A Unique Unpublished Abbasid Commemorative Dirham of Umm Al-Amin or Umm Ja'afar (Zubayda)

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Abstract
Sayyida Zubayda minted many commemorative silver dirhams recording her name. These included the present unmatched silver dirham that is published herein for the first time. It shows how al-Rashid and his subjects reverenced her till he allowed minting coins in her nicknames "أم جعفر" and "أم الأمين": "Umm Ja'afar" and "Umm Al-Amin". She was the first lady throughout Islamic history to mint coins in her name due to her noble Abbasid descent and prominent position in the governing dynasty. Zubayda's coins are of particular importance because they reflect her prominent social and political role in Islamic history. Socially, she helped her son, Caliph Al-Amin to get the pledge of allegiance to her grandsons, "Musa and Abdullah" as crown princes. Politically, she sustained the Caliph Al-Amin in his struggle against his brother Al-Ma'moun. Such roles empowered her to mint coins recording her nicknames in gratitude of her social and political influences. This research presents a silver dirham of the so-called "Umm Al-Amin", "Umm Ja'afar". It is not published before. It's preserved in the collection of (Ahmed Abo Osama, Aleppo, Syria) after Dr. Rafaat El-Nabarawy. Although it is an undated silver dirham, the researcher believes that it dates back to the eighties of the second century of Hegira as it was minted by a person called "Dawood", who lived in 176 AH. It is engraved in simple Kufic script and adorned with dotted circles. Thus, this unique commemorative silver dirham of Sayyida Zubayda highlights women's influential position during the Abbasid era.
Introduction

Coins throughout Islamic history are considered an essential source of historiography. In addition, they are one of the most important archeological sources of studying the economic, social and religious history of nations. Also, they can be considered official and valid documents as their inscriptions cannot be refuted or doubted. Coins are the mirror that reflects and shows clearly the various historical information including the economic, social, religious, political and literary aspects of life in the state that ordered minting them.

Minting coins is an important manifestation of sovereignty, so the caliphs and rulers were keen on minting and recording their names and titles upon them. Their inscriptions included prayers for the caliphs and rulers, supplicating God to preserve their countries, peoples and governance... etc. These coins are made out of gold, silver and copper.

Coins were minted under the supervision of the caliph himself due to the fact that this mission was an inherent action of the caliphate and kingship. However, during the reign of Caliph Al-Mansur this mission was entrusted to his vizier, Ja'afar bin Yahya Al-Barmaki. It should also be considered that Sayyida Zubayda's position in al-Rashid's heart enabled her to intervene and order striking dirhams(1) in her name.

These included the silver dirham recording her nicknames as "Umm Al-Amin" and "Umm Ja'afar"(2). It's published for the first time in this research. It's preserved in a private collection of (Ahmed Abo Osama, Aleppo, Syria) after Dr./ Rafaat El-Nabarawy. Although it is an undated silver dirham, the researcher believes that it dates back to the eighties of the second century of Hegira as it was minted by a person called "Dawood", who lived in 176 AH. It is engraved in simple Kufic script and adorned with dotted circles.

Brief Overview on Zubayda's Birth and Upbringing

Sayyida Zubayda is nicknamed Umm Ja'afar. She is Zubayda bint Ja'affar bin Abi Ja'afar Al-Mansur bin Muhammad bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Al-Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib bin Hashem. She was the wife and cousin of Harun Al-Rashid(3). Zubayda was a nickname(4) but her real name is Amat al-Aziz. Her grandfather al-Mansur had

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References:


Rashid was born in ray in the northern Iran , his reign was politically turbulent , with -) Harun al3( nearly every corner of the Abbasid Empire .


الأزدى: (أبو زكريا يزيد بن محمد) , تاريخ الموصل , تحقيق علي حبيبة, القاهرة, 1967, ص 194.
affectionately named her Zubayda, meaning “little Butterpat” due to her whiteness and beauty\(^{(5)}\).

**Her Life:**

Zubayda was born in 941 AH and her father died in 951 AH during the life of his father, Al-Mansur\(^{(6)}\). The sources stated that he was buried in Quraysh Cemetery in Baghdad, so he was the first Quraishi to be buried there\(^{(7)}\). Later, she moved to her grandfather's house, the Caliph Abu Ja’afar Al-Mansur where she was brought up luxuriously and enjoyed privileged and prestigious life\(^{(8)}\). Al-Mansur died in 957 AH, when she was about ten. Hence, her uncle, Caliph Muhammad al-Mahdi, took care of her upbringing and education until she memorized many verses of the Noble Qur’an, history and poetry\(^{(9)}\).

**Her Marriage to Harun al-Rashid:**

Zubayda was the cousin of Harun bin Caliph Al-Mahdi\(^{(10)}\). The historical sources agreed that they married in 975 AH, in Al-Khuld Palace in Baghdad in an unmatched ceremony in terms of preparations. The wedding banquet was held in the al-Khuld or Eternity Palace and basins of gold dinars were distributed among the guests. It was adorned with luxurious ornaments, crowns of gold, diadems, domes of gold and silver as well as clothing\(^{(11)}\). Perfumes, musk and amber were packed in glass flasks to be distributed to people\(^{(12)}\). The bride was adorned with exceptional jewels that the Caliph Al-Mahdi and Harun presented to her\(^{(13)}\). These included the "Umayyad Bedna"\(^{(14)}\), a bejeweled sleeveless jacket worn by the Umayyad queens - was passed

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\(^{(5)}\) الخطيب البغدادى : تاريخ بغداد , تحقيق ,: مصطفى عبد القادر عطا , بيروت , دار الكتب العلمية , ج.1, ص 434.


\(^{(7)}\) ابن قتيبة ( أبو محمد عبد الله بن مسلم ): المعةار، تحقیق : وةروت عكادةة، القاهرة، الييةةة المصةرية العامة للكتةا , 1992م، ص.379.

\(^{(8)}\) نبيا Abbott : Two Queens of Baghdad , Mothera and wife of Harun AL-RAshhid, P 150.

\(^{(9)}\) أبو الفرج الأصفهاني، أخبار النساء في كتاب الأغاني، جمع ودرح عبد الأمير ميوا، بيروت، مؤسسة الكتةب الققافية، 1999م، ص.24.

\(^{(10)}\) نبيا Abbott : Two Queens of Baghdad , Mothera and wife of Harun AL-RAshhid, P 137.

\(^{(11)}\) ابن الأثير (محمد بن عبد الكريم الفياني) , الكامل في التاريخ , بيروت , دار الكتاب العربي , 1967م, ج. 5 , ص 131.

\(^{(12)}\) الشابشتي ( ابي الحسن علي بن محمد ) : كتاب الديارات , على تحقیق ونشره كورکيس عةواد , بغداد , مطبعةالمارة, 1951م, ص. 100.
on to the new bride. It belonged before to 'Abdah bin Abdullah bin Yazid bin Muawiyah, wife of Hisham bin Abdul Malik.

The costs of this marriage amounted to one million three hundred and eighty-eight dinars from Al-Mahdi's treasury, as Harun spent about fifty million dirhams, while Zubayda spent ca. thirty-seven million dirhams. The couple lived happily, and she became a powerful figure at court. Harun loved her so passionately that he almost preferred living with her over taking over the caliphate. This urged his brother Al-Hadi to confiscate his right to the throne as a crown prince.

She did not give birth for a long time till a slave called "Marajil" gave birth to Harun's son "Abdullah" who was called "Al-Ma'mun". Marajil died in childbirth but bore Harun a son whom Zubayda brought up herself. Six months later, in April 787, she gave birth to her only son, Muhammad, later to become the Caliph Al-Amin. He was her only son, so Zubayda’s did her best to educate and bring him up. In addition, she brought him the most eminent scholars to teach him, such as Al-Kisa'i and Al-Mufaddal Al-Dabbi.

Zubayda’s love for her son, Al-Amin, made her influence Harun, with the help of her brothers and Abbasid supporters, to designate Al-Amin as the crown prince instead of his elder stepbrother "Al-Ma'mun". After eight years of this pledge of allegiance to Al-Amin, i.e., in 973 AH/811 AD, Al-Rashid reassigned Al-Ma'mun to be the crown prince, under the influence of his vizier Ja'afar bin Yahya al-Barmaki, who was entrusted with Al-Ma'mun's upbringing.

It seems that Zubayda's influence upon al-Rashid sowed the seeds of discord and division between both brothers, which eventually led to the murder of al-Amin in 918 AH/793 AD.
Her Generosity and Good Deeds:

The life of Sayyida Zubayda was characterized by generosity due to her noble Abbasid descent. She was the daughter of the Abbasid caliph Mansur's elder son, Jafar; and her mother was Salsal, the sister of Harun ar-Rashid's own mother\(^{(23)}\), named Khazuran. This had a clear impact on her gracious personality and philanthropic life style\(^{(24)}\). She managed to inspect the poor's conditions until she became an example for women of her time. It is reported that she established shelters for strangers, hospice for the poor and free baths. In addition, she built many mosques in Baghdad and Makkah Al-Mukarramah\(^{(25)}\).

Historians mentioned that she carried out large urban works such as palaces, including Al-Qarar Palace that was built during Al-Mansur's reign, but she reconstructed it and called it Qasr Zubayda\(^{(26)}\). There she allocated an unprecedented lounge for al-Amin. It was adorned with magnificent paintings, gold roof, walls, and doors, as well as gilded curtains hanging on its doors and luxurious furniture. Her prominent works included also the road she prepared for the pilgrims\(^{(27)}\). One of the most famous of her projects was the improvement of the pilgrim road across 900 miles of desert from Kufa to Medina and Mecca, which still in south Kufa is known as Darb Zubayda. She dug wells, built houses and water tanks\(^{(28)}\). However, historians did not report such deeds in detail. Yaqut Al-Hamawi referred to some of the houses and stations on the road connecting Kufa and Mecca\(^{(29)}\). The traveler Ibn Jubayr also referred to this road. Hence, the life of this lady is full of countless deeds. Finally, She died in Baghdad, around 216 AH.

Zubayda's Unique Commemorative Silver Dirham:

This unmatched Abbasid silver dirham is published in this research for the first time. It shows how al-Rashid and his subjects reverenced this lady till he allowed her to mint coins in her name. Sayyida Zubayda was the first lady throughout Islamic history to mint coins in her name due to her noble Abbasid lineage. She was the cousin and

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\(^{(24)}\) ابن وردان، تاريخ العباسيين، تحقيق مو ي الكعبي، بيروت، دار العرب الإسلامي، 1993، ص 209.

\(^{(25)}\) الفاكيي (محمد بن اسحاق) : مصداق مكة في قديم العهد وحديثة، تحقيق: عبد الملك بن دهيش، بيروت، دار خضر للطباعة، 1994م، ج4، ص 33.

\(^{(26)}\) ابن بطوطس: رحلة ابن بطوطس (المسماة تحفة الناظر في غرائب الأمصار وعجائب الأسفار، بيروت، دار الكتب اللبنانية، ص 118.

\(^{(27)}\) Nabia Abbott : Two Queens of Baghdad, Mothera and wife of Harun Al-Rasshid, 1946, P 155.

\(^{(28)}\) الطيف نبأ هومن : نقود الطالع والمعانيات إلى نهاية العصر العباسي 656 هـ / 1258 م، رسالة ماجستير مقدمة إلى قسم الأثار، كلية الآداب، جامعة بغداد، 2012، ص 125.

\(^{(29)}\) ابن الساعي: نساء الخلفاء، ص 70.

\(^{(30)}\) ينموي أبو خليل : هارون الرشيد أمير الخلفاء وأجل ملك الدناب، 4، دار الفكر، دمشق، 1999م، ج 1، ص ص 27، 33.
wife of Caliph al-Rashid who had great affection for her. In addition, she was very popular, and had a great status among the subjects. She was the mother of Muhammad al-Amin, who was the crown prince of the Caliph al-Rashid.\(^{31}\)

Sayyida Zubayda is the only woman as a wife of a caliph, and the mother of a caliph to strike coins in her name. Coins were minted for her commemoration along the eras of her husband Harun al-Rashid, her son Muhammad al-Amin from (184 AH until 196 AH), except in 185 AH. All of these coins were silver dirhams only. Some 23 types were collected throughout 13 years. They were struck in three mintage. However, there is a dirham but it did not record where it was struck. There is also half a dirham recording her name. It dates back to 175 AH, i.e., the year of swearing allegiance to her son Al-Amin as the crown prince, and another dates back to 193 AH, i.e., the year of his succession. There were other coins of relations to the soldiers and some prominent figures, but the title of "أم جعفر": Umm Ja'afar" did not appear on either of them.

The historical sources did not mention the responsible for minting Sayyida Zubayda's coins, but they referred to the mint as they were struck in Madinet al-Salam, the center of the Abbasid Caliphate.

In addition, the contemporary historical sources do not specify the number of Zubayda's coins. However, it should be considered that she struck many coins in various mints such as Madinat al-Salam, al-Kamiliyah, Ma'aden Bagnes, and others... Therefore, numismatics researchers could not determine the place of minting Zubayda's coins as they are multiple as stated previously.

Minting coins bearing the name of Sayyida Zubayda is a great historical event with many implications. It sheds light on some prominent events of the Caliphate. However, most of the Arab and Muslim historians did not pay attention to this incident because most of them did not consider coins to be a worthy and reliable source of historiography. Consequently, most of the numismatic scholars did not know - until recently - that coins were struck in honor of Sayyida Zubayda. They did not notice that inscribing the word reading "أم جعفر": “Umm Ja'afar", believing that it was the name of Ja'afar al-Barmaki that the Caliph Harun al-Rashid mandated to supervise minting coins and whose name was struck on them\(^{32}\). Moreover, some believed that the two letters "أ", "م": "alif and meem" mean "أم": "Mother", i.e., they believed that these two letters were the acronyms of two names.

Zubayda's coins included a matchless silver dirham that is published for the first time in this research. It's preserved in a private collection of (Ahmed Abo Osama, Aleppo, Syria) after Dr./ Rafaat El-Nabarawy. Its weight is 3.15 grams, diameter 25 mm. Although it is undated, the researcher believes that it dates back to the eighties of the second century of Hegira as it was minted by a person called "Dawood", who lived in 176 AH. It is engraved in simple Kufic as it was the then dominant script. After examining this silver dirham, the researcher found that it was made by striking due to the difference between the inscriptions on its obverse and reverse. As for its...
ornaments, it is adorned with dotted circles. Concerning the inscriptions, the obverse margin records the title "أم الأمين" : "Umm Al-Amin". These inscriptions are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reverse</th>
<th>Obverse</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>تبارك الله ود الأنكار والشهقان</td>
<td>صلى الله على محمد دا بسم الله لأم الأمين....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
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<td>Margin</td>
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Zubayda's coins have two significant indications. The first is her sovereignty and prominent position in the ruling court. The other is the supplication to God at the mosques to protect the ruler, especially in Friday sermons as a sign of paying the pledge of allegiance to him. It is noticed that Harun al-Rashid was the first caliph to abstain from supervising the caliber of coins himself, as his predecessor caliphs assumed scrutinizing the caliber of dirhams and dinars themselves. He granted that right to the Barmakids who inscribed their names besides his on the coins. This symbolized his ceding part of his sovereignty to them. Years later, Harun al-Rashid ordered minting silver dirhams bearing his wife's name - Sayyida Zubayda - for her wisdom, prudence and high influence as the court (33). This confirms the deep affection of Harun al-Rashid to Zabayda and her influence upon him.

Zubayda's prominent role was not limited to the Abbasid social life in the era of Caliph Al-Rashid because it extended to the era of her son, Caliph Al-Amin as well. For example, she helped him get the pledge of allegiance to his grandsons, "Musa and Abdullah" as crown princes. In addition, she sustained him during his struggle against his stepbrother Al-Mamun, and also minted coins in her name at that time(34).

It is worth noting that Sayyida Zubayda recorded the title "السيدة"; "Al-Sayyida or the Lady" on some of her coins that she minted during the reign of her son, the Caliph Al-Amin. The late scholar “Samir Shamma” stated that adopting such title denotes an insult to Al-Mamun (35). It may be a reference to his inferiority for being a son of a slave girl, while Al-Amin, was a son of a Hashemite woman. However, this opinion is refutable, because this title is commensurate with Zubayda's position in the Abbasid ruling court(36). She was a lady of noble descent and prominent position as her grandfather was “the Caliph Al-Mansour”, her uncle was “the Caliph Al-Mahdi”, her husband was “the Caliph Al-Rashid”, her son was “the Caliph Al-Amin” and her grandsons “Musa and Abdullah” were the sons of Al-Amin(37) and they were crowned princes. Hence, it can be said that she was a woman of so unique position on the one hand.

33(سمير شـما: مسكوكات السيدة زبيدة , ص 15، 16).
34(Nabia Abbott : Two Queens of Baghdad , Mothera and wife of Harun AL- Rasshid , P 165)
35(سمير شـما: أحداث عصر المأمون كما ترويها النقود، جامعة اليرموك، الأردن، 1995م، ص ص 125، 129)
36(عاطـف منصور: النقود الإسلامية وأهميتها , ص 240).
37(Nabia Abbott : Two Queens of Baghdad , Mothera and wife of Harun AL-Rasshid, 1946, P 175).
Moreover, Sayyida Zubayda took good care of Al-Mamun and raised him up since birth. This is evident clearly from her will \(^{38}\) to informed Ali bin Isa bin Mahan \(^{39}\). She said to Mahan: “Muhammad is my son and the apple of my eye, but Abdullah al-Ma’mun has an abundant share of love in my heart. I am the one who raised him, and I'm compassionate for him”\(^{40}\).

Likewise, Zubayda sent al-Ma’mun verses of poetry after the murder of her son al-Amin in 198 AH, in which she affirms her deep affections for him. She considered al-Ma’mun the best compensation for her father, husband and son. She says to him:

\[
\text{فَلَمَّا بَقَى وَالْحَمْدُ لَلَّهِ لِيَدُودُ}
\]
\[
	ext{فَقَلَتْ لَرَيْبِ الْدُّهرِ إِنَّ ذَهِبَتْ يَدُ}
\]
\[
	ext{إِذَا بَقَى الْمَأْمُونَ فَالْرَّهْبِ يُلُدُّ}
\]
\[
	ext{وَلَيْ جَعْفَرَ لَمْ يُفْقِدْ وَمُحَمَّدٌ}
\]

Therefore, it becomes clear that the Islamic coins of Sayyida Zubayda were of social significance as they recorded her titles such as “Umm al-Amin” or “Umm Ja’afar” in commemoration of such a noble woman. They also indicated how the Caliph Harun al-Rashid loved her, which is an important social indication of coins.

\(^{38}\) \text{الوصية في الديواني: الأخبار الطوال, ص 396.}
\(^{39}\) \text{Commander of the armies of Al-Amin, who went out to fight Al-Ma'moun.}
\(^{40}\) \text{سيرير شم: أحداث عصر المأمون, ص 128.}
\(^{41}\) \text{ابن العامر (عبد الحي بن أحمد بن محمد, ت 1089 ه): شنارات الذهب في أخبار من ذهب, القاهرة, 1979 م, ص 350.}
Conclusion:

The research depicts the influence of Sayyida Zubayda, her material and moral influence upon the Islamic state, which enabled her to strike coins bearing her name. She was the first woman throughout Islamic history to mint coins in her name due to her noble Abbasid descent and prominent position in the ruling court.

It is evidenced that the silver dirham published herein for the first time is a commemorative dirham prepared for a particular occasion and not for official dealings. Therefore, it does not adhere to the then standards of legal weight or inscriptions.

This unmatched commemorative silver dirham of Sayyida Zubayda records her titles as "أم جعفر: Umm Ja'afar" which was not inscribed before on her coins. The researcher examined the silver dirham closely, which allowed interpreting its inscriptions accurately, which allowed providing a brief overview on the titles of "Umm Ja'afar" and "Umm Al-Amin", showing that they belonged to Sayyida Zubayda (Mother of the Crown Prince).
Discussion and Recommendations

Zubayda's coins can be regarded a turning point in Islamic history as they helped in understanding the concept of women's sovereignty in the ruling court and beyond. Having examined Sayyida Zubayda's commemorative silver dirham, it becomes clear that she was of highly social and political influence. Therefore, the researcher bring these roles into focus through the following:

1- Shedding light on the life of Sayyida Zubayda, the wife of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, her political role and the coins she ordered to be struck. Many of these are preserved in international museums.
2- Showing how numismatics can be a means of addressing the people and spreading their ideas and principles, in an attempt to attract their support or manifesting governance, sovereignty and independence.
3- Recommending the Mint of Egypt and other Muslim countries to revive the ancient forms of Islamic coins in terms of their inscriptions and decorations. This can be done by minting modern coins similar to the ancient, considering the date, location and name of ruler in whose reign they are minted.
4- Using all of the available evidence and the historical record of coins provided by a variety of secondary sources to construct a detailed numismatic history of Islamic coinage.
5- Preparing an updated survey of Islamic classical coinages and a detailed study of each coin in its context to facilitate their understanding and retrieval.
Figures

(Fig. 1) Unmatched Abbasid Dirham of Umm Al-Amin (Zubayda).

(Photographed by the Owner of Collection)

The private collection of (Ahmed Abo Osama, Aleppo, Syria) after Dr. Rafaat El-Nabarawy.
(Fig. 2) The Eastern " Abbasid Empire"(42) .

Nabia Abbott: Two Queens of Baghdad, Mothera and wife of Harun AL42(
(Fig. 3) Table of Family Relationships of chief characters (43).

Rashid, P.267 - Alra and wife of Harun) Nabia Abbott: Two Queens of Baghdad, Mother
(Fig. 4) The tomb of Sayyida Zubayda\textsuperscript{(44)}.

Rashid – Nabia Abbott: Two Queens of Baghdad, Mother and wife of Harun AL 44(}
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