

Two Unique Aghlabid Dinars in the Shahat Museum: A Descriptive and Analytical Study

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Abstract

This study presents and analyzes two rare gold dinars struck under the Aghlabid dynasty (800–909 CE) and preserved in the *Shahat* Museum. It aims to examine their artistic and numismatic aspects, assess their rarity and position within the Aghlabid monetary system, and explore their political and economic implications. The significance of this research lies in highlighting the two *Shahat* Museum dinars and analyzing their epigraphic and decorative features, thereby contributing to their recognition within academic research. The study applies a descriptive–analytical approach to the data, supported by the historical method to interpret contextual events, along with direct practical examination of the specimens. The findings reveal that the two dinars are unique in type, demonstrating the continued appearance of the names “*Shukr*” and “*Balagh*,” which were overlooked by previous studies. The evidence also indicates that these *Mawali* were not merely mint officials but influential figures who held political, military, and administrative positions. This explains the prominence of their names on the coins as a form of political communication and propaganda. Such findings reflect the robustness of the Aghlabid economy and underscore the importance of coinage as both a symbolic and political instrument.

Keywords: Aghlabid, Gold Dinars, Shahat Museum, Numismatic Analysis, Mawali

Introduction

Islamic coinage constitutes one of the most important material sources for reconstructing the political, economic, and cultural history of Islamic polities. Beyond their monetary function, coins operate as concise historical records in which inscriptions articulate religious doctrine, political legitimacy, and official messaging, while their physical characteristics reflect technological capability and economic conditions. Within numismatic research, this study is grounded in a conceptual framework that synthesizes political numismatics, which investigates coinage as an instrument of authority and statecraft, with insights from economic anthropology and material culture studies, both of which interpret monetary artefacts as

socio-cultural texts shaped by broader structures of power, administration, and economic activity. This theoretical grounding provides the lens through which the present analysis examines variations in Aghlabid coinage and their historical implications.

Situated within this framework, the Shahat Museum houses a substantial collection of Islamic coins spanning multiple historical phases, from the Umayyad period to the Ottoman era. Among its holdings is a corpus of forty-one gold dinars attributed to the Aghlabid dynasty (184–296 AH / 800–909 CE), covering the years 201–292 AH. A detailed examination of this collection led to the identification of two previously unknown gold dinars, dated 262 AH and 269 AH, which have no documented parallels in international catalogues or major numismatic collections. Their discovery represents a noteworthy scholarly addition that warrants systematic documentation and analysis.

The present study examines the artistic, typological, and numismatic characteristics of these two dinars, assesses their rarity within the broader Aghlabid monetary system, and explores their political, administrative, and economic implications. This analysis is informed by the premise that variations in coinage frequently reflect shifts in governance, fiscal policy, ideological messaging, and the organization of minting authorities.

The 262 AH Shahat dinar challenges established assumptions concerning the coinage of Ibrahim II al-Aghlabi (d. 289 AH / 902 CE). Prevailing scholarship has held that the name of the mawla Shukr appears solely on dinars dated 261 AH, whereas the name Balagh is associated only with the issues of 262 AH. However, the newly identified specimen expands the known corpus, demonstrating the existence of three distinct variants of the 262 AH dinar: one bearing the name Shukr, a second lacking any reference to mint officials, and a third carrying the name Balagh. This unusual diversity raises important questions regarding its causes and its political, administrative, and technical implications.

Similarly, the dinar dated 269 AH provides a significant new datum. Bearing the name Balagh, it contradicts the widely accepted assumption that his name disappeared from the coinage after 268 AH. Its appearance suggests a longer period of administrative continuity in minting practices during the reign of Ibrahim II than previously assumed, highlighting the need to reassess the role of mawali and the symbolic and political functions their names fulfilled on coinage.

Based on these findings, the central research question of this study is formulated as follows: To what extent does the diversity of Ibrahim II's dinar issues (262–269 AH), including the continued appearance of mawali names, reflect political and administrative transformations, economic pressures, propagandistic strategies, technical minting practices, and the dynamics of different minting centers? Furthermore, what political and symbolic meanings can be inferred from this diversity?

Study Hypotheses

Based on the preceding discussion, a set of research hypotheses can be formulated to help explain this phenomenon, as summarized in the following table:

Table (1)

Possible hypotheses explaining the diversity of Ibrahim II's dinar issues.

Hypothesis	Description	Testing Mechanism in the Study
Political Administrative	Reflects rapid changes in the administration of the mint and the power struggle between the mawali (Shukr and Balagh).	Comparison of the chronological sequence of inscriptions with historical sources concerning state administration and the mawali.
Economic	The variation resulted from economic pressures or shortages of resources, leading to irregular issues.	Analysis of weight and fineness, and comparison with other contemporary dinars.
Propagandistic Symbolic	The appearance of names on the coins served as a means of propaganda to emphasize loyalty and reshape symbols of authority.	Examination of propagandistic formulations and comparison with earlier and later issues.
Technical	The differences stem from artistic or technical experiments in the minting process.	Analysis of engraving style and examination of the minting tools used.
Multiplicity of Mints	The activity of more than one mint (Qayrawan, Raqqada, etc.) led to the diversity of issues.	Comparison of stylistic and artistic features to determine the origins of different mint centers.

First. The Dinar of 262 AH

Museum No.	Amir	Weight	Diameter	Gold Purity	Year of Issue
4215	Ibrahim II	4.22 g	19 mm	87.5%	262 A.H

Description:

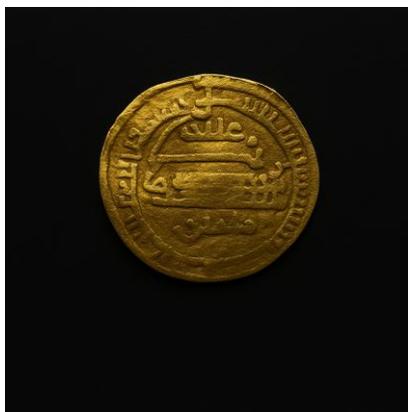


Obverse Inscription

<i>lā ilāh illā</i>	There is no god but
<i>Allāh waḥdahu</i>	God alone
<i>lā sharīk lahu.</i>	he has no partner
<i>Shukr</i>	Shukr

The margin *Muḥammad Rasūlu Allāh arsalahu bilhudā wa dinu alḥaqi '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 religion



Reverse Inscription

<i>Ghalab</i>	He prevailed
<i>Muḥammad</i>	Mohammed
<i>Rasūlu</i>	is the Messenger
<i>Allāh</i>	of Allah
<i>Ibrāhīm</i>	Ibrahim

The margin *Bismi Allah ḍuriba hādhā al-dīnār sanata ithnatayn wa-sittīn wa-mi'atayn*

In the name of God, this dinar was struck in the year 262 A.H

Analysis of Names

Ibrahim

The name refers to the ninth Aghlabid amir, *Abu Ishaq Ibrahim II* (261–290 AH / 874–902 CE). His reign was marked by a series of uprisings in Tripoli, Tunisia, and the region of *al-Zab*, which required repeated military interventions to maintain state authority.

In 265 AH, *Abbas ibn Ahmad ibn Toulun* attempted to rebel against his father, the governor of Egypt, by seizing control of *Barqa* and Tripoli. *Ibrahim* responded by dispatching his commander *Ahmad ibn Kurhub*, followed by another army under *Balagh*. A battle took place near Leptis Magna, ending with Abbas's defeat and retreat to *Barqa* (Ibn al-Athir, 1987).

In 267 A.H, the Berbers in Tripoli revolted and killed the amir's governor, *ibn Kurhub*. *Ibrahim* then sent his son *Abdullah* in 269 A.H at the head of an army that succeeded in driving out the rebels and restoring the city. Meanwhile, the people of *Ifriqiya* lodged complaints with the Abbasid Caliph *al-Mu'tadid*, who expressed displeasure with Ibrahim's actions and threatened to grant Tripoli to his cousin *Muhammad ibn Ziyadat Allah* (Ibn al-Abbar, 1985). Enraged, Ibrahim personally marched to Tripoli in 283 A.H, launching a surprise attack on the city and killing its governor (Ibn Idhari, 1983).

Within this turbulent political context, Ibrahim issued a series of distinctive dinars during his rule (261–289 AH). His name "*Ibrahim*" appears beneath the central inscriptions on the reverse, while the names *Shukr* and *Balagh* appear beneath the obverse inscriptions in specific years. This variation in the coinage reflects the political and administrative changes of the period and provides tangible evidence of the shifts in power and strategies of allegiance within the Aghlabid state.

Shukr

Beginning with the reign of the third Aghlabid amir, *Ziyadat Allah I* (201–223 AH / 817–838 CE), Aghlabid dinars were distinguished by the appearance of unfamiliar personal names alongside those of the ruling amirs. These included names such as *Khattab*, *Shukr*, *Hasan*, *Jubran*, *Alwan*, *Balagh*, *Khalaf*, *Dadi*, and *Musa*, among others. This phenomenon has sparked considerable debate among scholars regarding the identity and role of these individuals within the Aghlabid state.

According to *al-Shabi* (1966), these names belonged to *Mawali* and *Fityan* (young retainers) of the Aghlabid palace, primarily of Slavic origin (*Saqaliba*), who served within the court. *Al-Ush* (1982), however, argued that they were supervisors of the mints. Bates (1987) rejected this interpretation, suggesting instead that they were not mint administrators in the strict sense but rather high-ranking military officers, members of the court elite, or provincial governors. He dismissed *al-Ush's* view, noting the lack of historical precedent for including the names of “mint overseers” on Islamic coins.

Marçais (1991) proposed that the supervisors of the Aghlabid mint were *Mawali*, Greeks, slaves, or *Fityan* who had earned the absolute trust of the amirs. Similarly, *Kashbūr* (2000) argued that they were among the Aghlabids' *Mawali* who, through loyalty and dedicated service, gained favor with their masters to the extent that their names were inscribed on the coinage.

Shukr exemplifies this category of Aghlabid retainers whose names appeared on dinars. He appears to have enjoyed the confidence of Amir *Ibrahim II* during the early years of his rule, as his name was featured exclusively on the dinars of 261 AH and 262 A.H. The subsequent disappearance of his name raises several possible interpretations. It may have resulted from the temporary nature of the assignments given to palace retainers within the mint, from shifts in the balance of power among the Aghlabid court elite, or possibly from *Shukr's* fall from favor or early death. This brief but notable presence reflects the fluid role of these *mawali*, whose names became temporarily associated with official coinage, only to vanish soon after without leaving a lasting trace in the historical record.

Rarity of the Shahat Dinar (262 A.H)

A review of international numismatic catalogues and coin indexes indicates that the name *Shukr* had previously been associated exclusively with the dinar of *Ibrahim II* dated 261 A.H, after which it was believed to have disappeared. However, the discovery of the rare *Shahat* dinar dated 262 A.H, which also bears the name *Shukr*, provides conclusive material evidence that expands our understanding of this figure. This discovery refutes earlier opinions claiming that his name appeared only in the issues of 261 AH and confirms that his presence on Aghlabid coinage continued at least until 262 A.H.

Second. The Dinar of 269 A.H

Museum No.	Amir	Weight	Diameter	Gold Purity	Year of Issue
4219	Ibrahim II	4.23 g	19.5 mm	90%	269 A.H

Description**Obverse Inscription**

<i>lā ilāh illā</i>	There is no god but
<i>Allāh waḥdahū</i>	God alone
<i>lā sharīk lahu.</i>	he has no partner
<i>Balagh</i>	Balagh

The margin *Muḥammad Rasūlu Allāh arsalahu bilhudā wa dinu alḥaḳi '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>	He prevailed
<i>Muḥammad</i>	Mohammed
<i>Rasūlu</i>	is the Messenger
<i>Allāh</i>	of Allah
<i>Ibrāhīm</i>	Ibrahim

The margin *Bismi Allah ḍuriba hādhā al-dīnār sanata tis'a wa-sittīn wa-mi'atayn*

In the name of God, this dinar was struck in the year 269 A.H

Analysis of Names*Ibrahim*

Previously defined.

Balagh

Balagh was a *Mawla* of Amir *Ibrahim II* (261–290 AH / 874–902 CE) and one of his closest attendants. Available historical sources indicate that he occupied a position equivalent to that of a vizier. He was still alive in 267 A.H, the year when *Ibn Talib* was reinstated as judge through *Balagh's* intercession and influence (*al-Maliki*, 1994). It is most likely that he was killed in 279 A.H, since *Ibn Idhari* (1983) reports that Amir *Ibrahim ibn Ahmad* executed all his *Fityan* (young retainers) in that year and replaced them with black slaves (Sudan).

The name *Balagh* appears on dinars beginning in 262 AH and has been the subject of scholarly debate. *Al-Shabi* (1966) and *Lavoix* (1891) noted that *Michel Amari* (1858) had read the name as "*Rubai*," interpreting it to mean "quarter-dinar." This view was rejected by *al-Shabi*, as the name appears on both full dinars and quarter-dinars. Similarly, *Karabacek's* (1877)

interpretation that the word *Balaghi* means “without fraud or error” was dismissed, since the name occurs exclusively on the dinars of *Ibrahim* II. Lane-Poole (1976) and Lavoix (1891) considered it instead to be the name of an otherwise unknown individual, relying on the pattern of personal names that appeared on Aghlabid dinars prior to the reign of *Ibrahim* II.

Several historical sources confirm the correct reading of the name *Balagh*. *Qadi Iyad* referred to him in more than one instance (*al-Talibi*, 1969), and *Ibn al-Abbar* (1985) mentioned him in connection with the poet *Abu Bakr ibn Hammad al-Taharti*, who asked *Balagh* to deliver a poem he had written to *Ibrahim*. The author of *Riyad al-Nufus* also recounts that Amir *Ibrahim* was impressed during a debate with *Ibn al-Banna*, whereupon he turned to his retainer *Balagh* and said to him in the Slavic language: “I see that this man (meaning *Ibn al-Banna*) deserves that the judge’s cap be taken off and placed on his head” (*al-Maliki*, 1994). This indicates that *Balagh* enjoyed a position of high standing and great trust, appearing close to his master during court sessions. He was even entrusted with leading a major military campaign against *Abbas ibn Ahmad ibn Toulun* in Tripoli in 267 AH (*Ibn al-Athir*, 1987).

As for the confusion in reading the name *Balagh* as *Balaghi*, *Kashbūr* (2000) attributes it to the extended tail of the letter “ghayn” descending beneath the preceding letters, creating the illusion of a final “ya.”

It is noteworthy that the last known Aghlabid dinar bearing the name *Balagh* was struck in 276 A.H. Subsequent dinars issued by *Ibrahim* no longer featured his name, although in some cases, dinars issued within the same year exist both with and without the name *Balagh*.

Rarity of the Shahat Dinar (269 AH)

Numismatic catalogues and international coin indices indicate that the name *Balagh* first appeared on the dinars of *Ibrahim* II in 262 AH (Bernard, 2010, No. 141; *al-Ush*, 1982, No. 87). It then disappeared from the issues of 263 AH (*al-Ghadhban*, 2010), only to reappear in the dinar of 264 AH (*al-Ush*, 1982, No. 88; Lavoix, BN, II, No. 858), and continued to be present until 268 AH (Lane-Poole, 1889, No. 200; *al-Ush*, 1982, No. 102), after which it was believed to have vanished completely according to conventional sources. The discovery of the rare *Shahat* dinar dated 269 A.H, which also bears the name *Balagh*, represents a highly significant addition to the corpus of Aghlabid coinage. This find refutes the prevailing assumption in the literature that the appearance of his name ceased in 268 A.H.

This unique specimen not only confirms the continued presence of the name *Balagh* on Aghlabid coinage up to 269 A.H but also demonstrates the value of field surveys and new discoveries in reshaping our understanding of Aghlabid monetary history. The rarity of the *Shahat* dinar lies in the fact that it remains the only known example documenting this chronological extension, making it a cornerstone for studying the phenomenon of the appearance of retainers’ and *Mawali* names on Aghlabid coins.

Third: Artistic Analysis of the Two Dinars

Examination of the two *Shahat* dinars reveals an average weight of 4.225 g, with diameters ranging between 19.00 and 19.50 mm, yielding an arithmetic mean of 19.25 mm. This correspondence indicates that their weight closely conforms to the legal standard of the Islamic dinar, estimated at approximately 4.25 g. In terms of form, both dinars were struck as perfectly circular pieces, exhibiting a relatively smooth surface that demonstrates precision

in striking and careful attention to fine technical details. The edges are sharp and well-defined, consistent with the characteristic style of Aghlabid dinars.

Content Analysis

A structural analysis of the two Aghlabid dinars reveals that the obverse of each specimen bears four lines of inscription, while the reverse carries five. The total number of words in the central field amounts to nine on the obverse and six on the reverse. No geometric or vegetal ornamentation is present within the inscriptions.

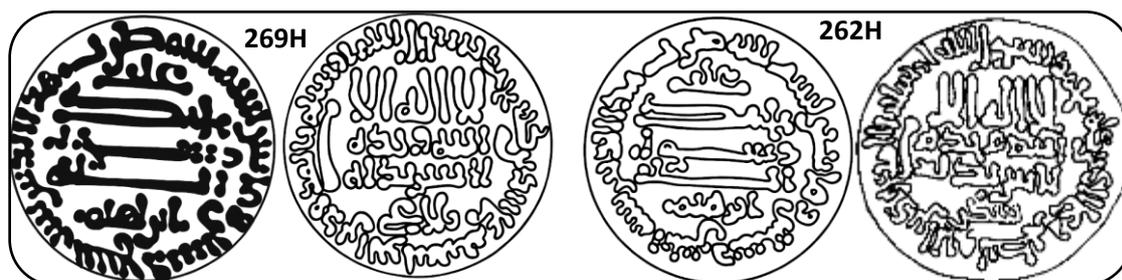


Fig. 2. Tracing of the inscriptions on the dinars of 262 and 269 AH

The script employed on both faces is a plain Kufic hand, exhibiting distinctive stylistic variations in the rendering of the amir's name. In writing the name *Ibrahim*, a connected dot was placed before the initial alif, whereas the medial alif was intentionally omitted to conserve space. The form of the letter *hā* (ه) evolved over time, assuming a more fluid shape. In the 262 AH and 269 AH dinars, the letter *qāf* (ق) in the word *al-ḥaqq* ("the Truth") was executed as an elongated simple curve, while in the dinars lacking the name of a mint servant (*fatā al-sikkah*), it appears as a curve with a decorative terminal designed to fill the vacant space.



Fig. 3. Epigraphic style of the name "Ibrāhīm" and the word "al-Ḥaqq"

By comparing the engraving of the names Balagh and Shukr on the two Shahat dinars, one can observe a clear evolution in execution style. The forms range from rounded granular strokes to smoother and more flattened lines, reflecting the gradual artistic development in Aghlabid coin design.

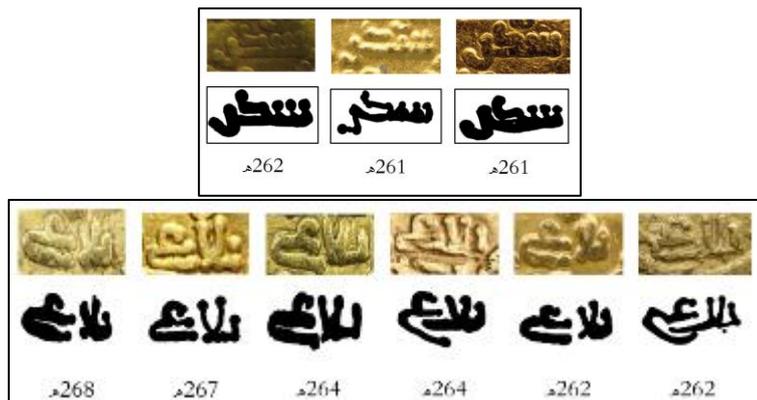


Fig. 4 Comparison of the names “Shukr” and “Balāgh” on the dinars

Analysis of the Obverse Margin

On the obverse margin, a Qur’anic quotation appears in two segments:

“Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; He sent him with guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religion.”

The first segment, *“Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,”* is part of the noble verse: Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are strong against the disbelievers and compassionate among themselves.” (Holy Qur’an, al-Fath, 29).

The second segment, *“He sent him with guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religion,”* appears three times in the Holy Qur’an, with minor contextual variations in different surahs:

1. *“It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religion, even though the idolaters dislike it.”*
(Holy Qur’an, al-Tawbah, 33)
2. *“It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religion, even though the polytheists dislike it.”*
(Holy Qur’an, al-Saff, 9)
3. *“It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religion; and sufficient is Allah as a witness.”*
(Holy Qur’an, al-Fath, 28)

The first complete appearance of this formula on Islamic coinage dates back to the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, during his renowned monetary reforms—specifically in their fourth phase, which abolished figural imagery and introduced Qur’anic inscriptions. This occurred in 77 AH / 696 CE. Since then, this Qur’anic citation has become a standard feature on Islamic coins (*dinars*, *dirhams*, and *fulus*) and continued throughout most Islamic dynasties in a nearly uniform textual form (*al-Naqshbandi*, 2002).

Status of Individuals on Aghlabid Dinars

A review of the historical sources concerning the Aghlabid state reveals several scattered references that highlight the influence and prominence of the individuals whose names appeared on coins, indicating that their roles extended far beyond that of mere mint officials. For instance, *Abu Harun Musa* served as the head of the *Diwan al-Barid* (Postal Bureau) during the reign of *Ziyadat Allah I* (*al-Shabi*, 1970). According to *Ibn al-Athir* (1983), *Abu Harun* led a

military siege against the rebel *ʿAmr ibn Muʿawiya al-Qaysi*, forcing him to surrender after several days.

Similarly, *Masrur al-Khadim* supervised the construction of the *Ribat* of Sousse, and his name was inscribed alongside that of Amir *Ziyadat Allah I* on the foundation plaque of the fortress (*ʿAbd al-Wahhab*, 1972).

As for *Balagh*, the trusted *Mawla* of Amir *Ibrahim II*, he occupied a position of exceptional closeness and confidence. Historical accounts describe him sitting beside the Amir in council, engaging in private conversation, and conveying orders in the Slavic (*Saqaliba*) language to avoid being understood by others (*al-Talibi*, 1969). Moreover, *Ibrahim II* entrusted him with command of a major military campaign against *ʿAbbas ibn Ahmad ibn Tulun* in Tripoli in 267 AH (*Ibn Khaldun*, 2000).

These examples collectively illustrate that the individuals whose names appeared on Aghlabid dinars were not mere mint supervisors but rather figures of considerable political, administrative, and military authority, whose presence on coinage served as a symbolic assertion of loyalty, prestige, and delegated power within the Aghlabid hierarchy.

Fourth: Historical Significance

Political Dimension

The presence of the Aghlabid emblem “Ghalab” affirms the political authority of the Aghlabids under the nominal sovereignty of the Abbasid Caliphate. The inscription of the amirs’ names on the dinars symbolizes local sovereignty and highlights their symbolic independence from Abbasid control.

Economic Dimension

The continued minting of high-purity gold dinars reflects the strength and stability of the Aghlabid economy, even during the later stages of their rule.

Propagandistic Dimension

The artistic and textual innovations observed in these inscriptions were likely part of a political discourse intended by the amir to emphasize his leadership, religious devotion, and protective role over both the state and Islam.

Conclusion

The two rare Aghlabid dinars preserved in the Shahat Museum represent a significant addition to the corpus of Aghlabid coinage, serving as a precise mirror of the political and economic history of the period and as primary sources for understanding the administrative and propagandistic transformations within the Aghlabid state.

The study reveals that the appearance of the names *Shukr* and *Balagh* reflects internal shifts within the Aghlabid court and illustrates Amir *Ibrahim II*’s efforts to consolidate his authority and assert symbolic autonomy from the Abbasid Caliphate. Moreover, the continued minting of high-purity gold coins underscores the stability and resilience of the Aghlabid economy, even amid political turbulence.

The findings further confirm that the names of mawali such as Shukr, Balagh, and Abu Harun Musa belonged to influential figures holding political, military, and administrative positions, and that the inscription of their names on coinage served as both a reflection of their prominence within the court and a propagandistic instrument to convey the amir's confidence in his inner circle.

Since no parallels to these two coins are recorded in major international collections, their discovery substantially enhances the scholarly and historical value of the Shahat specimens and broadens future research prospects for studying rare monetary typologies of the Aghlabid period.

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