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# Discovery of a unique golden Arabic morabetin from the year 1218 of the Safar Era in Gørding (Ribe-Denmark)

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**Summary:** Analysis and presentation of a totally unknown monolingual morabetin, coined in Toledo by Alfonso VIII, the king of Castile, in the year 1218 of Safar -Gregorian 1180 AD., found in the city of Gørding (Jutland-Denmark). These gold coins were minted for very few years, all of them being very scarce. Later the word “ALF” -abbreviature of “Alfonsvs”- was added to the inscriptions, thus making them bilingual, but keeping a Christian cross on one of its sides.

**Keywords:** Alfonso VIII, Morabetin, Middle Ages, Medieval Gold Coin.

## General introduction to the mintage of Alfonso VIII.

Alfonso VIII of Castile, also known as *The Noble* or *The One from the Navas*, was born in Soria on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1155, being in the end the only child born of the marriage between Sancho III of Castile and Blanca Garces of Navarre. His reign would be one of the longest of all the Spanish peninsular Medieval times, sitting on the throne of Castile for almost 56 years, being only surpassed by James I, who would be ruling in Aragon for a period of 63 years.

During this very long reign his coin minting was very abundant. This circumstance was much related with the intense warfare developed under his mandate, since in order to sustain the payment of his troops he needed large amounts of cash. He issued several series, generally maintaining his main coining production in the city of Toledo, although he also made some personal emissions in the Court Workshop -or of the King's mint mark-, an itinerant center that was moving around, depending on the political activity of their kingdoms or of the specific historical circumstances that occurred in each particular moment<sup>2</sup>. Currently, his known coinages exceed thirty -including in the calculation, of course, the co-payments of the unit “*denario*” and its divisor, the “*meiam*” or “*medaiam*”-.

On the other hand, the Castile coins struck by Alfonso, do not seem to follow a defined issuing pattern, which makes it difficult to connect them to time periods or significant events occurred during his reign. The specific features in the design, the symbolized motifs, the paleographic evolution that would develop throughout his monarchy, and the very representation of his person –

<sup>1</sup> Extended extract from Manuel Mozo Monroy's work called: *Enciclopedia de la Moneda Medieval Románica en los Reinos de León y Castilla* (ss. VIII-XIV). Vol. II: From Sancho III and Fernando II (1157) to Henry I y Alphons IX (1217-1230); Madrid, October-December 2017, pp. 273-280. A Danish version of this article will be published *Nordisk Numismatisk Unions Medlemsblad*, and in Spanish one also for *Documenta & Instrumenta*.

<sup>2</sup> The real existence of this supposed workshop is not totally assured because contemporary texts do not mention it explicitly. However, there does seem to be a direct relationship between the symbol of the star and the minting of pieces ordered under the sovereign regalia of coin-making by the king.

that varied immensely from coinage to coinage-, make us opt for fitting and analysing his coins based rather on historical landmarks, than on monatory milestones.

Thus, the coinage of Alfonso VIII necessarily has to be studied and analyzed on the basis of the political, war and peace periods in which his reign was divided. In this way, the temporal division of said coinage productions would be, according to our criteria, as shown below:

- A) Conquering Toledo (1158-1166).
  - 1 Infancy Coins.
  - 2 Fernando's II tutoring Coins.
- B) Resistance of Castile in front of the Almohad Invasion (1166-1173).
- C) Nearing the conquest of Cuenca and until the Battle of Alarcos (1173-1195).
- D) Since Alarcos to the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1195-1214).

Nevertheless, Alfonso VIII innovated substantially in his coinages, bringing some very important contributions to the medieval Christian numismatics. This is appreciated not only in terms of the visual effect, but also in the values and materials used in its manufacture. Billon pieces had hardly been coined since the reign of Alfonso VI, with the cuaternal law -four parts of silver on twelve possible-during the reign of Alfonso VI, which would degrade little by little during the rest of the successive reigns until reaching a league of inferior quality, the so-called ternal law -three parts of silver on the same twelve already indicated.

It can be said that, in general terms, the Castilian king would maintain this silver proportion in most of his emissions. However, in this monetary system-and for the first time in a way that we could qualify as assiduous-the use of the purely Christian gold coin was also extended, even though its typological features were clearly Islamic-, as opposed to the Muslim dinar, and as a result of the scarcity of currency of similar characteristics existing within the Andalusian Region; converting the before mentioned system into a bimetallic appearance of gold and billon. This Golden Alphonsian style would receive the name of “*morabetin*” – that would also be known in Romance language as “*maravedi*”-.

Similar coinage would be minted shortly after that in Leon territory, both under the ruling of Ferdinand II (Fig. 1), as well as that of his son Alfonso IX (Fig. 2). At first the maravedi of the Kingdom of Leon would be assigned a value of 8 sueldos of 12 deniers each maravedí – or what is the same, 96 deniers per gold piece-, and which would amount to 7.5 sueldos in Castile – that is, 90 deniers per Maravedi. Nevertheless, and despite this apparent inequality in the value of the maravedi, it was only a matter of counting in two different ways the same Carolingian sueldo used for a long time, and that was still worth in both cases the summing of 12 pieces; differing only in the value assigned to them in one kingdom or another, without real justification for it, as the coins were identical to each other, both in weight and in metrology. This separation in the countable value of the maravedi would last up till 1230.



Fig. 1 and Fig. 2: Golden Maravedis of Fernando II and Alfonso IX.

On the other hand, and with regard to the heraldic visual imagery embodied in the coins, it is important to say that Alfonso VIII was the first monarch to use in the coin the symbolic element of

the embattled castle as a symbol of the Kingdom of Castile—and the Latin inscription “*Castela*” or “*Castella*” as an allusion to the northern area of the kingdom, as the south was “*Toleto*”<sup>1</sup>-, in the same way that the lion had been for the Leonese kingdom, both during Alfonso VII’s time but also during Fernando II.

A characteristic in his coinage was the large number of different crosses which he drew as part of the religious component habitually engraved on the coins. No doubt, he was the Hispanic king that employed the most different forms of crosses in his coinage. Usually, this religious allusive factor was not lacking in any of his emissions; however, he was the last peninsular Christian king – together, of course, with the contemporary Leonese king Alfonso IX, in the last years of his rulling, – to put symbols of Christian profession on his coins.

Such ecclesiastical inclusions would rarely be repeated in the later coinages, as coins would begin to be seen as a political tool rather than a religious weapon that could proclaim the absolute power of the King as a representation of God's will. But perhaps the strangest and most peculiar feature of the inclusion of these crosses in his currencies was the fact of representing them in his gold coinages along with monetary inscriptions in Arabic characters, perhaps as a propaganda confirmation that the true religion was the Christian one, and that this one was imposed over the Islamic religious ideals.

### **Analytical study of the Arabic monolingual gold Morabetins.**

It is known that Islam minted gold coins since the time of Abd al-Malik, in the year 76-77 of Hejira (695-697 A.D.). Likewise, and from practically the first days of the conquest of the Iberian territories, the Umayyad Caliphate –beginning of the 8th century – minted a type of gold coin called *dinar de indicción*, that two centuries later would be renewed with the issuing of a new golden coin, of improved style and greater purity and art, coined during the government of the Caliph of Cordoba Abd-al-Rahman III (912-961): the dinar (درهم, in Arabic), which equalled to 10 silver dirhams. Later, the Emir Tashfin Ali ben Yusuf (1106-1143) would establish the dinar –with minimal typological differentiations- as the main Hispanic-Muslim peninsular currency, with an average weight of 3,85 gr.

The influence of this last gold issuing was imitated at first by some exceptional coinages made between 544 H. (1149-50 A.D.) and 548 H. (1153-54 A.D.) by Alfonso VII in Baeza (*Fig. 3*), territory conquered from the moors<sup>2</sup> in 1146, and that remained in Christian hands until the 1157, when it was lost again. During this conquest, the Emperor issued over a period of four years very different and rare dinars in Baeza –*bayyasíes* according to the Muslim Chronicles – with the similar tipology of the Almoravid ones. Although these currencies cannot be taken more than as a Christian experiment to gain the confidence of the conquered Arabs, it is no less true that they were the inspiration that would later lead Alfonso VIII to enter into the bimetal system (gold-billon), after the separation of Castile from Leon, as a result of the controversial Testament of the seventh of the Kings called “Alfonso”.

<sup>1</sup> In fact, this was not the case, but historically they were two different political entities. On one side the corresponding to the old county of Castile, transformed in kingdom by Ferdinand I, and the other the ancient territory of the Visigoth Toledo, with entity equally of Kingdom since the conquest of the same one by Alfonso VI. In other words, they were two different kingdoms in the hands of the same monarch.

<sup>2</sup> This lexical term – “mauro, mouro or moor”-, had nothing pejorative about it at the time, because it included all Muslim citizens from the vast province of North Africa called “Mauritania”.



3

Fig. 3: Alfonso VII Dinar minted in Baeza in the year of 545H = 1150 A.D.  
(Statal Museum of Hermitage in Sankt Petersburg, Núm. Inv. OH-B-A3-671)

In this way, the gold would be incorporated into medieval Castile, not with exceptional character but in a stable and regular way, using and imitating the dinar's typology and metrology. Although it has sometimes been said otherwise, the fact is that in its manufacture the commercial pragmatism needed for the establishment of economic ties, dominated more than the religious fanaticism and mutual hatred of both peninsular powers; as it was evident that the Oriental and Andalusi dinars, the Bezants from crusaders of the Holy Land and the Barcelona Mancus came to be the accepted standards of golden currency, typical and habitual in the Christian kingdoms and in the rest of the Christianity.

It was starting with 539H (1143 A.D.) when the rebellion against the Almoravids got generalized, taking advantage that the North of Africa was fighting against a new Berber religious movement, the so-called *Al-Muwahhidun* –in Arabic, الموحدون; meaning, “The Unitary” or Almohads- who conquered the city of Marrakesh in 541H (1145 A.D.). This helped to consolidate the revolt of the Andalusian people that were structured in various kingdoms of independent Taifas, and that even managed to coin their own currency, following the Almoravid model, without any other change than to replace the name, title and Kingdom of the Rulers.

One of these Taifas -perhaps the most important one- was that of Murcia, governed by Muhammad ibn Ahmed ibn Sa`d ibn Mardanis, from 542H to 567H (1147-1172 A.D.) –ruler also of Valencia from 1146-, better known as the King Wolf (in Spanish: Lobo) or Lope. This ruler made several alliances with Alfonso VII, that he would later maintain during the infancy of Alfonso VIII by officially visiting Toledo in 1167, in order to meet the Regent Nuño Pérez of Lara, with whom he would reaffirm the collaboration between the two. After the young king was officially declared an adult, in November 1169, the King Wolf increased his alliance with Alfonso, who, for his part, wanted to extend it even more including Alfonso II de Aragón -4th of june 1170-, in order to have more strength in defending the south border against the Almoravids.

Around 1171, the Almohad Caliph Abu Yaqub Yusuf, aware of the open insurrection by the Murcian king, went to the peninsula with his great army in the direction of Seville, with the intention of crashing him and his pro-independence aspirations. During the spring and summer of that year he devastated the Tajo area, delegating the following year (1172) the command of his troops to his brother Uthman ibn Abd al-Mun`im, governor of Granada, with the intention of definitively conquering the Taifa of Murcia. Ibn Mardanis and his allies came out to meet him, but they were defeated - and many of them imprisoned - in El Yellab, 16 kilometers away from the capital. Just a few days later, on March 28th, 1172, King Wolf died of a natural death, giving all power to his sons.

Alfonso VIII was left practically alone. From here, he would report victorious battles like Huete's relief in 1172 – his first military expedition- or the conquest of Cuenca in 1177, and crushing defeats like that of Alarcos in 1195. His main and crucial victory was that of the Navas de Tolosa in July 1212, that caused the definitive collapse of the Almohad forces, opening widely the gates of the Guadalquivir river valley. For better or worse, there were only five Christian kingdoms left that could face the powerful Almohad: Castile, Leon, Aragon and Portugal, and Navarre in the rearguard.

In the economic sphere, as already indicated, the Almoravid dinar, also called morabetin – “*medcales morabitinis*”- had been being used for transactions of some importance, as the typical currency in Christian territory, Toledo being the main center of gold transactions and commercial relations with *al-Ándalus*. Once the Murcia Taifa surrendered to the Almohad troops, the supply of gold coins from the allied Taifas towards the Christian north was cut off<sup>3</sup>, creating a monetary void that Alfonso VIII was forced to fill in. This involved considerable economic efforts, since it was not easy for a Christian King in minority to obtain such a large quantity of gold that was needed to be able to mint what would ultimately be a large gold monetary mass.<sup>4</sup>

Since those were years in which the rivalry against the Almoravids - "those devoted to God" or "those who lived in fortress convents or *ribats*- had disappeared, and since the emerging new power was that of the Almohads, there was no objection to also calling the new currency born of this initiative with a romance derivation of the same singular Arabic word (أ رات al-Murābit) or the plural (أ طون al-Murābitun) which was that ethnic group coming from the African Atlas were calling themselves; establishing in the Romance language its definitive name: *morabetino* or *morabetti*<sup>5</sup>.

At first, it had an average weight of 3,814 gr<sup>6</sup> –of which 3,638 were fine gold (83 of 89 percent purity, that is, some 870 /1000)- and a liberalization and exchange value of 6 sueldos of 12 deniers towards 1179 (72 total deniers) that according to the texts switched in 1197 -although it probably happened before- to 7,5 sueldos also of 12 deniers -90 deniers, therefore-, culminating towards 1217 in 8,66 sueldos -or what it is the same, 104 deniers per piece-. There is physical and documentary evidence of their existence since 1173<sup>7</sup>, although some manuscripts take it back to 1172, although no physical specimen is known for this date.

The main typological characteristics of these golden pieces<sup>8</sup>, that made them recognizable, were the presence of a cross potent<sup>9</sup>, that from 1173 to 1183 is accompanied by a star at the bottom of the supposed symbol of the Christian faith; in a clear substitution of the typical Arabic legend of Islamic coins (“*No hay divinidad, sino Dios*”- “*There is no deity, but God*”), also including a mention to the Pope of Rome (“*Imán de la iglesia cristiana, el Papa de Roma*”- “*Iman of the Christian church, the Pope of Rome*”).

<sup>3</sup> The morabetins “lupines” minted by ibn Mardanis and by his predecesor in the throne of Murcia - Abenayad.

<sup>4</sup> Read for more details Jacques Le Goff: “*La Edad Media y el dinero. Ensayo de antropología histórica*”, Akal, 2012, pp. 69, where he says: “*When the last of the Almoravid sovereigns of Spain, Mohammed Ben Saad stopped coining gold in Murcia in 1170, the King of Castile Alfonso VIII, began to mint in Toledo his own morabetins or maravedis*”.

<sup>5</sup> Simplified in some occasions and by homophony with the Islamists in “*dinar alfonsí*” and even with the Word “*mizgal*” (“*dinar*” in Arabic) that defines this monetary type, and which was transformed in romance in “*mizcal*” or “*mencal*”.

<sup>6</sup> That corresponds to 1/64 of the Castilian mark or of Burgos, to 75 pieces in mark.

<sup>7</sup> The first mention that we have of them comes from a diploma included in the cartulary of the monastery of Santa María de Rueda (Soria) dated in 1172 by which Guillermo Carrer and his wife Azirón deliver to the abbot Martín 10 “mencales” for the funerals of each one: “*si vero ego prior mortuus fuero habeant monachi medietatem meam datis pro sepultura decem mencalibus... datis pro sepultura uxoris mee decem menchalibus*”. This appointment is confirmed one year later in a romance script in Toledo where we are informed of the sale of an inn in the neighborhood of San Ginés for the price “*cabal de treinta mizcales de oro, del oro alfonsí, bueno de peso y cuño*”.

<sup>8</sup> Recently published by Manuel Mozo Monroy: «*Estudio y catalogación de los morabetinos arábigos monolingües y bilingües labrados en Castilla durante los reinados de Alfonso VIII, Enrique I y Fernando III*», *Omni, Revista Numismática*, núm. 7, (París, april 2013), pp. 165-186.

<sup>9</sup> Which transformed it in a propaganda coin, because despite being written in Arabic characters, it proclaimed the cross and the Christian religion, as an antagonistic and differentiating element from Islam. The implicit invocation of “*noli vinci a malo, sed vince in bono malum*”- Do not let yourself be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans, Rom. 12,21) seems obvious, a circumstance ratified by the legend of this typology, like we will verify later in this article.

After the year 1184 and until 1218, the star would be replaced by the Latinized legend “ALF”, abbreviation of the Christian king name Alfonso VIII, shifting the star symbol to a similar position on the back of the coin (*Fig. 5*). Due to the constant presence of this cross, these Morabetins were known in the documents of the time as “cross morabetins”, in the same way that based on the presence or not of the Latin inscription alluding to King Alfonso – “ALF”- they were also known as “monolingual or bilingual Alphonsian Maravedis”<sup>10</sup>.



Fig. 4 and Fig. 5: Monolingual Morabetin of Alfonso VIII minted in Toledo in 1212 Safar = 1174 A.D.; and Bilingual Morabetin of Alfonso VIII minted in Toledo in 1240 Safar = 1202 A.D.

We should not forget two other remarkable features of theirs; and it is the fact that said morabetins were always minted in Toledo -the only Christian workshop that had sufficient technical means to mint coins using Arabic characters, in addition to having employed workers of Mozarabic origin who were able to use the Semitic language with ease -, and that were dated by the calendar of the Safar era<sup>11</sup>, 38 years after the Gregorian calendar –“Anno Domini”- which is the one Christians would use to date their historically memorable events<sup>12</sup>.

It is also important to note that, although initially minting these “monolingual” morabetins was really a very scarce event, as the minting of the “bilingual” ones was advancing, the former were minted increasingly in larger quantities as well, until quite a high number of them were produced yearly. For many years, even after the death of the King of Castile, they actually became the true bastions of value transactions, not only in the Castilian trade, but also in the Leonese and the peninsular ones<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Some examples would be: “maravedís de bono auro et de peso et de cruz”, “bonos alfonsíes de auro et pondere”, “moravedis bonos alfonsíes d’oro et de peso” (Menéndez Pidal, Ramón: Documentos lingüísticos de España, t. I, Imprenta de Juan Carlos de la Peña, Madrid, 1919, docs. 155, 157, and 275).

<sup>11</sup> Sometimes these golden morabetins are usually dated by the Hispanic Era, which in reality, is a small mistake, since it is in really “al-safar” what is really written on them.

<sup>12</sup> The Hispanic Era is the calculation that counts the years from the year 38 b. J.C. (716 of the Rome Era) and it was used very frequently in Antiquity and in almost all the Middle Ages of the Iberian Peninsula and even in southern transpyrenean areas of France. Therefore, at the cited date of the Hispanic era we must subtract 38 years from it always. The Hispanic era served to date documents of all the Christian kingdoms, although in Catalonia and Aragon their use was more restricted because they preferred dating by years of reign in their documents. It was also used by the Mozarabic people of Toledo and therefore received the name of “The blonde Era” or *ta’rij al-sufr* (*sufr* is the plural form of *asfar*, which means yellow or blond). The Arabs applied this name to the Christians of Toledo, while they ruled Toledo until 1085, when the city was handed over by the Muslims to the Christian King of Castile Alfonso VI. The Hispanic era was used in Aragon mainly from 1180 to 1349, year in which its use was prohibited by Pedro IV, with the exception of Valencia, where it was continued using until 1358. In Castile and Leon, it was abolished by Juan I in the Segovian Courts, in the year 1383, with effects of December 25th, 1384. The Hispanic era stopped being used in Portugal by mandate of Juan I, starting with 22nd of August 1422. Navarre continued to use it until the fifteenth century. Despite these prohibitions, its use persisted in later years (Santos Agustín García Larragueta: *La datación histórica*, Pamplona, Ediciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 1998; same author, *Cronología (Edad Media)*, Pamplona: Ediciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 1976; y Pedro Cano Ávila y Aly Tawfik, “Estudio epigráfico-histórico de las inscripciones árabes de los portalones y ventanas del Patio de las Doncellas del Palacio de Pedro I en el Real Alcázar de Sevilla”, Apuntes del Alcázar de Sevilla, nº 5 (2004), 52-79, nota nº 24).

<sup>13</sup> As it will be seen below, there are identical Morabetins to this typology coined during the reign of Enrique I and Fernando III, but who have invariably the inscription “ALF”.

Although King Alfonso died in 1214, they continued to mint morabetins until 1217 (1255 of Safar), also during the brief reign of Enrique I (Fig. 6), the youngest son of Alfonso VIII and Lady Leonor of Plantagenet, who was crowned on October the 6th 1214, when he was only ten years old, for being the seventh surviving male child of the royal marriage, but he unfortunately also lost his life still young, on June 6th, 1217 in the Episcopal Palace of Palencia. During those years, it was Berenguela of Castile, Enrique's older sister, who exercised the king's guardianship and the regency of the kingdom, being the one to also receive the crown of Castile in Valladolid, on August 31st, 1217, at the death of the teenager Enrique, as there was no other living son of Alfonso VIII to inherit it. In the same act, the new queen gave the Castilian royal scepter in favor of her son Fernando - a great grandson of Alfonso VIII -, a 16-year-old boy at the time, who would be the third of that name and who would remain in the history with the name of The Saint.



Fig. 6: Bilingual Morabetin in behalf of Alfonso VIII minted in Toledo in 1255 Safar=1217 a.D. during the reign of Enrique I

Recently, it has been discovered that there is a new and very rare morabetin coined in 1218 -Safar Era of 1256 (Fig. 7), during the first year of the reign of Fernando III; which suggests the possibility that some of those minted in 1217, lacking the month of coinage, could have been carved during the reign of the new Castilian king.



Fig. 7: Bilingual morabetin in behalf of Alfonso VIII minted in Toledo in 1256 Safar=1218 a.D. during the reign of Fernando III

In the same way as for the kingdom of Leon, there was instituted the tax on “*moneda forera*”, by which the king committed not to break or devalue the metal content in his coinage for seven years, in exchange for a “*pecho*” or payment from his subjects, there was another similar canon called simply “*Moneda*” for the Castilian gold coins, which possibly also included those of billon. This would explain the fact that the Morabetins coined in the days of Enrique I and Fernando III had the same type, pattern, value and weight as those of Alfonso VIII, although he had already died.

There are documents of this period that refer to the distribution of percentages of benefits on “*moneda*” – “*tertiam partem de monetae*”-, but none of them clarify whether this tax was renewable every certain number of years. Today we can be sure that the Alfonsine Morabetins were coined, more or less, continuously (there are years for which we still do not know a physical example) from 1173 to 1218, which makes a total of 45 years of Castilian golden emissions with Muslim influence.

Returning to the specific study of the Morabetins of this first type - monolingual ones-, it can be said that for the years 1211 to 1221 of Safar (1173 to 1183 Christian Era, read from right to left and changing only the year of minting), their Complete legends are the following:

Anv: IA[central field]: رومة العظمى / المسيحية بابة / امام البيعة , Cross / “*Imam of the church / christian, [the] Pope / of the big Rome*<sup>14</sup>”. (A: “*Imam, albai'a / al-masihiya baba / ruma al'adhamaa*”).

EI[External inscription]: بسم الاب و الابن والروح القدس الاله الواح من امن و تعمد يكون سالما : “*In the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit, the only God, the one who has believed and been baptized, will be saved*”. (A: “*Bismi al ab wa al ibn wa al ruh al qadus al ilah al wahad min amana wa ta'amad yakün salaman*”).

Rev: IIA[central field]: و نصره / ايده الله / الفونش بن شنجة / القتولقين/امام [ ] , “*Emir (Prince) / of the Catholics / Alfonso son of Sancho / God help him (Allah) / and protect him*”. (A: “*Iman / al-qatuliqin / alfunsh ibn shanya / aiadahu allah / wa nasrahu*”).

EI[External inscription]: ضرب هذا الدينار بمدينة طليطلة سنة احد عشر و مائتين و الف الصفر : “*It was coined this dinar in Medina Toledo year nineteen and two hundred and a thousand Safar*” (1219). (A: “*Duriba hada al dinar bi madinat tulaytula sana ahad ashar wa miata'in wa alf al safar*”).



بسم الاب والابن والروح القدس الله الواحد من امانة وتعهد يكون سالما

EI: salvo / será / sea bautizado / y / crea / el que / único / Dios / Santo / del Espíritu / y / del Hijo / y / del Padre / En nombre

ضرب هذا الدينار بمدينة طليطلة سنة تسع عشرة و مائتين و ألف الصفر

IIM: de Safar / mil / y / doscientos / y diecinueve / año / Toledo / en medina / dinar / este / fue acuñado

It is important to note that, although there could exist the possibility of having minted these morabetins in all the years of the mentioned Safar Age- that is, from 1211 to 1221-, only six of them have survived till our times: 1211 (1173 a.D.), 1212 (1174 a.D.), 1213 (1175 a.D.), 1219 (1181 a.D.), 1220 (1182 a.D.) and 1221 (1183 a.D.)<sup>15</sup>. Below are examples of each of them:

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that until the fourteenth century the papal residence was in the Roman basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano (San Juan de Letrán) - near the Coliseum - and not in the San Pedro, located in the current Vatican City - old “Vaticinium-Vaticinio” or “Vatis canum- Song of the Prophet), where Constantine had ordered to build, on a pagan cemetery, a great basilica in honor of the before mentioned saint, initiator of the Christian bishopric of Rome.

<sup>15</sup> As we have already indicated, from the year 1122 of Safar, the visual format of the Alfonsinan morabetins changed slightly, adding the Latin word “ALF”, initial of the monarch name, making them bilingual. These mintings are already outside the scope of this work. However, we recommend reviewing a compendium of all of this in Manuel Mozo Monroy: *Enciclopedia de la Moneda Medieval Románica en los Reinos de León y Castilla* (ss. VIII-XIV); Madrid, October December 2017, vol. 2, pp. 273-296 about Alfonso VIII, pp. 421-425 about Enrique I; y vol. 3, pp. 23-25 about Fernando III.



Fig. 8: Monolingual Morabetins of Alfonso VIII minted in Toledo in (a) 1211, (b) 1212, (c) 1213, (d) 1219, (e) 1220, and (f) 1221.

### Specific study about the Golden Arabic monolingual Morabetin minted in 1218 of Safar Era.

On Friday, August 3rd, 2018 at 10:15 p.m., a metal detectorist posted a photo of what looked like a golden Arab coin in the Facebook forum called “*Detektor Danmark*”, that is dedicated in general terms, to encourage and inform about the detection of metallic elements in Denmark - among which there are of course, coins. As soon as the staff of the Southwest Jutland Museum became aware of this publication, they contacted the coin founder to obtain more information about it.

In Denmark, the detection of metals is considered a legal practice, and everyone can try their luck, after obtaining a license from the owner of the land where they will be doing this activity. However, the findings of the medieval period - or earlier - are reviewed by law and usually fall under the jurisdiction of the “*Treasure Trove Act*” or the Law about treasure location (*Danefæ*, in Danish). Although it seems incredible, this regulation started in the Middle Ages and it is based on

the principle that the King (today, the State) is the owner of everything that no one has possession of.

It is the National Museum of Copenhagen that decides what a National Treasure is, or what finding is likely to be recognized as of patrimonial interest. If a finding is declared as such, it becomes directly part of the National Museum of Denmark collections and the discoverer obtains a reward, paid by the State itself, which immediately becomes its owner with full rights.

The archeology in the small country of Denmark is a state monopoly, carried out and put into legal practice by 27 different museums, each with its own well-defined geographical area of action, and supervised by the Culture Agency –“*Slots og Kulturstyrelsen*”, in Danish-. This network of national archeological museums has regular and permanent contacts with most of the active metal detectorists in each area, and it is the one that serves as a legal and official connection with the state system. This system has really had and is having great success because today it operates with total clarity and precision throughout Denmark, for the overall benefit of the Danish heritage.

Black market sales seem to be almost non-existent today and every year local museums receive thousands of findings, which will increase the databases of local findings before being transmitted to the National Museum.

Local museums are the main reason for the success of this model and, in percentage, high scientific standards are being achieved in the detection of archeologically interesting locations thanks to the detectorists: almost all places of positive searches are recorded with GPS, keeping archaeological sites localized and the artefacts discovered are placed in separate bags that are not cleaned, that is they are preserved just as they came out of the soil.



Fig. 9. Gold Morabetin found in Gørding, Denmark, before and after the restoration. Diameter 26 mm, Weight 3,65 grams. On the back, there are traces of a needle mount, which shows that the coin was used as a brooch. Ref. Inventory nº SJM679x4. Photo: Museum of Southwest Jutland.

Another very important and very useful development in the last years is the increase of the internet social networks, as a place of sharing information among the detectorists. There are many national, regional or local groups. Although they are not run by museum professionals, these self-regulated communities are governed by high ethical standards, and serve as important bases and sources of education and discipline for newcomers.

The laws and disciplinary conduct relating to the metal detection are very different from one country to another. The system based on mutual trust between Detectors, Museums and State in Denmark, is the main reason why a unique find, such as that of the Hispanic gold coin presented in this article, is delivered immediately and without conflictive interests, to the nearest museum and with competent jurisdiction in the area of its location, thus making it accessible to the general public and to the numismatic community in particular.

On Monday, August 6th, we visited, Jean Stokholm, the finder of the coin, who works as a carpenter and lives in Gørding, who gave the gold coin to the estate. (*Fig. 9*). This interesting piece, after being professionally cleaned, was photographed again and everything related to the geopolitical and historical environment of said coin was investigated.



*Fig. 10. Exact location of the find. Map: Museum of Southwest Jutland.*

The coin was found in the village of Gørding, in southwestern Jutland, 20 kilometers away from the important medieval city and diocesan center of Ribe. The place of the find was not far away from the Romanesque town church, in the middle of a farm field. From old cadastral maps that date back to 1800, we were able to identify that this field has been cultivated for at least 200 years, although with total certainty its history goes back far more.

Having very few written sources preserved before the year 1400 in Denmark, we do not know much about the town of Gørding in the Middle Ages, but what we can affirm is that neither the known archaeological sites, the names of the places nor the architecture of the church are nothing extraordinary, compared to similar archaeological and territorial environments in the area. Gørding is, in general terms, just another medieval village (*Fig. 10*).

At this point it is important to note that the appearance of Arabian gold *dinars* in northern Europe is an extremely rare circumstance. Up to date, less than twenty are known in contrast to the millions of silver dirhems that have appeared (*Steuer 2002*).

Regarding to the Danish area, only three are known, all found by metal detectorists, on the island of Bornholm. In 2001, a gold coin was discovered that turned out to be a golden imitation of an Arab coin. Both the place of minting and the date of this piece are uncertain (*Moesgaard & Rispling 2002*). In 2014, two Fatimid dinars from the 11th century appeared in Ahlesminde Hoard (*Ingvardsen & Laursen 2014*). It is therefore important to emphasize that Gørding's currency is the

first purely Christian currency -although it is a Morabetino written in the Arabic language- of the Iberian Peninsula in Denmark.

If we return to the coin itself, its diameter is 26 mm, having a total weight of 3.65 grams -in spite of having the gospel missing caused by deteriorations of time-. It is slightly damaged in two small external areas, most likely due to the passage of a plow or the pressure of some heavy stone on its sides, also presenting slight superficial warping. However, and for the rest, the general state of the piece is a very good one.

On the back, there are clear traces of the ancient presence of a molten needle to the surface of the piece, and of a frame welded to fit the needle, which more than likely was at the time a small copper plate-. There are also clear traces of an attached circular brooch lock also molten to the coin. This type of ornamentation is well known due to other coin-brooches (Fig. 11). They are therefore simple brooches or pieces of jewelry located in Denmark, which are known to have been very popular throughout Jutland during the period from 1050 to 1250.



Fig. 11. A type of 12th century coin-brooch found during an excavation in Ribe, made with silver-plated copper alloy, and with a needle, saddle, and reed arrangement similar to the traces present in the gold coin discovered in Gørding. Diameter: 26 mm. Ref. Inventory nº ASR2090x1. Photo: Museum of Southwest Jutland

Often, coin-shaped brooches were used as pairs of links to seal chests, or as a string of chains to tie or unite garments in the form of Visigothic fibulae. However, this same arrangement that presents the needle in this case, has many parallels with other known Danish findings and leaves little doubt that the coin arrived in Denmark relatively soon after it was minted. The position of the needle also reflects that who tried to make this coin into a brooch was not able to place the needle correctly, so the cross that is present on the front of the piece would not be placed horizontally on top, but laterally.

It is very important to note that the discovery of this coin-brooch is not a common finding, but a unique and isolated one, and therefore it is impossible to consider that it is part of a treasure because it is not linked to any other archaeological dateable element.

The findings of objects from the Iberian Peninsula are very rare in medieval Denmark. From the fourteenth century, small quantities of Iberian ceramics arrived in Scandinavia in the form of tin-glazed boards and unglazed ceramic amphoras, indicating the existence of a certain level of trade, at a relatively small scale. Prior to the year 1300, the few Iberian findings located in Scandinavia are more representative of the exoticism acquired by pilgrims who visited the city of Santiago de Compostela or by those who docked in the ports of the Basque Country, for both commercial and religious reasons, in coastal territories that, at that time, in that year of Safar in 1218 -Gregorian in 1180- belonged to the kingdom of Castile.

Since the 12th century, Danish pilgrims traveled to “*Sancti Iacobi-Santiago*” in increasing amounts from the city of Ribe. Known is that the scallop shells –“*pectem iacobaeus*”-, are not indigenous to Danish waters, although they have been nevertheless discovered with a certain profusion in medieval necropolises, as well as in the sedimentary layers and urban archaeological strata found throughout Jutland, justifying direct evidence of the indicated visits to the Tomb of the

Compostellan Apostle. Ribe was also, therefore, one of those ports most elected for the departure and arrival of those pilgrims who traveled from Denmark, to “Spania”, or those who returned from the Galician coasts, or from the cantabrian territory near France.

Purely, there is no way to discover how this gold coin reached Gørding, but the most probable explanation must be as a token or "souvenir" of a Christian pilgrim - a circumstance that is supported by the presence of the cross on the coin obverse-. Nor can we rule out that it was simply a casual loss of a stranger passing through the village port. Although what seems more likely is that it was a local aristocrat who had lost it. In any case, it is true that all gold coinage was highly praised and desired in medieval Denmark, as in any other European city or town. And that without any doubt, we will never know for sure what was the reason why it got there, nor the ultimate reason for its loss.

This would be the main reason that prevents us from knowing, what was the origin of the coin, or the place from which it left the Hispanic territory. Purely, this golden morabetin should never have circulated in Leonese territory - that is, in the geopolitical spaces corresponding to the “*Campus Stellae-Compostela*”, ruled in those years by Fernando II, king of Leon-, but exclusively in Castilian territory, whose king was Alfonso VIII- that is to whom the Arabic inscriptions carved in this golden morabetin dated in 1180 are referring to.

But since gold coins in general, ran almost freely throughout Europe, -and with much more reason to the length and breadth of the Jacobean road-, is why we do not rule out that Santiago, where the existence of a “guild of money changers” for those years is documented, could have been the place where it could have been picked up by the Danish pilgrim, that would end up taking it to Ribe. In short words, it could have gone out through Galicia -Leon Kingdom- or via the Basque Country and Cantabria -Castile Kingdom-, with final destination the Danish port of Ribe.

Whatever it was, we do not want to finish this work without leaving a clear and powerful record, that this Morabetin is a faithful witness of the cultural and economic exchange between the Nordic Christian population with its peninsular Spanish homonyms. But what is really important about this coin is the fact that it is the **first and only known piece of monolingual Arabic coinage of King Alfonso VIII of Castile, coined in the year 1218 of Safar**, - which, as we have already indicated, corresponds to the Christian year of 1180-, date for which we did not have any reliable proof that this sovereign had coined gold morabetins. It is therefore this piece, reflection and faithful witness that the winner of Las Navas, coined golden morabetins in Toledo in 1180.

### Epigraphic coin description



Toledo (1218 Safar = 1180 a.C.). Diameter: 26 mm. Weight: 3,65 gr. R: Unique known exemplar. Collection of the Sydvestjyske Museer in Ribe (Denmark), Finds number SJM679x4.

Obverse: Inscription: Cross/ Imam of the church/ christian, pope/ of the big rome. Reading in Arabic: *Cruz/ Imam albai'a/ al masihiya baba/ ruma al 'adhamaa<sup>16</sup>*.  
 + امام البيعة / المسيحية بابة / رومة العظمى

Lettering in Observe: Inscriptions: In the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit, the only God, the one who has believed and been baptized, will be saved. Reading in Arabic: *Bismi al ab wa al ibn wa al ruh al qadus al ilah al wahad min amana wa ta'amad (yakiün) saliman.*  
 بسم الاب و الابن والروح القدس الله الواحد من امن و تعمد (يكون) سالما

Reverse: Year 1218 in Arabic characters. Inscriptions: Emir/ of the Catholics/ Alfonso son of Sancho/ help him Allah/ and protect him. Reading in Arabic: *Amir/ alqatuliqin/alfunsh ibn shanya/ aiadahu Allah/ wa nasrahu/ min nun* (there are two letters of the engraver or control of the mint).  
 امير/ القتولقين/ الفونش بن شنجة/ ايده الله/ و نصره/من

Lettering in Reverse: Inscriptions: This dinar was coined in Madinat Tulay (tula year) eight and ten and two hundred (and thousand of the safarian era) (1218). Reading in Arabic: *Duriba hada al dinar bi madinat tulay (tula sana) zaman 'ashara wa miatain (wa alf al safar)* (1218).  
 ضرب هذا دينار بمدينة طلي (طلة سن) ثمان عشر و ماتين (والف الصفر)

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<sup>16</sup> We thank Felipe Agüera Cachinero for his help in the correct translation of these monetary inscription in ancient Arabic.

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