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Note on a peculiar Arab-Sasanian coinage of Ibn al-Ash'ath

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Abstract

The present note offers a new, and hopefully more nuanced, reading for a cryptic marginal legend on an issue of the Umayyad-era rebel 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ash'ath (d. *circa* 85 AH/704 CE). Comparing this legend with several marginal legends of like character, and contextualising the formulae within contemporary religious idiom as expressed in late ancient Arabic-Islamic epigraphy, it is argued that all these legends contain proper nouns invariably belonging to the issuing authority, in conjunction with invocations addressed to God, in an attempt to establish a hierarchic relationship between the two. Drawing on literary sources, it is then demonstrated that the legend of the Ibn al-Ash'ath issue does indeed mention the name of an individual, the local governor, Kharasha ibn Mas'ūd ibn Wathima, a new name in the repertoire of governors known through Arab-Sasanian coinage. Based on these results, a case for further reliance on literary, epigraphic, papyrological, and other forms of evidence in the study of numismatics is made. A new chronology, based on numismatic evidence, for Ibn al-Ash'ath's rebellion is also proposed.

The rebellion (*circa* 80–84 AH/699–704 CE) of the Umayyad general 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ash'ath al-Kindī, more commonly known as Ibn al-Ash'ath to both medieval sources and modern scholarship, marked a low point in the history of the house of Marwān (r. 65–132 AH/685–750 CE), and briefly threatened its very existence.¹ There still are many questions concerning Ibn al-Ash'ath's rebellion that have yet to be addressed, of which the most important are its socio-political background, chronology, and ideological hue. Numismatic evidence is very important for the course of his rebellion, since the Arab-Sasanian coinage of the era always has a date, a mint name, and the name of the person in charge of the place where it was struck, as well as a short slogan that provides an indication, even if ambiguous or banal, of the individual's belief.

¹ On Ibn al-Ash'ath's revolt, see Clifford E. Bosworth, *Sistān under the Arabs: From the Islamic Conquest to the Rise of the Ṣaffārids (30–250/651–864)* (Rome, 1968), pp. 55–63; 'Abd al-Ameer 'Abd Dixon, *The Umayyad Caliphate 65–86/684–705: A Political Study* (London, 1971), pp. 151–168; Redwan Sayed, *Die Revolte des Ibn al-Aṣṣaṭ und die Koranleser: Ein Beitrag zur Religions- und Sozialgeschichte der frühen Umayyadenzeit* (Freiburg, 1977), especially pp. 192–276; Laura Vecchia Vaglieri, 'Ibn al-Ash'ath', *El²*. Older treatments include Jean Périer, *Vie d'al-Hadjdjādī ibn Yousof (41–95 de l'hégire = 661–714 de J.-C.): d'après les sources arabes* (Paris, 1904), pp. 154–204; and Julius Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall* (Calcutta, 1927), pp. 232–251. For the military background to the rebellion in Sijistān, see Clifford E. Bosworth, 'Ubaidallāh b. Abī Bakra and the "Army of Destruction" in Zābulistān (79/698)', *Der Islam* 50 (1973), pp. 268–283.

Sadly enough, however, Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s coinage and Umayyad coinage produced during the period of his rebellion are both equally underexplored, and there are many questions about them that have yet to be answered.²

The present study is limited to a very small feature of the coinage naming Ibn al-Ash‘ath—an issue from only two nearby mints during a single year—but a very brief summary of the coin evidence for his government and rebellion may be useful. A full study would have to take into account all the monetary production of southern Iran from the appointment of ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Abī Bakra, Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s predecessor, in 78 AH/698 CE. He is named only on *dirhams* with the mint abbreviation SK (for the provincial mint of Sakastān/Sijistān/Sīstān) in 79 and 80 AH/698–699 CE. Immediately to the west, several cities in Kirmān issued coins naming al-Muhallab ibn Abī Šufra and his son Yazīd in 78 AH/697 CE, but virtually nothing in the next three years.³ Cities in Fars produced a very regular, elegant, and carefully made series of *dirhams* naming al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf from 76–79 AH/695–699 CE.

The latter year was a major turning point: the previous coinage continuing Sasanian precedent was terminated and replaced by a new Islamic coinage with Arabic inscriptions only. Although at least 42 cities in the caliphate took up production of the new *dirhams* in the first year, their introduction was uneven. While there were seven mints striking the new *dirham* in Khūzistān, there were only five in Fārs, two in Kirmān (known today from only one coin each), and none in Sijistān.

Sijistān’s continuation of Sasanian-style coinage is fortunate for the historian, because that coinage, unlike the anonymous new *dirhams*, names the official in authority, providing definitive evidence for Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s chronology. In the year 80 AH/699 CE this mint’s issue of *dirhams* naming ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Abī Bakra was followed by *dirhams* naming ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad (ibn al-Ash‘ath), fixing his appointment as governor and commander, and ending the long-standing uncertainty as to the chronology of his revolt.⁴ The mint of Sijistān issued *dirhams* naming Ibn al-Ash‘ath in every year from 80–84 AH/699–704 CE. In the latter year and 85 AH/703–704 CE, *dirhams* were issued in the name of the successor appointed for him by al-Ḥajjāj, ‘Umāra ibn Tamīm, fixing the year 84 AH as the end of Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s rebellion.

The coin issues of southern Iran during Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s revolt are diverse and complicated, mainly because of the revolt. They include:

- 1) *dirhams* of Sasanian type naming ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad, that is, Ibn al-Ash‘ath himself, from Sijistān (Zaranj or Bust) dating from 80–84 AH; from

² Modern research on the subject begins with John Walker, *A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum*, Vol. i: *A Catalogue of the Arab-Sassanian Coins (Umayyad Governors in the East, Arab-Ephthalites, ‘Abbāsīd Governors in Ṭabaristān and Bukhārā)* (London, 1941), which is still an essential reference. It is followed by Heinz Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik* (Braunschweig, 1973); Stephen Album in Stephen Album and Tony Goodwin, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean*, Vol. i: *The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period* (Oxford, 2002); and Hodge Mehdi Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics and History during the Early Islamic Period in Iran and Iraq* (London, 2019). Album in particular breaks new ground in attempting a general chronological survey and geographical summaries of the coinage of each province, providing a foundation on which Malek, whose book is likely to be the new standard reference, builds admirably, but there is still much historical work to be done. We are grateful to Mehdi Malek for generously sharing with us drafts and proofs, a great help in the composition of this article.

³ Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, pp. 33–34; Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Vol. i, pp. 158–178.

⁴ The issue is not rare: Widād al-Qazzāz, ‘al-Dirham al-Islāmī al-maḍrūb ‘alā al-ṭirāz al-sāsānī li-‘abd al-raḥmān ibn muḥammad al-ash‘ath’, *Sumer* 26 (1970), pp. 285–289; Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, plate 26, no. 371; American Numismatic Society, holding number 1972.169.168. For the problems attendant upon chronology, see Vecchia Vaglieri, ‘Ibn al-Ash‘ath’.

- Khabīṣ in Kirmān (only two examples known), 83 AH; from Bīshāpūr, Iṣṭakhr, Dārābjird, and Jahrum in Fārs in 82 AH; and from Bīshāpūr alone in 83 AH;⁵
- 2) *dirhams* naming Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s governors: ‘Amr ibn Laqīt, five mints in Kirmān, 82-83 AH;⁶ ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, Basra, 83 AH, and ‘Kirmān’ (= Sīrajān?) 84 AH;⁷ ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Āmir al-Mujāshī‘ī, Sijistān, 84 AH;⁸ otherwise unknown figures Khālīd ibn Abī Khālīd, Jayy, 83 AH;⁹ and ‘Abd Allāh b. Baṣṭām, one mint in Kirmān, 82 AH;¹⁰ and not to overlook ‘Umāra b. Tamīm, appointed by al-Ḥajjāj to take over from Ibn al-Ash‘ath, Sijistān, 84-85 AH;¹¹
 - 3) *dirhams* naming al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, from Bīshāpūr, 80-81 and 83 AH; Ardashīr-Khurra, 80-81 AH; Iṣṭakhr, 82 AH; Fasā, 83 AH;¹²
 - 4) copper *pashīz* coins of a variety of types, with Sasanian, Byzantine, or fanciful Iranian images, sometimes with a mint name, sometimes with an unidentifiable official’s name, and very rarely with a date; at present not susceptible to meaningful organisation;¹³
 - 5) Islamic reformed *dirhams*: in 79 AH/699-700 CE, the first year of issue in southern Iran, *dirhams* were struck in some 21 mints from Basra to Kirmān; in 80 AH, 17 mints; in 81 AH, 13; in 82 AH, seven; in 83 AH, 13; in 84 AH, four; and none thereafter until 90 AH/708-709 CE. In 85-89 AH, all eastern mints except Wāsiṭ were closed.¹⁴

All these various issues require to be better catalogued in synthetic historical order to employ the numismatic evidence for Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s career, but this task is beyond the purview of the present study.

Under Ibn al-Ash‘ath, two cities of the Dārābjird district in eastern Fārs—the capital, Dārābjird, and Jahrum to its west—issued, in the year 70 of the Yazdgird regnal era (overlapping the years 82-83 AH/701-702 CE), an otherwise regular series with the unique marginal legend *بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ رَبِّ حَرَسِهِ*. Due to the inchoate nature of the Arabic script used in these legends, which lacks those dots that distinguish between several letters, the last word may be read in several ways, but the only (somewhat) meaningful reading proposed thus far is *bi-sm allāh rabbi ḥarasahu*, ‘in the name of God; my Lord, protect him!’¹⁵ This reading is, however, vitiated by the absence of a referent for the pronouns *-hu*, ‘him’; and *-i*, ‘my’.¹⁶ Furthermore, this interpretation ignores the affinity between this marginal legend and two similar ones used by other governors in other mints.

⁵ Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Vol. i, pp. 268-270. Although some coins of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad have been attributed in earlier works to the year 81 AH, this reading results from a misunderstanding of the Middle Persian digit 3 (with thanks to Alan DeShazo who first pointed this out to one of the authors).

⁶ Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Vol. i, pp. 271-272.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255 (where it is tentatively assigned to 80 AH).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹² This is a provisional listing, as not all examples have been carefully examined. With these coins being unlike his uniform standard pre-reform coinage from 76-79 AH and of various types, and as al-Ḥajjāj was one of the principal masterminds of the Islamic coinage reform, it is very unlikely that they were issued with his formal authority. They might be issues of his adherents temporarily in control of mints, or irregular private issues with false mint names and dates. The full compilation of issues with al-Ḥajjāj’s name by Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Vol. i, pp. 277-283, includes all the post-79 AH *dirhams* without special comment.

¹³ Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Vol. i, pp. 347-377.

¹⁴ Michael G. Klat, *Catalogue of the Post-Reform Dirhams: The Umayyad Dynasty* (London, 2002), pp. 285-286, lists the *dirham* mints known to have operated in each year. The enumerations above include new discoveries.

¹⁵ Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, p. 30 (who, however, both erroneously vocalise and translate the Arabic).

¹⁶ The first-person singular possessive pronoun *-ī* is occasionally shortened to *-i* in Quranic Arabic, and the above reading would only be grammatically meaningful if one assumed that the same phenomenon is at play here; Wolfdietch Fischer, translated by Jonathan Rodgers, *A Grammar of Classical Arabic* (New Haven, 2002), p. 96.

The first of these two parallel legends is the well-known and widely attested *bi-sm allāh rabbī* ('in the name of God, my Lord') series of several governors,¹⁷ first introduced by Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān (d. 54 AH/673-674 CE¹⁸), governor of Basra and then also Kufa for the Umayyad caliph Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 41-60 AH/661-680 CE), to distinguish his anonymous coinage from that of his predecessor who had named himself. We know that Ziyād was first appointed governor only of Basra, and Kufa was later added to his domains; we also know that coins naming the Sasanian emperor Khusraw II with the marginal legend *bi-sm allāh rabbī* were issued throughout the Basran prefecture from 47-50 AH/667-670 CE; and we know that coins with the same inscription were issued throughout both zones from 50-54 AH/670-674 CE, but with 'Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān' in place of the Sasanian name. The conclusion would be that *bi-sm allāh rabbī* was Ziyād's personal slogan, used at first before his 'attachment' (*dī'wa*) to the caliph Mu'āwiya as his paternal half-brother. Until then, Ziyād, who was of unknown paternity, had no formal name to inscribe on his coins, but even after becoming Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān, the son of Mu'āwiya's father, Abū Sufyān—a name which he now proudly inscribed on his coins—he continued to employ the formula *bi-sm allāh rabbī*. The referent of the possessive pronoun 'my' in this legend is therefore Ziyād himself.¹⁹ This form of reference to God as the Lord of the writer is also known from early Islamic inscriptions, in which, following the engraver's name, the construct *rabbuhu/rabbuhā* is apposed to *allāh: āmana 'ubayd ibn muḥsin al-wā'ilī bi-llāh rabbīhi* ('Ubayd ibn Muḥsin al-Wā'ilī believes in God, his Lord');²⁰ *tawakkala ṣāliḥ ibn ḥasan 'alā allāh rabbīhi* ('Ṣāliḥ ibn Ḥasan relies on God, his Lord');²¹ *āmana bilāl abī [sic] 'umar bi-llāh rabbīhi* ('Bilāl Abū 'Umar believes in God, his Lord');²² *āmana bishr ibn nawmān [?] bi-llāh rabbīhi wa-'alayhi tawakkala wa-yathiqu bihi innahu raḥīmun karīmun* ('Bishr ibn Nawmān believes in God, his Lord, relies on Him, and trusts Him, for He is compassionate and benevolent'); and so forth.²³

¹⁷ Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, pp. 12–15 *et passim*; Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Vol. i, pp. 65–67. On p.65 Malek notes that the earliest date on coins with *bi-sm allāh rabbī* is 25, interpreted by him as a Yazdgird era date, equivalent to 36 AH/656-657 CE. However, the coins with 25, as well as those with 55—the latest date he notes for Ziyād's issues—are surely not official issues but imitations that copy Ziyād's slogan. His authentic coins were minted only from 47-54 AH. The slogan was also used by the mint SK (Zaranj or Bust) from 80-86 AH/699-705 CE, first under 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Abī Bakra (80-81 AH) and then on *dirhams* naming Ibn al-Ash'ath himself (81-84 AH), 'Umāra ibn Tamīm (84-85 AH), and Mālik ibn Misma' (85-86 AH): *ibid.*, pp. 299–300. The initiator of the practice, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Abī Bakra, was Ziyād's nephew (Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, [ed.] 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar [Cairo, 1421/2001], Vol. ix, p. 15) who possibly reused the slogan out of family loyalty. As Malek also notes, the slogan was never used on coins of Dārābjird district, which is one of the hints that the district seems to have had a special direct relationship with the caliph, not understood as yet, in the seventh century CE.

¹⁸ Muslim authorities provide various dates for Ziyād's death, but coinage with his name is abundant from 50-54 AH, with none later, suggesting the latter year as correct. The only problem is that there are no Arab-Sasanian coins of 54 AH with a different name to indicate the beginning of his successor's tenure, nor any coins at all for the next year, 55 AH, except for an implausible imitation or forgery with Ziyād's name; e.g. Walker, *Catalogue*, p. 40, no. Cam.2. One can only conclude that minting in Ziyād's realm ceased with his death and resumed only when his son 'Ubayd Allāh became governor of Basra and its dependencies in 56 AH. For an outline of Ziyād's career, his coinage, and the dates of his appointments and death, see Michael L. Bates, 'How Ziyād Made a Name for Himself' (forthcoming).

¹⁹ As noted already by Stuart D. Sears, 'The Legitimation of al-Hakam b. al-'As: Umayyad Government in Seventh-Century Kirman', *Iranian Studies* 36 (2003), pp. 5–25, at p. 16.

²⁰ 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Sa'id and Muḥammad Shafīq Khālid al-Bayṭār, *Nuqūsh ḥismā: kitābāt min ṣadr al-islām shimāl gharb al-mamlaka* (Riyadh, 1439/2017), pp. 90–91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 116–117.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

The second legend is known for one governor only, al-Ḥakam ibn Abī al-ʿĀṣ, who controlled Kirmān during the reign of Muʿāwiyā from 56–58 AH/675–677 CE.²⁴ Al-Ḥakam’s coins bear the words *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْحُكْمِ* on their obverse margins, which have been read both as *bi-sm allāh rabb al-ḥukm* (‘in the name of God, the Lord of judgment’) and as *bi-sm allāh rabb al-ḥakam* (‘in the name of God, the Lord of al-Ḥakam’).²⁵

These two issues are not entirely dissimilar to a third type of marginal legend.²⁶ This type is attested for two governors. The first, ʿAwn, is named on an irregular issue that formed part of Stuart Sears’ ‘Class II’, consisting of coins with the mint mark SK for Sijistān, but probably not from the provincial mint in its capital Zaranj.²⁷ Sears assigns the varieties of Class II to ‘the mid-sixties AH (ca. 680s CE) until ca AH 92 (CE 711), so that their minting overlapped considerably with the Class I issues’.²⁸ One of another group of related coins has the mint name Bust, which is also a plausible location for the Class II issues—at any rate, somewhere east of Zaranj. The mint was very likely set up to process the output of a large silver mine otherwise unrecorded. The relationship of this coin group and of ʿAwn himself to direct caliphal authority is doubtful. He is named on only one issue of the group, and is the only person named on any of them. Nevertheless, he was certainly a Muslim and sufficiently knowledgeable to compose a valid Arabic-Muslim slogan that can be considered alongside others.

ʿAwn’s issue, in addition to a *bi-sm allāh rabbī* legend, bears, in the first quarter of the obverse margin, a legend reading *الله ولي عون*.²⁹ Some numismatists have interpreted this legend as ‘God, master of help’,³⁰ but this reading is not only without any precedent as a religious formula, the word ʿawn also needs to be prefixed by the definite article *al-* in order to mean ‘help’ in this context.³¹ The word can only be understood as a proper name, ʿAwn, which is grammatically definite and needs no article.

²⁴ For this issue, see Sears, ‘The Legitimation of al-Ḥakam b. al-ʿĀṣ’. For some unknown reason, Sears calls him ‘al-Ḥakam ibn al-ʿĀṣ’ throughout the article, but the name legend is unmistakably *hkm y ʿawl?ʿn*—that is, al-Ḥakam ibn Abī al-ʿĀṣ. The identity of this issuing authority is unknown, and, in the absence of literary evidence explicitly connecting one of the historical figures called al-Ḥakam ibn Abī al-ʿĀṣ with Kirmān, the identifications proposed by Dale L. Bishop, ‘Problems in Arab-Sasanian Numismatics’, *Iranica Antiqua* 11 (1975), pp. 178–193, at pp. 178–180 (followed by Sears); and Heinz Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik* (Braunschweig, 1973), p. 67, remain purely conjectural.

²⁵ The reading *rabb al-ḥukm* is preferred by Album, in Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, p. 17; whereas Sears, ‘The Legitimation of al-Ḥakam b. al-ʿĀṣ’, prioritises *rabb al-ḥakam*. The discussion of this issue and that of Ibn al-Ashʿath in Malek Iradj Mochiri, *Arab-Sasanian Civil War Coinage: Manichaeans, Yazidiya [sic] and Other Khawārij* (Leiden, 1986), pp. 40–41, is completely unintelligible and has been debunked in Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, p. 17, n. 71.

²⁶ Also similar is the marginal legend *bi-sm allāh rabbīnā* of the Zubayrid governor of Basra al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Rabīʿa al-Makhzūmī; Sears, ‘Claiming Absolute Authority’, p. 17 and plate 2.

²⁷ Stuart D. Sears, ‘The Sasanian Style Drachms of Sistan’, *Yarmouk Numismatics* 10 (1998), pp. 31–42; reprinted, with errors, in the next volume of the same periodical as ‘The Immobilised Sasanian Style Drachms of Sistan’, *Yarmouk Numismatics* 11 (1999), pp. 18–28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33. These dates are to be regarded as provisional. The dating 64–92 AH is explained on pp. 38–39, n. 16, but need not be taken at face value.

²⁹ Walker, *Catalogue*, p. 22, misread this as *allāh wa-rabī ʿawr*, but, as noted by Stuart D. Sears and Hodge Mehdi Malek, ‘Claiming Absolute Authority: The Draḥms of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿĀmir al-Mujāshīʿī of Sijistān’, *American Journal of Numismatics* 18 (2006), pp. 131–140, at p. 133, there is a slant in the marginal legends of this issue, an observation that makes the reading ʿawn almost certain.

³⁰ For example, Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik*, p. 25.

³¹ We are grateful to Marijn van Putten for pointing out the absence of the definite article in the phrase.

The second governor for whom this type of marginal legend is attested is one ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amir ‘al-Na‘‘ār al-Tamīmī, who deputised for Ibn al-Ash‘ath in Sijistān—using the legend *عبد الله بن عمرو بالله / باسم الله*.³² The second word in these two inscriptions has been read differently as either *walī* (‘guardian’, ‘friend’) or *wallā* (‘appointed as governor’).³³ There are, nevertheless, several facts that militate against the reading *allāh wallā* ‘awn/‘abd allāh, the most important of which is that the syntactical structure of the sentence (subject + verb + object, instead of verb + subject + object, and with ‘awn in the nominative) is neither idiomatic nor grammatical.³⁴ In contrast, the notion of God as protector and friend (*walī*) of the believers is a recurrent motif in the Quran, where it usually denotes the bonds of friendship and patronage between the faithful and God.³⁵ Perhaps its clearest manifestation is Quran 2:257, where the Quran declares that, ‘God is the protector/friend of those who have believed’ (*allāh walī alladhīna āmanū*), as well as in Quran 3:68, where, ‘God is the protector/friend of the believers’ (*allāh walī al-mu‘minīn*).³⁶

For the early Muslims, underscoring this relationship between themselves, as ‘believers’, and their God became one way of professing their faith in Him, as the epigraphic record attests.³⁷ Extant examples are so abundant that we confine ourselves to citing just a few—those interested may consult any corpus of early Islamic epigraphica for more: a graffito in Qā‘ banī Murr, in northwestern Saudi Arabia, reads: *allāh walī bukayr ibn ‘umar wa-‘alayhi yatawakkalu*, ‘God is the guardian of Bukayr ibn ‘Umar, and upon Whom he relies’;³⁸ a host of individuals from al-Suwaydira, near Medina, in Saudi Arabia, invoke God as their *walī*, or friend-cum-guardian, in several extant graffiti.³⁹ One of them wrote: *allāh walī ḥusayn ibn ‘abd allāh wa-huwa yas‘alu llāh maghfiratan ‘an mā lā yu‘dhiru daniyyan wa-lā yuktasibu ba‘dahā ithman*, ‘God is the guardian of Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abd Allāh, and he asks God to offer him forgiveness for that which He does not pardon any lowly individual for and after which no sin would be committed’.⁴⁰ Another graffito from the same locality reads: *allāh walī yaḥyā ibn ibrahīm wa-rajāhu*, ‘God is the guardian of Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm and his hope’.⁴¹

As is clear, the phrase is simply a common formula for beseeching divine protection, borrowed from the Quran. Moreover, it would be highly idiosyncratic, perhaps even heretical, were a governor to claim that God had personally placed them in office, despite

³² For his issues, see Sears and Malek, ‘Claiming Absolute Authority’. The authors mistakenly give his name as ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amir ibn al-Mujāshī‘ ibn Dārim’, whereas al-Mujāshī‘ ibn Dārim was his clan. On him, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, (ed.) Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1387/1967), Vol. vi, p. 369; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, (eds) Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ Zirīklī (Beirut, 1417/1996), Vol. vii, p. 315 (both cited by Sears and Malek).

³³ Album, in Album and Goodwin, *Sylloge*, pp. 26 and 31, prefers the latter reading, while Sears and Malek, ‘Claiming Absolute Authority’, opt for the former.

³⁴ As noted, passingly, in Sears and Malek, ‘Claiming Absolute Authority’, p. 135. Our thanks to Marijn van Putten for alerting one of the authors to the fact that the noun ‘awn is not in the accusative here.

³⁵ Elizabeth Urban, ‘The Foundations of Islamic Society as Expressed by the Qur’anic Term *mawlā*’, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 15 (2013), pp. 23–45.

³⁶ Cf. also Quran 45:19, 5:55, and 7:196.

³⁷ For ‘believer’ as a marker of self-identity in early Islam, check Fred M. Donner, ‘From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community’, *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–2003), pp. 9–53; for its manifestation in the epigraphic record, consult Ilkka Lindstedt, ‘Who Is in, Who Is out? Early Muslim Identity through Epigraphy and Theory’, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 46 (2019), pp. 147–246.

³⁸ al-Sa‘īd and al-Bayṭār, *Nuqūsh ḥismā*, pp. 220–221.

³⁹ Sa‘īd ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Rāshid, *al-Suwaydira (al-ṭaraf qadīman): āthāruhā wa-nuqūshuhā al-islāmiyya* (Riyadh, 1430/2009), pp. 160, 246, 277, 283.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 299. Yet another example may be found in al-Sa‘īd and al-Bayṭār, *Nuqūsh ḥismā*, pp. 236–237.

Sears's and Malek's attempt at justifying this reading by alleging that the governor probably sought to legitimise his authority by making such a claim.⁴² The Umayyads and their supporters (as well as their rivals, within their own spheres of influence) did no doubt attempt to legitimise their rule by trying to establish a connection between themselves and the heavenly realm—most importantly by claiming to be the 'vicegerents of God', or *khulafā' allāh*⁴³—but for a governor to claim that they were directly appointed by God is something unheard of.

This brings us back to al-Ḥakam's coinage. Hardly any previous scholars have taken notice of the intertextuality between the marginal legend of al-Ḥakam's issue and that of the *bi-sm allāh rabbī* series,⁴⁴ as well as, to a lesser extent, 'Awn's and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir's. In the light of this intertextuality, and if the possessive pronoun in the *bi-sm allāh rabbī* series does indeed refer to the issuing authority, it seems to follow that the last word in the marginal legend of al-Ḥakam's issues is to be read *al-ḥakam*, the governor's own name—with the legend translating as 'in the name of God, the Lord of al-Ḥakam'. This way of invoking God (as the Lord of the writer) is also known from the epigraphic record: an early Arabic graffito found in Ḥiṣmā, northwestern Saudi Arabia, for instance, reads: *yā rabb muḥammad ibn 'amr ibn 'imrān ibn 'amr ibn bulayl qihu al-sayyi'āt yawm al-qiyāma*, 'o Lord of Muḥammad ibn 'Amr ibn 'Imrān ibn 'Amr ibn Bulayl, protect him from the evil deeds on the day of resurrection!'⁴⁵ This, in addition to the fact that the legends of 'Awn's and 'Abd Allāh's issues and the *bi-sm allāh rabbī* legends both establish a top-down, patron-protégé relationship between God and the issuing authority, makes it all the more likely that the al-Ḥakam issues are, likewise, to be read as *bi-sm allāh rabb al-ḥakam*, as it establishes a similar top-down relationship between al-Ḥakam and his God.

Taken together, then, these marginal legends all seem to share the same intent: to establish a hierarchic relationship between the issuing authority and God. If this interpretation is tenable, then the Ibn al-Ash'ath issue with the legend *بسم الله رب حرسه* should also be understood as an invocation which refers to God as a governor's Lord. In that case, the final word is to be read as a personal name, and the only proper noun that the consonantal skeleton can accommodate is Kharasha.

In the end, there is a historical text that confirm this all: an obscure passage in al-Balādhuri's *Ansāb al-ashraf*, on the progeny of Shaqira ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Tamīm ibn Murr ibn Udd ibn Ṭābikha, provides us with precious information bearing on the question:

amongst them [that is, Shaqira's progeny] is Kharasha ibn Mas'ūd ibn Wathīma, the commander (*ṣāhib*) of the fort [known after him as] Kharasha in Fasā, Fārs, whom Ibn al-Ash'ath made governor of Dārābjird. When Ibn al-Ash'ath was killed, Kharasha fortified himself in the stronghold, but was subsequently given quarter and brought to al-Ḥajjāj [ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī]. He eventually died in Wāsiṭ. His descendants live in Nasā.⁴⁶

⁴² For example, Sears and Malek, 'Claiming Absolute Authority'.

⁴³ On the use of this concept as an instrument for legitimisation, see Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986); and now Andrew Marsham, "'God's Caliph" Revisited: Umayyad Political Thought in Its Late Antique Context', in *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam*, (eds) Alain George and Andrew Marsham (Oxford, 2018), pp. 3–37.

⁴⁴ With the exception of Stefan Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and Its Religion on Coin Imagery', in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, (eds) Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (Leiden, 2010), pp. 149–195, at pp. 165–166.

⁴⁵ al-Sa'īd and al-Bayṭār, *Nuqūsh ḥiṣmā*, p. 146; cf. also the *rabbuhu/rabbuhā* formulations above.

⁴⁶ al-Balādhuri, *Ansāb*, Vol. xii, p. 12.

As it transpires, the governor of Dārābjird under Ibn al-Ash‘ath was indeed one Kharasha, and hence the marginal legend on the coins from these mints and in this year must be read *bi-sm allāh rabb kharasha*, ‘in the name of God, the Lord of Kharasha’, in reference to him. This, in turn, gives further potency to the suggestion that the marginal legend of al-Ḥakam’s issues should be read *bi-sm allāh rabb al-ḥakam*, in reference to the governor on whose behalf they were struck.

As mentioned, coins with Kharasha’s slogan were minted in only two places, Dārābjird and a nearby subdistrict capital, Jahrum. The first is one of the most important Iranian mints of the seventh century, one of the five district capitals of Fārs province. It is identified on silver coins of the Sasanians and the Arabs by a two-letter Middle Persian inscription, *D*², on the reverse to the right. *D*², following standard practice in the Dārābjird district (and nowhere else in Iran), is always written in this location on the coins of the district sub-mints as well. The sub-mints are identified by additional letters appended to *D*² or placed in some nearby blank space. At the time of issue of Kharasha’s coins, the letters were placed on the reverse to the left of the pillar of the fire altar. Jahrum is identified in that way by the first two letters of its Persian name, *GH*.⁴⁷ Like almost all seventh-century Iranian silver coins, the *dirhams* are dated in Middle Persian words written on the left side of the reverse, but, as is characteristic of Dārābjird district coins, the date here is in the ‘Yazdgird era’ dating from the accession of the last Sasanian emperor, Yazdgird III, in 632 CE, so that 70 on the coin equates to 82–83 AH/701–702 CE. The fire altar on the reverse with two attendants was retained on the coinage when minting under Muslim authority began, until the replacement of Iranian coinage by Islamic epigraphic coinage in 79 AH/699 CE under the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86 AH/685–705 CE).⁴⁸

The obverse image of a typical seventh-century Sasanian emperor was also retained from imperial issues. By the time these coins were issued, it was standard for the emperor’s name in the space before his portrait to be replaced by the name of an authority deemed responsible for the issue; these authorities include, according to circumstances not really understood, city, district, provincial, and regional governors as, well as sometimes, the caliph. On this issue, the name is ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad (ibn al-Ash‘ath), just as it had appeared throughout the southern provinces from the time of his appointment in 80 AH/699–700 CE, before he rebelled.⁴⁹ It is written in Middle Persian transcription, but a few coins from other mints have his name in the Arabic script following the precedent of his predecessor al-Ḥajjāj. In the wide blank margin, the second quarter from 3 to 6 o’clock on the clock face has *bi-sm allāh* followed by *rabb kharasha* in the third quarter. The triads or triangles of dots left and right of the bottom sun/moon symbol are a unique feature of all Dārābjird district issues since 41 AH/661 CE.

⁴⁷ This unique local mint identification system was first recognised and explained in 1992 by Stephen Album, ‘An Arab-Sasanian Dirham Hoard from the Year 72 Hijri’, *Studia Iranica* 21 (1992), pp. 161–195, at pp. 177–178.

⁴⁸ Although the introduction of the new coinage was a great success almost everywhere, there are some instances of Arab-Sasanian coinage, like this issue, minted after the official transition to the new coinage. Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s rebellion disrupted minting throughout southern Iran, including Fārs, where three different series of silver coins were issued, in no particular sequence or geographic pattern: 1) the official Islamic Marwanid *dirhams* ordered by al-Ḥajjāj, with Arabic inscriptions only and no images (and, in these years in Fārs, displaying many irregularities); 2) unofficial Arab-Sasanian coins naming al-Ḥajjāj but without the *shahāda* and not officially sanctioned by him or the caliph, as they lack several essential features of his pre-reform coinage, including complete uniformity at all mints; 3) Arab-Sasanian coins naming ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad (ibn al-Ash‘ath) authorised by his governors. For ‘Abd al-Malik’s reforms in the precious metals, consult Luke Treadwell, ‘Abd al-Malik’s Coinage Reforms: The Role of the Damascus Mint’, *Revue numismatique* 165 (2009), pp. 357–381.

⁴⁹ New discoveries now provide coins of the mint of Sistān dated 80 AH and naming Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s predecessor ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Abī Bakra and naming Ibn al-Ash‘ath himself, as well as issues of the same mint dated 84 AH/703 CE naming Ibn al-Ash‘ath, and others naming the first post-rebellion Marwanid governor, ‘Umāra ibn Tamīm; Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Vol. i, pp. 203–204.



Figure 1. Issue of Kharasha from Jahrum (© Bibliothèque nationale de France).

Given that al-Balādhurī's notice explicitly connects Kharasha with Fasā, the third Dārābjird district mint, it is interesting that there are no coins naming him with the distinctive letter *P* (for Pasā, the Persian name of the place) that identifies that mint in other years, nor any at all with *P* in the year 70 of the Yazdgird era. In previous decades, Fasā seems to have been somewhat more prolific than Jahrum. Coins of Fasā naming al-Ḥajjāj are known from the following year 71 of the Yazdgird era (83–84 AH/702–703 CE). These were presumably minted under the authority of loyalists after the city was retaken from Kharasha. On the Kharasha *dirhams* without a letter, however, there is a large pellet on the reverse left of the altar pillar in the place where the letter *P* appears on the Fasā *dirhams*. Is it possible then that the dot is an indication of Fasā? One can imagine a novice or newly arrived die-engraver presented with a worn coin of Fasā as a model confusing the round *P* with a solid dot. The last previous issue, dated 65 of the Yazdgird era (77–78 AH/696–697 CE), has in fact a large dot as well as the letter *P*. If all this mere speculation is real, the three mints of Kharasha's issue would be:

- 1) Dārābjird with mint letters *D'* only;
- 2) Fasā with *D'* and a dot left of the altar pillar;
- 3) Jahrum with *D'* and the digraph *GW* left of the altar pillar.

In conclusion, the above-discussed legends, as the epigraphic record demonstrates, are meant to be indicative of the issuing authority's piety rather than of their claims to absolute power, or some form of divine prerogative specifically conferred on them. They are scarcely any different from the earlier *bi-sm allāh rabbī* series, and thus do not constitute bold innovations into which new religio-political pretensions could be read. The formulae employed and ideas expressed therein are inspired by the Quran, and are well-known from contemporary material culture. This, therefore, is a further reminder of the fact that the study of coins (or, for that matter, any other specialised topic) ought not to be conducted in isolation, and note should be taken of developments, old and new, in neighbouring fields in dealing with any subject, however recondite it may be.

List of the known specimens of Kharasha's issues

- 1) Baldwin's of St James's, auction 10, September 2017, lot 3011 (Jahrum);
- 2) Classical Numismatic Group, auction 102, May 2016, lot 1251 (Dārābjird);
- 3) Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Vol. ii, plate 41, no. 481 (Jahrum);
- 4) Baldwin's, Islamic Coin Auction 9, October 2004, lot 3212 (Dārābjird);
- 5) Bibliothèque nationale de France, holding no. 1965.570 = Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik*, plate 4, no. 39 (Figure 1) (Jahrum);
- 6) Mochiri, *Arab-Sasanian Civil War Coinage*, plate 7, no. 42 (Jahrum);
- 7) Warden-Album private collection, no. 336 (Jahrum);
- 8) Morton and Eden, auction 18, March 2006, lot 8 (Jahrum);
- 9) Figure 2 (Dārābjird).



Figure 2. Issue of Kharasha from Dārābjird (© N B J the art of numismatics).

The legends on Kharasha's issues

Obverse field, to the left:

gdh

ʔzwtk (standard on all Iranian coins since the conquest)

Obverse field, to the right:

ʔdwlhmʔn

y mwhmtʔn (Middle Persian for ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad)

Obverse margin, in Arabic:

bi-sm allāh rabb kharasha (‘in the name of God, the Lord of Kharasha’)

Reverse field, to the left:

hptʔt (‘seventy’)

Reverse field, to the right:

dʔ (for Dārābjird)

Reverse field, to the left of the altar pillar (on the issues of Jahrum only):

gh (for Jahrum)