

The Numismatic Evidence for the Reign of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (254–270/868–883)

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Abstract

This paper re-examines the reign of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (254–270/868–883), taking account of the currently available numismatic evidence. It argues for a reappraisal of the crucial triangular relationship between Ibn Ṭūlūn, the caliph al-Muṭamid ʿalā Allāh (256–279/869–892) and the latter’s brother Abū Aḥmad (known as al-Muwaffaq billāh from 261/874). The rise of the Tulunids is situated within the context of the weakening of the Abbasid unitary state in the middle of the third century AH/ninth century CE, and the emergence of powerful provincial governors whose rise to power anticipated the eclipse of the caliphal state in the fourth/tenth century. The value of the numismatic evidence lies mainly in the names and titles that occur on the coins. These allow the historian to control the sometimes contradictory narrative of the textual sources and also raise questions about the nature and extent of Tulunid autonomy.

Tulunid history (254–292/868–904) has enjoyed a revival in recent years. Careful analyses of the Tulunid dynasty in Egypt, particularly the life and works of the first ruler, Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, have brought the subject into the mainstream and have begun the process of updating and correcting the narrative of Zaky Mohamed Hassan’s *Les Tulunides* (1933), the only monograph-length history of the dynasty in a European language.¹ In an attempt to provide a context for the emergence and consolidation of Tulunid power, this article reviews the relationship between Ibn Ṭūlūn and the Abbasid family during his governorship of Egypt, by bringing the coinage evidence to bear and re-examining certain key passages in the textual sources in light of that evidence. A central aim of the article is to argue the case for a reappraisal of the crucial triangular relationship between Ibn Ṭūlūn, the caliph al-Muṭamid ʿalā Allāh (256–279/869–892) and the latter’s brother Abū Aḥmad (known as al-Muwaffaq billāh from 261/874).

1. In addition to Hassan 1933, see in particular Becker (1902–1903) for Ibn Ṭūlūn’s life and career; Bonner 2010a; Gordon 2014; and Gordon 2015. Gordon’s biography of Ibn Ṭūlūn will appear in the series *Makers of Islamic Civilization* (Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies), I.B. Tauris, London.

This reassessment places the significant collaboration between Ibn Ṭūlūn and the caliph centre stage and suggests that Hassan exaggerated the extent of al-Muwaffaq's dominance of the state from 257–261/870–874, due to his heavy reliance on the *Sīrat Ibn Ṭūlūn* of the Egyptian historian Ibn al-Dāya (d.c. 330–340/941–951). Hassan accepted the latter's sequence of events uncritically, while ignoring al-Ṭabarī's chronicle and such numismatic evidence as was available to him. Consequently he mistakenly assumed that al-Muwaffaq became the dominant power in the state in 257/870 and immediately took action to remove Ibn Ṭūlūn from the governorship of Egypt.² Hassan's book is now more than eighty years old and is no longer much cited by contemporary scholars of the Tulunids. However, in the absence of a replacement for his study, we will begin with a critical analysis of Hassan's chapter on Ibn Ṭūlūn's conflict with al-Muwaffaq.

2. Z. M. Hassan on Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq

As we will see below (Section 4), al-Ṭabarī's chronicle dates the succession arrangements implemented by al-Mu'tamid to the year 261/874. He tells us that al-Mu'tamid gave his brother the title al-Muwaffaq billāh and elevated him to the position of second in line to the throne, after his own son, Ja'far. Al-Ṭabarī's evidence fits perfectly with the changes in numismatic titulature that emerge in the following year, 262/875, when the first coins bearing al-Muwaffaq's newly-acquired title were issued. In Chapter Four of *Les Tulunides*, however, Hassan claims that al-Muwaffaq acquired his title in 257/870, before setting off to fight the Zanj. As soon as he engaged the Zanj, he demanded that Ibn Ṭūlūn send him the revenues of Egypt to help fund his campaign. Having received less than he expected from Egypt, he turned against Ibn Ṭūlūn and attempted to force his dismissal from the governorship. In response, Ibn Ṭūlūn began to fortify his capital city and managed to face down Mūsā b. Bughā, al-Muwaffaq's right-hand man, who had taken charge of the campaign to replace him as governor of Egypt. Ibn Ṭūlūn's actions bore fruit very quickly: by 259/872, Hassan tells us, Mūsā was dead, Egypt was secure, and Ibn Ṭūlūn was enjoying a period of unprecedented economic and military success.

Hassan's chronology is patently wrong.³ Among other indications, the two following points are crucial: al-Muwaffaq could not have begun his campaign against Ibn Ṭūlūn before 262/875 (or late 261/874) because the correspondence between them could only have been written after the succession arrangements had been concluded in 261/874 (see below, Section 8); and Mūsā b. Bughā died in 264/877, as Ibn al-Dāya himself notes, not 259/872.⁴

2. Hassan (1933, p. 41) quotes *Fakhrī* (written in 701/1302) in summary of his own view: "A Mutamid appartenait le Khutba (prône), le droit de battre la monnaie et le droit de porter le titre d'Emir des Croyants; à son frère Talha, le droit d'ordonner et de défendre, la conduite des troupes, l'exercice des hostilités contre les ennemis, la garde des frontières, l'installation des vizirs et des émirs." Hassan continues (p. 42) in his own words: "Ibn Ṭūlūn aura presque toujours à lutter contre Muwaffak et non contre le calife légitime."

3. Hassan's chronology was accepted by Randa (see Randa 1990, p. 156, note 2).

4. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 83.

How did Hassan arrive at this erroneous version of events? The answer lies partly in his dependence upon a source that was written a few decades after the events described, namely Ibn al-Dāya's *Sīrat Ibn Ṭūlūn*, which survives in the later work of the Andalusian writer Ibn Sa'īd (d. 685/1286), known as *al-Mughrib fī ḥulā al-Maghrib*. Ibn al-Dāya's account describes the events of 258/871, when Ibn Ṭūlūn assumed control of the *kharāj* of Egypt, accurately enough.⁵ But it is followed by his account of an earlier series of events which begin with al-Muwaffaq's recall from exile in 257/870, and al-Mu'tamid's immediate announcement of the succession arrangements (i.e. in 257–258/870–871). Ibn al-Dāya's text then describes the course of the conflict between Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq over the revenues of Egypt, which, the reader is led to understand, blew up soon afterwards (i.e. in the late 250s).⁶ These accounts and the sequence in which they were presented were adopted almost verbatim by al-Balawī (writing in the 4th c. AH/10th c. CE), who copied and extended Ibn al-Dāya's narrative in his *Sīrat āl Ṭūlūn*, although he provided a different ending to the story of the conflict.⁷ Thus the two main Egyptian sources for the life and career of Ibn Ṭūlūn (henceforth referred to collectively as the Egyptian *sīra* tradition)

5. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 84. See below, Section 6, for a detailed treatment of the events of the year 258 AH. Hassan cited Vollers' edition of Ibn al-Dāya: *idem., Sīrat Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn*, in *Fragmente aus dem Mughrib des Ibn Sa'īd*, ed. K. Vollers, Berlin, 1894

6. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, pp. 84–91 (for a detailed analysis of the conflict between Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq see below, Section 8). The sequence of accounts in Ibn al-Dāya's text is as follows: events of 258 (the date given is given in the text) (p. 84); the story of Ibn Ṭūlūn's rejection of the advice of 'Abdallāh b. Dashūma regarding his plans for reducing the tax burden on his Egyptian subjects (pp. 85–86); within the account relating to Ibn Dashūma, Ibn al-Dāya places a short reference to the treasures found in the Egyptian desert that Ibn Ṭūlūn used to fund construction of his new mosque and hospital (*māristān*); next he recounts Abū Aḥmad's return from exile and the succession arrangements (pp. 86–87); this is followed by his remarks on the beginning of the conflict between Abū Aḥmad and Ibn Ṭūlūn, which includes a misplaced reference to al-Muwaffaq's plot to replace Ibn Ṭūlūn as governor of Egypt with Amājūr (pp. 87–88); then he presents the full text of Ibn Ṭūlūn's letter to al-Muwaffaq (pp. 89–91); finally, he describes how al-Muwaffaq reacted to Ibn Ṭūlūn's angry letter by persuading al-Mu'tamid that Ibn Ṭūlūn should not be allowed to send a representative to take control of the Syrian *thughūr* (pp. 91–92). But here Ibn al-Dāya's text is confused. As al-Balawī's account correctly points out, after receiving Ibn Ṭūlūn's long letter, al-Muwaffaq did not complain to the caliph about Ibn Ṭūlūn and question his right to be involved in the *thughūr*, but instead opted for unilateral action; he ordered Mūsā b. Bughā to take charge of the campaign to remove Ibn Ṭūlūn from office and replace him with Amājūr (see next footnote).

7. Al-Balawī 1939. Al-Balawī adopts Ibn al-Dāya's narrative and interpolates a couple of anecdotes into it, but makes no substantial modifications to it, until the final episode. His narrative runs as follows: the events of 258/871 (pp. 73–74); Ibn Ṭūlūn's rejection of the advice of 'Abdallāh b. Dashūma and the story of the treasures (pp. 74–77); then follows his account of the succession arrangements—in this passage he explicitly mentions that al-Mu'tamid appointed al-Muwaffaq to the succession when he first arrived in Samarra (*fa-lamma waṣala ilayhi 'aqada al-ahd ba'dahu li-ibnihi al-Mufawwad wa lahu min ba'dahu*) (p. 77). At this point al-Balawī introduces a couple of anecdotes: the first concerns al-Mu'tamid's addiction to pleasurable pursuits, while the second draws a parallel between al-Mu'tamid and the caliph al-Ma'mūn in respect of their succession arrangements (pp. 78–79). Al-Balawī picks up the thread again with his description of al-Muwaffaq's conflict with Ibn Ṭūlūn (p. 79–81); this is followed by the text of Ibn Ṭūlūn's letter (p. 82–85). In the final episode, al-Balawī deviates from Ibn al-Dāya's narrative, stating that al-Muwaffaq ordered Mūsā b. Bughā to lead the ill-fated campaign to remove him as governor of Egypt (pp. 85–80).

present misleading accounts of Ibn Ṭūlūn's relations with the Abbasids between the years 257–262/870–875.⁸

One wonders how Ibn al-Dāya, a near-contemporary observer of Ibn Ṭūlūn's career, could have made such glaring errors. It seems that the fault may not have lain with Ibn al-Dāya himself. His account is preserved only as an abbreviated text (a *mukhtaṣar*) which was incorporated in Ibn Sa'īd's *Mughrib*. The *Sīra* as we have it in Ibn Sa'īd's recension appears as a collection of stories focused on the Tulunid rulers, which are mostly arranged in roughly chronological order, interspersed with digressions on interesting characters and observations on caliphal history. But the chronological sequence of the narrative is occasionally disturbed, as we have noted above; and, moreover, the text gives very few dates for individual events, which makes it difficult to keep track of the chronology. Although we have no idea of the form of the original text written by Ibn al-Dāya, it is reasonable to assume that some of the disruptions in the present text may have arisen during the process of abridgement.

The section of Ibn al-Dāya's narrative which misled Hassan begins with the passage in which al-Mu'tamid asked his brother to return to Samarra from his exile in Mecca. Here the text reads: "[...] (in 257/870) al-Mu'tamid sent a messenger to bring al-Muwaffaq from Mecca, where he had been exiled by al-Muhtadī, to the capital and settled the succession upon al-Mufawwad, then (as second in line) upon Abū Aḥmad and gave him the title al-Muwaffaq [...] and divided the state between them..."⁹ Hassan follows Ibn al-Dāya's text in dating the succession arrangements to 257/870, but adopts a far more condensed chronology than his source for subsequent events. His narrative collapses Ibn Ṭūlūn's rise to power into half a decade of frenzied activity, during which he successfully resisted al-Muwaffaq's challenge to his authority and saw off all his enemies. Hassan concludes that only *five* years after he became governor of Egypt (i.e. in 259/872), Ibn Ṭūlūn effectively achieved his independence.¹⁰ As we will see below, Ibn Ṭūlūn's rise to power in Egypt followed a slower and more circuitous path than this.

Having noted the problems with Hassan's chronology, we will now try to reconstruct a more accurate view of early Tulunid history on the basis of a wider range of sources, some of which, notably the abundant numismatic sources, were unavailable to Hassan.

3. The Importance of the Numismatic Evidence

Numismatic evidence has not yet played a very big part in Tulunid historiography. Grabar's publication of the coinage of the Tulunids was thoughtful and trenchant but lacked the

8. For a succinct general introduction to the historiography of the early Tulunid period, see Bonner 2010a, pp. 578–580.

9. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 86: *fa-anfadha al-Mu'tamid rasūlan fi ḥaml al-Muwaffaq min Makka ilā al-ḥaḍra wa kāna al-Muhtadī nafāhu ilayhā fa-'aqada al-Mu'tamid al-'ahd ba'dahu li al-Mufawwad thumma li abī Aḥmad wa laqabahu al-Muwaffaq...wa qasama al-mamlaka baynahumā.*

10. Hassan 1933, p. 63. Hassan's next chapter (Chapter Five), on Ibn Ṭūlūn's Syrian campaign of 264/877, fails to account for the five-year gap between 259–264/872–877.

more plentiful evidence available today.¹¹ By contrast, the historiography of the succeeding Ikhshidid dynasty (323–358/934–968), has been re-examined by Bacharach, paying particular attention to the value of coins as a historical source.¹²

Central to our understanding of the political significance of the coinage is the caliph's enduring control over the production of Abbasid precious metal coins (silver dirhams and gold dinars) in the third century AH/ninth century CE. The commonly accepted meaning of the caliphal right of *sikka* takes the word in its figurative sense to mean the ruler's right to place his name on the coinage, thus making *sikka*, alongside the *khuṭba* (the ruler's right to have his name pronounced in the Friday address), one of the two essential components of his authority.¹³ In the second half of the third/ninth century, the caliph exercised direct control over coinage production in many mints in the central Islamic lands through his monopoly over the production of coin dies, which were produced in a centralised die manufactory in the caliphal capital. This allowed the caliph's administrators to determine both what was written on the dies and the quantity of dies produced every year for each mint.¹⁴ In light of the considerable power which the caliph exercised by this means, it may be worth considering whether the term *sikka* was, at least in this period, understood not only in a figurative, but also in a literal, sense, as the right to produce, or at least closely monitor, the production of the dies (*sikak*) from which the coinage was struck.

The *Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*, the well-known work on the theory of state written by the Abbasid wazir, al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) was written almost a century and a half after the Tulunid period, but is nevertheless relevant to our discussion. It offers the following definition of legal coinage:¹⁵

So long as the gold and silver (bullion) is free of corruption (i.e. adulteration), it (the bullion) is worthy to (be struck into) legal coin and to be impressed with the sultan's dies and trusted due to its impression (with these dies) to be free from substitution or fraud. This is indeed valid (coinage).

Here the emphasis lies clearly on the caliph's (*sulṭān's*) control of the coin-making process through the application of the "sulṭān's dies" to the bullion. The question where the dies used in the Miṣr mint were manufactured—whether in Samarra or Fuṣṭāṭ—recurs more than once in the course of this article.

11. Grabar 1957.

12. See Bacharach 2015. See Chapter 1, for an introduction to the use of coinage as a historical source up to and including the Ikhshidid period.

13. Darley-Doran 2012.

14. The caliphal monopoly over die production was enforced intermittently in the early Islamic period, but was upheld, albeit within a limited geographical scope, during the second half of the third/ninth century—for the ground-breaking article which first brought this topic to light was, see Ilisch 1979. For further details, see Treadwell 2011, Chapter 2.

15. [...] *wa idhā khalaṣa al-‘ayn wa al-waraq min ghishsh kāna huwa al-mu‘tabar fī al-nuqūd al-mustaḥiqqa wa al-maṭbū‘ minhā bi al-sikka al-sulṭāniyya al-mawthūq bi-salāmati ṭab‘ihi min tabdīlihi wa talbisihi huwa al-mustaḥiqq...* (al-Māwardī 1327, p. 139).

The coins struck in Egypt and Syria in the Tulunid period are easy to read, but they do not yield their secrets lightly. They bear titles that sometimes appear difficult to match with the texts, and tantalising evidence of big shifts of power between the centre (Samarra/Baghdad) and the periphery (Miṣr), which need to be given contextualised meaning. We are hampered in our attempts to address these questions by our uncertainty about who issued the dies or commissioned the inscriptions. We do not know a great deal about the contemporary numismatic context in other regions of the Abbasid world, which, taken as a whole, is one of the most complex and intriguing of the early Islamic period. Vasmer made an important start with his study of Saffarid numismatics, but there is still some way to go with Saffarid coinage.¹⁶ The picture for the Khurāsānī mints is clearer than for the mints of Iraq and Fars, especially in the case of the mint of Nishapur, where self-appointed rulers of the city began to strike their own coins from the mid third/ninth century onwards.¹⁷ The wider numismatic context, although still not fully understood, provides an indispensable background for the Tulunid coinage record.

4. Abbasid Politics in the Mid-Third/Ninth Century

How was the caliphal state configured in 254/868, the year of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn's appointment as governor of Egypt? And what can his sixteen years as governor of Egypt tell us about the breakdown of the unitary caliphal state, a process that began in the years prior to Ibn Ṭūlūn's arrival in Egypt, with the deposition and murder of the caliphs in Samarra by their own courtiers and soldiers? The Abbasid *dawla* was plunged into a state of crisis by the events of the 250s/860s. Once the caliphs began to be deposed and murdered with impunity, the nature of the political process changed. The caliphs lost their position at the centre of the patronage network that had controlled the state. The extreme fluidity of personal and group alliances that characterised the hyper-volatile politics of the period meant that no political actor had much to gain from remaining loyal indefinitely to a single master or peer group. The turmoil at the centre made available sources of wealth and power to all who wielded a modicum of military force.¹⁸

At the same time, the Abbasid state entered a period of steep economic decline as the caliphal tax-collection system faltered and peripheral provinces ceased remitting revenues to the centre.¹⁹ The political trajectories traced by the conflicts that arose from the competition for resources among the Turkish amirs from the 240s/850s onwards seem to have been mainly centripetal. Most successful amirs returned when they could to the capital in their anxiety to keep an eye on events. No long-term power bases were established elsewhere. To take the pre-Tulunid governorship of Egypt as a case in point: in this province, Turkish officers with

16. See Vasmer 1930: and Tor 2002 for a recent summary of the Saffarid numismatic evidence.

17. See Ramadan 2012.

18. For a good general description of the political situation in the mid-third/ninth century, see Bonner 2010b.

19. For the causes and consequences of economic decline, see Kennedy 1986, pp. 200–211; Kennedy 2004; Gordon 2001, pp. 90–91 and 118–119; and Gordon 2015, pp. 229–230.

Samarran backgrounds had held senior positions for many years before Ibn Ṭūlūn's arrival, yet none of them managed to establish an enduring regional presence.²⁰ It seems that it was in no-one's interest to permit the emergence of a hegemon, either at the centre of power or in the regions. Even the most powerful generals were reluctant to commit their forces to all-out contests of strength for fear that deserters might change the course of a battle in the flash of an eye. In spite of the undoubted turmoil of these years, there is a curious sense of restraint on the part of the amirs: now that there were few rules in the game of power, even those who were best placed to seize it, hedged their bets for fear of failure.

From the mid-250s/860s, when the Abbasid state began a temporary recovery, under al-Muṭamid 'alā Allāh (256–270/869–883) and his brother, Abū Aḥmad Ṭalḥa (later al-Muwaffaq billāh), the caliph's scope for effective action was limited to the central Islamic lands which still lay within his grasp. The shockwaves of the anarchy in Samarra contributed to the rapid weakening of caliphal authority in the Mashriq, where Tahirid rule was abruptly brought to an end in 260/873 by the Saffarid ruler Ya'qūb b. Layth, who proceeded to press very hard against caliphal interests in Fars and Khuzistan.²¹ In the 260s/870s, central and northern Iraq remained under direct caliphal control and the caliph's horizon of action had narrowed to the defence of southern Iraq against the Saffarid raiders and the Zanj rebels and the consolidation of the northern border with Byzantium. Egypt, the traditional provider of abundant revenues to the caliph's exchequer, was a key resource for the Abbasids.

While the caliphs had undoubtedly lost personal credibility, the institution they served remained ideologically valid, and the state apparatus largely intact. Although circumscribed in the range of demands he was able to make, the caliph continued to levy taxes and moreover, never relinquished control of the levers of moral power. Al-Muṭamid is certainly portrayed in some sources as weak and ineffectual, by comparison with his dynamic brother Abū Aḥmad (al-Muwaffaq), who had extensive military experience and enjoyed good relations with many of the most influential Turkish commanders.²² But, as this article will argue, in the first decade of his reign, there is evidence to suggest that al-Muṭamid managed to restrain his more active brother quite effectively.

Al-Ṭabarī is our most reliable source for the first contacts between al-Muṭamid and his brother.²³ When he became caliph, al-Muṭamid summoned Abū Aḥmad from Mecca, where he

20. For Yazīd b. 'Abdallāh al-Turkī, Ibn Ṭūlūn's predecessor as governor of Egypt, see al-Kindī n.d., pp. 228–234.

21. See Tor 2007 (Chapter 5) who argues, on the contrary, that the Saffarid Ya'qūb was a supporter of the Abbasid state, who wanted to revive the Abbasid state by replacing al-Muṭamid with a more dynamic caliph.

22. See al-Mas'ūdī 1966, vol. 4, pp. 111–142 for an account of al-Muṭamid's reign which mentions his addiction to pleasurable pursuits and his love of wine. Al-Maqrīzī (n.d., vol. 2, p. 178, line 14 from the bottom of the page) characterizes the caliph as a man devoted to the indulgence of personal pleasures, which included hunting, game playing and secluding himself with his slave girls. Al-Maqrīzī did not copy this characterization of the caliph from Ibn al-Dāya: the latter's account lacks any adverse comments on the caliph's character.

23. As a resident of Baghdad with a keen eye for the day-to-day political scene, al-Ṭabarī was meticulous in his recording of state appointments and court ceremonies in this period. He tells us that he personally witnessed Abū Aḥmad's departure from Samarra to fight the Zanj in 258/871 (al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 3, p. 1862).

had been exiled by al-Muhtadī (255–256/868–869). In Safar 257/869 he assigned him territories in S. Iraq, the Hijaz and the Yemen and in Ramadan of the same year he added Baghdad, the Sawad, the Tigris districts, Wasit, al-Basra, al-Ahwaz and Fars, appointing governors to Baghdad and al-Basra on Abū Aḥmad’s behalf.²⁴ In the following year he assigned him several more territories on Iraq’s northern flank, no doubt with the aim of deploying his military skills to strengthen the frontier with Byzantium, which had become vulnerable during the period of anarchy in Samarra. These territories included the ‘*awāšim*, Qinnasrīn and Diyār Muḍar.²⁵ In the same year, he appointed him to lead the military campaign against the rebellious Zanj in S. Iraq.²⁶ In the course of these two years, therefore, al-Mu‘tamid appointed his brother over many of the core territories of the Abbasid state, and put him in charge of the army, while he himself retained control of the capital Samarra, as well as the caliphal chancery and mint.

Furthermore, the caliph did not immediately appoint his powerful brother as his successor, even though he did not have a son of a suitable age to fill the role. When al-Mu‘tamid did address the question of the succession in 261/874, he bestowed on his infant son Ja‘far the title al-Mufawwaḍ ilā Allāh, and appointed him heir apparent, even though as a minor he was not eligible for the role. He appointed him governor of the ‘Maghrib’, a region which for these purposes was defined as including Ifrīqiya, Egypt, Syria, the Jazira, as well as the Khurāsān road up to Ḥulwān.²⁷ Yet the caliph also conceded an important, though undefinable, role in the management of the western territories to none other than Mūsā b. Bughā, a close ally of al-Muwaffaq. Al-Ṭabarī tells us that al-Mu‘tamid “attached” Mūsā b. Bughā to him.²⁸ The sense conveyed here is that Mūsā was appointed as executive officer on behalf of the heir apparent, perhaps with responsibility to ensure the payment of revenues due to the caliph’s son from his territories, though Mūsā never seems to have exercised this responsibility in Tulunid Egypt.²⁹ As we will see, only a few years after these arrangements were put in place, al-Muwaffaq ordered Mūsā to attack Ibn Ṭūlūn in Egypt. Although formally attached to al-Mufawwaḍ by the terms of the arrangements made in 261/874, there is no doubt that Mūsā remained a loyal ally of al-Muwaffaq.

As for his brother, al-Mu‘tamid confirmed Abū Aḥmad’s *de facto* control of the eastern regions by appointing him governor of the Mashriq, and brought him into the line of

24. Al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 3, pp. 1841–1842 (appointments of 257/870).

25. Al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 3, pp. 1859–60 (appointments of 258/871).

26. For an overview of his career, see Kennedy 2012.

27. The Aghlabids (184–290/800–902) were still governors of Ifrīqiya in this year. The term Maghrib (“Western lands”) had never before this date included any lands to the east of Egypt. As for the Khurāsān road, al-Ya‘qubī notes that the caliph’s stud was located in the meadows at the foot of the Ḥulwān pass, while Ibn Ḥawqal mentions the fertility of the region (Le Strange 1930, p. 192).

28. Al-Balawī (1939) uses the phrase *ḍammahu ilayhi*. Al-Maqrīzī (n.d., vol. 2, p. 178) says that al-Mu‘tamid appointed Mūsā b. Bughā as deputy (*istakhlafahu*) over al-Mufawwaḍ’s territories and that Mūsā in turn appointed ‘Ubaydallāh b. Sulaymān b. Wahb as his secretary.

29. Mūsā did possess property in Egypt, in the form of several private estates (al-Balawī 1939, pp. 88–89).

succession after his son, conferring on him the title al-Muwaffaq billāh.³⁰ In a document which he ordered to be displayed within the Ka'ba in Mecca, no doubt as a conscious attempt to bring to mind Harūn al-Rashīd's succession arrangements, the caliph decreed that each of his heirs was only entitled to draw revenues from *his* half of the empire. The document also stipulated that the son was first in line to the succession, while his uncle was second in line, though the uncle would succeed should the son die before he reached the age of majority. In the normal course of events, no heir apparent could be appointed before he reached his majority, so it appears that al-Mu'tamid was bending the rules somewhat, in order to enable him to divide the empire's resources between his two heirs and to frustrate his brother's claim to the succession. The deal was made in 261/874, and from 262/875, the son and the uncle's titles appeared on coins struck in their respective halves of the empire.³¹

5. Establishment of Ibn Ṭūlūn's Authority (254-258/868-871):

The Emergence of a New Relationship between Miṣr and the Caliphal Capital

Ibn Ṭūlūn's early career has been covered in some detail in the secondary literature and there is no need to dwell on the few facts that appear to be reliable.³² Ibn al-Dāya and al-Balawī tell us that he was an able Turk who aspired to a life of orthodox piety and looked down on his fellow Turks as uncouth and corrupt. A spell in the frontier zone (*al-thughūr*) early in his adult life implanted a love of the ascetic pioneering way of life in him as well as an enduring fondness for the physical surroundings of the northern Syrian borderlands. Ibn Ṭūlūn spent most of his early career among the Turkish elite in Iraq and managed to keep in with the most powerful men in the state. In 254/868 his patron, the Turk Bāyakkāk, was appointed governor of Egypt and sent his young protégé off as governor of Fuṣṭāṭ.

Although we know nothing about the army that Ibn Ṭūlūn led to Egypt, it is a reasonable guess that he commanded a sizeable force and that it was for his military skills as much as his political acumen that Bāyakkāk had chosen him for the job. At the time of his arrival in Fuṣṭāṭ, Ibn al-Mudabbir was the long-serving financial officer (*sāhib al-kharāj*) in the province, with responsibility for ensuring the prompt dispatch of tax revenue to the Abbasid capital. Ibn

30. Al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 3, p. 1890. Two erroneous references to the succession arrangements should be noted here. Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630) states that Abū Aḥmad received the full title *al-nāṣir li-dīn Allāh/al-Muwaffaq billāh* in 261/874 (Ibn al-Athīr 1998, vol. 6, p. 252). However, the first element of this title only appears on the coinage from 271/884, having presumably been awarded to al-Muwaffaq in recognition of his victory over the Zanj in the previous year. For an early dirham with the title *Abū Aḥmad al-nāṣir li-dīn Allāh* see Isbahan 271 (American Numismatic Society collection of Islamic coins 1971.316.173). Second, al-Ya'qūbī (1960, vol. 2, p. 510) mistakenly claims that al-Muwaffaq's son, Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad, the future caliph al-Mu'taḍid billāh (278–289/891–901), also received his title and secured a place in the succession before the end of the 250s/860s (first noted in Becker 1902–1903, pp. 162–163). However, there is no numismatic evidence to support the appearance of his title until 278/891, the year he succeeded his uncle as caliph. See e.g. dirham of 278/891 of Jannaba (Vasmer 1930, p. 42).

31. But see below for the exceptional use of of Ja'far's *ism* on the dinars struck in Miṣr in 263/876.

32. See Gordon 2015, and Gordon 2017a for a good summary of Ibn Ṭūlūn's career.

al-Mudabbir's task had been made difficult in recent years by a series of revolts triggered by anti-tax protests, which were probably stimulated by the widespread recognition that the caliph's authority had been much weakened by events in Samarra.

Ibn Ṭūlūn's first actions speak of his determination to bolster his personal power and authority at the expense of the *ṣāhib al-kharāj*. We are told that Ibn al-Mudabbir sent him a gift of 10,000 dinars, which was surely intended to buy his acquiescence to the *status quo*. But the new governor refused the money and demanded instead that Ibn al-Mudabbir give him his personal bodyguard of one hundred Ghurid soldiers. The bodyguard's transfer to Tulunid service must have sent an unambiguous message to all Egyptians that henceforth supreme power lay in the hands of the governor.³³

His first year as governor of Egypt has left a small memorial in the form of a glass weight dated 254/868, which bears the words *amara bihi al-amīr (...?) Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn*. Fahmy suggests that the weight demonstrates that Ibn Ṭūlūn controlled the finances of Egypt from this year, but this is an over-interpretation of the inscription.³⁴ Egyptian governors had issued glass weights throughout the first half of the third/ninth century with the same formulae as we find on Ibn Ṭūlūn's piece.³⁵ While the weight bears testimony to the new governor's intention to support the provincial administration's efforts to maintain good working practices in the markets of Fuṣṭāṭ, it tells us nothing about who controlled the country's finances. Indeed, the evidence to hand suggests that Ibn al-Mudabbir continued to be in charge of the country's financial affairs until he left the country in 258/871.

Ibn Ṭūlūn's early achievements impressed his Iraqi backers, most importantly Yārjūkh, the successor of his first patron Bāyākḅāk.³⁶ Within two years, he had been assigned the governorship of the whole province of Egypt and had appointed his own governors to Alexandria and Barqa. In 256/869, he responded to a request from the caliph to march northwards to hunt down ʿĪsā b. Shaykh, a maverick amir who had seized a large consignment of several hundred thousand dinars that had been dispatched by Ibn Mudabbir towards the caliphal treasury. The caliphal command gave him the opportunity to recruit large numbers of soldiers (Greeks, Africans and others), but in the event he did not mobilise his forces, because al-Muʿtamid sent another amir, Amājūr, against ʿĪsā, possibly for fear that Ibn Ṭūlūn might capitalise on his success by incorporating Syria into the territories under his control. Reports sent back to Samarra by Amājūr and others warned the caliph that Ibn Ṭūlūn had assembled a huge army in preparation for this campaign. When invited to return to Iraq and take up the post of Commander-in-Chief, Ibn Ṭūlūn wisely declined the caliph's offer and sent his agent al-Wāsiṭī to the capital with sufficient funds to grease the palms of the amirs whose support he required. Al-Wāsiṭī's

33. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 78.

34. Fahmy 1957, p. 5.

35. See Balog 1976.

36. Gordon 2015, p. 248.

mission was successful: he gave the caliph's wazir such a valuable present that Ibn Ṭūlūn was excused his absence.³⁷

The huge investment which Ibn Ṭūlūn made in the system of spies and go-betweens to secure support in the caliphal capital shows that he regarded the distribution of favours in Iraq as being of vital importance to his success in Egypt. Meanwhile in Fustāṭ, he began the construction of al-Qaṭā'ī⁶, a new administrative quarter with public buildings designed to accommodate his growing secretariat and army. At the same time, he kept up the pressure on Ibn al-Mudabbir and tried to implement reforms in the economic and tax regimes to increase the amount of revenue available to him locally and help him forge good relations with his new subjects, both rich and poor. At least this is impression given by the Egyptian *Sīra* tradition, which acknowledges his enormous energy and praises his determination to implement economic initiatives (e.g. the cultivation of flax and the promotion of the linen industry) and eradicate occasional taxes that held back development and exchange.³⁸

Ibn al-Mudabbir finally conceded that Ibn Ṭūlūn's standing in Samarra was unassailable and that his position had become exposed as a result.³⁹ With the help of his brother in Iraq, he secured a transfer northwards to take up the post of *ṣāhib al-kharāj* in Syria and Palestine, handing over his Egyptian properties to Ibn Ṭūlūn so as to guarantee safe passage out of Egypt. Ibn Ṭūlūn provided an escort to accompany him up to the border, perhaps mindful of the impression that his measured actions would have in Samarra as well as Fustāṭ.⁴⁰

The record of the precious metal coinage (mostly gold) of the mint of Fustāṭ between 254–258/868–871 gives us another useful perspective on Ibn Ṭūlūn's first period as governor. In these early years the mint of Miṣr struck only small quantities of dinars, as well as some dirhams.⁴¹ Bates discusses the extraordinary fact that the many specimens of Miṣr dinars dated 255/868 appear to have had the name of the caliph al-Mu'tazz (252–255/866–868) and that of his son 'Abdallāh gouged out of the die before the coins were struck. Two blank raised areas (with no lettering) are visible above the titles of the caliph and his son (*amīr al-mu'minīn* and *ibn amīr al-mu'minīn* respectively).⁴²

37. See Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 84 and al-Balawī 1939, pp. 57–58, for the primary reference and Becker (1902–1903, p. 161) for the analysis. The story recounts the wazir's delight in the gift and his subsequent favour to Ibn Ṭūlūn. No doubt al-Wāsiṭī's successful mission also served to remind al-Mu'tamid that Ibn Ṭūlūn had the means to provide substantial funds for the caliphal exchequer.

38. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, pp. 85–86 (Ibn Ṭūlūn's remission of taxes).

39. Ibn al-Mudabbir may also have found it difficult to remit the annual tribute to the caliphal court at a time when there was little coin being struck in Fustāṭ (see below).

40. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 84.

41. Bates n.d. stated that, at the time of writing his paper, he knew of only five dinars of Miṣr struck in the period from the accession of al-Muhtadī to the end of 257/870. No dinars are known to have been struck in 256/869. For the Tulunid copper coins of Miṣr issued between 257–259/870–872 and those of the *thughūr* issued in the 260s/870s, see below (Section 11).

42. For a specimen of these dinars on which the names and titles of the caliph and his son have been erased on the die, see Morton and Eden sale 27.4.17, lot 342 (<https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=sale&sid=1937&cid=&pg=4&so=1&search=&s=1>).

Bates suggests that Ibn Ṭūlūn refused to name the new caliph al-Muhtadī when he came to the throne in 255/868 because of religious differences, and chose instead to erase the names of Muʿtazz and his son from the dies that were already in use in the mint and to continue using these altered dies to strike coins.⁴³ However, rulers did not usually allow their religious scruples to dictate their fiscal policies and furthermore, a small number of Miṣr dinars and dirhams bearing al-Muhtadī's name are known to have been struck, so we can be sure that at least a small quantity of such dies was manufactured.⁴⁴

The question is where these dies were manufactured and why so few of them were made available to the mint that the master of the mint decided to reuse existing dies. The more likely explanation for the continuing use of obsolete dies is simply that there were no new dinar dies available for use in the mint. The very small quantity of coinage struck by the mint of Miṣr in this period could have been a result of interruptions in the supply of dies from Samarra, rather than Ibn Ṭūlūn's reluctance to produce coinage.⁴⁵

Could there have been other reasons for the lack of dies supplied to the mint of Miṣr? Perhaps the caliphs were so alarmed by 'Isā b. Shaykh's seizure of a huge consignment of Egyptian dinars en route to Iraq that they did not commission the striking of large amounts of cash in Fuṣṭāṭ for fear of losing more shipments of coin. In Fuṣṭāṭ itself, Ibn Ṭūlūn may have hoarded those tax revenues in cash and kind which did arrive in his treasury, in order to meet the expenses required by his growing army and his ambitious building programme on the new settlement of al-Qaṭā'ī^c—but we have no idea of the means by which he paid for his ambitious plans.⁴⁶ In 258/871, al-Muʿtamid agreed that he would not seek to recoup outstanding amounts of revenue owed from Egypt (see Section 6), suggesting that revenue flows to Iraq had not been fully maintained in the preceding years.

6. 258/871-872: The Conclusion of the Financial Agreement between Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn and the Caliph al-Muʿtamid

With Ibn al-Mudabbir out of the way, Ibn Ṭūlūn took full control of the financial affairs of Egypt. The account becomes a little opaque at this juncture, but the story (as told by Ibn al-Dāya)⁴⁷ seems to have unfolded as follows. In 258/871, al-Muʿtamid sent a certain Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ukht al-Wazīr as Ibn al-Mudabbir's successor. He relayed the caliphal command that Ibn Ṭūlūn should continue payments to Samarra, presumably in order to reassure the caliph that Ibn al-Mudabbir's departure would not entail a cessation of payments. However Ibn Ṭūlūn managed to negotiate a private agreement with the caliph that guaranteed the resumption of regular annual payments to Iraq *and* ensured his right to a portion of the

43. Bates n.d., pp. 3–4.

44. Bates n.d., note 5.

45. See fn. 14 (above) for the distribution of dies from the caliphal capital in the third/ninth century.

46. See above, Section 2, for the stories about the fortuitous discovery of treasures that Ibn Ṭūlūn used to pay for his building projects.

47. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, pp. 84 ff.

revenue of Egypt.⁴⁸ Furthermore, he persuaded al-Muʿtamid that he could only conceal the full amount of the annual payment he would make to the caliph’s private treasury from the caliph’s *awliyāʾ* (the military elite) if he himself took direct responsibility for the *kharāj*.⁴⁹

The caliph accepted his proposal and added the responsibility for the *maʿūna*⁵⁰ of Egypt as well as the *kharāj* of the Syrian *thughūr* to Ibn Ṭūlūn’s portfolio, perhaps in order to increase the amount of revenue which would be secretly dispatched to his own treasury.⁵¹ As a further concession to Ibn Ṭūlūn, al-Muʿtamid agreed to waive his demand for the sums which Ibn Ṭūlūn owed to Samarra (from the first four years of his governorship), so long as he promised to resume payments to Samarra on the same scale as they had been “in the past”, i.e. in pre-Tulunid times.

The caliph dispatched two trusted agents in the delegation which he sent to negotiate these special terms secretly with Ibn Ṭūlūn. Here, it must be said, we enter a particularly tangled and complex episode of early Tulunid history, in which the prosopography of the principal actors is difficult to ascertain. Ibn al-Dāya tells us that the caliph sent two high-level clients (*khādīms*, probably therefore both eunuchs) of his, named Nafis and Nasīm, to oversee the process.⁵² However, another source identifies a third *khādīm* who also played a role in these events. The *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, an anonymous fifth/eleventh-century compilation of brief accounts of rare and precious objects, tells us that a certain Niḥrīr, who is described as the *khādīm* of al-Muʿtamid, took charge of the sum of 1.2 million dinars that Ibn Ṭūlūn sent to the caliph in Iraq, as well as a consignment of slaves, horses, weapons and luxuries.⁵³ The date of Niḥrīr’s mission is only vaguely alluded to in the text, but the

48. Although no source explicitly states that Ibn Ṭūlūn received a guaranteed portion of the annual revenues as part of this deal, it is very likely that he did so. He must have been receiving a part of the annual revenues from 254/868 onwards, otherwise he would not have been able to fund the recruitment of his large army and the beginning of his ambitious building program. But by taking control of the *kharāj* himself and making a secret deal with the caliph, he was able to regularize the previous *ad hoc* arrangements and put them on a stable basis.

49. The reference to the *awliyāʾ* must have been to the senior Turkish officers at the caliphal court and perhaps also hinted at the supporters of the caliph’s brother, Abū Aḥmad.

50. We should understand *maʿūna* in this context as ‘special payments,’ which were made to the governor that were not included in the annual taxation assessment (see Crone 2012).

51. Bonner (2010a, pp. 583-584) dates Ibn Ṭūlūn’s assumption of financial control over Egypt to 262/875, but this is four years too late.

52. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 84; al-Balawī, (1939, p. 73) mentions only Nafis. Bonner notes that Nafis subsequently took up a post in the Tulunid *diwān al-kharāj* and became a trusted confidant of governor (Bonner 2010a, p. 583). The implication of the story seems to be that the client played the role of the guarantor of the clandestine agreement between caliph and governor, earning the confidence of the governor, while still able to reassure his caliphal master that the Tulunids were carrying out their part of the bargain.

53. See Hamidallah 1959 for the Arabic text: and al-Qaddūmi 1996 for an English translation and important revisions to the questions of authorship and title of the book. The account in question can be found in al-Qaddūmi 1996, passage no. 43. Bates (n.d.) notes that variant vowelings of this *khādīm*’s *ism* are found in different sources.

numismatic evidence allows for precision. Many of the Mişr dinars dated 258/871 AH bear Niḥrīr's name below the reverse field.⁵⁴

The Mişr dinars of 258/871 display a similar style of engraving to contemporary dinars of other caliphal mints and may well have been struck from dies which had been engraved in al-Muʿtamid's die manufactories in Samarra. If these were indeed of Iraqi manufacture, one might imagine that, having sent the two *khādims* to supervise the conclusion of the deal with Ibn Ṭūlūn, al-Muʿtamid dispatched Niḥrīr with several pairs of dies to the mint of Mişr, where the gold bullion was waiting to be struck into coin. Those bearing the name *Niḥrīr* were struck up and returned to the caliph's personal treasury in Niḥrīr's charge, while the other half were presumably used to strike dinars that were destined for the payment of Ibn Ṭūlūn's officials and troops—though the sources say nothing about the fate of these coins.

Ibn al-Dāya gives us no explanation of the caliph's decision to accept Ibn Ṭūlūn's demands. Did al-Muʿtamid act out of self-interest, calculating that the surest way of maintaining a share of Egypt's declining revenues was to align himself with the Tulunid governor? It seems that the caliph realised that he had to sustain the flow of revenue from Egypt to Samarra in order to strengthen his hand against his brother. The deal enabled Ibn Ṭūlūn to recruit a huge army that the caliph allowed him to pay from local revenues and to acquire large reserves of funding which gave him the opportunity to retain the favour of key players in the Abbasid regime.

7. The History of the Syrian *Thughūr* (258–263/871–876)

One of the murkiest topics of early Tulunid history concerns the administration of the Syrian *thughūr* during the years 258–263/871–876.⁵⁵ As noted above (in Section 4), al-Ṭabarī tells us that caliph appointed his brother Abū Aḥmad governor of the *ʿawāsim* and Diyār Muḍar in 258/871, thus making him the *de facto* powerbroker of the northern frontier. It may be for this reason that, according to Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Ṭūlūn appealed to Abū Aḥmad, rather than the caliph, to appoint him governor of Tarsus in the same year.⁵⁶ His request was turned down. Ibn al-Dāya provides a brief synopsis of the careers of the three governors whom Abū Aḥmad appointed to take charge of the *thughūr*, one after the other, beginning in the late 250s/860s, probably soon after he had turned down Ibn Ṭūlūn's request to govern Tarsus.⁵⁷ Before appointing the first of these governors, Abū Aḥmad complained to the caliph that Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn would only appoint a governor to

54. The date at which Niḥrīr performed this duty is said to have been the period in which the “Alawī of Baṣra rose (in rebellion)”. The reference must be to the Ṣāḥib al-Zanj, whose rebellion lasted from 255/868 to the early 270s/880s. The full text of the reverse field of the dinars of 258/871 is *lillāh/Muḥammad/rasūl/Allāh/al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh/Niḥrīr*. For a specimen of this dinar type see Morton and Eden, 27/6/2006, no. 61 (<http://www.mortonandeden.com/pdfcats/20web.pdf>). Bates n.d., pp. 4–5, estimates that roughly half the known dinar dies of that year bear the name of Niḥrīr below the reverse inscription.

55. As Bonner (2010a, p. 583) states: “[...] the events and chronology are especially confusing.”

56. Ibn al-Athīr 1998, vol. 6, p. 272 (*anno* 263 AH).

57. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, 91–92. The third of these governors, who is named Arjwān b. Ūlugh Ṭarkhān al-Turkī in his text, was appointed in 260/873 and ended his career in the *thughūr* in 263/876.

the *thughūr* who would not carry out his responsibilities there.⁵⁸ This cryptic remark is clarified by al-Balawī, who explains that Abū Aḥmad believed that Ibn Ṭūlūn's appointee would not seek to take independent action as governor and would not fulfil the duty of leading the local population in *ghazawāt* against their Byzantine enemy.⁵⁹

Although the Egyptian *sīra* tradition gives no explanation for Abū Aḥmad's remark, a clue to its context may lie in the details of the financial deal that Ibn Ṭūlūn concluded with the caliph in the same year, 258/871 (see above, section 6).⁶⁰ In addition to awarding him full responsibility for the collection and disbursement of the Egyptian *kharāj*, the caliph also placed responsibility for the *kharāj* of the *thughūr* in Ibn Ṭūlūn's hands.⁶¹ Could this appointment have prompted Abū Aḥmad's remark? Was Abū Aḥmad saying that he understood that Tulunid financial administrators would be appointed to the *thughūr*, but that as they would not be tasked with military responsibilities, the region still needed a governor who would lead the *jihād* against the Byzantines? Since it was Abū Aḥmad who subsequently took the initiative to appoint the three governors, we must assume either that the caliph permitted him to take charge of these appointments or that Abū Aḥmad acted unilaterally: the sources do not allow us to come to a definite conclusion on this matter.⁶²

Abū Aḥmad's governors proved to be unfortunate choices. The first died before arriving in the region; the second was murdered by the people of Tarsus and the third disgraced himself in 263/876 by stealing public funds donated for the relief of the garrison of an important fortress (Lu³lu'a) which was under threat from the enemy. The *thughūr* descended into chaos at this point and Ibn Ṭūlūn was asked to regain control of the region.⁶³ His appointee, Ṭukhshī b. Balīn (b. Balzad in al-Balawī's text) managed to pacify the region. In the following year, Ibn Ṭūlūn marched into Syria and in 265/878 he came to the *thughūr* in person.⁶⁴

58. Ibn al-Dāya (1953, pp. 91-92) states: *a'lama (al-Muwaffaq) al-Mu'tamid anna [...] Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn innamā yab'athu ilayhā man lā yashtaghilu (= yastaqillu? see next footnote) bihā...*

59. Al-Balawī (1939, p. 89) states: *kataba al-Muwaffaq ilā al-Mu'tamid inna al-thughūr al-shāmiyya ḍā'i'a wa innahā taḥtāju ilā man yuqīmu fihā wa yaghzū bi-ahlīhā wa inna Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn muhmlilun li-amrihā wa innamā yab'athu ilayhā man lā yastaqillu bihā...*

60. Bonner (2010a, pp. 583-584) believes that Ibn Ṭūlūn was not assigned responsibility for the *kharāj* of the *thughūr* until 262/875.

61. The implication here is that Mu'tamid gave Ibn Ṭūlūn the responsibility for collecting and disbursing the revenues of the *thughūr* but did not appoint him as governor of the region. In other words, Mu'tamid did not grant Ibn Ṭūlūn the *wilāya* of the *thughūr*.

62. Gordon (2017b, p. 7) has suggested that Mu'tamid and his brother each made their own appointments to the *thughūr*, implying that the two governors had overlapping responsibilities. But it seems that Ibn Ṭūlūn's representatives were limited to the management of financial matters before 263/876, while Abū Aḥmad's held the *wilāya*: the two posts were complementary.

63. Ibn al-Dāya (1953, p. 92) does not make it clear who involved Ibn Ṭūlūn in this matter, although the context suggests that it was Abū Aḥmad (by now titled al-Muwaffaq) rather than the caliph.

64. For the history of Ibn Ṭūlūn's less than successful interventions in the region, see Bonner 2010a and Gordon 2017b.

8. Breakdown in Relations between Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq (c. 262/875)

As already noted, soon after al-Muwaffaq's appointment as an heir to the throne in 261, a violent quarrel erupted between him and Ibn Ṭūlūn over the apportionment of Egyptian revenues. Although no source mentions the date on which this conflict broke out, it must have postdated 261/874, the year in which al-Muwaffaq acquired his title.⁶⁵ We may assume that the quarrel most likely broke out in the following year, 262/875, although it is possible that the seeds of the conflict had already been planted earlier, given the rising tension between the two amirs over the management of the *thughūr* and al-Muwaffaq's brittle relationship with the caliph.⁶⁶

The story is recounted in detail by al-Maqrīzī, who based his account on the same passage in Ibn al-Dāya, that led Hassan to miscalculate the chronology of the early Tulunid period (see Sections 1 and 2).⁶⁷ The trouble began when al-Muwaffaq wrote to Ibn Ṭūlūn, seeking funds for the prosecution of the war against the Zanj. In the letter he acknowledged that Egypt belonged to the Maghrib region and was thus within the territories of al-Mufawwad, but pleaded his case on the grounds that revenues from the Mashriq were much reduced, as a result of the disruption caused by the Zanj.

Egypt was the richest territory in the Maghrib and the most accessible from Iraq.⁶⁸ Al-Muwaffaq appears to have discovered that Mu'tamid had been secretly sequestering the annual revenues from Egypt (or at least a part of them) since 258/871, according to the terms of the deal he had concluded with Ibn Ṭūlūn in that year (see Section 6).⁶⁹ This knowledge allowed him to maintain a degree of leverage over his brother, who for four years had benefitted from a private financial agreement that was probably never legally ratified. Al-Balawī states that al-Muwaffaq was compelled to seek the revenues of Egypt because of unavoidable financial expenses incurred in the war against the Zanj.⁷⁰ In fact al-Muwaffaq was looking for more than monetary gain alone in Egypt. It is clear that he intended from the outset to bring down Ibn Ṭūlūn by subverting the loyalty of his generals and replacing him as governor. With Ibn Ṭūlūn gone, al-Muwaffaq knew that his brother's privileged access to Egyptian funds would cease and that he himself would be able to tap into the province's wealth.

As for the detailed narrative of these events: al-Maqrīzī begins by telling us that al-Muwaffaq dispatched a certain Niḥrīr, whom he describes as Mutawakkil's *khādim*, to

65. As noted above (Section 2), Ibn al-Dāya's account implicitly dates the conclusion of the succession arrangements to the year 257/870, when Abū Aḥmad returned from Mecca to the Hijaz.

66. Indeed it is possible that al-Muwaffaq began pondering how he could get his hands on the revenues of Egypt as soon as he returned to Samarra from exile in the Hijaz. But he first took action on the issue only after he had been placed in the line of succession to the throne in 261/874.

67. Al-Maqrīzī n.d., vol. 2, pp. 178–179; Ibn al-Dāya 1953, pp. 89–91.

68. Although more remote from Iraq than Egypt, Ifrīqiya was also a rich province. But there is no evidence that the Aghlabids (184–290/800–904) paid *kharāj* to the Abbasids on an annual basis.

69. Ibn al-Dāya (1953, p. 87) notes that when al-Muwaffaq complained of his urgent need for funds, the “revenues of Egypt were delayed (i.e. had not arrived in the Abbasid treasury) because they were secretly carried to al-Mu'tamid.” The implication is that al-Muwaffaq himself already knew that his brother was siphoning off Egyptian funds into his private treasury.

70. *Fa-da'at Abā Aḥmad al-ḡarūra ilā an kataba ilā Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn...* (p 79).

collect the funds he had requested from Ibn Ṭūlūn.⁷¹ At first glance, it would seem that al-Maqrīzī's source, Ibn al-Dāya, has misnamed al-Muwaffaq's envoy, confusing him with the *khādim* of al-Mu'tamid who was took charge of the financial arrangements in 258/871 and whose *ism* appears on the Egyptian coins of the same year. On further investigation, however, it appears that Niḥrīr did make a second journey to Egypt, this time on behalf of al-Muwaffaq, in c. 262/875.

Al-Muwaffaq evidently managed to coerce Niḥrīr, the caliph's *khādim* and a senior financial official in the Abbasid financial system, into helping him to oust Ibn Ṭūlūn.⁷² Why did al-Muwaffaq make the risky choice of the caliph's *khādim* to lead the embassy to Miṣr? One reason may have been that Niḥrīr's presence conveyed the impression that the caliph sanctioned al-Muwaffaq's appropriation of Egyptian wealth. Niḥrīr was also the bearer of seditious letters to Ibn Ṭūlūn's generals. The reader of al-Maqrīzī would assume that al-Muwaffaq himself was the signatory of these letters: and so he may have been. But it is also possible that Mu'tamid had been coerced by his brother into signing the letters. If this were the case, Niḥrīr would have been a good choice as the messenger, because he could reassure the generals that his master the caliph was acting in their best interests. Forewarned of his arrival by al-Mu'tamid, Ibn Ṭūlūn arrested the envoy in Egypt and confined him to his quarters, to prevent him from making contact with the generals. Ibn Ṭūlūn then took possession of the letters that Niḥrīr was carrying and punished those who were implicated in the plot against him.

But Ibn Ṭūlūn could not solve his main dilemma. He found himself caught between the competing demands of the caliph, to whom he had existing financial obligations, and the new demands made by his powerful brother. The caliph had reminded Ibn Ṭūlūn of his obligation to send the customary annual tribute of cash and other goods including *ṭirāz*, slaves, horses and wax (*sham'*) to the caliphal treasury. But the Tulunid decided to honour al-Muwaffaq's demands instead⁷³ and sent him the province's annual tribute (or at least a portion of it), amounting to the sum of between 1.2–2.2 million dinars, as well as other

71. Al-Maqrīzī (n.d., p. 179) has 'Taḥrīr', but this must be a scribal error for Niḥrīr, which is the spelling given in Ibn al-Dāya's text (Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 87).

72. As a major player in the events of 258 and a close associate of the caliph, Niḥrīr must have been fully aware of, and was probably complicit in, the caliph's financial subterfuge. Niḥrīr remained loyal to Mu'tamid throughout this period, as proved by his presence at Mu'tamid's side in 269–270/882–883, during the caliph's attempted flight to Egypt—he also witnessed his tearful reaction to the news of Ibn Ṭūlūn's death in 270/883 (see al-Balawī 1939, pp. 291 and 357 respectively).

73. Gordon (2015 pp. 230–231) says that al-Balawī (1939, pp. 80–81) notes that Ibn Ṭūlūn sent 1.2 million dinars to the imperial treasures in 262/875. But al-Balawī's text states that this was the sum that Ibn Ṭūlūn consigned to Niḥrīr when he escorted him to the Egyptian border, before formally handing it over to Amājūr, governor of Syria. The next appearance Niḥrīr made in the story was when he delivered the 1.2 million dinars to al-Muwaffaq. It seems that Ibn Ṭūlūn diverted the sum which was annually sent to Mu'tamid (*mā jarā al-rasm bi-ḥamlīhi*—al-Balawī 1953, p. 81) to al-Muwaffaq, taking great care to have witnesses record the full amount before handing Niḥrīr and the revenue over into Amājūr's care. Amājūr's task was to ensure the safe passage of the envoy and his consignment through Syria en route to al-Muwaffaq's court.

commodities that were customarily included in the annual remittances from Egypt.⁷⁴ By giving in to al-Muwaffaq's demands, Ibn Ṭūlūn broke the terms of his standing agreement with al-Muʿtamid.⁷⁵

But when Niḥrīr delivered the *kharāj* to al-Muwaffaq, the latter declared himself dissatisfied with the Tulunid's contribution.⁷⁶ He wrote again to Ibn Ṭūlūn, this time in intemperate terms, complaining that he had received only a fraction of the amount he was due.⁷⁷ Ibn Ṭūlūn was no doubt desperately disappointed by the failure of his attempt to mollify al-Muwaffaq by sending him funds. He adopted a tone of righteous indignation in his response to al-Muwaffaq, querying the claim that there was an outstanding account that needed to be settled and drawing attention to the great contribution he had made to the defence of the *dawla* and the trouble he had taken to recruit the bravest soldiers to his army and to feed and equip them. He claimed that all who showed loyalty to such a degree were deserving of recognition and promotion. Yet he, by contrast, had been subjected to demands in unnecessarily harsh terms. He reminded al-Muwaffaq that those who made demands on their inferiors, were expected to accompany their requests with gifts and promises of favours. In raising this complaint, Ibn Ṭūlūn was in effect accusing al-Muwaffaq of failing to show the gratitude expected of a master whose servant had excelled himself in his service. The charge of *kufrān al-niʿma* (ingratitude for benefits delivered) was a powerful one, which could be launched by a complainant against both social superiors and social inferiors.

In the same letter, Ibn Ṭūlūn reminded al-Muwaffaq that he had broken the terms of the succession agreement of 261/874 and that for this reason, the Muslim community was no longer obliged to render allegiance to him.⁷⁸ He said that his senior amirs (*awliyāʾ*) had begged him to remove his name from the *khuṭba* but claimed that he had chosen not to give in to their pleas. Ibn Ṭūlūn also accused al-Muwaffaq of seeking to replace him as governor of Egypt, a charge that both he and al-Muwaffaq knew to be true. Finally he reminded him that he commanded a powerful army that would prevail against all opponents in battle. The general tone of the letter is one of outrage for wrongs done to him: but one also suspects that the high emotion of Ibn Ṭūlūn's language was fuelled by anxiety—his gamble had failed and he now found himself in dispute with both al-Muwaffaq and al-Muʿtamid.

74. Al-Maqrīzī (n.d., p. 179) gives the amount as 1.2 million dinars while Ibn Khaldūn (1284, p. 299) states that the amount was 2.2 million. The question of the exact amount sent to al-Muwaffaq remains unresolved. The total annual yield from Egypt was estimated at 4.3 million dinars by Bianquis (1998, p. 95), but without references. It is impossible to calculate the average amount of the annual tribute from Egypt accurately, due to the inconsistency of different reports: moreover, the amount of revenue may have changed from year to year, depending on the success of the harvests.

75. Al-Maqrīzī n.d., p. 179.

76. Ibn al-Dāya 1953, p. 89: "he (al-Muwaffaq) said that the total sum amounted to many times the sum that (Ibn Ṭūlūn) conveyed to him in the care of Niḥrīr." It seems likely that al-Muwaffaq had specified the sum he wanted in his first message, but that Ibn Ṭūlūn had not remitted it in full.

77. The phrase is *yaqūlu inna al-ḥisāb yujābu aqʿafa ma ḥumilat* (al-Maqrīzī n.d., p. 178).

78. Here Ibn Ṭūlūn first articulated the grievance against al-Muwaffaq that subsequently drove him to convene the 'Damascus Assembly' in 269/882 (see below).

To summarise the conclusions drawn so far about the events of 262/875—the evidence strongly suggests that al-Muwaffaq intended to get rid of Ibn Ṭūlūn from the outset. Although the intense rivalry between two must have kicked off in the late 250s, they did not come into direct conflict with one another until this year. By 262/875, al-Muwaffaq was already an experienced field general with many campaigns under his belt. He knew that Ibn Ṭūlūn commanded a mighty army and that his capital was well defended. He realised that a military assault against Egypt would probably not succeed and that the best way to unseat Ibn Ṭūlūn was to turn his own men against him. But once Ibn Ṭūlūn had frustrated the attempt to subvert his generals, al-Muwaffaq was forced to challenge him directly.

When al-Muwaffaq received Ibn Ṭūlūn's dismissive response, he ordered Mūsā b. Bughā to drive the Tulunid out of Egypt and appoint Amājūr, the governor of Syria, in his place. Amājūr refused to accept the appointment, realising that his army was no match for Ibn Ṭūlūn's forces. Mūsā then marched against Egypt, reaching al-Rāfiqa, and Ibn Ṭūlūn began to construct fortifications in his capital to resist the new threat. But, in 264/877, Mūsā withdrew from Syria, due to lack of adequate funds for the payment of his soldiers and Amājūr died in the same year.

Ibn Ṭūlūn's next step was novel. In a tactical move that must have been intended to frustrate any future threat from Syria, he took advantage of Amājūr's death and Mūsā's withdrawal to fill the Syrian power vacuum himself. He marched northwards, rapidly taking over Amājūr's territories and appointing his own governors to Syrian cities and created a buffer zone between his core lands in Egypt and those of his enemies in Iraq. By the time he was forced to return to Egypt from Tarsus in 265/878 to deal with his son's rebellion, he had consolidated Tulunid authority over Syria.

9. Dinars of 265/878 bearing Ibn Ṭūlūn's name

At this point we come to another numismatic crux. In 265/878, gold coins were struck in Miṣr and al-Rāfiqa bearing the name *Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn* below that of the caliph al-Mu'tamid on the reverse field, with al-Mufawwad's title placed below the obverse field. Such coins were struck in these and other mints for the remainder of Ibn Ṭūlūn's life.⁷⁹ Why did his name appear on these dinars and what did it signify? To address this question, we begin by reviewing the precious metal coinage struck in the region from 259–265/872–878, in order to establish a context for the new inscription.⁸⁰

From 259–260/872–873, the mint of Miṣr produced a small supply of precious metal coins, but no Miṣr dinars are known dated to 261–262/874–875.⁸¹ This raises the question of how Ibn Ṭūlūn remitted the revenue due to the caliph in those two years. Miṣr dinars are known

79. For the dinars of 265 see Kazan 1983, p. 288, no. 401 (al-Rāfiqa); and Ibrāhīm 2005 (Miṣr). The Miṣr dinar is held in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL, item no. 49711 (see <http://petriecat.museums.ucl.ac.uk/detail.aspx>). Both mints struck dinars every year from 265–270 (see Grabar 1957 and Nicol 2007). In addition, a dinar is known from Ḥims dated 266 (Nicol 2007, 'Ṭūlūnids', no. 1) as well as dinars and dirhams from Dimashq.

80. For a review of precious metal coinage from the region struck before 259, see above, Section 5.

81. Bates n.d., p. 8.

for the year 263/876, but these coins bear Ja‘far’s *ism*, rather than his title (al-Mufawwad), which appeared on all Abbasid precious metal coinage struck in the Maghrib from 262/875 onwards. The exceptional occurrence of Ja‘far’s *ism* in the inscriptions of the Miṣr coins of 263/876 requires an explanation.

Bates has suggested that Ibn Ṭūlūn may have refused to make the *bay‘a* to Ja‘far b. al-Mu‘tamid as heir apparent in 261/874, because he was displeased by al-Muwaffaq’s simultaneous appointment as second in line to the throne. Yet our sources provide no evidence that Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq were in dispute with each other before the succession arrangements were made.⁸² On the other hand, Ibn Ṭūlūn did divert the annual caliphal tribute to al-Muwaffaq’s treasury in the following year, 262/875. Al-Mu‘tamid tried to prevent the diversion of Egyptian funds away from Samarra and must have been deeply aggrieved by Ibn Ṭūlūn’s decision to send funds to al-Muwaffaq. It is quite likely that the positive relationship they had enjoyed hitherto was soured by these events. In these circumstances, it is conceivable that Ibn Ṭūlūn commissioned dies to be made for the mint of Miṣr without Ja‘far’s new title as a sign of his displeasure with the caliph. Whatever the truth of the matter, the dies for the dinars of 263/876 must have been made in Miṣr, rather than Samarra, suggesting that the days when the caliph supplied dies for the Miṣr mint had come to an end. However the quarrel with the caliph, if such it was, did not last long. Miṣr dinars with standard inscriptions, including Ja‘far’s title al-Mufawwad, were struck in small quantities in 264/877 and early 265/878.⁸³

Why did Ibn Ṭūlūn issue dinars that bore his own *ism* and patronymic in 265/878? These were not the first Tulunid coins struck in Syria. A copper *fals* struck in Damascus in 264/877, shortly after the Tulunid occupation of the Syrian capital, bears Ibn Ṭūlūn’s *ism* Aḥmad.⁸⁴ Since no coppers had been struck in the city during Amājūr’s governorship, we may assume that one reason for the named Tulunid issue of 264/877 was to mark the inauguration of the new regime. The inclusion of the caliph’s name on the dinars of the following year suggests that the Ibn Ṭūlūn did not strike these coins as a declaration of his independence from the Abbasid regime. Although there is no evidence to support the idea that Ibn Ṭūlūn considered himself a rebel against the Abbasids,⁸⁵ however, the new inscription did coincide with his occupation of Syria and must have been intended to publicise the significant expansion of the Tulunid state. Ibn Ṭūlūn’s initiative was prefigured by rapid changes that occurred in the naming practices of other Abbasid mints in this period. The Saffarid Ya‘qūb b. Layth had

82. It is hard to understand why Ibn Ṭūlūn would have refused to acknowledge the appointment of Mu‘tamid’s son, if he was disturbed by al-Muwaffaq’s appointment as second in line to the throne. Moreover, as we know from Ibn Ṭūlūn’s letter, al-Muwaffaq’s title was included in the Egyptian *khuṭba* (see Section 8).

83. Bates n.d., p. 9.

84. See Nicol 2007, ‘Ṭūlūnids’, no. 3. The defective specimen described by Nicol lacks the decade, but has been assigned, presumably on the evidence of style and historical context, to the year 264/877.

85. Ibn al-‘Adīm claims that Ibn Ṭūlūn cut the route to Baghdad and ceased sending revenue to al-Mu‘tamid at this time, but he is probably confusing events in 265–266/878–879 with those of 269/882, when the Tulunid was once again in dispute with al-Muwaffaq (see Ibn al-‘Adīm 1988–1989, p. 826). Bonner (2010b, p. 320) notes that Ibn Ṭūlūn assumed the prestigious title *mawla amīr al-mu‘minīn* “after 265/878,” which suggests that relations with Mu‘tamid continued to be amicable after this year.

already begun to put his own name on his coins from the late 250s/860s and the various amirs who governed Nishapur, like ‘Abdallāh al-Khujastānī and Rāfi‘ b. Harthama, followed suit in the 260s/870s: this is a process that is not yet well understood and deserves further study.⁸⁶

10. The Events of 268–269/881–883

After Ibn Ṭūlūn was forced to return to Egypt in 265/878, al-Muwaffaq’s efforts to undermine Ibn Ṭūlūn’s authority in Syria began to bear fruit. Lu’lu’, Ibn Ṭūlūn’s *mawlā* and his governor of al-Rāfiqa, renounced his allegiance to the Tulunids and fled to al-Muwaffaq with his army. As an intriguing aside to this major event, it should be noted that the coins of al-Rāfiqa dated to the year 268/881 bear the name Lu’lu’ below that of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn on the reverse.⁸⁷ There is little to guide our understanding of the background to this new inscription. Did Lu’lu’’s name appear on the coins to indicate that he was responsible for collecting the caliphal tax revenues due from al-Rāfiqa (as in the case of Niḥrīr’s name which appeared on the Miṣr coins of 258/871)? Should the coins be seen as an attempt at political self-assertion, immediately prior to Lu’lu’’s defection? If so, it is strange that Lu’lu’ took care to include Ibn Ṭūlūn’s name and patronymic. As in the case of Ibn Ṭūlūn’s named coins of 265/878, it is impossible to answer this question with certainty. Perhaps Lu’lu’’s coin should be taken as a sign of the extent to which powerful local rulers, even those who were city governors rather than regional governors, were becoming aware of the value of the coinage as a means of asserting their presence in the regions they governed.

Lu’lu’’s defection caused a further deterioration in relations between Ibn Ṭūlūn and al-Muwaffaq. After al-Muwaffaq’s allies had arrested al-Mu‘tamid in 269/882, preventing him from fleeing to Ibn Ṭūlūn, the latter declared al-Muwaffaq unfit for his office and convened a group of ‘*ulamā*’ in Damascus to ratify his declaration, with mixed results.⁸⁸ A year after the meeting in Damascus, Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn was dead.

11. Conclusions

Although the coinage inscriptions offer insights into relations between the Abbasids and Ibn Ṭūlūn, many issues surrounding the production and use of Egyptian coinage and the raising and distribution of Egyptian revenue in the Tulunid period remain obscure. For example, we do not always know in which form the ‘money’ owed to the Abbasids was paid: whether in gold coin or in bullion or in coinage of other denominations. Given the imprecision and sparseness of the textual source material, we cannot be sure that the amounts recorded in dinars were always remitted in Islamic gold coins. The sums of dinars quoted in some of our sources may have been cited as a money of account, rather than quantities of individual

86. Ya‘qūb the Saffarid began striking coins bearing his own *ism* in the mid-250s/860s (for a dirham of Fars dated 256/869, see Nicol 2012, no. 714)—a dirham of the same mint dated 255/870 which also bears his *ism* is reported to be in a private collection. It is reasonably safe to conclude that these early Saffarid issues from Fars were struck from Ya‘qūb’s own dies, given the parlous state of his relations with the Abbasids.

87. See Nicol 2007, nos. 8–9.

88. See Bonner (2010a) for an in-depth discussion of the so-called Damascus Assembly.

coins. This means that it is difficult to correlate the estimated output of the mint of Miṣr (which seems to have been low in the first years of Ibn Ṭūlūn's governorship, judging by the numbers of surviving specimens) with the amount of Egyptian revenue received by the caliph and his brother.

Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn played an important role in the history of the Abbasid caliphate as the first Turkish amir to leave the Iraqi centre and construct a stable polity in a major imperial province. His career reflects the conditions of a new phase in the evolution of the caliphal state, which began with the murder of al-Mutawakkil. Abbasid authority became progressively diminished as local rulers began to encroach upon caliphal lands and eventually, with the Buyid capture of Baghdad in 334/945, the temporal power of the caliphate was completely eclipsed. The Tulunid interval represents an intermediate stage in the transition from a strong unitary state to the political fragmentation of the fourth/tenth century. In the second half of the third/ninth century, the Abbasids retained enough authority to keep a grip on the central Islamic lands, but they did so at the expense of having to negotiate working relationships with regional actors like Ibn Ṭūlūn.⁸⁹

Ibn Ṭūlūn was the first Turkish amir in Abbasid service to establish a measure of autonomous agency within a province of the Abbasid state. This article has attempted to sort out the political history of Ibn Ṭūlūn's career with a particular focus on his relations with the caliph al-Mu'tamid and his brother al-Muwaffaq. Some aspects of this triangular relationship have remained obscure until now, in spite of the best efforts of several scholars, largely due to two factors: the failure to utilize the available numismatic evidence;⁹⁰ and a reluctance to explore the complex historiography of the written record for the Tulunids, in particular the work of Ibn al-Dāya and al-Balawī. Tulunid historiography is a wearisome but not overwhelmingly challenging subject: a comprehensive comparative survey of the common patterns within, and intertextual links between, the main sources outside the *sīra* tradition (among them al-Kindī, al-Ya'qūbī, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn al-ʿAdīm and al-Maqrīzī) is much needed.⁹¹

Finally, a few thoughts on one of the fundamental questions governing Ibn Ṭūlūn's rise to power—how did he legitimize his rule in Egypt (and later in Syria), given the recent precipitous decline of caliphal power and his status as a member of the Samarran Turkish community? When he arrived in Egypt in 254/868, Ibn Ṭūlūn suffered from a chronic deficit of political

89. See Bonner 2010b for the notion of the 'intermediate stage' in the decline of the unitary state.

90. The Islamic historian's disinclination to make full use of the evidence of the coinage is understandable. For the non-numismatist, the numismatic literature is difficult to master, especially now that so much material is available online. Even when one has a grasp of the relevant material, there is little reliable guidance as to its proper use.

91. It is puzzling that little serious work has been done on the historiography of the Tulunids since Becker addressed the issue at the beginning of the 20th century. Current academic fashion is one factor. The compulsion to publish accessible scholarship that engages with live macrohistorical issues, such as, in this case, the modalities of the disintegration of the unitary Abbasid state, is strong in today's academic environment. A worthy historiographical study of a tradition that is partial, fragmented, and, for the most part, much later than the events it describes, would be unlikely to win much recognition for its author.

capital.⁹² As the son of a deracinated Turkish lord who had been sold into slavery and given as a gift to the caliph al-Ma'mūn at the beginning of the third/ninth century, he had no access to (and probably little conception of) any tradition of regnal authority that might have helped him establish and sustain his authority. Unlike the Samanids of Transoxania, for example, who had already spent half a century consolidating their grip over western Central Asia when Ibn Ṭūlūn entered Fuṣṭāṭ, he was not a local nobleman with a genealogy that he could exploit to his own political ends. Nor did he have access to the longstanding tradition of Persian kingship to which the Samanids and their Buyid contemporaries, in their different ways, both claimed to be heirs.⁹³ Ibn Ṭūlūn's only recourse was to a tradition of pious Islamic authoritarianism which would allow him to refashion himself in the image of an ideal Muslim sovereign, who practiced just rule, in close collaboration with pious Muslim scholars.⁹⁴ Close alignment with the world of the pious scholar also helped him to maintain the illusion that he was a faithful servant of the Abbasid caliph, rather than a powerful regional ruler who commanded substantial military and economic resources. The Egyptian *sīra* tradition, whatever its shortcomings as a source for annalistic history, provides persuasive testimony for Ibn Ṭūlūn's efforts to cast himself in this mold.

Did Ibn Ṭūlūn also seek to present himself as a *ghāzī* warrior, the defender of the northern frontier against the Byzantine enemy, as a boost to his image as a righteous Muslim ruler? According to the *sīra* he had spent time in his early youth taking part in *ghazawāt* against the Byzantines and was deeply attracted to the *ghāzī* ideal. Ibn al-Athīr tells us that soon after he arrived in Egypt he asked to be appointed governor of Tarsus, which indicates that he had not lost his enthusiasm for the frontier by the late 250s/860s (see Section 7). Whether he had the opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to *jihād* effectively in later years is doubtful. His interventions in the *thughūr* were not particularly successful and he never personally led a campaign against the Christian enemy.⁹⁵ But it is true that he used the language of the *ghāzī* quite freely, calling for *jihād* against no less powerful a figure than al-Muwaffaq towards the end of his life. We should also bear in mind that after 258/871, the *thughūr* represented for Ibn Ṭūlūn not only a spiritual ideal, but also a source of revenue. Al-Muwaffaq appears to have tried to frustrate Ibn Ṭūlūn's attempts to fulfill his role as the *ṣāhib al-kharāj* of the frontier region by appointing his own governors to the region. Ibn Ṭūlūn's interest in the region must have been sharpened by his financial interests as well as a desire to counter al-Muwaffaq's persistent interference.

92. The phrase is Gordon's: see Gordon 2015 (pp. 240–252) for an excellent discussion of Ibn Ṭūlūn's strategies of self-legitimization.

93. See, among other useful studies, Bosworth 1978.

94. Gordon, 2015, points to Ibn Ṭūlūn's efforts to create his credentials as a pious Muslim ruler, including dispensation of justice through the *maẓālim* courts, good works (such as the hospital [*māristān*] and his enormous new mosque), and the cultivation of good relations with the most important community leaders, like the chief *qādī*.

95. See Bonner 2010a and Gordon 2017b for mildly divergent views on Ibn Ṭūlūn's '*jihād*'.



Figure 1: *Fals* of Miṣr 258 AH
(Zeno no. 71755)



Figure 2: *Fals* of al-Thughūr
al-shāmiyya 2(6?)4 AH (Zeno no. 134791)

Did Ibn Ṭūlūn intend to create a dynasty that would rule Egypt and Syria after his death? He did appoint his son as his heir apparent, which shows that he anticipated continuity of rule among his descendants. But there is nothing to indicate that he invested heavily in the notion of dynastic identity, in the way that his Iranian contemporaries did.

However, one intriguing piece of numismatic evidence suggests that he went some way towards creating an emblem of his family's collective identity. A series of copper coins struck on his authority in Miṣr between 257–259/870–873 bear no names: neither the title of the caliph, nor the *ism* of Ibn Ṭūlūn himself (see figure 1).⁹⁶ But they do contain an enigmatic graphic sign at the bottom of the obverse consisting of a rhombus lying on its longer axis, which is flanked by a number of vertical lines to either side. The sign may have been modeled on the *tamghas* employed on some copper issues struck by the early Abbasid governors of Transoxania.⁹⁷ The same sign recurs on coppers bearing Aḥmad's name, which were struck in the region of the *thughūr* in the 260s/870s (see figure 2).⁹⁸ A Central Asian *tamgha* of a different design was also employed on the copper coinage struck by Muḥammad b. Tughj (323–334/934–945), the founder of the regime of the Ikhshidids, the next ruling family to govern Egypt after the demise of the Tulunids. Like Ibn Ṭūlūn, Ibn Tughj was a Turk, though of Farghanan rather than inner Asian, origin.⁹⁹ Both *tamghas* seem to have belonged to an 'invented tradition', sourced from the coinage imagery of second/eighth-century Central Asia, which was appropriated by these amirs to provide themselves with an originary foothold in the Central Asian region. Both the intention behind such collective symbols of identity and their effectiveness are difficult to gauge in the absence of any other objects bearing these symbols. The choice of Central Asian *tamghas*, or approximations to them, hints that both Tulunids and Ikhshidids recognized that these symbols resonated with some aspects of the identity they had created for themselves as servants of the Abbasid state.

96. See Grabar 1957, p. 10, no. 17.

97. See the mintless issue of Abū Muslim (Nastich 2012, fig. 4b) and the issue of al-Ṣāghāniyān dated 146/763 (Nastich 2012, fig. 13). Both these coppers have horizontal lozenges with palmettes to either side.

98. See Miles 1956, no. 20. A recent specimen of this type offered for sale in the Bruno Peus auction of 7–9 November 2012, identifies the date of issue as 2(6)4/877 and the mint as *al-thughūr al-shāmiyya* (Peus 2012, no. 1471).

99. Bacharach 2015, pp. 34–36.

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