

A RECENT FIND OF COINS OF THE AMIRS OF CRETE

Students of mediaeval Cretan history will be interested to learn that some copper coins (*fulūs*) dating from the period of the Arab occupation of Crete were recently found in Candia*.

The existence of this class of coins has been established only within the last two years, although some specimens were known years ago and were misattributed then and later by various writers to Spain or to other areas¹. To Dr. John Walker, Keeper of the Department of Coins and Medals in the British Museum, goes the credit for the proper attribution of these coins of the Amirs of Crete. His article describing both gold and copper coins struck in Crete during the latter half of the 9th century appeared in *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 1953, pp. 125 - 130, and it is on the basis of this contribution that the following attributions are made.

The coins in question (nos. 2 - 6 illustrated in the accompanying plate A', enlarged about 2 diameters) are in very poor condition, but there can be no doubt about their correct identification. No. 1 is almost completely effaced but is probably identical with nos. 3, 4 and 6, which are similar to Walker's no. 6, their reconstructed legends reading :

*) The coins were discovered during the course of excavating the foundations for a new hotel in the street leading to the port (ὁδὸς 25 Ἀγιοῦστου), just opposite the Post-Office, in a depth of some metres. These coins were first recognised as possibly Arabic by Mr N. Platou, Director of the Candia Museum. He says that the stratum to which these coins belonged underlay some Venetian constructions. Another earlier stratum, possibly roman, has been noticed under the Arabic one. In the same area there were found coins of the second Byzantine period. (after 961). From the Arabic coins only six are preserved and from these only five conserve their characters, the other being quite illegible.

¹) See for example Antonio Vives y Escudero, *Monedas de las Dinastías Árabe - Espanolas* (Madrid, 1893), nos. 341 and 342; and, following him, George C. Miles, *The Coinage of the Umayyads of Spain* (New York, 1950), nos. 181 (g) and (h).

Obverse


لا اله الا There is no god but
 الله وحده لا Allāh, He is one; there is no
 شريك له Partner with him.

Border consisting of a linear circle enclosed by circles of dots.

Reverse

محمد Muhammad
 رسول is the messenger
 الله of Allāh
 شعيب Shu'aib

Border as on obverse.

Nos. 2 and 5 are similar to Walker's no. 5, their legends being identical with those given above with the addition of the name  ('Umar) beneath the obverse area.

In view of the deteriorated condition of these specimens the weights have no significance.

In Walker's opinion, to which I subscribe, the latter coins (nos. 2 and 5) are attributable to Abu - Hafs 'Umar, the first Amīr of Crete, and are to be dated about 850 A. D. (about 235 of the Hijrah). The name of Shu'aib beneath the reverse area would be that of his son and successor². In the case of nos. 1, 3, 4 and 6, bearing Shu'aib's name alone, there can be little doubt that these coins belong to Shu'aib's reign and are to be dated after ca. 854 A. D. (240 A. H.).

There are many voids in our knowledge of this interesting period in the history of Crete, but it is with the aid of such little documents as these that we are able in part to fill the empty spaces. Certain gold coins published by Walker, bearing not only Shu'aib's name but also the dates 271, 275 and 281 A. H. (884, 888 and 894 A. D.) have been of special importance in supporting a tentative chronology for the Amīrs of Crete, but these humble coppers are also part of the record. It is to be

²) Walker however reserves the possibility that the 'Umar named here may be a son of Shu'aib, which would place these coins in the reign of Shu'aib and datable therefore a generation (or less) later.

hoped that this short note may serve to bring to the attention of students of Cretan history, particularly of those who reside in Crete, the existence of coins of this type; and that it may be instrumental in bringing to light other specimens, perhaps with further data which will supplement our knowledge^a.

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^a) Since the appearance of Walker's article I have myself found a number of these coppers, hitherto unattributed or wrongly assigned, three in the cabinets of the American Numismatic Society in New York, one in the coin collection of the Greek Gymnasium in Alexandria, Egypt, and several in a private collection. Unfortunately none of them has added anything new to the record, except to show that specimens are not so rare as one might have thought. I understand also that another copper of this class was found last year by the Italian School of Archaeology in their excavations at Gortyna.