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(11th to 12th centuries): A chronological analysis

by

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Treasure hoards with Taifa coins in al-Andalus (11th to 12th centuries): A chronological analysis¹

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Abstract: In the eleventh century AD al-Andalus was divided into small kingdoms known as Taifa states. Each state struck coins, resulting in great variety in metrology and design. In recent years, several hoards with Taifa coins have been discovered in the Iberian Peninsula. These hoards often contain coins from different Taifas, including rival states, as well as foreign currency, especially Fāṭimid coins. This article analyses the spatial distribution and characteristics of these hoards, and proposes a classification and chronological order based on their composition which reflect the changes that took place in the monetary system of the Taifa states.

Key words: Islamic coins, Taifa, Almoravid, al-Andalus, eleventh to twelfth centuries

Introduction

Internal conflicts put an end to the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba and to its strong centralised power structures at the beginning of the fifth century Hegira (eleventh century AD). The fall of the Cordoban caliphate worked out well for many local leaders, most of whom came from important families or had been prominent members of the caliphal administration. They were able to set up independently resulting in al-Andalus being divided into many small kingdoms, known as Taifa states (figure 1).

This situation is reflected numismatically, since each state struck its own coins in its own mints. Borders were unstable, territories changed and some even disappeared after annexation. The constant conflicts were expensive and the taxes consequently burdensome for the people. We know of about 50 hoards containing Taifa coins which survive from this period of political fragmentation and economic impoverishment, distributed across the southern and eastern parts of the Iberian Peninsula. It should be noted that, in the western half of al-Andalus, the hoards with coins from the eleventh century do not pass the Guadiana River in the north, or its headwaters, the Tajo or the Duero in the west (figure 2).

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The coins in these hoards are usually monometallic. In the few bimetallic hoards the coins are mostly silver³ with a few, mostly poor alloy, gold coins.⁴ About twice the number of silver coins is seen in the hoards, compared with electrum or gold. In contrast to some finds from the caliphal period, where other objects or jewels appear alongside coins, the hoards from the eleventh century are composed exclusively of coins.⁵

The number of pieces the hoards contain varies considerably: some have less than 50 coins, while others have several thousands, such as the large Cordoban hoards in Haza del Carmen,⁶ the Guadalquivir River,⁷ and Belalcázar.⁸

In Taifa hoards, the most common coins are those issued by the dynasty ruling the territory where the discovery was made, though the hoards often also contain coins from other Taifas, including rival states.⁹ Figure 3 shows two examples which contain coins from almost all the kingdoms: these are the Belalcázar hoard, from the Guadalquivir valley,¹⁰ and Santa Elena hoard in Sharq al-Andalus.¹¹ This shows political borders were no barrier for currency movement. A few hoards seem to be formed exclusively of coins of only one Taifa, but we cannot be sure that any of them are complete.¹²

Taifas hoards not only contain Andalusian currency, but also African coins. This is the case of many hoards found in the Guadalquivir Valley and Sharq al-Andalus, most of which include Fāṭimid coins. The Fāṭimid dynasty, traditionally in conflict with the Umayyads over the control of certain territories in Northern Africa and the control of the Western Mediterranean, minted a large coinage, which is frequently part of the Andalusian hoards dating from the eleventh century (figure 4). In this century Fāṭimid coins, especially those from the western Mediterranean and Sicily, circulated throughout al-Andalus. They were hoarded together with the Andalusian coins and suffered the same degree of mutilation. The quantity of Fāṭimid coins varies greatly from one hoard to another. In some hoards there is a high percentage of Fāṭimid coins, especially in the Mediterranean areas. Fractional Fāṭimid coins – quarter dinars and quarter and half dirhams – are much commoner than whole

³ One exception is the Alcañiz (Teruel) hoard (Lasa, 1990, pp. 249–58).

⁴ The hoards of Lucena in Cordoba (Canto, 1992, p. 38 and 1994, pp. 294–5), Río Alcaide in Vélez Blanco, Almería (Fontenla, 2005, pp. 135–46), Constitución in Valencia (Doménech-Belda, 2021) and Las Suertes in Sinarcas, Valencia (Arroyo, 1989, pp. 467–79) have percentages below 10%; El Castellar in Xilxes, Castellón (Doménech-Belda, 2003, p. 43) and Cihuela in Soria (Navascués, 1963, pp. 81–3 and Sáenz-Diez, 1991, pp. 231–44) have higher percentages, but they do not exceed 30%. There is no reliable information from the hoard of Calle de la Paja in Zaragoza.

⁵ Only the Lucena hoard contains the remains of some jewels, and even though it contains 34 Taifa coins, it has mostly Almoravid coins (98%), and was hidden during the twelfth century (Canto, 1992, p. 38 and 1994, pp. 294–5).

⁶ Sáenz-Diez, 1984, pp. 147–52.

⁷ Prieto, 1915, pp. 310–37.

⁸ Codera, 1897, pp. 449–57; Canto and Martín, 2000, pp. 27–40.

⁹ It is the case of coins minted by the Valencian ʿĀmirids or the Banū Di-l-Nūn in Toledo and Valencia. They appear in most of the discoveries, even in those far from the areas controlled by these Taifas (Doménech-Belda, 1992, pp. 43–64).

¹⁰ Canto, 1994, p. 292.

¹¹ Canto *et alii*, 2005, pp. 177–96.

¹² For instance, a hoard from the Zaragoza region (Pellicer, 1997, pp. 15–24), and others from Bonete, Albacete (Sáenz-Diez, 1987–8) or the Xilxes hoards in Castellón (Doménech-Belda, 2003, p. 43).

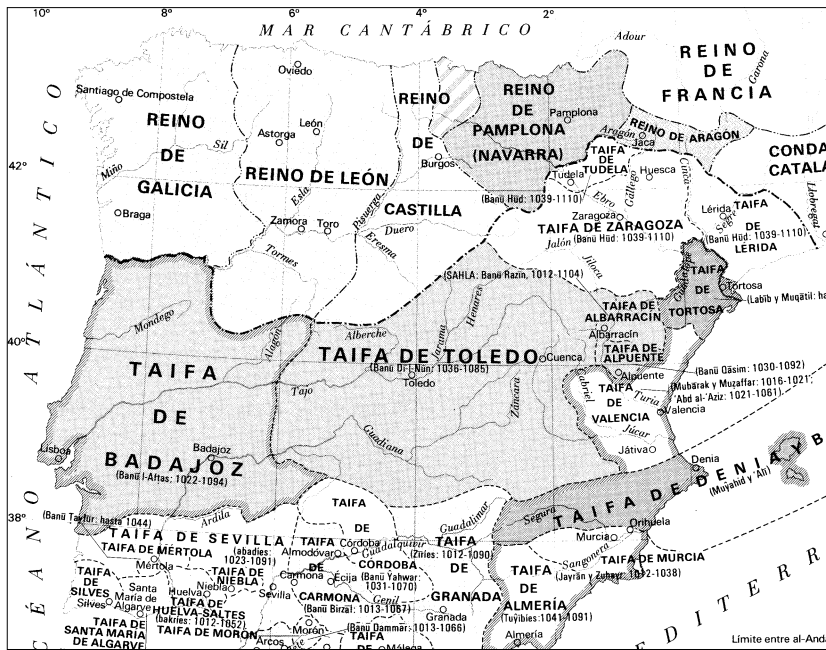


Figure 1. The Iberian Peninsula at the eleventh century according to J. Salvat, *Historia de España*, 5, 1989, p. 456

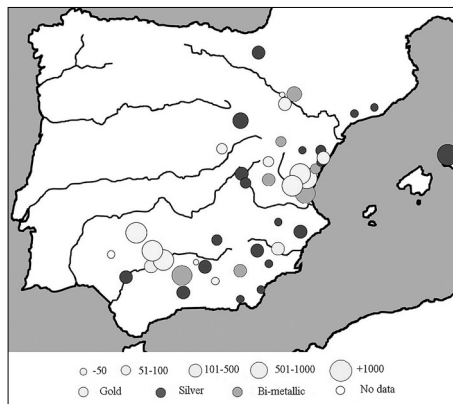


Figure 2. Hoards with Taifa coins found in the Iberian Peninsula



Figure 3. Origin of the coins from the Taifas hoards: A: Santa Elena hoard, Valencia and B: Belalcázar hoard, Córdoba

dinars and dirhams. These fractions were better adapted to the economic reality of the Andalusian Taifas. The abundance of these Fāṭimid coins in the Andalusian hoards is evidence for the sizeable flow of this foreign coin and the role it played in the economy of the Taifa states.

The analyses of the hoards of the eleventh century show the changes that took place in the monetary system of the Taifa states. The composition of these hoards varies through the course of the eleventh century and, in general, can be divided into three categories as established by Canto:¹³

1. Hoards of transition between the caliphal and Taifa periods
2. Hoards which are mostly Taifa
3. Hoards connected to the currency of the Almoravid dynasty, which takes us into the first half of the twelfth century.

Let us examine some of these changes mostly using hoards recovered during archaeological excavations as the information and percentages obtained are more reliable (figure 5). Archaeological excavations should recover all the objects which were hidden. According to Bacharach:

*Hoards, which enter museums and private collections from the market, may not reflect the original composition because dealers may have removed particularly valuable pieces for sale separately or very poor pieces fearing that there was no market for them.*¹⁴

Although this article focuses on the coin hoards recovered from archaeological excavations, one must remember that single finds are also an important reflection of monetary circulation.

Hoards from the first half of the eleventh century

The eleventh century began with a period of great instability: the civil war that would put an end to the caliphate of Cordoba. The degree of use of the coins in the Andalusian society is reflected in the size of the hoards (figure 6).

Most hoards contain more than five hundred coins; some have a few thousand, such as those from the Guadalquivir River and the others, while the Valencia hoards contain over a thousand coins. The hoards of that period contain mostly caliphal currency, sometimes from the beginning of the caliphate and also from the revolts. These coins may be fragments or have cuts or perforations to the flan.

Alongside these, can be found coins from the Ḥammūdīd dynasty, who claimed to be the successors to the caliphate. The Banū Ḥammūd were self-proclaimed caliphs in the south of the Iberian Peninsula and in North Africa, and coined from 403H until the end of the dynasty in the 446. The Ḥammūdīd coins, which follow the caliphal tradition of regular issues of good quality metal, are considered transitional issues between the caliphate and the Taifas.

Some hoards from this period were deposited before the rulers of the Taifas began their own systematic and regular issues, at a time when there was almost no coin

¹³ Canto, 1992, p. 30.

¹⁴ Bacharach, 2006, p. 12.

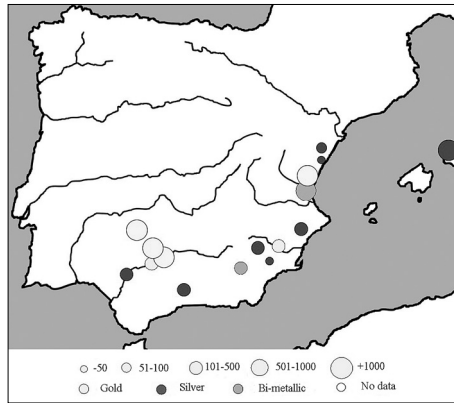


Figure 4. Hoards with Andalusian Taifa and Fātimid coins

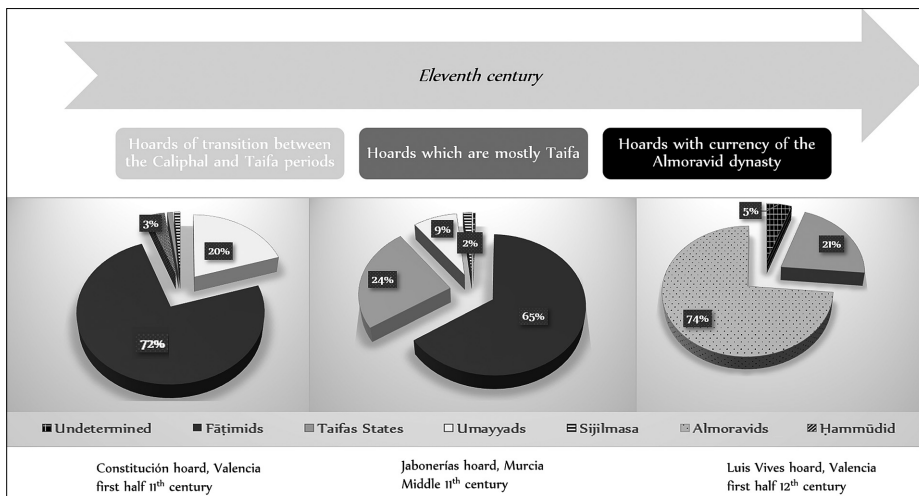


Figure 5. Changes in the composition of hoards during the eleventh century

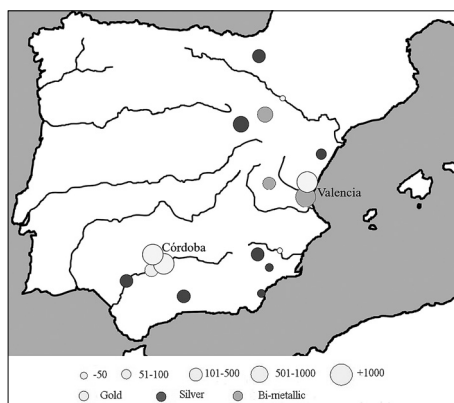


Figure 6. Hoards of transition between the caliphal and Taifa periods

being struck in al-Andalus. As a result, Taifa coins are very scarce or lacking, as can be seen in the Begastri (Cehegín, Murcia) hoard found during archaeological excavations (figure 7).¹⁵ This hoard dates from the first third of the eleventh century. 237 silver coins, many of which were small fragments, and a few pieces of jewellery were discovered inside a ceramic vessel. Most of the coins are North African, struck by the Fāṭimids, enemies of the Spanish Umayyads.

The few Taifa coins present in these hoards are the earlier issues. For example, in the hoard of Cruz Conde (Córdoba),¹⁶ one of the few old hoards that is complete, the Taifa coins represent 2.6% of the hoard with five coins minted by the Banū Tuḡīb of Zaragoza (41x–28H) and another one from Seville (433H), while in the Constitución (Valencia) hoard they make up 0.5% with Tuḡībīd coins (411–30H) (figure 8). These are, therefore, hoards of coins that were in circulation, together with coins from previous periods. In these hoards Fāṭimid coins are common, both in the eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula where it reaches a very high percentage, and in the Guadalquivir Valley.¹⁷

Hoards from the second half of the eleventh century

Later in the eleventh century Taifa coins become commoner, for example in the Valencian hoard of Santa Elena where they make up 26% of the total from different Taifas (figure 9). This hoard shows how political borders were not a barrier for currency movement and is an example of how the circulation system changed during the eleventh century.

By the middle of the eleventh century the surviving Umayyad coins had mostly disappeared from circulation. The Taifa states had begun to mint coins regularly in the second third of the century and these are considerably more abundant in the hoards. The Fāṭimid coins, however, are still present in many hoards such as Santa Elena. This hoard contains the largest group of Fāṭimid gold coins found in al-Andalus.¹⁸ Other hoards have higher percentages of Fāṭimid coins, particularly on the east coast, where the number of Fāṭimid coins is higher than in the Guadalquivir Valley.¹⁹

Andalusian hoards from the second half of the eleventh century usually contain smaller numbers of coins than those from previous phase (figure 10). The Jabonerías hoard is representative of this period.²⁰ It is a gold coin hoard recovered in 2012 in the course of archaeological excavations taking place on Jabonerías Street, in Murcia (Spain). Murcia was the capital city of Cora of Tudmir, located in the south-eastern area of al-Andalus or Sharq al-Andalus. Its contextualisation in a stratigraphic

¹⁵ Doménech-Belda, 2006, pp. 211–49. During the excavations in the archaeological site of Begastri (Cehegín, Murcia) some metallic remains were discovered inside a ceramic vessel. This small treasure, dated to the eleventh century, consists of a few pieces of jewellery and 237 silver coins, many of these being small cut fragments. Most of the coins are North African, produced by the Fāṭimids, the enemy dynasty of the Spanish Umayyads.

¹⁶ Navascués, 1961 pp. 170–2 and 1963, pp. 79–80.

¹⁷ Doménech-Belda, 2004, pp. 339–54.

¹⁸ Canto, Martín and Doménech-Belda, 2017, pp. 1083–8.

¹⁹ Doménech-Belda, 2016, pp. 199–232.

²⁰ Doménech-Belda, 2013, pp. 8–24.

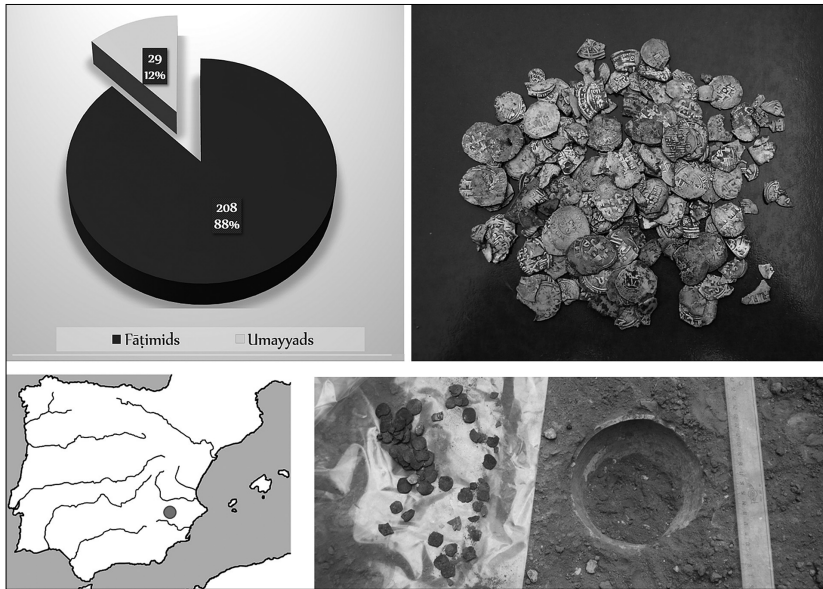


Figure 7. Begastri hoard (Murcia, Spain)

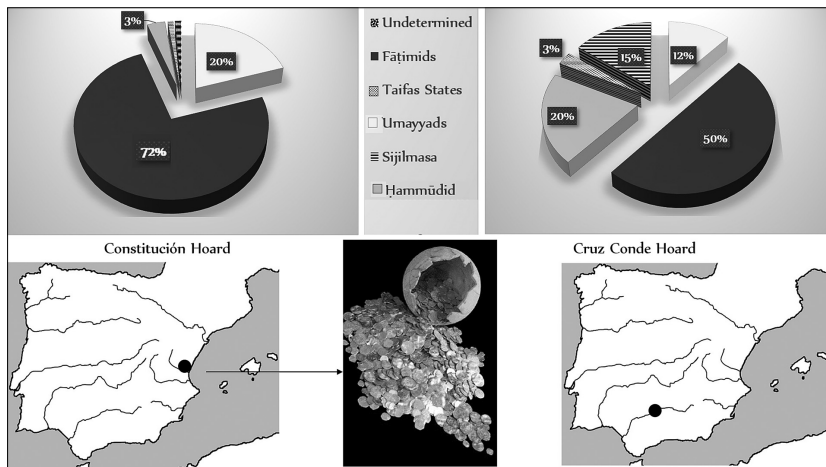


Figure 8. Constitución hoard (Valencia, Spain) and Cruz Conde hoard (Córdoba, Spain)

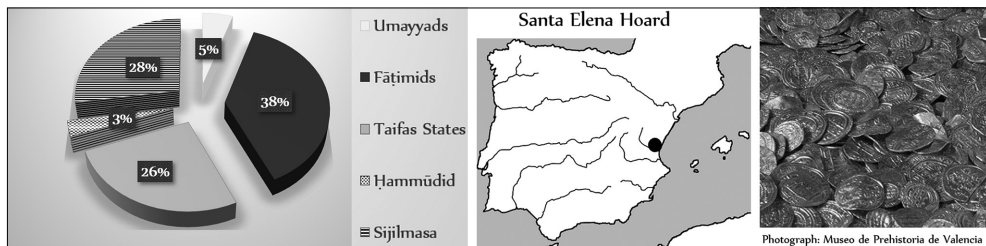


Figure 9. Santa Elena hoard (Valencia, Spain)

sequence provides valuable information to enable its correct interpretation. At the same time, this a very useful discovery, which provides relevant historical data for understanding the relations between al-Andalus and other areas of the Western Mediterranean, especially the island of Sicily, as can be inferred from the numismatic analysis of the group. The coin hoard was recovered during the excavation of an Islamic house located in the ancient Islamic medina next to the wall. The house, which has the structure of a typical Islamic house with a courtyard, was constructed at the beginning of the eleventh century. It was then abandoned for an indefinite period during the same century.²¹ Among the collapsed remains of one of the walls of the hall, a ceramic vessel was found. Inside there was a group of gold coins and four smaller objects of the same material.

This hoard consists of 424 gold coins, 51 of which are fragments, some very small. Issues of the Fāṭimid caliphs predominate, representing 65% of the total coins discovered with the Andalusian (Taifas) coins constituting a quarter of the total (figure 11). There are two dinars minted in the final days of the Córdoba caliphate. These two coins, together with a series of coins of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Hākīm, who ruled during the first two decades of the eleventh century, are some of the oldest pieces of the hoard. The remaining 103 coins (24%) are issues from the Taifa period, all of them fractional dinars.

Among the coins from the Taifa period, the largest number corresponds to the Taifa of Valencia. This abundance of Valencia Taifa coinage is found over most of the Iberian Peninsula, especially in the eastern area, where it was the predominant currency during the eleventh century. The group discovered at Jabonerías Street is good proof of that, since the Valencian issues represent 85% of all the Taifa coins in the hoard. The rest are fractional dinars from other Taifa kingdoms, comprising just a few coins. These are the main Taifa states from the southern and eastern half of al-Andalus: besides Valencia, there is also the neighbouring Taifa of Denia; Tortosa, Zaragoza and Calatayud in the Ebro Valley; the powerful Taifa of Toledo; and Córdoba, Granada and Seville in the south.

The Fāṭimid coins (figure 12) come from four mints, all located in the western Mediterranean: al-Mahdīya (1%), al-Manṣuriya (12%), Aṭarāblus (5%) and Siqillīya (82%). Miṣr in Egypt does not appear, even though it was the capital of the dynasty when these coins were struck. All the coins from Aṭarāblus were struck in the name of al-Hākīm, the most commonly represented caliph in the hoard. Sicilian coins are often found in Andalusian hoards.²²

The Jabonerías hoard shows how the coinage changed during eleventh century, from whole units to fractional dinars. This can be seen in all the contemporary hoards. All the pieces in the Jabonerías hoard are quarter dinars, apart from eight coins which are whole dinars. These whole dinars consist of eight North African coins originating from the Sijlmasa area which make up 1.6% of the total and there are also two caliphal dinars. The Fāṭimid coins, the most abundant coins in the hoard, are all quarter-dinar coins, known as ruba'as, weighing around one gram

²¹ García, 2013, pp. 25–49.

²² Doménech-Belda, 2016, pp. 199–232.

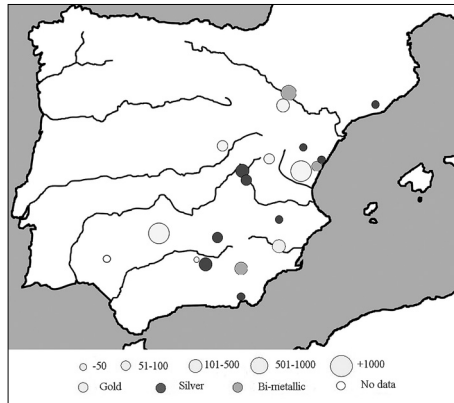


Figure 10. Hoards from the second half of the eleventh century

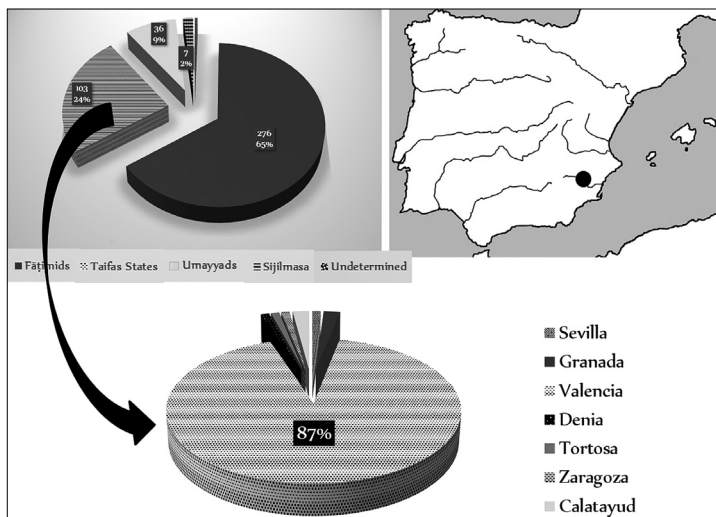


Figure 11. Jabonerías hoard (Murcia, Spain)

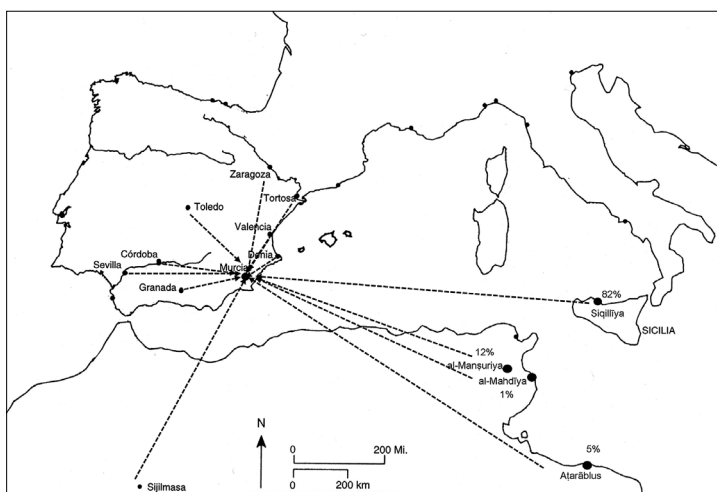


Figure 12. Origin of the coins from the hoard of Jabonerías (Murcia, Spain)

and mostly with a diameter between 12 and 16 millimetres (figure 13). The word 'ruba'a' appears on very few coins but the word 'dinar' appears on many of them, as it was a generic term with gold issues. Their metrological characteristics (weight around 1 gram and diameter between 12 and 16 mm) however, leave no doubt about their value as ruba'as. The ruba'a was adapted to the battered economy of the Taifas states. In this period, the monetary system in al-Andalus was based on fractions of a quarter dinar.

In the second half of the eleventh century hoards which are complete, show that Taifa coins were hoarded alongside coins from other periods or from outside al-Andalus. Other hoards seem to be formed exclusively of Taifa currency, but we are not sure whether these hoards are complete. One example is the hoard of Belalcázar (Córdoba), which is one of the largest finds of the period with more than 8 kilograms of gold in coins, but it has only been possible to study a little more than a thousand of these coins.²³

Hoards from the first half of the twelfth century

At the end of the eleventh century, the arrival of the Almoravids put an end to the Taifa states and al-Andalus was again unified. The Almoravids introduced a new monetary system, minting dinars and fractions in gold of good quality. They were able to do this because they controlled the caravan gold routes to the Maghreb from the southern Sahara desert. The silver dirham was replaced by a new coin which weighed one gram, named a quirat. Fractions of quirats were also struck to a standard weight.

One group of hoards containing Almoravid coins, as well as Taifa coins, were hidden during the twelfth century. These are fewer in number than those from previous periods (figure 14).

Gradually, Taifa coins became less important compared with Almoravid coins so that by the mid-twelfth century they comprised a minority of the coins in hoards (figure 15).

An example of this is the Calle Luis Vives Valencia hoard. It was discovered during archaeological excavations in an angle of the courtyard of a large Islamic house which was built in the eleventh century and rebuilt in the middle of the twelfth century.²⁴ The hoard, which contained 1674 coins, was discovered inside a ceramic vessel. According to the authors, this change in the composition of the currency is reflected by the hoard. The hoard is mostly composed of Almoravid coins from the reign of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf (500–37H / 1106–43AD) (74% of the entire hoard). In addition there are Taifa coins from the previous period, which may still have been in circulation; these coins came specifically from the 'Āmirids and Banū Dī al-Nūn (the Taifa states of Valencia and Toledo), and form 21% of the hoard (figure 16).

²³ F. Codera studied about 1000 coins (Codera, 1897, pp. 449–57) and A. Canto and F. Martín about 230, all of them Taifas (Canto and Martín, 2000, pp. 27–40).

²⁴ Algarra *et alii*, 2005, pp. 197–241.

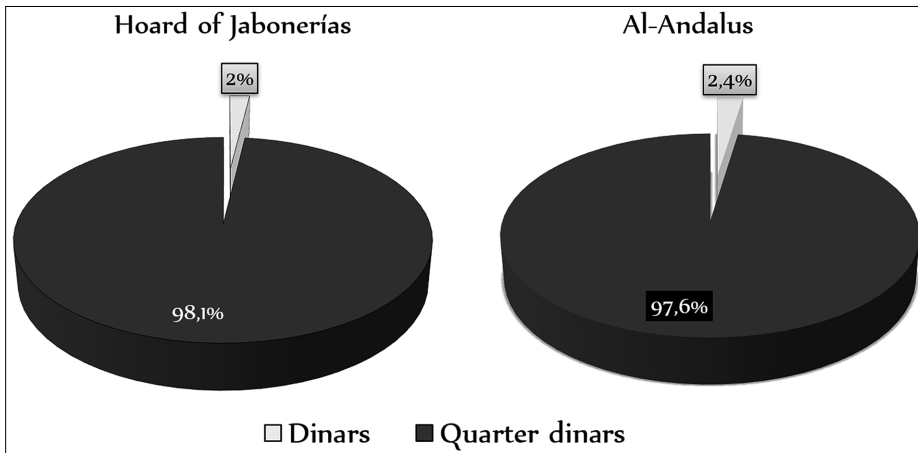


Figure 13. Dinars and quarter dinars in the Jabonerías hoard and the whole of al-Andalus

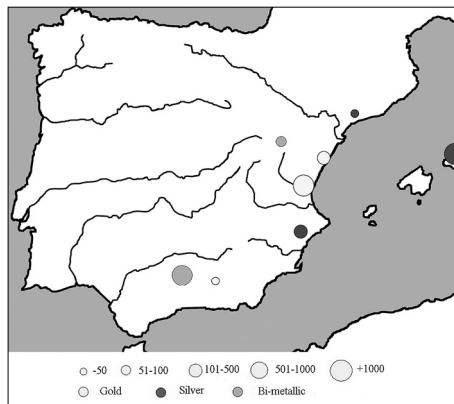


Figure 14. Hoards with Taifa and Almoravid coins

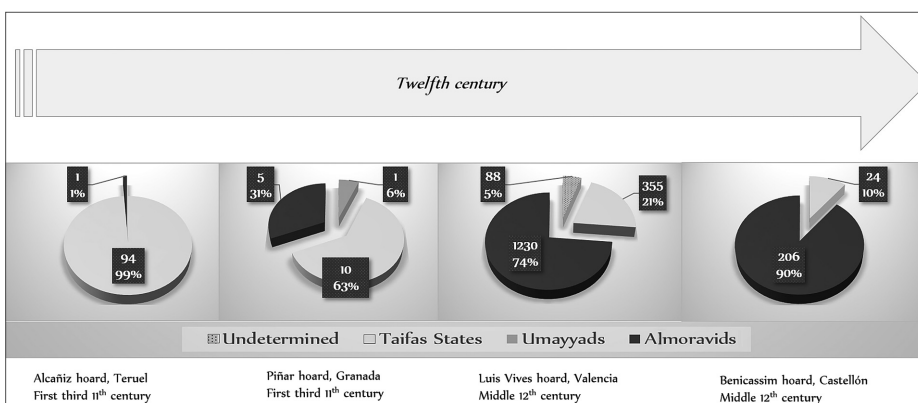


Figure 15. Changes in the composition of hoards during the first half of the twelfth century

The hoard of Benicassim, Castellón, in the eastern area of al-Andalus, is similar in composition, though with even less Taifa coins (230 pieces amounting to 10% of the hoard).²⁵

These hoards, dating from the first half of the twelfth century, are the last to contain Taifa coins. In the second half of the twelfth century, Taifa coins tend to disappear and are replaced by the currency of African dynasties, first the Almoravids and then the Almohads, who minted with great technical perfection and high metal quality thanks to their access to metals obtained in the southern Sahara. The Almoravids also put an end to the political division of al-Andalus under the Taifas and unified it again, annexing it to their North-African empire.

Conclusions

In recent years, several hoards with Taifa coins have been discovered in the Iberian Peninsula. These must be catalogued and analysed in their entirety, as the Taifa currency provides interesting novelties and new data.²⁶ Complete hoards recovered during archaeological excavations are of the most interest, of course, as we know their size and composition, which vary considerably. They are usually composed exclusively of coins, in contrast to some finds from the previous periods.

The hoards are located across the southern and eastern parts of the Iberian Peninsula. Most (86%) are made up of one metal, but there are a few hoards with coins of both gold and silver. These bimetallic hoards mostly contain silver, with a few gold coins.

The composition of these hoards show that political borders were no barrier to currency movement as they often contain coins from different Taifas, including rival states, and foreign currency, especially Fāṭimid coins. Fāṭimid currency arrived in al-Andalus in the first half of the eleventh century, in the main. Fāṭimid coinage was integrated into the Andalusian monetary circulation and was hoarded together with Andalusian coins. Most of these Fāṭimid coins are fractions: half and quarter dirhams and quarter dinars. These monetary values were well adapted to the economic reality of the Andalusian Taifas. Fāṭimid coins, like the Andalusian, were sometimes holed, damaged or cut into fragments.

Changes in the composition of hoards during the eleventh century and first half of the twelfth century reflect the changes in the Taifa states' monetary system until its disappearance. The present study of archaeological finds supports Canto's suggestion that these hoards can be divided in three categories: ones of transition between the caliphal and Taifa periods, others which are mostly Taifa, and those with coins of the Almoravid dynasty.²⁷

Hoards from the first half of the eleventh century contain mostly caliphal coins, sometimes dating from the beginning of the caliphate, which may have been cut, fragmented or holed, like the Taifa coins. In addition, we find coins from the revolts and from the Ḥammūdīd dynasty while, in many hoards, the percentage of Taifa coins is low or they are absent. Where present they belong to the earlier issues.

²⁵ Ripollés and López, 1977, pp. 203–41.

²⁶ This is the case of the finding of Constitution Avenue in Valencia, where the oldest Taifa dinars minted in a local mint have been found, see Doménech-Belda, 2021.

²⁷ Canto, 1992, p. 30.

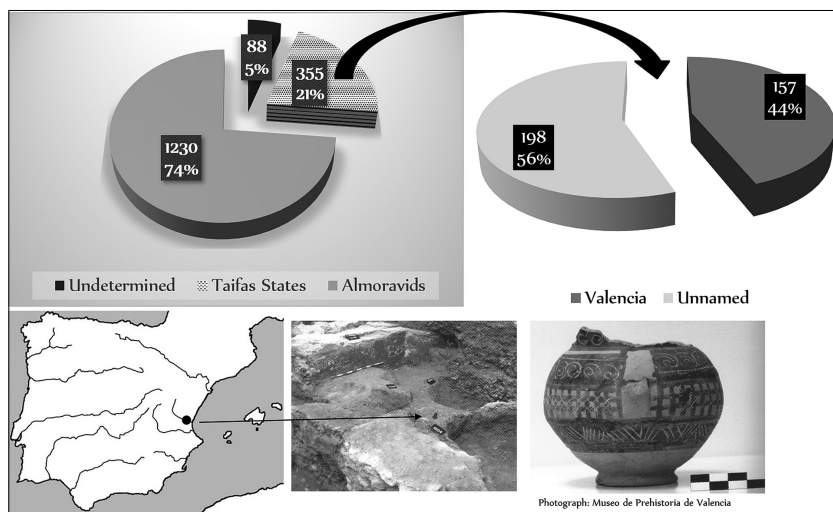


Figure 16. Luis Vives hoard (Valencia, Spain) according to Algarra *et alii* 2005

In the second third of the century, the Taifa states began to mint coins regularly and, as a result, Taifa coins are considerably more abundant in the hoards from that time. In the middle of the century, coins from previous periods disappeared from circulation or were a minor part of hoards. Andalusian hoards of this period usually include fewer pieces than those of the previous phase.

Finally, in hoards from the beginning of the twelfth century, the percentages of Taifa coins are high. Nevertheless, as the century goes on, Almoravid coins begin to appear more frequently while Taifa coins decrease and are a minority by the middle of the century.

The general analysis of Taifa hoards enables one to see important changes in their composition and provides one with the relevant historical data for understanding political and economic changes in the Iberian Peninsula during the eleventh century and the relations, not only between different Taifa states, but also between al-Andalus and other areas of the western Mediterranean, especially Sicily, as can be inferred from the numismatic analysis of these hoards.

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