

# The *Silah* Dinars in the Aghlabid Era: Political and Artistic Dimensions

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v15-i12/27031>

**Published Date:** 06 December 2025

## Abstract

This study examines the *Şilah* dinars (Dinars of Connection) issued during the Aghlabid period (290–296 A.H) as a model of medieval Islamic coinage that transcended its traditional economic function to become a political and propagandistic instrument. The significance of this research lies in uncovering the role of coinage in consolidating Aghlabid legitimacy, affirming their local identity, and securing recognition from the Abbasid Caliphate. The central research problem concerns how coinage inscriptions and decorative motifs were employed to articulate the balance between local authority and symbolic allegiance to the Abbasid Center. The study aims to introduce these *Şilah* dinars and analyse their functions; while also tracing the formal and artistic developments they underwent during the Aghlabid era. Methodologically, the research adopts the critical historical approach in analyzing primary sources and international collection catalogues, alongside the descriptive-analytical method in studying the inscriptions and ornamental features. The findings reveal that the *Şilah* dinars served as an integrated medium for expressing both local legitimacy and symbolic loyalty to the caliphate, extending far beyond their role as instruments of economic exchange.

**Keywords:** *Şilah* Dinars, Aghlabid Period, Legitimacy, Coinage Inscriptions, Political Propaganda

## Introduction

The study of *Şilah* and commemorative coinages occupies a central position in historical and archaeological research due to their unique ability to preserve political, social, and cultural realities in material form. Unlike textual sources which may be subject to loss, distortion, or bias coinages provide direct, contemporaneous evidence that reflects shifts in political authority, social alliances, state propaganda, and cultural identity. Investigating these coinages is therefore essential not only for reconstructing historical events, but also for understanding the mechanisms through which rulers communicated legitimacy, negotiated authority, and projected their image to different social groups.

In particular, the significance of studying *Şilah* and commemorative coinages lies in their utility for multiple disciplines. For historians, they offer verifiable evidence about political alliances, successions, and ideological orientations. For archaeologists and art historians, they reveal stylistic developments, calligraphic traditions, and symbolic vocabularies. Economists and numismatists benefit from insights into monetary circulation, regional trade, and fiscal policies. Thus, examining this category of coinage is beneficial for understanding not only the political landscape of Islamic societies but also their economic systems, cultural values, and social hierarchies. The present study seeks to highlight this multidimensional importance and demonstrate the effectiveness of these coinages as primary historical sources.

*Şilah* and commemorative coinages are among the most important sources for the study of history and archaeology, as they constitute highly significant material documents for recording political, military, and social events, such as marriage alliances. They also served as a medium for announcing and promoting the heir apparent, or for self-glorification and the display of status. Throughout the Islamic periods, which spanned several centuries, various types of such coinages emerged. Foremost among them were the “coinage of the revolutionaries,” which bore religious phrases and Quranic verses affirming their issuers’ claims to authority and the caliphate, such as those struck by Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr and Abd Allah ibn Muawiya. Another notable category included coins that featured images alongside inscriptions for instance, the coinages of the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, issued shortly before the full Arabization of Islamic coinage, which depicted his figure holding a sword.

With the Abbasid era, coinage gained greater freedom and a wider diversity of themes, as the state became increasingly open to non-Arab elements influenced by Roman, Byzantine, and Persian traditions. Some Abbasid coinages were distinguished by the mention of heirs apparent for the first time, and even included the names of women from the Abbasid household, struck in contexts of *Şilah* and political propaganda. Notable examples include coinages that documented major political marriages and alliances, such as the marriage of Caliph al-Tā’i bi-llāh to the daughter of the Buyid prince Izz al-Dawla Abū Maṣṣūr Bakhtiyār, which was commemorated as a significant event on the coins themselves.

Some previous studies have examined this phenomenon through classification, as noted by Kiwan (2021, p. 384), who divided commemorative coinages into several distinct categories. These include coinages of a political and military nature, as well as those of a social character, such as *Şilah* issues, propagandistic pieces, coins commemorating marriages and alliances, and those struck to announce the appointment of an heir apparent or a minister, or to honor a wife and display prestige. Other categories encompass religious coinages issued during festivals for the purpose of distributing alms and gifts to the public, as well as sectarian coinages that reflected the doctrinal orientation of the ruling state, exemplified by Fatimid issues. In addition, commemorative coinages were produced to immortalize specific victories, while other types served glorificatory and laudatory purposes, celebrating rulers or significant achievements.

What concerns this research is the *Şilah* and commemorative coinages of the Aghlabid period, particularly those associated with reconciliations, agreements, and alliances between rulers and states. These coins were struck to memorialize such occasions and were often distributed

as gifts to various groups ranging from the general populace, to leading emirs and state officials, and even to the poor during religious festivals and special occasions. These coinages are distinguished from ordinary currency by differences in their weight, fineness, and the circumstances and timing of their minting, in addition to the inscriptions, texts, and decorative motifs with which they were embellished.

The research problem becomes evident through several interconnected issues. First, there is a clear lack of specialized studies on Şilah dinars during the Aghlabid period, especially when compared with the broader body of research devoted to other Islamic coinages. This gap leaves many aspects of these dinars insufficiently explored and understood.

Another dimension of the problem lies in understanding how coinage slogans and decorative motifs were used to express the delicate balance between local political authority and the symbolic allegiance maintained toward the central caliphate. The ways in which these visual and textual elements conveyed political messages remain largely understudied.

Moreover, there is a pressing need for a research approach that integrates both historical and economic perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the value of these coinages and to analyze their artistic and epigraphic characteristics. Without such an interdisciplinary examination, the significance of Şilah dinars within the broader context of Islamic monetary history cannot be fully appreciated.

Based on the issues outlined above, this study aims to achieve several interconnected objectives. It seeks to identify the artistic characteristics of the Şilah dinars, examining their inscriptions, calligraphy, forms, and weights in order to clarify their aesthetic and technical features. In addition to this artistic focus, the study also investigates the political dimension behind the issuance of these dinars, particularly their role in expressing symbolism of allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate and reflecting the dynamics of authority during the Aghlabid period.

The research further aims to shed light on the economic importance of the Şilah dinars, especially their function in facilitating trade within the African region and beyond its borders. Understanding their circulation and economic influence contributes to a broader appreciation of their historical significance. Finally, the study seeks to compare the Şilah dinars with contemporary monetary issues in both the Islamic East and West, providing a comparative perspective that situates these coins within the wider landscape of Islamic numismatics.

#### *The Concept of Şlah Coinage*

*Al-Qaysi* (2011, p. 1402) defined Şilah and commemorative coinages as coins that bore images, poetic verses, or Quranic texts distinct from those found on circulating currency, and that were characterized by special weights. They were most often associated with the commemoration of victories or social occasions. In the same context, *Ramaḍān* (2008, p. 230) considered these coinages as commemorative money struck to memorialize significant political, social, and religious events, such as the founding of states, accession to the throne, marriages and alliances, cases of illness and death, military victories, and religious festivals. Similarly, *al-Nabrawi* (2008, p. 445) noted that these were coinages outside the scope of daily monetary circulation, issued to commemorate major occasions such as the investiture of

princes. *Al-Naqshbandi* (2001, p. 19) further argued that they were coins primarily struck for propagandistic purposes, with some even bearing the images of caliphs. In this way, they differed from circulating currency in terms of inscriptions and weights. He also observed that only a very limited number have survived, and that they were called *Şilah* because they were distributed as gifts to relatives, the poor, orphans, as well as to emirs and commanders.

The emergence of *Şilah* coinage is linked to an early stage of Islamic history, specifically during the Umayyad period under Caliph *Abd al-Malik* (65–86 AH / 685–705 CE), when he initiated the policy of Arabizing coinage. He appropriated the Byzantine dinar then in circulation, removing the image of Emperor Heraclius and replacing it with his own likeness holding a sword a symbolic reference to striving in the path of God (*al-Qusūs*, 1996). This transformation represented a qualitative shift that extended beyond the artistic aspects of coinage, carrying with it propagandistic and political dimensions aimed at asserting the independence of the Islamic state from Byzantine influence. It was this development that paved the way for the emergence of what later came to be known as *Şilah* and commemorative coinages, associated with the memorialization of events and the affirmation of political legitimacy.

Among the most prominent examples of propagandistic coinage to appear in the late Umayyad period were the dirhams struck from the year 127 AH onwards, which bore the Abbasid slogan embodied in the Quranic verse: “Say, I ask of you no reward for it except love of kinship” (*Qur’ān*, al-Shura 42:23). This slogan clearly reveals the political and ideological dimension of the currency, as the Abbasids sought through it to attract supporters and rally allegiance to their cause. These coins thus constituted a significant propaganda tool that preceded the success of their revolution by nearly five years, that is, before their seizure of power in 132 AH / 750 CE (al-Qaysi, 2006, p. 92).

In the Abbasid period, coinages were used to commemorate numerous occasions, whether victories over enemies, social events, or the enthronement of a caliph or heir apparent. Some of these coins bore images or inscriptions unfamiliar to the issues intended for daily circulation, and they differed in size and weight from ordinary coinages amounting to twice the weight of the circulating dinar or dirham, and in some cases reaching as much as ten times (*al-Diwih Ji*, 1976, p. 130). These commemorative coins were not intended for monetary circulation, as they were struck primarily to be distributed as gifts to courtiers, military commanders, and poets, which explains the limited number of surviving specimens. Some sources also indicate that such pieces were at times reminted or clipped so that they could be used for their bullion value by money-changers, a practice that further contributed to the reduction of their original numbers (*Ramadan*, 2004, p. 229).

#### *The Aghlabid Coinage*

The Aghlabid state was established in Africa (184–296 AH / 800–909 CE) [covering present-day western Libya, Tunisia, and eastern Algeria] as an emirate nominally subordinate to the Abbasid Caliphate, yet it enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy in managing its political, military, and economic affairs. Their influence extended across the Mediterranean, reaching as far as Sicily and southern Italy. Under their rule, Africa experienced a remarkable economic prosperity not witnessed since the third century CE (Archibald, 1960, p. 252). Their monetary

system was characterized by a high level of sophistication, reflecting both their political stature and their economic strength.

The Aghlabid coinages were distinguished by a high degree of gold purity and precision in minting, and they bore religious and political inscriptions affirming their nominal subordination to the Abbasid Caliphate. In their earliest issues, the dinars adhered to the traditional Abbasid pattern: the testimony of faith (shahada) inscribed in three lines on the obverse, with the Muhammadan mission formula placed in the margin, while the reverse margin was reserved for the date of minting. However, Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab (184–196 AH / 800–812 CE) deliberately avoided explicitly mentioning the name of the Abbasid caliph on his dinars, particularly during the conflict between al-Amin and al-Mamun (193–198 AH). This set the stage for his son, Abu al-Abbas Abd Allah I (196–201 AH / 812–817 CE), to strike dinars that bore his own name without reference to the caliph. This development was considered a decisive step toward monetary and political independence from the caliphate an approach subsequently maintained by later Aghlabid rulers without notable objection from Baghdad (Fahmi, 1964).

#### *Dinars Lil-Khalifah “for the Caliph”: The First Aghlabid Ṣilah Dinars*

The Abbasid province of Africa experienced recurrent unrest and local uprisings that provoked the displeasure of Caliph *Harun al-Rashid*, who was regularly informed of these disturbances. *Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab* capitalized on this situation by presenting a request to *al-Rashid* to assume the governorship, coupled with a significant financial commitment. In exchange for the governorship, he renounced the annual subsidy of one hundred thousand dinars that Africa had been receiving from the caliphate, and instead pledged to pay forty thousand dinars annually into the Abbasid treasury, on the condition that the emirate be granted to him and his descendants after him. *Al-Rashid* accepted the proposal and conferred upon him the governorship of Ifriqiya in 184 AH / 800 CE (*al-Yaqubi*, 2010; *al-Ṭabari*, 1967). In fulfillment of this commitment, *Ibn al-Aghlab* ordered the striking of special gold dinars for the Abbasid caliph, which bore the inscription “for the caliph” (*li-l-khalifa*) without any Aghlabid slogan. At the same time, however, the mints of *al-Qayrawan* and *al-Abbasiyya* issued coinages designated for local circulation, which carried the Aghlabid political slogan “*ghalaba*” (“he prevailed”), without reference to the caliph.

The earliest known dinar of the Aghlabid amir *Ibrahim* I is dated to the year 189 AH, and is recorded in several international collections (*Abd al-Wahhab*, 1966, no. 57; *al-Ush*, 1982, nos. 1–2; Lavoix, 1891, no. 829). This dinar was issued in two distinct versions:

- First issue: The reverse field includes, beneath the central inscription, the Aghlabid slogan “*ghalaba*” (“he prevailed”), without any reference to the Abbasid caliph.
- Second issue: Struck by Amir *Ibrahim* throughout his reign (184–196 AH), in which the Aghlabid slogan was replaced with the phrase “for the caliph” (*li-l-khalifa*). Examples of this type survive in international collections, dated to the years 189 AH, 191 AH, 192 AH, and 196 A.H.

## 1- Textual Comparison of the Slogans (Inscriptions):



A model of a Şila dinar dated 189 A.H

## Issue 1

• **Obverse Center:**

*lā ilāha illā Allāh waḥdahu lā sharīka lahu.*

“There is no god but God alone, He has no partner.”

• **Obverse margin:**

*Muḥammad rasūl Allāh arsalahu bi-l-hudā wa-dīn al-ḥaqq li-yuḏhirahu ‘alā al-dīn kulihi.*

“Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth, that He might make it prevail over all religion.”

• **Reverse center:**

*Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*

“Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.”

with the Aghlabid emblem Ghalab (“he prevailed”) below.

• **Reverse margin:**

*bism Allāh ḍuriba hādhā al-dīnār sana tis’ wa-thamanīn wa-mi’a*

“In the name of God, this dinar was struck in the year 189.”

## Issue 2

the same slogan appears on both the obverse and reverse; however, at the lower center of the reverse, the word “*Ghalab*” was replaced with the phrase “*li-l-khalifa*.”

## 2) Symbolic and Political Analysis of the Slogans

• **The slogan “ghalaba” (“he prevailed”):**

- This represents the affirmation of an independent political identity for the Aghlabids, appearing for the first time clearly on coinage as a reference to the new ruling house.
- Its placement at the bottom of the reverse suggests a mark of sovereignty, signifying that the dinar was subordinated more to local Aghlabid authority than to the central power.

• **The slogan “*li-l-khalifa*” (“for the caliph”):**

- This reflects the assertion of legitimate ties with the Abbasid Caliphate, particularly since Ibrahim I had derived his governorship from a direct mandate granted by Harun al-Rashid.
- Its substitution in place of “ghalaba” indicates an attempt to reconcile local independence with nominal allegiance to the Abbasid center.

### 3) Spatial Comparison (Placement of the Slogans)

- **First issue:**

The slogan “ghalaba” (“he prevailed”) appeared at the bottom of the reverse field a secondary position, yet clearly visible as a marker. In later dinars, however, the placement of the slogan “ghalaba” shifted to the upper reverse, beginning in 197 A.H. This change indicates a development in the boldness of asserting Aghlabid identity, making it more prominent.

- **Second issue:**

The phrase “li-l-khalifa” (“for the caliph”) remained in its position throughout the reign of Amir Ibrahim I.

### 4) Weight Comparison

According to the two dinars of 189 AH preserved in international collections:

- The “*li-l-khalifa*” (“for the caliph”) dinar weighed 4.20 g, making it the heavier specimen. This may have been intentional in order to emphasize its official value and its direct association with the caliph.
- The “*ghalaba*” (“he prevailed”) dinar weighed 4.14 g, slightly lighter, which can be interpreted as reflecting its different context of circulation more local in character rather than formally central.

### 5) General Analysis

It is evident that the dinars of 189 AH represent a transitional stage:

- From the prominence of the Aghlabid slogan “ghalaba” as a local symbol.
- To the adoption of the formula “for the caliph” (*li-l-khalifa*), which affirmed legitimate association with the Abbasid caliphate.

This alternation between the two slogans reflects the political balance that Ibrahim I sought to maintain:

- **Central legitimacy** (satisfaction of the Abbasids).
- **Local identity** (the emergence of the Aghlabids as a de facto ruling power).

A comparison between the first and second issues of Ibrahim I’s dinars from the year 189 AH demonstrates that coinage functioned as an overtly propagandistic and political instrument. The first issue reflected the Aghlabids’ inclination to assert their independence by adopting their family slogan “*ghalaba*” as a distinctive mark on the reverse. By contrast, the second issue conveyed allegiance to the Abbasid authority by replacing the local slogan with the phrase “for the caliph,” accompanied by an increase in weight consistent with the more official character of *Ṣilah* dinars.

This divergence reveals the dual strategy pursued by Ibrahim I: on the one hand, seeking to consolidate his internal legitimacy through a slogan tied to his ruling family, and on the other,

ensuring the favor of the central caliphate to secure political support and recognition of his authority in Africa.

#### *The Şilah Dinars Of Ziyadat Allah Iii*

Numerous historical sources mention a gold coinage issued by *Ziyadat Allah III*, the last of the Aghlabid rulers, in the year 291 AH / 904 CE, which he presented as a gift to the Abbasid caliph *al-Muktafi bi-llah* (r. 289–295 AH / 902–908 CE).

*Ali ibn al-Fath*, known as *al-Muṭawwaq*, records: “*Ziyadat Allah ibn Abd Allah ibn al-Aghlab*, ruler of the *Maghrib*, sent in the year 291 AH gifts of great value to *al-Muktafi bi-llah*, including ... one hundred thousand dinars, each dinar equal to ten [ordinary] dinars.”; *Ali ibn al-Fath* further states: I examined one of these dinars, and on one side was inscribed:

*Yā sā'iran naḥwa al-khalīfah qul lah — inna qad kafāk Allāh amruka kullahu*  
*Bī-ziādat Allāh bin 'Abdullāh ----- Sayf Allāh min dūn al-barriyyah sallhu*

#### **Translation:**

“O you who travel towards the caliph, tell him: God has sufficed you in all your affairs  
Through *Ziyadat Allah ibn Abd Allah*, the Sword of God, drawn against all mankind.”

On the other side was inscribed:

*Ma in yara laka bil-khilafati munafiqun — illa istabaḥa ḥaramahu wa-adhallaha*  
*Man la yara laka ta atan fa-Allahu qad — a mahu an ṭariqi l-huda wa-aḍallahu*  
(Ibn al-Zubayr, 1959, p. 47).

#### **Translation:**

“Whoever, as a hypocrite, contests your caliphate he only violates what is sacred to him and debases himself.

And whoever does not see obedience to you, God has surely blinded him from the path of guidance and cast him into error.”

These verses reflect the Aghlabid amir’s attempt to strengthen his relations with the Abbasid caliph *al-Muktafi bi-llah* by declaring his formal loyalty and sending *Şilah* contributions to the Abbasid court. The gesture also aimed at securing Abbasid support against the rising Shi i Fatimid threat in North Africa. This orientation was echoed in the monetary system of the Aghlabid mint the gold dinars issued at that time followed two principal patterns. One was designated for local circulation, bearing the amir’s name alongside that of the mint official (*fata al-sikkah*), *Khattab*. The other was intended for dispatch to *Baghdad*, restricted to the name and title of the amir alone, so that the coinage would be formally recognized and accepted within the monetary sphere of the Abbasid Caliphate.

#### *The Şilah Dinar Of 290 A.H*

In general, the Aghlabid rulers followed a consistent practice of striking dinars bearing different inscriptions within the same year, as confirmed by specimens preserved in major international catalogues. A review of these catalogues indicates that Amīr *Ziyādat Allāh* was no exception to this pattern. In 290 A.H, he issued a dinar that omitted the name of the mint official, *Khaṭṭāb* (Algeria Museum; *al-'Ush*, 1982, no. 148; Stephen Album, 2013). The absence of the mint official’s name on this dinar may suggest that it belonged to the category of *Şilah* coinages, struck in a format distinct from those intended for local circulation.

## A specimen of the dinar of the year 290 A.H.



## Obverse Inscription

<b><i>lā ilāh illā</i></b>	There is no god but
<b><i>Allāh waḥdahū</i></b>	Allah alone
<b><i>lā sharīk lahu.</i></b>	He has no partner

**The margin** *Muḥammad Rasūlu Allāh arsalahu bilhudā wa dinu alḥaḳī 'li-yuḏhirahu 'alā al-dini kulihī.*

*Muhammad is the Messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth that he may make it victorious over every other*



## Reverse Inscription

<b><i>Ghalab</i></b>	
<b><i>Muḥammad</i></b>	<b>Mohammed</b>
<b><i>Rasūlu</i></b>	<b>is the Messenger</b>
<b><i>Allāh</i></b>	<b>of Allah</b>

**The margin** *Bismi Allāh ḍuriba hādhā al-dīnār sanata tis'īn wa-mi'atayni.*  
In the name of God, this dinar was struck in the year 290 AH

*The Ṣilah Dinar of 291 A.H*

It is observed that this dinar bears the same inscriptions as the dinar of 290 AH (*al-'Ush*, 1982, no. 151; Lavoix, II, no. 885; Stephen Album, 2023), differing only in the year of minting. Its issue coincided with another dinar on which the name of the mint official Khaṭṭāb appears (*al-'Ush*, 1982, no. 150; Bernardi, 1982, no. 146; Roma Num, 2019). This parallelism in issues suggests that the Aghlabid mint adopted a dual-issuance policy: one type designated for local circulation, bearing the name of *Khaṭṭāb*, and another type—omitting his name intended for dispatch to the Abbasid Caliphate.

*The Ṣilah Dinar of 292 A.H*

The same pattern applies to the dinar of 292 AH, which was struck in two parallel issues. The first bears the same inscriptions as the dinar of 290 AH (*al-'Ush*, 1982, no. 153; Bernard, 1982, no. 146), while the second includes the name of the mint official *Khaṭṭāb* (*al-'Ush*, 1982, no. 152; Lane-Poole, IX, no. 217K).

*The Ṣilah Dinar of 293 A.H*

Beginning in 293 AH / 906 CE, new inscriptions appeared on the dinar of that year (Type 293 AH A), differing from the conventional patterns of Aghlabid Ṣilah coinage. The word "*li-illāh*" ("for God") occupied the first line on the obverse, while the name of the amir, *Ziyādat Allāh*, was transferred to the fifth line, replacing the name of the mint official *Khaṭṭāb* found on the local type. On the reverse, the word "*ghalaba*" ("he prevailed") remained fixed on the first line, while the amir's honorific title "*Abū Muḍar*" appeared on the fifth line (Kazan, 1983, no.

293; ZENO.RU, 2002). In the same year, the mints continued producing dinars bearing the name of *Khaṭṭāb* (Type 293 AH B) (*al-'Ush*, 1982, no. 154; Mitchiner, 1977; Baldwins Auction 18).

#### A specimen of the dinar of the year 293 A.H.



Obverse Inscription

<b><i>Li-Ilāh</i></b>	For God
<b><i>lā ilāh illā</i></b>	There is no god but
<b><i>Allāh waḥdahu</i></b>	Allah alone
<b><i>lā sharīk lahu.</i></b>	He has no partner
<b><i>Ziyādat Allāh</i></b>	Ziyadat Allāh

**The margin** *Muḥammad Rasūlu Allāh arsalahu bilhudā wa dinu alḥaqi 'liyuzhirahu 'alā al-dini kulihī.*

Muhammad is the Messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth that he may make it victorious over every



Reverse Inscription

Ghalab	
<b><i>Muḥammad</i></b>	Mohammed
<b><i>Rasūlu</i></b>	is the Messenger
<b><i>Allāh</i></b>	of Allah
<b><i>Abū Muḍar</i></b>	Abu Mudhar

**The margin** *Bismi Allāh ḍuriba hādhā al-dīnār sanata thalāth wa-tis'īn wa-mi'atayni.*

In the name of God, this dinar was struck in the year 293AH

#### *The Ṣilah Dinar of 294 A.H*

The dinar of 294 AH (*al-'Ush*, 1982, no. 155; Bernardi, 1982, no. 147; Stephen Album, 2016) corresponds in content and inscriptions to the previous *Ṣilah* dinar of 293 A.H (Type A). However, it differs in its physical appearance: it was struck within a narrow flan lacking the usual circular border lines and displays a noticeably lower standard of design. The central inscriptions are so crowded that they nearly merge with the marginal legends.

This artistic decline likely reflects haste in its production—possibly connected to the urgent need to remit a tax payment or tribute to the Abbasid treasury.

A specimen of the dinar of the year 294 A.H.



#### Obverse Inscription

<i>Li-llāh</i>	For God
<i>lā llāh illā</i>	There is no god but
<i>Allāh waḥdahu</i>	Allah alone
<i>lā sharīk lahu.</i>	He has no partner
<i>Ziyādat Allāh</i>	Ziyadat Allāh

**The margin** *Muḥammad Rasūlu Allāh arsalahu bilhudā wa dinu alḥaqi 'li-yuḏhirahu 'alā al-dini kulihi.*

Muhammad is the Messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth that he may make it victorious over every other religion



#### Reverse Inscription

<i>Ghalab</i>	
<i>Muḥammad</i>	Mohammed
<i>Rasūlu</i>	is the Messenger
<i>Allāh</i>	of Allah
<i>Abū Muḏar</i>	Abu Mudhar

**The margin** *Bismi Allāh ḏuriba hādhā al-dīnār sanata arba' wa-tis'īn wa-mi'atayni.*

In the name of God, this dinar was struck in the year 294A.H

#### *The Ṣilah Dinar of 295 A.H*

The dinar of 295 AH was struck in two parallel issues. The first issue (A) features a broad margin and well-organized inscriptions, carrying the same slogans as the preceding dinar (*al-'Ush*, 1982, no. 147; Lavoix, II, no. 886; Stephen Album, 2016, lot 362). The second issue (B) follows the same format as the dinar of 294 AH—that is, struck on a narrow flan lacking circular border lines—which reflects a decline in artistic quality compared with the first issue (Musée de *Raqqāda*; *al-'Ush*, no. 157; Bernardi, no. 147; Stephen Album, 2022, lot 319).



Two *Şilah* Dinars Struck in 295 A.H Issued by Ziyādat Allāh III

### *The Şilah Dinar of 296 A.H*

In this year, Amīr *Ziyādat Allāh* III struck three types of dinars. **The first** type, Dinar 296 A.H (A), was produced on a narrow flan and bore the traditional inscriptions on both obverse and reverse. The name of the amir, *Ziyādat Allāh*, appears in the center of the reverse, while the name of the mint official *Khaṭṭāb* is inscribed below the central field on the obverse (*al-‘Ajā’ibī*, no. 204; *al-‘Ush*, no. 159; Baldwin, 2013, Auc. 24, lot 4534).

**The second** type, Dinar 296 AH (B), was also struck on a narrow flan and repeated the same traditional inscriptions, but included only the name of Amīr *Ziyādat Allāh* III in the center of the reverse, omitting any mention of the mint official (*Bū Qurbah*, no. 03; Bernardi, no. 146; *al-‘Ush*, no. 159; Farrugia, no. 28).



Two *Şilah* Dinars (A&B) Struck in 296 A.H Issued by Ziyādat Allāh III

**The third** type: Dinar of 296 A.H. (C), This issue represents a deliberate transformation in the visual and ideological language of minting. The dinar was no longer conceived merely as a medium of exchange, but rather as a propagandistic instrument embodying the political orientations of the ruling authority during a period of instability. The die engraver took particular care to emphasize formal and aesthetic elements by precisely delineating the circular borders and expanding the flan diameter to approximately 23 mm, giving it a more commanding visual presence compared with earlier specimens (18–19 mm).

The calligraphic layout of the 293 AH (Type A) dinar was revived, but with additional decorative flourishes intentionally applied to the lettering, underscoring its symbolic character and distinguishing it from the ordinary Ifrīqiyah coinage intended for daily circulation. This deliberate refinement of form, together with meticulous attention to detail, reveals the intent of the governing authority—whether the amir himself or the head of the

mint—to employ coinage as a rhetorical medium serving to project the regime’s image and reinforce its legitimacy amid the political crisis confronting the emirate.



Şilah Dinar (C) Struck in 296 A.H Issued by Ziyādat Allāh III

### Conclusion

The analysis of Aghlabid *Şilah* dinars reveals that coinage transcended its purely economic function to become an overtly political and propagandistic instrument. From the early issues of 189 AH, which combined the dual inscriptions “*ghalaba*” (“he prevailed”) and “for the caliph” (*li-l-khalīfa*)—expressing both an assertion of local identity and a nominal allegiance to the Abbasid center—to the dinars of *Ziyādat Allāh* III (293–296 AH), which represent the culmination of artistic and ideological refinement, Aghlabid coinage consistently reflected the dialectical relationship between autonomy and subordination to the caliphate.

The variations in form, inscription, and flan size demonstrate the Aghlabid rulers’ acute awareness of how coinage could be employed as a visual and political discourse addressing dual audiences: domestically, to consolidate internal legitimacy, and externally, to secure recognition from Baghdad and maintain a delicate equilibrium with it.

This unique character renders the *Şilah* dinars invaluable material documents, exemplifying the sophisticated use of coinage as a medium of identity, propaganda, and diplomacy simultaneously. In this respect, the Aghlabid experience occupies a distinct place within the broader history of Islamic numismatics, illustrating how monetary production served as a tangible reflection of the interplay between politics and legitimacy in the medieval Islamic world.

The issues of 189 AH clearly demonstrate the dual political function of Aghlabid coinage, expressed through the pairing of the slogan “*ghalaba*” (“he prevailed”), which conveyed a sense of local Aghlabid identity, with the phrase “for the caliph” (*li-l-khalīfa*), signalling continued allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate. As the coinage evolved, the dinars issued under *Ziyādat Allāh* III between 293 and 295 AH exhibited noticeable formal and artistic transformations. These changes, marked by increasingly refined calligraphy and more elaborate decorative elements, reflect the sensitivity of the Aghlabid mint to shifting political conditions and financial demands.

This trajectory culminated in the dinar of 296 AH, which stands out for its enlarged flan diameter and the precision of its ornamentation. Such features set it apart from earlier issues and illustrate how coinage became an effective medium of both visual and political communication during this period.

The findings of the study indicate that the *Ṣilah* dinars served a dual purpose: while their economic function was relatively limited, their political and propagandistic influence was significant. The slogan “ghalaba” was employed to project autonomy and assert a distinctly local identity, whereas the formula “for the caliph” reinforced symbolic loyalty to the Abbasid center. This dual-issuance strategy—one line addressing local audiences and another directed toward Baghdad—reveals a calculated political awareness among Aghlabid rulers as they sought to balance internal priorities with external expectations.

The artistic diversity observed in the issues of 294–295 AH points to immediate pressures arising from fiscal responsibilities and political obligations, which directly influenced the mint’s production style. Meanwhile, the dinar of 296 AH represents a decisive shift toward a fully developed propagandistic use of coinage, transforming it into a comprehensive tool for visual messaging and political expression. Overall, the Aghlabid experience with *Ṣilah* coinage underscores the unique capacity of Islamic monetary production to articulate identity, project legitimacy, disseminate propaganda, and serve diplomatic objectives simultaneously.

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