

## NOTAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

### ISLAMIC COINS AND THEIR CATALOGUES: A PROBLEM CASE

David J. WASSERSTEIN  
Tel Aviv University

Islamic numismatics has a long history.<sup>1</sup> Nearly half a century ago, the late Richard Ettinghausen wrote of the «head start» enjoyed by numismatics, «which put it in advance of all other branches of Muslim art and archeology».<sup>2</sup> It can be said to have its remote origins in the eighteenth century, when Islamic coins minted between the eighth and the eleventh centuries began to turn up in some numbers in north European areas round the Baltic, in Scandinavia, in northern Germany and in Russia, the product of lengthy medieval trade routes. The first real evidence of scholarly interest in such coins lies in the appearance in 1724 of George Jacob Kehr's study of their inscriptions.<sup>3</sup> And as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, we see the establishment in a long series of publications by C. M. Fraehn, of the classification of the coins of Islam, and the arrangement of their issuing dynasties, which remains more or less the standard to our own day.<sup>4</sup> The next hundred years witnessed the systematic and careful cataloguing of a number of important public and semi-public collections. The catalogue of the British Museum collection, by Stanley Lane-Poole, the nephew of Edward Lane, is only one, though probably the largest and best known, of a number of such catalogues which carried the work of Fraehn forward and by the First World War placed Islamic numismatics firmly among the many and diverse fields which benefited from the great nineteenth-century passion for

<sup>1</sup> This is a review article of De Luca, M.<sup>a</sup> A., *Le monete con leggenda araba della Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo*, Parte 1 (Presentazione di Filippo Guttuso), Palermo (Città di Palermo Assessorato alla Cultura; Biblioteca Comunale: Aere Perennius, Cataloghi. 1), 1998, XXXIX + 399 p.

<sup>2</sup> Ettinghausen, R., «Islamic Art and Archeology», in T. Cuyler Young (ed.), *Near Eastern Culture and Society*, Princeton, 1951, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Kehr, G. J., *Monarchiae Asiatico-Saracenicae Status qualis VIII, et IX. ... seculo fuit, ex nummis argenteis prisca Arabum scriptura kufica a monarchis arabicis al-Mansor, Harun Raschid, al-Mamon, aliisque in metropolibus Chaldaee, Persiae, Transoxanaeque cisis, et nuper in littore maris Balthici prope Gedanum effosis, illustratus*, Leipzig, 1724. I owe this reference to Ettinghausen's article, cited above, quoting from Mayer, L. A., *The Rise and Progress of Moslem Archaeology, An Inaugural Lecture*, Jerusalem, 1935 (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> The numerous publications of this prolific student of Islamic numismatics are most conveniently listed in L. A. Mayer's *Bibliography of Moslem Numismatics*, London, 1954 (second edition).

collecting and classifying, and created a firm foundation for all subsequent scholarly study of these coins.<sup>5</sup>

Like the history of Islamic studies in general, however, the history of Islamic numismatics is extremely thin.<sup>6</sup> When we compare almost any area of Islamic studies with its parallel in, say, the field of Classics or Ancient History, we see at once how very thick the tradition of scholarship and of writing in the classical half of the pair is, and how extremely thin the Islamic sister is. In the field of numismatics this is as true as in other fields. The vast areas covered by the Roman empire at its height all produced coins, many of them long before their incorporation into the Empire; and we have in public and private collections alike uncountable numbers of these coins. For centuries now they have been the object of studies of the most varied and numerous kinds, and they are probably at least as well understood as the great bulk of the literary texts which have come down to us from classical antiquity. The field is supported by an amateur (in both senses of the word) population of collectors and others, who in their turn maintain societies and a thriving market in such coins which help to keep interest and activity in the field lively.

Islamic numismatics is in very different case. The territories covered by the field are as large as, indeed much larger than, those of classical numismatics. Most of the area of the former classical world came to form part of the Islamic world at some point or another during the medieval period, and to these territories many others, stretching far over to the east and also southwards into Africa, came to be added at later stages. The economic history, like the numismatic development, of these areas was strong, varied, influential and important during the fourteen centuries that have followed the rise of Islam. The numismatic history of these territories has, it would seem reasonable to suggest, at least as much to offer to, and as strong a claim on the attention of, the student of coins and their history, whether from the scholarly, academic point of view or from that of the amateur (again in both senses of the term), as that of the classical world.

<sup>5</sup> Lane-Poole, S., *Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the British Museum*, 8 vols., London, 1875-1889, plus two supplementary volumes, 1890. The same scholar also produced catalogues of the Islamic coins in the Bodleian Library, and in the Library of Christ Church, Oxford, now in the Ashmolean Library, as well as of the coins in the Khedivial collection in Cairo (the catalogue of the Christ Church coins was never published; it exists in manuscript in the archives of the Heberden Coin Room, in the Ashmolean).

<sup>6</sup> Apart from the article of Etinghausen cited above, see now, for archaeology, the study of Stephen Vernoit, «The rise of Islamic archaeology», *Muqarnas*, 14 (1997), 1-10.

Things are not, however, so simple. Islamic numismatics, like everything else to do with Islamic studies, suffers from a variety of features which together make it very much a Cinderella. The first of these is, most simply and most obviously, the fact that interest, in this sort of context, means essentially interest among people in Europe (and in the north American extension of Europe). There the interest is, in one way or another, perceived or apprehended as interest in the past of Europe. The classical past is part of the heritage of the ancient world to Europe, only in part because of the geographical continuity. Modern Europe, as daughter to the ancient world, is heir to the civilisation (this includes the numismatics) of that ancient world (this includes all territories, European and other, that formed part of the empire —even, for example, the Greek extension of the period following the death of Alexander in Bactria). Such an awareness, or consciousness, or adoption, of cultural continuity does not exist in the Islamic world. There interest in the classical past is muted at best. And, more to our point here, interest in the post-classical history and culture of the non-European territories of the ancient world (Bactria included) also does not exist in Europe. The Islamic extension of the classical world does not form part of European awareness of a European, or classical, past. This is as true of numismatics as of other fields.

In the Islamic world, by contrast, as noted a moment ago, interest in the pre-Islamic past is muted at best —but the character of the Islamic countries, as not forming part of the present-day European-dominated world of science, means that interest or lack of interest there is of little consequence for the development of the field. But this is true for numismatics in its Islamic dress too. For in the Islamic world such interest as exists in Islamic numismatics forms part of two areas: the one is scholarship, and the other is the market. As to the latter, it is worth noting here only that there is no such strong, developed and lively collectors' world supporting that of scholarship as there is in Europe. A coin market in the Islamic world seems to exist principally to fulfil the demands of the tourist (and to some degree also the western scholarly) market.<sup>7</sup> And as part of the broader world of Islamic art, to which it clearly does belong, Islamic numismatics suffers from the general decline of interest and investment in the field at the moment, perhaps accentuated by the general decline which resulted from the disappearance of the huge price rises produced by the oil price

<sup>7</sup> As an example of this, it is worth pointing to a report in the *Jerusalem Post*, 15 January 1999 (4), reporting on the case of a volunteer in the Israeli Civil Guard who was dismissed for wearing his uniform while visiting Kalkilya (in the area of the Palestinian Authority); «he reportedly told» Palestinian policemen who picked him up «that he had been going to Kalkilya to buy a gold coin».

increases of the seventies. Such a decline may even be greater in the numismatic field than in others. This is because Islamic coins are unlike many other forms of Islamic art, which can be appreciated easily for their appearance without much expert knowledge. They are also unlike manuscripts and other works of art which, while involving writing, can still be appreciated again without very much expert knowledge or understanding. Islamic coins, which are by and large devoid of pictorial representations, and differ from each other principally in minor details of the contents of the inscriptions which are their principal feature, lack the prime quality needed for continued popularity, accessibility. These differences are too few and too small to be easily distinguishable by the non-expert.<sup>8</sup> Coins, further, are very small, and generally need to be kept in a safe or in a bank for security. The result is that it is rare to find a collection of Islamic coins on display as a part of conspicuous collecting by a wealthy collector, whereas we may easily find other types of Islamic art on display in such a person's home.

On the scholarly side, similarly, Islamic numismatics suffers from various disabilities. Like numismatics in general, it tends to attract smallish numbers of students from among the overall number of people involved in the broader field of studies to which it belongs. Most Islamists tend to be interested in other fields and sub-disciplines. Like others fields, it calls for the acquisition of techniques and skills which are perceived as difficult and demanding; they are also seen as hard to transfer from one sub-field to another, unlike some of the techniques which, needed for one purpose, can often be used also for other purposes in the broader area of Islamic studies, such as those connected with the study of literary texts and manuscripts. As a sub-discipline, rather than a field in its own right, furthermore, it tends to be seen more as a museum-oriented technique than as a scholarly endeavour in its own right.

All of this means that the overall situation of Islamic numismatics, both in the past and still to some degree today, is poor in comparison with that of classical numismatics. Small collections, relatively few collections, few curators, few students, small numbers of actual specimens in public collections, fewer private collections (though some of outstanding importance); and little public interest. Snowballs grow in the rolling, but we can easily imagine a reverse process. And one of the results of this situation is that, despite a long tradition of work in the field, the cataloguing of Islamic coins —both those in collections, public and

<sup>8</sup> See, for the general point made here, «Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation», in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. George C. Kouymjian, Beirut, 1974, 297-317. What Ettinghausen says there of inscriptions applies with even greater force to coins.

private, and the broader study of those coins that were issued, as a general topic not tied to those specimens actually in collections— is very far from being as developed as in the classical field. In consequence, our knowledge of these coins, and their possible contributions in other areas, for example in the study of economic history or in that of the ideological significance of the inscriptions and other signs which they carry, is also underdeveloped.

A glance at the bibliographical situation will confirm this. We have catalogues of the principal public collections: Paris, London, Madrid (though the special character of the history of that collection means that a wholly new catalogue is in fact required<sup>9</sup>), Berlin (though this presumably needs up-dating, again for reasons connected with the history of Germany), Petersburg, Cairo. All of these catalogues are old and could do with up-dating and modernisation, both to take account of newer acquisitions (or losses) and to accommodate themselves to more modern standards and norms of cataloguing. We also have some catalogues of private collections or of exhibitions. We have a few catalogues which are devoted not so much to collections as to issues of individual dynasties or periods; among these that devoted, by Miles, to the Umayyads of Spain stands out; so does the two-volume work of Walker on early issues in the British Museum collection. And some of the older works on the numismatics of the Muslims in Spain, in particular those by Codera and Vives, still have considerable value today. But we still have no comprehensive work on the coinages of the 'Abbasids (though publication of the late Nicholas Lowick's work on this is awaited eagerly), or the Fāṭimids (though, again, we are encouraged to hope that the work in progress on this by Nicol will appear in print soon). And there is the great collection of the American Numismatic Society—no published catalogue, but thanks to Michael Bates and his colleagues information about pretty well all of it is available in computerised form. And something similar can also be said about the important collection in Tübingen. This indeed may well be the direction of such cataloguing in the future.

The collection of Islamic coins in the Biblioteca Comunale in Palermo is very old, well-known and justly renowned. It contains a large number of coins, many of them important, numismatically and historically, and it was among the earliest of public collections to be catalogued and discussed in print.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the collection, and its catalogues, also have a rather chequered history, being involved

<sup>9</sup> Such a catalogue is apparently in preparation, as the second volume of the overall catalogue of the coin holdings of the Museo Arqueológico Nacional (in progress), but its appearance is said to be several years away, at best.

<sup>10</sup> Apart from the work of Giuseppe Vella, who is mentioned below, and of his critics, in the work of Mortillaro, V., *Il Medagliere arabo-siculo della Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo*, 1861 (this includes, at 141-146, an appendix «Monete false coniate dall' ab. Giuseppe Vella»).

with forgers or other inventive types and losing (but also acquiring) coins along the way from its foundation to the present. The last serious attempt to produce a listing of the coins of use to scholars was that of Bartolomeo Lagumina, just over a century ago.<sup>11</sup> Another catalogue was published in 1975, but of very different type and quality.<sup>12</sup> The author of the present work, Maria Amalia De Luca, praises that catalogue for bringing some 260 or so of the coins in the collection to public attention and for the quality of its photographs; but she also notes, without comment, an article of Umberto Rizzitano,<sup>13</sup> and the review of Andrea Borruo,<sup>14</sup> which were both highly critical of the book and of the author's qualifications for such work as the preparation of this kind of catalogue demanded. Umberto Rizzitano also wrote a review of the work, entitled suggestively «Nuove ombre sul monetario arabo ed arabo-normanno della Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo».<sup>15</sup>

Since the time of Lagumina, the collection has changed its shape somewhat, and its size, and a new catalogue has for a long time clearly been a desideratum. «Clearly», however, to very few people, for the collection remained rather unknown, principally, perhaps, because of its location in Sicily, which is not among the main tramping grounds of the average Islamic numismatist. Catalogues and other works which refer to coins there do so generally by reference to the catalogue of Lagumina, which is now very out of date. On the basis of the present book, one cannot say that Sicily will receive many more Islamic numismatic tourists, but there will certainly be many who will visit it in something akin to what we have come to call a virtual sense, for the book itself is sure to become a standard work of great utility.

In a learned and absorbing introduction the author gives an account of the publication history of the book itself. She describes its genesis as a matter of chance, rather than as the product of a mature or deliberate research project; it emerged quite incidentally out of a discussion between two civil servants over some Arabic manuscripts. Would that other countries had such civil servants. De Luca gives much detail of the history of the numismatic collection and of the long and complicated story of its study and the catalogues of it which have been produced over the last two hundred years. She describes its formation and early

<sup>11</sup> Lagumina, B., *Catalogo delle monete arabe esistenti nella Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo*, Palermo, 1892.

<sup>12</sup> Sapio Vitano, F., *Il Nummarium islamico e normanno della Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo*, Palermo, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> «Un secolo di studi arabistici siciliani», in *Atti del Convegno La presenza della Sicilia nella cultura degli ultimi cento anni*, Palermo, 1976, 54-69.

<sup>14</sup> *Oriente Moderno*, LV, 1975, 445-447.

<sup>15</sup> This appeared in *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, ser. IV, 1, 1975, 196-206.

history, and devotes special attention to the connections with it of the notorious Maltese abbot Giuseppe Vella.

Giuseppe Vella, who lived from 1740 to 1814, is not to be confused, despite occasionally being spelled identically, with the celebrated Lorenzo Valla, a man of altogether different character and contrasting stamp. Although Vella's first language was Maltese, which is at base merely an Arabic dialect, he actually possessed a remarkably small knowledge of Arabic. He was nevertheless able to impose his forgeries, of Islamic coins, of Arabic manuscripts and of works based upon them, on a gullible and eager audience for some time. And although in the end he found himself in gaol, his colourful career, and another of his forgeries, the so-called «Dīwān Miṣr», provided the subject in our own day of Leonardo Sciascia's wonderful novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* (published in 1963). Apparently Vella claimed as early as 1782 to possess the lost books of Livy, but when he published them they turned out to be merely the *Epitome* of Florus, a writer of the early second century A.D. (who had, it is true, made use of Livy).<sup>16</sup> It is striking how Livy's lost decades continue to fascinate: in our own century Lévi-Provençal still had to debunk another claim of similar sort, in a note published in 1925.<sup>17</sup> But all was not shadow in Vella's career, at least in one sense. The great Italian orientalist Carlo Nallino, in a notice of Vella which he contributed to the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, pointed out that he was connected with the establishment of the first chair of Arabic in Palermo, a chair that survives to this day; the work of publishing his forgeries led to the acquisition for Sicily of Arabic type for printing; and in general his activity gave a welcome impetus to Arabic studies in Sicily.

Despite all this Vella was unmasked as a forger at a surprisingly, and very impressively, early date: the two Tychsens, both of them among the great early European orientologists of the eighteenth century, were not taken in by his products.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See the notice in the *Enciclopedia Espasa-Calpe*, vol. 67, 798 (unsigned).

<sup>17</sup> Lévi-Provençal, E., «Sur un prétendu manuscrit de Tite-Live à Fès», *Revue Archéologique*, XXI, 1925, 172-173.

<sup>18</sup> Oluf Gerhard Tychsen was born in Schleswig in 1734 and died in Rostock, where he had been professor of oriental languages in the university for decades, in 1815 (the University was actually in Butzow when he was appointed, in 1763, but it moved to Rostock in 1789). This Tychsen was a pupil, in Hebrew and other Jewish subjects, of Jonathan Eybeschütz (1690 or 1695-1764), the famous rabbi and talmudist who may also have been a secret member of the Sabbataean heresy. He was also involved, with indifferent success, in another numismatic dispute, over ancient Samaritan coins, with a Spanish polymath called Francisco Pérez Bayer; on this see Mateu y Llopis, F., «Ante una vieja polémica que renace: los siclos de Israel (En torno de la labor numismática de Francisco Pérez Bayer)», *Sefarad*, 11 (1951), 37-73 (in the first note to this article, the author refers to another work by himself on the same scholar as being then, in 1951, in the press; it is not clear, however, whether this did in fact ever appear). Thomas Christian Tychsen, who was also born in Schleswig, in 1753, died in Göttingen, where he had been professor of oriental languages, in 1834. In 1788, it is worth pointing out, he will have been only 35. It is not clear whether the two Tychsens were related. There are useful entries on the pair in the Spanish *Enciclopedia Espasa-Calpe*, vol. 65, 660.

Each of them wrote as early as 1788 denouncing some of his material as forgeries, and in the following year J. G. Eichhorn did the same.<sup>19</sup>

De Luca also points to several periods when the collection suffered greatly just from neglect, to such a degree that new cataloguing activity seems almost every time to have had to begin anew with the task of sorting out the mess and deciding how much of what was there the previous time was still there now, and how it related to the previous catalogue. Not an easy task under the best of conditions, this was rendered still more difficult in the conditions of work which generally prevailed in the collection, especially the absence of basic reference works and catalogues of the holdings of other important collections.

This introduction is a valuable (as well as an entertaining) piece of historical and historiographical detective work in its own right, which makes clear many of the under-appreciated and often badly understood problems and difficulties which encumber the task of the historian. It is also in parts a gripping read, unlike the dry prose which is usual in numismatic writing. For these reasons and because the catalogue is unlikely to be read much outside the small circle of numismatists (it is written in Italian, a language which is now not widely read among numismatists or Islamists in general), it is much to be hoped that an expanded version of this introduction will be published separately, preferably in a different language, so as to make it available to the much larger readership that it undoubtedly deserves.

The book itself is a splendid production. It contains full descriptions and illustrations (black and white but generally very good) of just over 1000 coins. A second volume will apparently contain descriptions of jetons and of the forgeries of Vella, together, presumably (it is not made clear), with other oriental coins not included in this volume. Of the coins in this volume 41 are oriental Umayyad (11 silver, 30 copper —these latter all anonymous), issues of ‘Abd al-Malik, Walīd I, Sulaymān and Hishām. ‘Abbāsids are represented by 99 specimens, of which five

Hartmut Bobzin, in Fischer, W. (ed.), *Grundriss der arabischen Philologie*, III, Supplement, Wiesbaden, 1992, 160, refers to a work by a pupil and biographer of Oluf Tychsen, Anton Theodor Hartmann (1774-1838), in which this writer also gives a graphic account of Tychsen's work as a missionary among the Jews in Mecklenburg: *Oluf Gerhard Tychsen oder Wanderungen durch die mannigfaltigsten Gebiete der biblisch-asiatischen Literatur* (Bremen: Heyse 1818-1820).

<sup>19</sup> See [Oluf Gerhard Tychsen], «Palermo», in *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, 21 July 1788, Bd. II, 116. St., 1162-1166; Tychsen, T. Ch., «Einige Aktenstücke der neuern arabischen Entdeckungen in Sizilien», *ibid.*, 2057-2062; Eichhorn, J. G., «Nachrichten. Palermo», *Eichhorn's Allgemeine Bibliothek der biblischen Litteratur*, 1789, Bd. II, 360-373; all of them making reference to «L. de Veillant» (identified by Mayer, L. A., *Bibliography of Moslem Numismatics, India Excepted*, 2nd ed., London [Royal Asiatic Society, Oriental Translation Fund, vol. XXXV], 1954, *sub nomine*, as a pseudonym of Vella himself), *Lettre à Mr. de Guignes... sur la supposée authenticité du Codex diplomaticus Siculus sub imperio Saracenorum*.

are of al-Manṣūr, ten are of al-Mahdī, 29 are of Hārūn al-Rashīd, one each of al-Amīn and al-Muhtadī, five of al-Mu'tamid, two each of al-Mu'taḍid and al-Muktafī, seven of al-Muqtadir, one each of al-Raḍī and al-Muttaqī, two of al-Mustakfī and one of al-Muṭī'. All of these are of silver. There are also a further 30 or so of base metal and not always certain attribution. Al-Andalus is represented by a very large number of coins, 312, all of silver; all of these (with the exception of a single specimen of 359/969-970) are of dates between 150/767-768 and 212/827-828. Aghlabids are represented by 120 specimens, again a large number to find in a single collection. And Fāṭimids by 332, the largest sub-division in the collection. Miles in 1951 noted the presence of 296 Fāṭimid specimens in the British Museum, 335 in the former Khedivial Library in Cairo, 386 in Paris, and 537 in the combined collection of the American Numismatic Society and the University Museum in Philadelphia, so that this is a collection of world class size in this area.<sup>20</sup> There also 198 coins of the Normans of Sicily, nineteen of the Suevi rulers Henry VI and Frederick II, in addition to two coins of the little-known rebel Muḥammad b. 'Abbād who ruled part of Sicily briefly in the early thirteenth century. We have records of very few specimens of this ruler, so it is particularly good to have this publication of these two, especially given the reproductions which are an important part of the work. The work is completed by a bibliography.

As can be seen even from such a brief survey of its contents, this is quite a large and also an important collection. It is equally clear from these figures that the main weight of the collection, at least in terms of numbers, but also in fact in importance, is represented by just three groups of coins. A large number of specimens of the Spanish Umayyads, of the Aghlabids and of the Fāṭimids, is unusual in any collection, and in this case the excellence of the presentation makes the collection generally accessible to the world of learning in a most useful way. Up to now, these coins have been relatively little known, precisely because of the way in which they, or parts of them, have been published in the past, and the publishers, as well as those who made the publication possible, are to be applauded for the enlightened patronage which has brought this about. It remains a pity that the work is probably so expensive as to be unobtainable for the majority of those who will need to work with it.

What is such a work useful for? One thing is merely the fact that it makes known what there is in the collection. It is a list. It is actually an extremely good

<sup>20</sup> Miles, G. C., *Fāṭimid Coins in the Collections of the University Museum, Philadelphia, and the American Numismatic Society*, New York (American Numismatic Society, Numismatic Notes and Monographs, n.º 121), 1951, 1.

list, given its form of presentation. Every single coin is illustrated. We are given all the basic information necessary —metal, weight, size, date and mint, as well as a general inventory number— and in addition to this full transcriptions of the inscriptions on the coins. This pattern of presentation leads to some unnecessary duplication, especially in the inscriptions, where a simple «as previous» or «as no. x» would very often have been sufficient. The compiler notes this in the introduction, but the pattern was imposed by those who provided the funds for the publication, and it may also in fact have other advantages, especially given the difficulty of access to the coins themselves from which most students of these coins will suffer.

But there is more to it than this. A list is useful in a number of ways, but it is an inadequate substitute for the real thing, which can be seen only by going to the collection itself. Palermo is a little out of the way of most scholars, especially in Islamic numismatics. A list presented in such detail as this, in particular with the full illustration of each piece in the collection, has many more uses. We can for example study minor variants in decoration on particular issues, or die patterns of years which are well represented. Here we have, in the Umayyad series in particular, some years which are very well represented. Thus the year 198/813-814 is represented, in this single collection, by thirty specimens —the corpus of Miles contained references to only some eighty three world-wide. For the following year, 199/814-815, we have here in this collection alone 104 specimens, while Miles' corpus has references to only (curiously, again) 83. Miles' work itself was published nearly half a century ago and clearly does not contain references to anything like the totality of the specimens now known (it is very easy to buy Umayyad dirhems on the open market in Madrid: they are both plentiful and cheap. While the state of the market for Islamic coins in general goes some way to explain the cheapness, the level of supply, at least for certain years, is also clearly such that a new corpus to replace that of Miles would be not only very different in many ways, it would also be very much larger). Nonetheless, it is just as clear that such large numbers of specimens in a single collection, published in this way, will make possible to a far greater degree than in the past work on such subjects as die patterns, and it will also make such studies very much easier.

What is true of the Umayyad series is equally true of the Aghlabid and the Fātimid series too. In fact it seems, from the relatively superficial examination which is all that I have been able to give to this aspect of the work, that it is even more true of these two dynastic series than of that of the Umayyads. In the case of the Aghlabids, there are numerous cases (perhaps not too surprisingly, given the location of the collection) where De Luca adds a number of specimens to that

known for a particular issue, and the presence of illustrations means that we can now study variants and in particular the presence of symbols and ornaments on these issues much more fully than has been possible ever in the past. Here again we find surprisingly large concentrations of specimens of single issues, and the large numbers, allied to the sumptuous illustrated manner of presentation, again make it possible to envisage the prosecution of far more detailed studies involving the coins than has been the case hitherto.

With all the praise which this work deserves, and the welcome which it will undoubtedly receive, there are also some reservations. The principal one concerns the way in which the cataloguing has been done. Despite acknowledgement in the preface of help from Michael Bates, of the American Numismatic Society, there are some notable gaps in the bibliography. These particularly concern works of central significance in the field. For example there seems to be no evidence of knowledge, let alone of use, of George Miles' standard work on the coinage of the Umayyads of Spain, referred to above.<sup>21</sup> Given the size and importance of the Spanish Umayyad series in this collection, this is a strange, and serious, omission. Similarly, for the Aghlabid coins, another large and important section of this collection, we should have expected to see evidence of knowledge and use of the work of Muḥammad Abū-l-Faraj al-'Ush on the coins of that dynasty.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the Fātimids things are better, but this is paradoxically because of the fact that we still do not have such a standard work; De Luca has been reduced to referring us to the Paris and London catalogues, with occasional references also to Miles' important little work on the coins in the American Numismatic Society.<sup>23</sup>

These gaps are more than merely irritating, in particular in the cases of the Spanish Umayyads and the Aghlabids. In the first case we are compelled for every single coin both to check in Miles' work to see whether he included it (via the catalogue of Lagumina—though this is, it is true, generally indicated in De Luca's work) and then, if not, to work out whether what we have is simply yet another example of a very well known type or on the other hand, perhaps, an unregistered variant. This difficulty is especially important in the case of the Andalusī Umayyad coins, because of the overall size of the holdings in this area—as noted above, the collection includes over 300 Andalusī Umayyad coins—and, more importantly, because De Luca adds the qualification «inérita» to something like

<sup>21</sup> Miles, G. C., *The Coinage of the Umayyads of Spain*, New York (American Numismatic Society, Hispanic Numismatic Series, n.º 1), 1950; there are however references to fifteen other works by this scholar in the bibliography.

<sup>22</sup> Muḥammad Abū-l-Faraj al-'Ush, *Monnaies aghlabides étudiées en relation avec l'histoire des Aghlabides*, Damascus, 1982.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.* (*supra*, n. 20).

259 out of this number, or some 86% of the entire group. The second case is similar, though somewhat less serious. Muḥammad al-‘Ush listed something like 1000 coins in his corpus of 1982, of which about ninety, or nine per cent of the total then known, came to him from Lagumina’s catalogue of the Palermo collection. The present catalogue lists 120 such coins, of which 29 bear the label «*iné dita*». Once again the user is compelled to check whether the type in each case is known to al-‘Ush and to what extent the specimen represents a rare type and whether it offers new or unknown variants on well-known types. In both these cases, the Spanish Umayyad and the Aghlabid, it seems fair to suggest, the user would not only have welcomed but also expected to find information about these matters included in this catalogue. The absence of such information seriously reduces the ease with which the catalogue can be used, and hence also the profit to be derived from it. References are given to previous publication of the specimens themselves, where known, and these include also references to the 1975 catalogue referred to above. Paradoxically, perhaps, this has the further effect of obscuring some new information still more: while «*iné dita*» indicates that there is no previous publication, a reference to publication in the 1975 work may well have the effect of concealing the fact that the coin in question is *otherwise* «*iné dita*». Given the small circulation of that work, quite apart from the reputation which it has, this is scarcely very helpful. It seems likely that there are quite a few cases of this type in this work. It is precisely the sorts of study mentioned above, studies which we might have expected to benefit greatly from just such publication as that provided here, which are likely to suffer from the lack of the information which would have been supplied by use in this catalogue of the information contained in the works of Miles and al-‘Ush on the coinages of these dynasties. The absence of references to such standard earlier publications is all the more to be regretted in the context of a work which concerns itself to such a degree with the local history, so to speak, of the collection in Palermo. In doing so it shows itself aware of the value and significance of placing a catalogue in the scholarly context to which it belongs. Contextualisation, in this case, means the cataloguing history of the coins, and the coin types, in question.

Although there is no price indicated in the copy received for review, it is to be assumed that it is out of the range of the pockets of most students of Islamic numismatics —since this is in part a function of the sumptuousness of the production, the note of slight criticism discernible in De Luca’s introduction is easily understood by those who will have to buy their own copies.

Finally, a minor but not irrelevant irritant: there is no list of the abbreviations employed. Since there are quite a few of these (and De Luca actually makes a

point in her introduction of stressing that one of her aims was to make the work very user-friendly and to make it unnecessary to look in a number of places at once to understand an entry in the catalogue), it can on occasion be quite a task discovering what the abbreviations refer to in the bibliographical references.

These criticisms aside —and they are not without importance— this is nevertheless an important and useful work. It provides up to date information about the contents of an important and a less than easily accessible collection, containing several series of unusually great size and significance. It gives very full information about the coins themselves, including good and usable illustrations. And it does so in a format which is agreeable and by and large easy to use. While the lost opportunity to make the book much more useful and to integrate it more fully into the current state of scholarship in the field is greatly to be regretted, we may be grateful for what it actually does provide.