

MAMLUK SEQUINS

by

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The gold coinage of the Burji Mamluks was initially struck to a very wide range of weights. Although it is possible that the mints aimed to produce a set number of coins from each unit weight of gold, once the struck coins left the mint they must have circulated by weight with the minting process only guaranteeing the fineness of the metal.

During the troubled reigns of Faraj (AH 801-815/1399-1412 AD), two attempts were made by his administrators to introduce a gold coinage of nominally consistent weight. The first, in the year 800, produced dinars of the traditional Umayyad weight of 4.25 grams but it seems that they failed to find acceptance, perhaps because people had become unaccustomed to dealing in units of that value. The second attempt, made ca 810, used as a model the Venetian ducat of 3.5 grams, which was accepted and copied all around the Mediterranean as a trading currency under the name of the zecchino or sequin. In the event, the Mamluk sequins settled down to a weight of ca 3.4 grams, slightly less than the Venetian currency and were identified by the use of two horizontal lines separating the reverse field into three sections, a design which had been used by previous Mamluk rulers but for copper coins only.

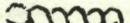
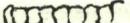
Initially the new coins were produced only at Cairo mint, although some of Faraj's pieces do not bear a mint name, but his successor the Caliph al-Musta'in also minted them at Damascus, in all probability in recognition of the fact that the real power at the time lay in Syria rather than in Egypt. Al-Musta'in was replaced as Sultan after only 6 months by Shaykh al-Mahmudi in whose name sequins were struck in Cairo in 815 and 816. The combination of the intense civil wars with outbreaks of plague and several years of low Nile water levels must have greatly reduced international trade with Egypt and, after a second abortive attempt to reintroduce traditional dinars, the gold currency reverted to the earlier style of relatively uncontrolled but large coins. It was left to Barsbay al-Duqmaqi (825-841/1422-1453) to control the quarrelling mamluk amirs and to encourage the return of trade and prosperity, a process which was helped no doubt by the 100,000 dinars (or ducats) paid as ransom for Janus, the captured king of Cyprus in 829/1426, the year in which the minting of sequins was resumed.

To judge from the number of specimens surviving, Barsbay's sequins must have been produced in large quantities over the period 829-841 and their distinctive style was maintained until the end of the Mamluk dynasty. Although the horizontal dividers introduced by Faraj were retained, they were increased in number to 3, applied to both sides of the coin and made up of a 'cable' of extended 'z's. In general, one side, called here the reverse carries the Kalima, and the other, the Sultan's name and titles together with the phrase "azze nasruhu". The date is written out in full until 857 when a change is made to large clear digits although the practice of using flans very much smaller than the dies has resulted in the omission of both date and mint from most of the surviving specimens. Only three mints are recorded for the whole series, Cairo, Damascus and Aleppo although a certain number of coins after ca 900, do not show their mint of origin. There are in addition many specimens where the mint name is not visible as the flan is too small or the coin was struck off-centre.

Over the century during which the sequins were the normal Mamluk gold currency, remarkably little change took place in their basic design. Four issues are known where a central cartouche was used on one side as on the silver coins, namely Uthman, mint ? 857, Qa'itbay nd. of Aleppo and Qansuh al-Ghuri, Damascus 917-919 and n.m., n.d. but otherwise the design changes are confined to the type of field dividers and variations in some sections of the legends. As specimens of this series so often have incomplete legends, it may be of value to note here the main varieties. The normal obverse legend for all sultans except al-Musta'in who uses his Caliphal titles, follows the pattern of the coins of Barsbay, which have:- al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abu-al-Nasr Barsbay Azze Nasruhu. Only 7 different throne-names are used viz. al-Nasir (twice), al-Mu'ayyad (twice) al-Ashraf (6x), al-'Aziz, al-Zahir (5x), al-Mansur and al-'Adil. The patronymic that follows is omitted by Faraj and on certain issues of Yusuf and Qansuh al-Ghuri but again the choice is made from a very limited selection of only 6 names with Abu al-Nasr used by 8 out of the 13 sultans named on this series including the last 4 of the dynasty. The phrase Azze Nasruhu - May his victory become illustrious - was first used on the sequins by Shaykh in 816 in place of the Khalad Mulkah of earlier coins and subsequently omitted only on coins of Yusuf and Uthman. The only other change recorded to the obverse legend so far in the whole series, is the addition of the name of the Sultan's father in the rare cases where a son actually followed his father on the Mamluk throne, viz. Faraj bin Barquq, Yusuf bin Barsbay, Ahmad bin Aynal and Mohammad bin Qa'itbay, the latter adding "May God have mercy upon him" to his coins from Damascus. The reverse legend have even less variation than the obverse and normally have the Kalima and the Mamluk exhortation of "Arslah b'al-Hady". This latter phrase occasionally moves to the obverse and is sometimes omitted altogether on e.g., the coins of Ahmad, Temirbugha and al-Ashraf Tumânây.

The other key component of the design is provided by the horizontal lines which differentiate the sequins from other Mamluk gold coins.

There are 5 main types

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|------------------|---|
| 1. | Plain line | |  |
| 2. | Dotted line | (a) single |  |
| | | (b) double |  |
| 3. | "Rigid" cable of 'Z's | (a) to the left |  |
| | | (b) to the right |  |
| 4. | "Flexible" cable of 'S's | (a) to the left |  |
| | | (b) to the right |  |
| 5. | Indented floriated "coil" | |  |

Type 4 is an obvious development from type 3 and catalogue descriptions are sometimes insufficiently precise to distinguish between them or even on occasions to decide whether they point to the left or the right. A first attribution to ruler or sometimes to mint of origin can be provided by the type of divider used. Full details are given in the listing at the end of this paper but the general sequence is as follows:-

- i Faraj, al-Musta'in and Shaykh: Type 1 on one side only.
- ii Barsbay, Yusuf and Jaqmaq: Type 3 on both sides.
- iii Uthman, Type 2 on both sides.

- iv Aynal to early Khushqadam; Cairo - Types 3 or 4 on obv., Types 1 or 2 on rev., Damascus - Type 3 a both sides.
- v Late Khushqadam to Qa'itbay, Types 3,4 or 5, often with different types on each side. There is a Qa'itbay series from Aleppo with Type 4b and central arabesque.
- vi Mohammad to al-Ashraf Tumanbay, Type 4 with Damascus normally to the left only (type 4a). There is also a Cairo issue of Qunsuh al-Ghuri of 914-917 with the coil of type 5 on both sides, followed in 918-920 by a mixture of type 4a and 5 on both sides.

It is perhaps worth noting that all coins attributed to Damascus have cables to the left (Types 3a or 4a) and that cables to the right (Type 3b or 4b) are recorded only within the period 863-908.

Another potential mark of identification is the border but on many specimens this is completely off the flan. The usual design is a circular plain or pelleted line but where variations to this are known they are listed at the end of this paper.

Mamluk Sultans named on Sequins and their Titles

801-815	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir Faraj bin Barquq
815	al-Imam al-'Azam al-Musta'in bi'Allah Abu al-Fadl al-'Abbas
815-824	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Abu al-Nasr Shaykh
825-841	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Barsbay
841-842	al-Sultan al-Malik al-'Aziz Abu al-Mahasin Yusuf bin Barsbay
842-857	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Zahir Abu Sa'id Jaqmaq
857	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Mansur Abu al-Sa'adat 'Uthman
857-865	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Aynal
865	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Abu al-Fath Ahmad
865-872	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Zahir Abu Sa'id Khu shqadam
872	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Zahir Abu Sa'id Bilbay
872	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Zahir Abu Sa'id Temirbugha
872-901	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Qa'itbay
901-904	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Nasr Abu al-Sa'adat Mohammad
904-905	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Zahir Abu Sa'id Qansuh
905-906	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Janbalat
906	al-Sultan al-Malik al-'Adil Abu al-Nasr Tumanbay
906-922	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Qansuh al-Ghuri
922	al-Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Tumanbay

Catalogue of Coins

<u>Ruler</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Mint</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Divider Type</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Faraj	801-815	Cairo	810,812-14	1	No dividers on rev.
"		no mint	810,814	1	" " " "
al-Musta'in	815	Cairo	815	1	" " " "
"		Damascus	815	1	" " " "
Shaykh	815-824	Cairo	815,816	1	" " " "
Barsbay	825-841	Cairo	829-31,34-38,40,41	3a	Border of pellets and diamonds
"		Damascus	840	3a	Border linear multi-lobe

Catalogue of Coins (Continued)

<u>Ruler</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Mint</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Divider Type</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Yusuf	841-842	Cairo	842	3a	Pellets & Diamonds
Jaqmaq	842-857	Cairo	842, 43, 46 & 54	3a	" "
"		Damascus	?	3a	
"		Aleppo	?	3a	
'Uthman	857	Cairo	?	2b	
"		?	857	0/2a	Central cartouche and circular border of amulets
Aynal	857-865	Cairo	857	3a/1	
"		Cairo	857	3a/2b	
"		Cairo	857, 859	3a/2a	
"		Cairo	863	3b/2a	
"		Cairo	n.d.	1	Dekagram border to obv.
"		?	?	3a	Pellets & Diamonds
Ahmad	865	Cairo	865	4b/2	
"		?	?	4a	
Khushqadam	865-872	Cairo	865, 866	4b/2a	
"		Cairo	867	4b/5	
"		Cairo	867	5	
"		Cairo	?	3b	
"		Damascus	?	3a	
Bilbay	872	?	?	3a	
Temirbugha	872	?	872	4a	
"		?	?	5	
Qa'itbay	872-901	Cairo	881	4a	border linear multi-lobe ?
"		Cairo	886	4b	" " "
"		Cairo	886, 889	4a	" " "
"		Cairo	897	4b/5	" " "
"		Cairo	?	5	" " "
"		Aleppo	879, 892	4b	
"		Aleppo	?	4b/4a	
"		Aleppo	?	4b	Arabesque in centre of obverse
"		Aleppo	?	0/4a	Circular obv. cartouche
"		?	896	4b	Arabesque in centre of obverse

Catalogue of Coins (Continued)

<u>Ruler</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Mint</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Divider Type</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Qa'itbay		?	886	4a	Date in words
"		?	?	4a/2a	
Mohammad	901-904	Cairo	904	4a	
"		Cairo	904	4b	
"		Damascus	902	4a	
al-Zahir Qansuh	904-905	Damascus	?	4a	
"		no mint ?	no date ?	4b	Border linear multilobe
Janbalat	905-906	no mint ?	no date ?	4b	
al-'Adil Tumanbay	906	no mint ?	906	4a	
"		" "	?	4b	
Qansuh al-Ghuri	906-922	Cairo	913	4a	
"		Cairo	914-917	5	
"		Cairo	918-920	4a + 5	Centre Dividers coils
"		Damascus	917-919,22	0/4a	mint in rev. cartouche
"		Aleppo	?	4a	
"		no mint	908	4b	
"		no mint	909-911	4a	
"		mint ?	?	4b	
"		"	?	4a	Arabesque in centre of obv.
"		no mint	no date	0/4a	Obv. cartouche
"		"	911	2a/4a	
al-Ashraf Tumanbay	922	Cairo	922	4a	