



Malta
Classics
Association

MELITA CLASSICA

Vol. 3
2016

*Journal of the
Malta Classics Association*

MELITA CLASSICA

MELITA CLASSICA

Vol. 3
2016

*Journal of the
Malta Classics Association*

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing by the publisher.

Melita Classica

Vol. 3, 2016

Text © Malta Classics Association
Design and layout © Book Distributors Limited

ISBN: 978-99957-847-4-4

Malta Classics Association,

The Department of Classics and Archaeology,
Archaeology Farmhouse, Car park 6,
University of Malta, Msida
classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com

www.classicsmalta.org

CONTENTS

Editorial	9
Opening Adresses	11
Sanskrit: The Philosophy <i>Michael Zammit</i>	23
The Role of Slaves in Roman Land Surveying <i>Levente Takács</i>	33
Themistocles as a trickster in Herodotus <i>Nijole Juchnevičienė</i>	45
Drawing Distinctions in the <i>Laches</i>: the <i>Elenchus</i> as search <i>Jurgen Gatt</i>	63
Aristotle on History <i>Vita Paparinska</i>	85
Changed Forms, Migrating Identities: Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i> and the Posthuman <i>Gloria Lauri-Lucente</i>	101
The Appropriation of the Classical Pastoral Elegy in Milton's <i>Lycidas</i>, and Beyond <i>Peter Vassallo</i>	117
Ferrying Nothingness: the Charon motif in Murnau's <i>Nosferatu</i> and Dreyer's <i>Vampyr</i> <i>Saviour Catania</i>	125

**Byzantine Greek on Maltese soil:
evidence from *Tristia ex Melitogaudo***

Jerker Blomqvist

141

Ovid on Gozo? *Metamorphoses* as a source for the *Tristia ex Melitogaudo*

Stephen J. Harrison

169

***Οἱ Παῖδες Ἄγαρ Ἀθέου*
The Arabs in Malta: 870-1150**

Stanley Fiorini and Martin R. Zammit

179

***Ḍuriba bi-Mālṭa* ‘Minted in Malta’:
deciphering the Kufic legend on the Fāṭimid quarter dinar**

Martin R. Zammit

209

**Through Western Eyes: Greek and Latin Sources for
Byzantine-Iranian Relations**

David Frendo

217

**The Cult of Hercules in Roman Malta: a discussion of the
evidence**

Anthony Bonanno

243

***“Magnis nata triumphis insula”*
Malta in the *Liladamus* of Jacques Mayre (1685)**

Heinz Hofmann

265

**"The First Performance of a Greek Play in the Island's
History": Classical drama in Malta in the late 1940s**

Carmel Serracino

285

The Malta Classics Association Committee 2016

Hon. President	Ms Bernie Mizzi
Executive President	Prof. Horatio C.R. Vella
Vice President	Mr Samuel Azzopardi
Secretary	Ms Ilaria Labbate
Treasurer	Mr Victor Bonnici
P.R.O.	Ms Jessica Farrugia
Education Officer	Mr Carmel Serracino
Archivist	Dr Jurgen Gatt
Members	Ms Maria Zammit
	Ms Jennifer Mitchell

***Melita Classica* Editorial Board 2016**

Editor of the Journal	Mr Victor Bonnici
Organizer of the 2014 Conference and Editor of the proceedings	Prof. Horatio C.R. Vella
Member	Mr Carmel Serracino

***Ḍuriba bi-Mālṭa* ‘Minted in Malta’: deciphering the Kufic legend on the Fāṭimid quarter dinar**

Martin R. Zammit

Until the acquisition, by the Central Bank of Malta in 2010, of the gold Fāṭimid quarter dinar, it was inconceivable that Arab Malta could have had its own coinage. Helen W. Brown, in her article about the coins of Muslim Malta, states that “It is not, on the basis of present evidence, suggested that any Muslim coins were struck in Malta itself.”¹ Quite obviously, this acquisition was bound to revive memories of the ‘great Mdina hoard’ of gold coins found in 1698 and known from the descriptions of Ciantar’s *Malta Illustrata* in 1771.

It is indeed amazing that the Arab Fāṭimid quarter dinar minted in Malta, whose circumference hardly exceeds 38 millimetres, and weighing 1.30 grams, is inscribed with about 80 letters on its obverse, and more than 70 letters on its reverse. The reservations concerning the obverse side of the coin stem from the fact that here the coin is somewhat less well preserved, and therefore much less legible than the reverse. This write-up tackles the central and marginal legends inscribed on both sides of the quarter dinar.

One cannot but admire the engraver’s skill, faced as he was with the task of inscribing a considerable number of words within the extremely limited area of the Fāṭimid quarter dinar. He achieved this by producing an inscription which is best described as a miniscule form of Kūfic.² A most conspicuous characteristic of Kūfic script is the angular form of most of

¹ H.W. Brown (1992), 11.1.3.

² Kūfic script is one of earliest Arabic scripts which emerged in Arabia around the 3rd century A.D. Unlike the cursive *naskh* scripts used on such soft materials like papyrus, parchment and paper, hard metallic mediums needed a rigid, angular script. For this purpose, Kūfic was considered the ideal choice. The term Kūfic refers to the southern Iraqi

its letters and the frequent omission of the diacritical dots distinguishing one letter from the other. Given that in the Arabic alphabet there are nine groups of letters which depend on diacritical dots to be read distinctly, it becomes immediately evident that the omission of these dots renders reading Kūfic a difficult task. To complicate matters, vowel marks, and very often the letter *ʿalif* (ا), were also omitted. The omission of the *ʿalif* can be observed in the word *Māliṭa* ‘Malta’ as attested in the Fāṭimid quarter dinar. In Arabic, the word *Māliṭa* can be written, or inscribed, either with two *ʿalifs*, one after the letter /m/ and a final *ʿalif* (مالطا), or with an *ʿalif* after /m/ and a final *tāʾ marbūṭa* (مالطة). The second version is the one adopted in the quarter dinar, with the *ʿalif* after the letter /m/ omitted, i.e. ملطه (m - l - ṭ - a). However, in the case of the word *dīnār*, the *ʿalif* is not left out, hence دينار. At times, engravers did insert a kind of ‘point’ above or below certain letters, but apparently such points indicated marks of genuineness, or the engravers’ marks, and therefore had no orthographic function.

The legends on Muslim coins:

Muslim coins, in general, contain three kinds of religious legends:

- a. The dogmatic formulae: *bi-smi llāh* ‘in the name of *Allāh*’, *la ilāha illā llāh* ‘there is no god but *Allāh*’; *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* ‘Muhammad is the messenger of *Allāh*’,
- b. Koranic verses, and
- c. pious expressions, such as *ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam* ‘May *Allāh* bless him and grant him peace’; *al-ʿamru kulluhu li-llāh* ‘the whole matter belongs to *Allāh*’, *lā quwwata illā bi-llāh* ‘there is no power except with *Allāh*’, etc.

Moreover, regal titles, such as *ʿamīr al-muʿminīn* ‘the prince of the believers’, names of the cities in which the mints were located, as well as the dates of minting were also included. Till the thirteenth century, numerals referring to the year of minting were inscribed in words.

city of Kūfa, but it has not yet been satisfactorily proven that the script actually developed in that city.

In his manual of Muslim numismatics, Codrington lists 15 dogmatic formulae, 62 different Qur'ānic verses, 202 pious expressions, and 1,068 Asian and North African placenames minting Muslim coins.³ In Codrington's list of placenames, reference is made to a city called Malatya (in Arabic ملطية and ملاطية), a placename which resembles *Mālīṭa*. However, Malatya is a city in Armenia which, in the past, minted Seljuk coins. Malta is not among the enlisted cities.

The legends on both sides of the Fāṭimid quarter dinar:

In the quarter dinar under consideration, one can immediately notice the concentric circles which characterize Fāṭimid coins. The legends are inscribed inside the inner circle and along the outer marginal circle of the coin.

The observe: the central area contains the following Muslim doctrinal formulae:

لا إله إلا الله - محمد رسول الله

lā 'ilāha 'illa llāh - muḥammad rasūl allāh

'There is no god but *Allāh* - Muhammad is the messenger of *Allāh*.'

Unlike the central inscription, which does not pose any deciphering problems, the marginal inscription is a very hard nut to crack. Almost half of the inscription is illegible, because it seems that when the coin was struck, the die did not hit the gold piece exactly in the centre. Hence, some letters on the die did not leave their mark on the piece. Moreover, a few letters are also slightly crushed, rendering the inscription almost illegible. On the basis of evidence from other Muslim coins, one would expect this space to contain a verse from the Qur'ān. Brown considers a particular coin kept at the National Museum in Valletta, minted in 1086/7, that is just six years later than our coin, as "... one of the few specimens to have survived the melting down of the hoard."⁴ This coin can perhaps afford some hints as regards a possible Qur'ānicverse for our coin. Brown

³ O. Codrington (2010).

⁴ H.W. Brown (1992), 11.

refers to verse 33 from chapter 9 (*sūrat al-tawba*), which is also attested in verse 9 of chapter 61 (*sūrat al-ṣaff*), namely:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

Huwa lladhī 'arsala rasūlahu bil-hudā wa-dīni l-ḥaqqi li-yuẓhirahu 'alā d-dīni kullihī wa-law kariha l-mushrikūn.

'It is He who hath sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the pagans may detest (it).'⁵

The underlined section of the above transcription seem to be reproduced on the Fāṭimid quarter dinar, but the graphic similarity characterising many letters of the Kūfic script, on the one hand, and the imperfect state of preservation of the coin, on the other, severely hamper the deciphering exercise.⁶



The obverse of the Fāṭimid quarter dinar

⁵ A. Yūsuf 'Alī (1989).

⁶ Such deciphering problems involving Kūfic are not uncommon. Thus, for example, the final section of the inscription on the Maymūna tombstone, housed at the Archaeology Museum in Gozo, has not yet been satisfactorily deciphered.



The coin turned 90 degrees clockwise



The coin turned 180 degrees

It should be stated that, although the value of the coin is of one quarter dinar, nevertheless, it is referred to as a 'dinar' in the legend. This is in line with the common Muslim coinage practice of rarely mentioning the actual value of coins.⁷

The historical importance of the Fāṭimid quarter dinar struck in Malta cannot be stressed enough. It sheds new light on the otherwise very obscure Arab period in Maltese history, in general, and on Maltese numismatics, in particular. The need for the minting of coins obviously implies some form of commercial exchange between the Maltese islands and the neighbouring countries during the last quarter of the 11th century. The tiny proportions of this coin are counterbalanced by the significant historical implications which should prompt historians to reconsider much of the hypotheses put forward till now about Malta's Arab period.

*Rev. Martin R. Zammit is Professor of Arabic, at the University of Malta.

For references see pages 205-208

⁷ 1, ½, and ¼ dinars were minted.