was once again in Ta'izz. It is not possible to detect from the sources the reason for this move, but there was no obvious crisis in Ta'izz which might have precipitated the transfer at the beginning of the reign of al-Afḡal»: see Smith, *The Yemenite Settlement*, p. 124 and footnote no 26.

<sup>31</sup> The village of Tha'bāt was actually used by the first and the second Rasulid sultans – al-Manṣūr and al-Muḡaffar – by the fourth, al-Mu'ayyad (696-721/1297-1322), who built palaces

Anyhow, new data attest of the activity of the mint of Tha'bāt from 736/1335-1336 until 799/1396-1397<sup>32</sup>, and of the mint of Ta'izz during the period from 777/1375-1376 (plate 1) until 799/1396-1397.



Pl. 1. London, British Museum: Rasulid dirham, Ta'izz 777/1375-76. Inv. n.o 1.915, 0108.209 (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

To understand better the political and historical events that took place in that period, we must therefore reconsider the relationship between the two mints, and investigate archives and literary sources.

This moving mint – assuming that the mint had indeed left Ta'izz for Tha'bāt from 750 until 776 – would not be unique in the history of Rasulid Yemen. The mint of Tha'bāt has been compared to the mint of Mabyan<sup>33</sup> but, whether Tha'bāt was a temporary mint or a well-established one, its case is in fact substantially different from that of Mabyan.

The area around Mabyan, a fortress 8 km away from Haḡḡa, was conquered by al-Malik al-Manṣūr in 634/1236-1237, and coins were struck there from the following year onwards. It remained controlled by the Rasulids until 646, and intermittently later: coins dated 657 and 658 are known<sup>34</sup>.

First of all, it is a new mint that was established in Mabyan, rather than

there, and by the fifth – al-Muḡāhid (721-764/1322-1363) – who turned it into a town and place of learning and built defensive walls around it; see Smith, *The Yemenite Settlement*.

<sup>32</sup> See Diler, *Islamic Mints*, p. 423.

<sup>33</sup> On the Mabyan mint, see Porter, *The Rasulid Sultan*.

<sup>34</sup> Porter comments: «It remains to be seen whether coins from subsequent years will appear and show conclusively whether this was a temporary mint or a longer established one», and she adds in the footnote: «Stephen Album in a private communication has suggested the strong likelihood that the Rasulids moved their mints around. This has certainly been shown to have been the case with the Rasulid mint of Tha'bāt»: Porter, *The Rasulid Sultan*, p. 40 and p. 45, footnote 15.

a pre-existing one that was moved there. In Tha'bat instead, it is the mint of Ta'izz that was supposedly relocated there.

On a political point of view then, Mabyan was a fortress: the striking of coins there was a symbol of the Rasulid power, a message addressed to their rivals. Tha'bat instead was a peaceful village, an «espace propre au pouvoir princier, selon un modèle ancien qui avait conduit, sous les Abbassides de Bagdad ou les Umayyades de Cordoue, à l'apparition de villes-palais telles que Samarra ou Madinat al-Zahra»<sup>35</sup>. It is to such town-palaces that the Tha'bat mint should be compared, not to Mabyan. Mabyan and its mint appear, rather, to be a Rasulid pendant to the Zaydī mint of Thulā, which only struck Zaydī coins in 645/1247-1248, but no one suggested that Zaydī imāms had a system of moving mints<sup>36</sup>.

The existence of temporary mints in Yemen is not particularly surprising considering the struggles that kept taking place in the region, and that are one of the peculiarities of Yemeni history.

The case of the mint of Ṣan'ā' should be recalled here: it struck coins for the Rasulids when they held the city, in 651-660/1253-1262 and 678-750/1279-1350. Ṣan'ā' was neither a moving mint nor a temporary mint: its activity stretches from 'Abbasid time (169/785-786) until modern times (1340/1921-1922). But, as Lowick pointed out: «The sparseness of its issues may be connected with the fact that it lay on the northern fringes of the Rasūlid territory, constantly threatened and sometimes occupied by the Zaydīs»<sup>37</sup>.

## 2. Numismatic evidence and Literary sources

An interesting piece of information regarding the mint of Ta'izz, and its activity in Rasulid times, is to be found in an anonymous chronicle of the Rasulid dynasty<sup>38</sup>. The account of Al-Ašraf's accession to power, according to what is reported in this chronicle, is the following:

taqaddama mawlānā al-sultān al-Malik al-Ašraf ilā Ta'izz al-mahrūs nahār al-sabt, itnayn wa 'išrīn min šahr Ša'bān al-karīm wa daḥala Ta'izz nahār al-itnayn, arba' wa 'išrīn Ša'bān al-karīm, sana' tamān wa sab'in wa sab'imī'a. Nuqīṣat al-sikka al-ašraf-iyya nahār al-ḡum'a sitt 'ašr min šahr Ramaḍān sana' tamān wa sab'in wa sab'imī'a. Ṭubī'at al-darāhim <sic> al-sikka al-sa'īda al-ašraf-iyya arba' wa 'išrīn šahr Šawwāl min al-sana al-maḍkūra.

<sup>35</sup> Vallet, *La vigne et le palmier*, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> The Zaydī and Rasulids coinages should be studied in parallel for a better understanding of the monetary history of mediaeval Yemen.

<sup>37</sup> Lowick, *The Mint of Ṣan'ā'*, pp. 306-307.

<sup>38</sup> See *A Chronicle of the Rasūlid Dynasty*, pp. 17-18. The author of the chronicle seems to be a contemporary of the reigns of al-Ašraf, al-Nāšir and al-Zāhir and it appears possible to narrow down the date of completion of his work between 840-841/1436-1438.

Al-Ašraf proceeded to Ta'izz on Saturday 22 Sha'ban and he entered the city on 24 Sha'ban 778 (6 January 1377); the cutting of the dies of al-Ašraf took place on 16 Ramaḍan 778 (27 January 1377)<sup>39</sup>, and dirhams were struck in al-Ašraf's name on 24 Šawwāl 778 (6 March 1377).

The existence of a dirham from Ta'izz dated 778 is confirmed<sup>40</sup>. Surprisingly though, it still bears the name of the late al-Afḍal<sup>41</sup>. The same seated man appears on both the dirhams of al-Afḍal struck in 777 at Tha'bāt<sup>42</sup> and the dirhams struck in Ta'izz in 778 – suggesting once again the identity of the mint.

This account of al-Ašraf's accession to power should be compared to al-Ḳhazraġī's chronicle, in his *Kitāb al-'uqūd al-lu'lu'yya fī ta'rīḥ al-dawla al-rasūliyya*<sup>43</sup>. Al-Ḳhazraġī makes no mention of the mint, nor of any process of die cutting, though the events of 778 were much closer to him than those marking the beginning of the Rasulid dynasty: his work ends with the death of al-Ašraf in 803, and he died himself just a few years later in 812. But al-Ḳhazraġī often lacked historical assessment, as already stated by scholars<sup>44</sup>.

In Rasulid Ta'izz, a dirham of al-Nāšir Aḥmad (803-827/1400-1424), dated 811/1408-1409, seems to have been the last coin struck<sup>45</sup>.

To conclude. Only some aspects of the activity of the mint of Ta'izz have been sketched here, but a number of research-perspectives can already be seen: the need of cataloguing the Rasulid coins in the main coin collections, in Europe and elsewhere, appears clearly.

<sup>39</sup> I would like to thank Lutz Ilisch for his advice in the translation of this passage.

<sup>40</sup> London, British Museum, Cabinet 50-tray 19, inv. n. 1.94 OR 2552; see Prideaux, *Coins of the Benee*, p. 14, n. 13; Lane-Poole, *Catalogue of Oriental Coins*, 5, Classes XIVb, XXVII, and Prideaux, *Additions to the Oriental Collection*, 10, Part 2. Year missing in Diler, *Islamic Mints*, pp. 394-396.

<sup>41</sup> The date and the mint are actually changed, so this is not a case of dies re-used after the death of sovereign, on this last occurrence see Rispling, *Islamic Imitations*, p. 37.

<sup>42</sup> See Baldwin, *Islamic Coin Auction*, n° 6, London 7 May 2003, n°. 249.

<sup>43</sup> «When the Sultan Melik al-Afḍal died at the date above mentioned [21 Ša'ban 778/2 January 1377] (...) and when general consent was declared as to the accession of his son the Sultan Melik 'Eshref 'Ismā'il (...), the ceremony of swearing fealty to him took place after the congregational service on Friday the 21<sup>st</sup> of Sha'ban in the year 778 aforesaid. And when that matter was settled, privately and publicly, and when the pen had held its course in felicity, first and last, he distributed to the troops a goodly gratuity, and set out with his father for the capital city of Ta'izz. He was buried on Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> of Sha'ban (5<sup>th</sup> January), and recitation of the Qur'an was continued over him without interruption for seven days. After this, orders were issued to all the cantons to make all things firm and to hire men. He remained there during the remainder of Sha'bān, during the month of Ramaḍān, of Shawwāl and Dhu'l-Qa'da, as also the beginning of Dhu-l-Hijja, letters from all parts coming into him, and the Arabian tribesmen arriving as deputations from every quarter. He gave answers to each letters as was requisite, and received all who came to him with what was due to each and gave satisfaction, so that the regions, near and remote, were made sure, and the people yielded obedience, whether dutiful or refractory»: Redhouse, *The Pearl-Strings*, 2, p. 142; Al-Khazaraġī, *Kitāb al-'uqūd al-lu'lu'yya fī ta'rīḥ al-dawla al-rasūliyya*, I, pp. 163-164.

<sup>44</sup> «al-Ḳazraġī from the start alienates our confidence in his historical assesment by his continual panegyric of the Rasulid princes. (...) It seems to me that the 'Uqūd may well have been a work specially commissioned by the ruling Rasulid house, which, therefore al-Ḳazraġī could do little other than depict in the best possible light, thereby, it would appear, sacrificing objectivity in his narrative»: Smith, *The Ayyūbid and Rasulids*, p. 187.

<sup>45</sup> See Diler, *Islamic Mints*, 1, pp. 394-396.

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### Abstract

#### *La zecca di Ta'izz in epoca rasulide*

Il contributo è dedicato alla zecca di Ta'izz in epoca rasulide (secoli VII-IX AH/AD XIII-XV secolo) e offre un'aggiornata disamina della letteratura numismatica relativa all'attività di questa zecca. Una fonte araba anonima, non ancora impiegata nel tracciare la storia di questa zecca, fornisce dettagli sul processo di preparazione dei conî e di produzione di nuovi dirham in occasione dell'ascesa al potere di al-Ašraf (778-803 AH/AD 1363-1376). Il parallelismo tra la zecca di Tha'bāt, località presso la quale la zecca di Ta'izz si è trasferita nel corso di alcuni anni, e quella di Mabyan viene messa in discussione così come l'esistenza di un sistema di zecche mobili nello Yemen rasulide.

The paper focuses on the mint of Ta'izz in Rasulid times (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Century AH/AD 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Century) and offers an updated review of the numismatic literature devoted to the activity of this mint. An anonymous Arabic source, not yet considered for the history of this mint, give hints on the process of cutting dies and striking new dirhams in connection with the accession to power of al-Ašraf (778-803 AH/AD 1363-1376). The parallel, made in some previous publications, between the mint of Tha'bāt, where the Ta'izz mint moved for some years, and Mabyan is questioned as well as the existence of moving mints in Rasulid Yemen.

*Keywords:* Middle Ages; 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Century; Yemen; Ta'izz; Rasulids; Mint.

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