

ARTÍCULOS

Exarachellos: Dirhams in Tenth-Century Barcelona

Exarachellos: Dirhames en la Barcelona del siglo X

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Abstract

Around the year 1000, in addition to local currency, dirhams from al-Andalus circulated in Barcelona, which were called *caceminos* in documents. This name imitated the Arabic designation *darāhim qāsimiyya*, reminiscent of Córdoba's famous mint master, Qāsim ibn Ḥālid. Furthermore, three local documents testify to the use of silver coins called *exarachellos*. Based on philological considerations, this word can be deciphered as a nickname of the dirham, formed from the Arabic word for shine (*al-šaraq*) and the Romanic diminutive ending *-ello*. In allusion to their silvery shine, the dirhams in al-Andalus could have been referred to as **al-šaraq-ellos* ("little shiners"), a nickname later transmitted to Barcelona in the course of close bilateral contacts.

Key words: 10th-century Barcelona; 10th-century al-Andalus; coin names; colloquial language; Arabic-Romanic hybrid words; Romanic *ħarġas*.

Resumen

Alrededor del año mil en Barcelona circulaban, aparte de la moneda local, dirhames de al-Andalus que fueron llamados *caceminos* en los documentos. Este nombre imitaba la denominación árabe *darāhim qāsimiyya* que recordaba el famoso director de la Moneda de Córdoba, Qāsim ibn Ḥālid. Además de esto, tres documentos locales atestiguan el uso de monedas de plata llamadas *exarachellos*. A base de consideraciones filológicas, esta palabra puede ser descifrada como un apodo del dirham formado a raíz de la palabra árabe para brillo (*al-šaraq*) complementada por la desinencia románica del diminutivo *-ello*. En alusión a su brillo argénteo, los dirhames en al-Andalus podrían haber sido llamados **al-šaraq-ellos* ('piezas brillantes'), un apodo transmitido posteriormente a Barcelona a través de contactos bilaterales estrechos.

Palabras clave: Barcelona siglo X; al-Andalus siglo X; nombres de monedas; lenguaje coloquial; palabras híbridas arabo-romances; *ħarġas* romances.

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1. Dirhams in Barcelona

On 28th April 1009, a certain Guimara in Barcelona donated eleven *exarachellos de argento* for the restoration of the Monastery of Sant Pere de les Puelles.¹ Further mentions of three or twelve *exarachellos* can be found in two local sales documents from the years 986 and 988.² Research has suggested different explanations for this enigmatic name. *Exarachellos* were presumed to be coins from the Byzantine exarchate in Italy or they would be no coins at all, but silver jewels such as rings or bangles. The Catalan numismatist Joaquim Botet i Sisó assumed that *exarachello* was not the actual denomination of a coin, but a popular name.³

In addition to the eleven *exarachellos*, Guimara also donated eleven *mancusos aureos* to the monastery. Under this name local charters recorded, around the year 1000, gold dinars imported from al-Andalus.⁴ Guimara's donation classifies *mancusos* and *exarachellos* as a 'sum of money' (*sumam pecunie*), so *exarachellos* will have been coins as well. The deeds of 986, 988 and 1009 were written by three different scribes. The name was therefore not the result of someone's imagination. At the time in question, the term *exarachello* must have been in use in Barcelona as the designation for a silver coin accepted as a means of payment.

Before trying to clarify the meaning of this name, we need to know which coins circulated in Barcelona towards the end of the 10th century. Formally still part of West Francia, the Catalan counties also remained in the Carolingian coinage system, which was based on silver. The only official coin was the silver *denarius* minted in the local Mint of Barcelona. Twelve *denarii* made one *solidus*, which only served as a unit of account and did not exist as a

minted coin (*solidos de denarios*). We have only incomplete information concerning the weight and silver content of the *denarius* in tenth-century Barcelona. The few coin finds indicate an increasing debasement, whereby the *denarii* finally weighed less than 0.5 g and had a low silver content. It was not before Count Ramon Borrell (993-1018) that heavy *denarii* were minted again, weighing 1.3 g.⁵

In addition to these debased *denarii*, silver coins of high quality imported from al-Andalus were also in circulation in Barcelona at the time.⁶ Eleven documents from the years between 981 and 1041 mention coins that—in different variants—were called *solidos de argento caceminos de Ispania*.⁷ Here the name *solidus*, previously used to denote a unit of account, was given to an actual coin. To distinguish them from the local *denarii*, the "Spanish" origin of this foreign currency was mentioned (*Ispania*). Finally, the adjective *cacemino* referred to the head of the Mint of Córdoba, Qāsim ibn Ḥālid, who in 330/941 initiated the coinage of dirhams with a high silver content.⁸ Caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III had appointed him after his predecessor was convicted of fraud. Although Qāsim was assassinated as early as 332/944, the high standard of coins he had introduced remained associated with his name in the following period. Subsequent Arab chroniclers such as Ibn 'Idārī and al-Maqqarī recorded large amounts of money under the name *darāhim qāsimiyya*. The average weight of a dirham increased from 2.83 g under Caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (dec. 350/961) to 3.11 g under Hišām II (366-399/976-1009). They had a silver content of up to 75%.⁹

Compared to the *qāsimī* dirhams, with up to three times more weight and a high silver content, the local *denarii* were probably not very attractive. Besides these two coins, however, there was probably no third silver currency in Barcelona. We can therefore surmise that the *exarachellos* were nothing else than *qāsimī*

¹ Feliu i Montfort & Salrach i Marés, *Els Pergamins*, no. 96 (1009): *super hoc addidistis nobis sumam pecunie, id est XI mancosos aureos et XI exarachellos de argento, quod expendimus in restaurationem prefati cenobii*.

² Fàbrega i Grau, *Diplomatari*, no. 166 (986): *exarachellos III de argento* and no. 181 (988): *exarachellos XII de argento*. Both cases concern the sale of land that was pledged as security for loans in the amounts mentioned.

³ Botet i Sisó, *Les monedes*, p. 31; Mateu y Llopis, *Glosario*, p. 75f.; Pagès i Paretas, "L'epitafi", p. 216, note 36 with an overview of the different explanations; see also Feliu i Montfort, "La moneda", p. 113; and Jarrett, "Currency", p. 226, note 65.

⁴ Bonnassie, *La Catalogne*, pp. 372-376; Quinsat & Bonnassie, "Le 'mancusos'", pp. 305-307; Manzano & Canto, "The Value", pp. 190-193.

⁵ Feliu i Montfort, "La moneda"; Jarrett, "Currency"; Balaguer, *Història*, pp. 63-70.

⁶ The Andalusī gold dinars (*mancusos*) can be disregarded for the time being. See paragraph 3 below.

⁷ Bonnassie, *La Catalogne*, pp. 384-386; those dirhams circulated also in the Kingdom of León at the time, see Manzano & Canto, "The Value", p. 187.

⁸ Chalmeta Gendrón, "Précisions", pp. 316-321; Canto García, "La reforma"; Frochoso Sánchez, *Las monedas califales*, pp. 35f.

⁹ Miles, *The Coinage*, pp. 91f.

dirhams under a different name. How did this name arise?¹⁰

2. The nickname of a coin

The ending *-ello* refers to a Romanic diminutive. Although corresponding word formations are attested for tenth-century Barcelona (e.g., the place name *Lubricatello*),¹¹ a local origin cannot be assumed here, as the noun *exarach* obviously does not have a Latin root. Since we suspect Andalusian dirhams behind the *exarachellos*, we have to examine the possibility of an Arabic origin.

Under this assumption, the initial vowel “e” could represent the assimilated Arabic article “al-”, especially since one of our three relevant documents reproduces the word in question in the form *axarachello*.¹² The Arabic basic noun would therefore be hidden behind the transliteration *xarach*. In the documents of tenth-century Barcelona, the Latin letter “x” could be used to reproduce the phoneme *š*, which does not exist in Latin.¹³ This is well documented for the vernacular name of the hoe, which was called “exada” in many medieval wills. Today’s Catalan orthography prescribes the form “aixada”; the pronunciation was probably “ešada” as early as the 10th century.¹⁴

We therefore recognize, behind the Latin transliteration *xarach*, the Arabic radicals *š-r-q*.¹⁵ The basic meaning of the verb *شَرَق* (*šaraq*) is *shine, radiate, glare*. Derivatives include

šurūq (rising of the sun, moon and stars) and *mašriq* (East/Orient). With reference to the dirham, one could assume that this word alluded to the silver-light shine (*al-šaraq*) of the coin. A comparable denomination can be found in 18th and 19th-century England. Here gold and silver coins such as the Sovereign were nicknamed “shiners” in popular slang, alluding to their metallic shine.¹⁶

Abū Nuwās (dec. 200/815), court poet of the Caliph of Baghdad Hārūn al-Rašīd, testifies that dirhams could be described as shiny in the Arab world of the Middle Ages as well. In a riddle poem, he pretends to describe a hunting falcon. However, various properties ascribed to the bird, such as *small, round, white, shining* and *radiant*, would be more suitable for a dirham. Furthermore, a dirham would be able to help the poor, hardly so a falcon. It has also been well observed that a silver coin shines brightest shortly after minting (“one month old”) and only emits noise when thrown:

I sing the praise of a falcon who defeats all falcons,
victorious, *white* and *circular*
as a one-month-old child, *shining* and *radiant*,
it resembles Sirius in shape.
It is honorable and makes no sound,
unless moved or thrown.
It is *small* and yet can do great things.
[... ..]
It helps the needy and the poor.
[... ..].¹⁷

In classical Arabic legal literature, a distinction is made between “white” and “black” dirhams, which obviously related to the different silver content of the coins.¹⁸ Accordingly, high-quality dirhams were described as “white”, an epithet echoed by Abū Nuwās.

But how did the Arabic word *al-šaraq* get its Romanic ending? The existence of hybrid Arabic-Romanic words is well attested for Al-

¹⁰ At this point it has to be emphasized that the present article does not deal with real coins as objects of numismatics. It is a philological study on the origin and application of certain names and nicknames given to dirham coins in al-Andalus and Barcelona in the 10th century.

¹¹ Feliu i Montfort & Salrach i Marés, *Els Pergamins*, nos 16 (*Lobregadelo*, 995), 64 (*Lubrigadello*, 1002) and 235 (*Lubricatello*, 1034).

¹² Fàbrega i Grau, *Diplomatari*, no. 181 (988): *exarachellos XII de argento*; in the original parchment (Arxiu Capítular de Barcelona, Perg. 1-2-139): *axarachellos XII de argento*.

¹³ Besides its use in genuine Latin words like “exarator”, “exinde” or “exio”.

¹⁴ In the *Cartulario de Sant Cugat* alone, there are five entries of “exades” from the 10th century: Rius Serra, *Cartulario*, nos 30 (949), 72 (964), 78 (965), 108 (975) and 188 (986).

¹⁵ As early as 1941, the Finnish Hispanist Eero K. Neuvonen interpreted the word *exarachello* as a Mozarabic formation from an Arabic noun and a Romanic ending. However, he interprets the third radical as *kāf* instead of *qāf* and reads the Arabic word as *al-šarak* (الشرك) = ‘parte’: Neuvonen, *Los arabismos*, p. 80f. This interpretation is not convincing, especially since *al-šarak* does not mean part, but noose, trap or net. See also García González, “Una perspectiva”, pp. 539 and 541.

¹⁶ Schwabe, “Germanic”, p. 169; Frey, *A Dictionary*, p. 218 with references.

¹⁷ Translation from the Arabic by the author. The original Arabic text of the entire poem edited in Wagner, *Der Dīwān*, p. 254; Wagner, *Abū Nuwās*, p. 286 offers a free German translation with commentary. In the Arabic original, the words for *shining* and *radiant* are *wāḍiḥ* and *munīr*. In the translation, *circular* stands for the Arabic *mustadīr*, meaning both *round* (like a dirham) and *circling* (like a falcon in flight).

¹⁸ Udovitch, *Partnership*, p. 56f.; See also Goitein, “The Exchange Rate”, pp. 36-38, on *white silver pieces* in the commercial letters of the Cairo Geniza.

Andalus in the so-called *ḥarġas* (*ḥaraġāt*) of the 11th and 12th centuries. *Ḥarġas* are final stanzas of a certain genre of poems, the *muwaššahāt*, that were written in classical Arabic or Hebrew. Apparently to express common touch, the *ḥarġas* switched to vernacular at the end of the *muwaššahāt*. There are *ḥarġas* in Andalusian Arabic dialect, others used the Hispanic-Romanic vernacular.¹⁹ The Romanic *ḥarġas* in turn incorporated individual Arabic words as well as hybrid words, which were made up of an Arabic root word and a Romanic suffix. A commonly used suffix for nouns was *-ello*.²⁰ The following *ḥarġa*, inserted at the end of a Hebrew *muwaššah* by the famous poet Yehuda Halevi (dec. 1141), serves as an example, with the Romanic components put in capital letters and the Arabic ones in lower case:

DES KANDO MEW sidELLO BENID
TAN BONA lbišara
KOMO RAYO DE SOL ISID
EN wad-alhajara.

Ever since my Cidello came,
Such good tidings!
It is if a ray of sun shone
In Guadalajara.²¹

In this example, the Arabic word for “master”, *sīd*, had the suffix *-ello* added (meaning ‘dear master’). Such hybrid words are likely to have been formed frequently in the largely bilingual population of Al-Andalus, and some of them found their way into the *ḥarġa* poems.

The word **al-šaraq-ello* could therefore interpreted as a hybrid form that was used to designate the dirhams in al-Andalus. Following the example of the English slang name from the 18th century, we may translate **al-šaraq-ellos* as ‘little shiners’. This nickname made its way—apparently together with the dirhams—from al-Andalus to Barcelona, where it was finally adopted as *exarachello* into the local Latin documents. However, the name could not be read

from the coin, it must have been passed on orally when the coins were handed over. Where and by whom this transmission took place remains unknown due to lack of sources. The assumption that traders from al-Andalus came to Barcelona paying their trading partners with dirhams under the name **al-šaraq-ellos* seems enticing, but cannot be proven. It is equally possible that Catalan mercenaries serving in Al-Andalus received those dirhams in pay.²² Both traders and military leaders could have used and passed on the nickname.

3. Conclusions

At the turn of the 11th century, dirhams from Al-Andalus circulating in Barcelona were either called *caceminos* or *exarachellos*. While the term *cacemino* was borrowed from the “official” Andalusian denomination of the dirham, *dirham qāsīmī*, the term *exarachello* can be identified as an Andalusian nickname of the same coin.²³ Both designations, *cacemino* and *exarachello*, must have been transmitted orally from Al-Andalus to Barcelona, although details of the relevant contacts are not known to us. Different ways of transmission may have led to the use of the different names.²⁴

Since most documents from Barcelona were destroyed during the looting of the city by the troops of the Andalusī *ḥāġib* al-Manšūr in 985,²⁵ we cannot expect to find much written evidence of dirhams from the preceding decades.²⁶ Under these circumstances, the three documents from the years 986, 988 and 1009 probably represent the final phase of a longer period during which Andalusian dirhams were known in Barcelona under the nickname *exarachellos*. The mere reception of this Arabic name in the local Latin documents presupposes a certain duration of the relevant contacts with Al-Andalus.

²² For the mercenary thesis, see Bonnassie, *La Catalogne*, pp. 347, 423-425, 432f.

²³ As far as I know, the reconstructed word **al-šaraq-ello* has not been found in Arabic literature.

²⁴ The two names seem to have been linked to different dimensions of the amounts accounted for: the modest 3, 11 and 12 *exarachellos* (986-1009) contrast sharply with the higher sums of 150 to 5,000 *caceminos* (ten documents from the years 1016-1041), with the exception of 5 *caceminos* only in one early document from 981, see Bonnassie, *La Catalogne*, p. 385.

²⁵ Bonnassie, *La Catalogne*, pp. 28f.; Ballestín Navarro, *Almansor*, pp. 92f.

²⁶ The only exception are the five *caceminos* in the document from the monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallés from the year 981, Rius Serra, *Cartulario*, no. 136.

¹⁹ For the transmission of the *ḥarġas*, see Cennane, *Las jarchas*, pp. 16-19; List of the manuscripts, pp. 244-314; Photographs of the manuscripts. *Ḥarġas* editions in Corriente, “The Kharjas”, pp. 120-124 (from Arabic manuscripts), pp. 125-127 (from Hebrew manuscripts). Further sources for hybrid Arabic-Romanic formations in botanical, agronomic and medical dictionaries, see Corriente, *Romania arabica*, pp. 101-104.

²⁰ Corriente, “El idiolecto”, p. 13f., note 36; Corriente, *Romania arabica*, pp. 131 and 134.

²¹ Corriente, “The Kharjas”, p. 125, with the English translation; Cennane, *Las jarchas*, pp. 50 (H3) and 81.

After 1009, the name *exarachello* disappears from the documents, whereas the last payment in *caceminos* is attested for 1041.²⁷ The main reason behind this extinction probably lies in the massive influx of the Andalusian gold dinars. Mentioned for the first time in a local document in 978, these coins, called *mancusos de auro cocto*, came to dominate monetary transactions in Barcelona ever more in the following decades. In the 1020s, Barcelona even started minting its own gold *mancusos*.²⁸ This “gold fever” seems to have gradually superseded the use of the silver dirham together with its nickname.

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²⁷ Last mention of *caceminos* in a will from 1087, Baucells et al., *Diplomatari*, no. 1475.

²⁸ Bonnassie, *La Catalogne*, pp. 372-376, 379-382; Balaguer, *Història*, pp. 52f., 70-72.

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