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# REAPPRAISAL OF THREE AFRICAN FALS WHICH HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE EVENT OF THE ARAB CONQUEST OF SPAIN

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*Summary: This article aims to revise the interpretation of three fals that were almost certainly minted in Tangiers, and have been associated with the planning and financing of the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula.*

We propose to review three fals of African origin, identified by Walker<sup>1</sup> with the references: **P. 120**, on page 227; **738**, on page 225 and **B. 52**, on page 271. Walker describes these three fals separately, independently from each other, although on page ixviii of the introduction, he treats them as a group, by saying:

"Then there is the most instructive little group of very rare pieces with most remarkable legends, which certainly in some cases, perhaps in all, emanated from Tanja."

Today, almost sixty years since the assessment by Walker, two of these coins are still very rare; the other coin (**P. 120**) is no longer rare (although it is not excessively abundant, it is not scarce)<sup>2</sup>. Although they have completely different legends, these three fals were included in the same group. The reason for such a grouping is based on the interpretation of the different legends. Walker, along with other authors, both before and after him, assumes that the legends refer to the collection of a levy to be used to finance the forthcoming conquest of Hispania. For this reason they are known as "feluses de la conquista" (fals of the Conquest), as it is thought that they were used in the planning and execution of the invasion of the peninsula.

Two main themes stand out from the interpretation of the significance of these fals:

1. they pre-date the conquest
2. they were used to pay the salaries, the transport and maintenance of the participating troops

## First coin

We will begin by commenting on fals **P.120**.

This coin has the legend<sup>3</sup>: نفقة في سبيل الله. Of the three legends (one for each fals), this one presents the least difficulties in its literal reading. Its interpretation is another matter. The first to interpret it was Joseph Von Karabacek<sup>4</sup>. He did this whilst grouping this fals P.120 with number 738 in his explanation. Karabacek begins with fals number 2610 of Tiesenhausen<sup>5</sup>. He translates the legend into German as "eine Ausgabe auf dem Wege Gottes" (a payment in the way of Allah) and explains it as: "d.h. zum Solde auf dem Kriegswege gegen die Ungläubigen" (i.e. for the payment of the path of war against the infidels). He then comments on an Arabic text by al-Mâwerdî (d. 1058 d.C.) which speaks of the payment of the troops that

<sup>3</sup> Contribution (payment) in the way of Allah

<sup>4</sup> Karabacek 1877, pages 356-359

<sup>5</sup> Tiesenhausen 1873, no. 2610, page. 267. This describes an incomplete reverse and a reverse with two lines of text, without mentioning the ornaments. The coin is said to be in the Boze collection. It says that the coin was described by Frähn, adding that no explanation was given for this fals, and by Gaillard who confuses "nafaqa" with "gafar". Tiesenhausen shows the legend on the fals, but offers no further explanations.

<sup>1</sup> Walker 1956

<sup>2</sup> Simply by searching **nafaqa** in Google, many descriptions are available, and it is easy to find examples by following sales in eBay.

participate in the "Holy War", as a function of the requirements of the outward and return journeys, of the participation in the war itself and the control of the frontiers. All this could serve to justify the purpose behind the minting of this fals. However, in another paragraph it mentions that in reality dinars were minted to pay the troops (the so-called military dinars):  
الدنانير الجيشية

Walker maintains the same theory; "Payment in the Way of Allah" with the same interpretation.

In our country, Barceló<sup>6</sup> culminates a series of publications since 1972 on the same topic. He maintains a different theory, as follows: "la vinculación de la acuñación de fulûs a la expedición militar se basaba en una comprensión inadecuada de los términos نفقة (nafaqa) and نفاق (nifâq)" (the link between the minting of fals and the military expedition was based on and inadequate understanding of the terms نفقة (nafaqa) and نفاق (nifâq)). He also affirms: "Hay una aparente conexión entre nafaqa y yihâd - la participación en la guerra contra La Meca - en la azora II/261 y en la II/262". (There appears to be a connection between nafaqa and jihad - the participation in the war against Mecca - in sura II/261 and in sura II/262)<sup>7</sup>.

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ  
سَبْعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنبُلَةٍ مِائَةُ حَبَّةٍ وَاللَّهُ يُضَعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ  
وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾

Translation of sura II/261: The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.\*

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ لَا يُتْبِعُونَ مَا أَنْفَقُوا مَنًّا  
وَلَا أَذًى لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ  
يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Translation of sura II/262: Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and then do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.\*

It is true that both suras begin with "alladina yunfiquna fi sabil Allâh....", but, as in novels, any parallel with the fals is a pure coincidence. The suras bear no relation to any war, not even the holy war. Nor do they refer to any fiscal obligation. They speak of the way of Allah, a way of righteousness, the path shown by Allah to each individual at each moment. They do not even refer specifically to charity or alms, even though these could form part of this way of righteousness. And there is no mention of war. This is not the underlying theme of these suras.

Barceló affirms that *nafaqa* "como término fiscal, no es incorporado al vocabulario fiscal omeya" (is not used in the Umayyad vocabulary related to fiscal matters) but "el registro numismático puede obligar a modificar esta afirmación" (the numismatic record could force a modification of this affirmation)<sup>8</sup>. Nowadays<sup>9</sup>, the term *nafaqa* refers to the obligation of a husband to provide the necessary items for the maintenance of his wife. This includes food, lodging, furniture, clothes and any other accessories that could be required. It is derived from the Quran: IV/38. If the husband does not respect his obligation, the wife has the right to ask for the dissolution of the marriage. If we put this in the context of war and taxation, we cannot believe that the fals were minted to cover the needs of "war widows", this would be pushing the argument too far; but equally, we do not agree either on the *Holy War*, or on an exclusively fiscal use for this fals. (Any coin that is legal tender can be used to pay taxes). To begin with, we disassociate it completely from the word "nifaq" mentioned previously (this word supposedly appears on another fals, **but this is not the case**, as we will explain further on). Secondly, at the time when we believe that this coin was minted, both dinars and dirhams

<sup>6</sup> Barceló 2010

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. page 75

<sup>8</sup> op. cit., page 77

<sup>9</sup> Papi 2009, page 89

cannot have been very abundant, so if this fals was minted for the payment of taxes, huge quantities would have had to have been minted, and today they should be very common.

To sum up, two explanations have been proposed:

- the coin was minted to pay the troops participating in the conquest. They were therefore minted prior to the conquest and could be considered to be the first Muslim coinage related to Hispania.
- they were issued as a fiscal tool.

We do not share either of these explanations, and think that they are to be considered simply as a means to provide alms to the community.

Let us take a look at some examples of this fals<sup>10</sup>:



In these three examples, although the legends are not complete, they can be read without difficulty and the coins are well struck.

But this is not usually the case; most known examples are overstrikes using already existing fals, so reading the coins is nearly always somewhat more complicated. It is precisely these overstrikes that will help us to set a time frame for their production. On page 78, Barceló comments on the appearance of the word "*mulk*" over "*naḥaqa*". This is without doubt an overstrike, possibly of a coin from Frochoso's group X<sup>11</sup>, or Walker's reference P.119.

The great variety of sizes is also explained by the (re-)use of a large number of previous fals of all sizes.

In the same way, fals were also struck using this fals - P.120 - as a blank.

### Examples of overstruck fals<sup>12</sup>:

#### Example no. 1



19.50 mm diameter x 1.70 mm. 3.05 g.  
Walker ref. 683/4 struck over ref. P. 120

#### Example no. 2



16.60 mm diameter x 2.70 mm. 3.90 g.  
As in the previous example, Walker ref. 683/4 struck over ref. P. 120.

From these two examples it is obvious that the minting of P. 120 preceded that of Walker 683/4.

<sup>10</sup> Examples from private collections

<sup>11</sup> Frochoso 2001, page 29

<sup>12</sup> From private collections



Example no. 3



20 mm diameter x 3.00 mm. 6.60 g.  
Fals P. 120 struck over Walker ref. 752/8

With this example it can be affirmed that **fals P. 120 is later than Walker 752/8.**

Example no. 4



21 mm diameter x 2.20 mm. 4.70 g.  
Walker ref. 683/4 overstruck on fals 752/8

It is this fals, reference 752/8 (Vives no. 44, Frochoso group XVII), which most often appears to be overstruck, and this could indicate that its minting took place close to the time of its re-minting<sup>13</sup>.



	بلا ننلس
لا اله الا الله وحده محمد رسول الله	بسم الله ضرب هذا الفلوس

14

It has also been indicated that this fals ref. 752/8 is the first to be minted at the time of the conquest. To quote Medina<sup>15</sup>: *Estos feluses debieron ser los primeros que se acuñaron.....*) (These fals must be the first to have been minted.....). We know (thanks to the sequence

<sup>13</sup> The example illustrated is from a private collection

<sup>14</sup> The legends of this coin translate as follows: There is no god except Allah. He is alone. (left column). In the name of Allah this fals was minted in Al-Andalus (right column)

<sup>15</sup> Medina 1992, footnote on page 86

of overstrikes) that this is not the case; we have reasons to suppose that they were minted between 108 A.H. and 110 A.H., possibly in 109 A.H. There is one known example of fals 752/8 overstruck on a fals dated 110 A.H., and we know of numerous examples that have been overstruck using Walker 683/4. The overstrikes ceased at this time and none are known using fals with a date later than 110 A.H.

It is clear that the existence of these overstrikes serves to prove that **fals P.120 is not the first Hispanic copper coin**, and therefore could not serve to finance a conquest that had already taken place. If these fals were issued in relation to some plan, the plan in question could not have been the invasion. And if they were not used to pay the soldiers who took part in the invasion, which Holy War did they serve? And which war was financed with fals? Despite the distance, it cannot have been fals that Count Reverter<sup>16</sup> kept in his armour and that prevented him from moving.

We think that Karabacek allowed himself to be influenced by the association of jihad with Islam. We consider that the subject is much more straightforward, and that this fals was simply a means of giving alms.

**Second coin: fals ref. Walker 738**

Below we include a drawing of a small fals, with a weight of 2.41 g., based on a photo that can be found in the ZENO database<sup>17</sup>. Whereas the reading of the obverse - Bismi Allah (in the name of Allah) presents no difficulties, the same cannot be said of the reverse.



<sup>16</sup> Count Reverter was a Catalan count who fought as a mercenary in Morocco on the side of the Almoravids in their attempt to slow down the Almohad movement. The soldiers in his army kept the gold that they received (as payment for fighting or as war booty) in their armour, until a point was reached where the weight of the gold prevented them from moving. Thus they were defeated and killed.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=37251>

Lane Poole<sup>18</sup> describes two fals of the same type, but leaves a question mark after the legend.

	37	
Obv.	[بسم]	
	* * *	
	الله	
Rev.	لذكه (?)	
	الله	Æ 8
	38	
Same		Æ 85

Karabacek did not have the opportunity to examine these two fals, but relied on the description by Lane Poole. Before continuing, let us take a look at another contemporary coin<sup>19</sup>, with a similar style of calligraphy:



It is a third dinar dated 102 A.H., with mint Al-Andalus. Although it has the same style of lettering, it would be unthinkable to read the image on the right as:

بسم الله / الزحمن / الزحين

because, among other reasons, everyone knows what it says<sup>20</sup>.

Karabacek (without having seen the coin) made such a mis-reading. Based on the notes of Lane Poole (who had not dared to venture a reading) he decided with great daring and courage. But clearly, he then ran into a problem, as his reading did not fit with the proposal for fals reference P.120.

Karabacek read: لزكة, which is meaningless, but which, having recourse to the eternal

argument of an error in the inscription, can be made to read what he wanted it to read: (لزكاة). "wir sehen also hier nach alter Weise das لزكاة ohne Alef productionis geschrieben"<sup>21</sup> (thus we see لزكاة written without an Alef, as was the practise formerly). The interpretation of Karabacek was fortunate and has not been contested since he wrote it. It has been accepted by everyone, and we can see that Walker had accepted it without questioning it (although he does not go so far as to include the missing Alef).

Walker translates the sentence into English as: For the alms of Allah. It was translated literally into Spanish (para las almas de Dios), and still nobody noticed anything strange<sup>22</sup>.

We have not followed Karabacek's logic, and believe that the coin reads as follows:

بسم الله	بركة الله
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(In the name of Allah, the blessing of Allah)<sup>23</sup>

We are not alone in our reading of this fals.

In 1981<sup>24</sup>, Jere L. Bacharach and Henry Amin Awad described a fals (their reference number 4) from Al-Fustat, as follows: "4. Copper. No mint. No date."

Obv.	Rev.
الله	بركة الله

Diameter 12 mm, weight 1.73 g.

They only describe the fals, without making any comments.

In the plates (plate V), there is a photo of the fals. Although the image is not perfect, we can see that it is the same coin type that we are discussing here.

<sup>18</sup> Lane Poole 1875, page 179, coins 37 and 38

<sup>19</sup> Tonegawa Collection

<http://andalustonegawa.50g.com/coins/nisf%2010%20andalus>

<sup>20</sup> Bismi Allah al-Rahman, al-Rahîm (In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate)

<sup>21</sup> Karabacek 1877, pages 356-359

<sup>22</sup> Frochoso 2001, page 31

<sup>23</sup> Alternatively: in the name of Allah, the grace of Allah.

<sup>24</sup> Bacharach and Awad 1981, pages 51-56, along with three plates with photos of the coins (plates IV, V and VI)

On the obverse the first line of the legend is missing (a narrow line of dots can be seen, which is all that is visible of the word *bismi*). Below this are three stars aligned horizontally, underneath which is the word *Allah*. Two lines can be seen on the reverse, although the beginning of the first word appears to be missing. Professor Bacharach and Awad do not recognise it as being a fals number 738 of Walker. They read it without preconceived ideas and without the influence of the succession of polluting arguments that have been linked together over time.

In view of the above, this fals no longer has such a romantic background, it does not tell us of an obligatory almsgiving, nor of a holy war. It is merely a small coin for use in small-scale transactions.

This coin, along with other contemporary coins minted in Tangiers<sup>25</sup>, have short and very expressive legends. Today, many of them are exclamations in everyday use, used frequently and in many different circumstances<sup>26</sup>:

الامر لله	المالك لله	الحمد لله	بسم الله
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم		بسم الله الوفاء لله	

At the time of their issue, north Africa was neither arabised nor Islamised. This group of *fals* with *extraordinary* legends must have been intended as a means of propaganda and indoctrination.

Third coin: fals ref. Walker B.52



Private collection, weight 4.05g, diameter 12 mm

<sup>25</sup> Tanja

<sup>26</sup> From left to right: In the name of Allah; Praise be to Allah; To Allah belongs the Kingdom; Power belongs to Allah; In the name of Allah, loyalty to Allah; In the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate

When referring to the legend نفاق طيب عن الله؟ (we have kept the question mark included by Walker), Walker<sup>27</sup> says that it is taken from a unique coin located in the Berlin Museum, and that its reading is not clear. This must be the coin that is illustrated with reference B. 52 on plate XXVIII, which shows a coin with part of the legend missing<sup>28</sup>. He associates the contents of this legend with the legend نفقة في سبيل الله and assumes they are the same. All hinges on the word "**nafaqa**" the meaning of which to him is without doubt: *Nafaqa was the pay given to warriors, who went forth to fight "in the Way of Allah", i.e. to take part in the Jihad or Holy War against the infidels.* However, by observing an example with a more complete legend, it is possible to say that what is written is radically different to such a noble cause as "pursuing infidels".

Here is the complete image:



The proposed reading is: بما في طيب من الله (from that which is good, coming from Allah). Once again, if we change the reading of the text, the whole meaning changes, and it is no longer the means of fiscal/warrior support implied by the first coin (there is no sequence of letters made up of *nafaqa* or *nifaq*). We end up with a text that does not suggest an epic, there are no battles, there are no tax inspectors greedy to collect money (this hasn't changed). The reading goes in the opposite direction: God be praised, for everything! Nicol was also confronted with an example of this fals that was either overstruck or in very poor condition<sup>29</sup>, such that it was not possible to read it correctly.

<sup>27</sup> Walker 1956, page 271

<sup>28</sup> Walker includes a footnote which says: The obv. legend had never been satisfactorily interpreted.

<sup>29</sup> Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean, volume 2, no. 1234

The complete legend is as follows<sup>30</sup>:

### Conclusions

بما في	ضرب
طيب	هذا
من الله	الفلس
	بطنجة
بما في طيب من الله	ضرب هذا الفلّس بطنجة

There are other fals minted in Tangiers with *remarkable* legends, but only these three apparently have offered possibilities for fantastical interpretations. Because of this, they were given a meaning that they do not possess. We think that the reality is more prosaic, and less resounding.

They were not used to plan any invasion, nor any war, nor were they minted exclusively for fiscal purposes. They were small, humble coins, with unusual legends, for daily use, and one of them could have been used specifically for the payment of alms (fals with nafaqa, which was also issued after the conquest).

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\* translator's note: this translation taken from: [www.quran.com](http://www.quran.com)

<sup>30</sup> Right-hand column: This fals was minted in Tangiers.

Left-hand column: From that which is excellent, proceeding from Allah



