



Trade and Trade Posts Between North Africa and Italy

April 28, 2023

Universität Hamburg/AS-SAAL, ESA 1



**Universität Hamburg**
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

Funded by
 **Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft**
German Research Foundation

RomanIslam

Center for Comparative Empire
and Transcultural Studies

The workshop focuses on the entanglement between slave and bullion trade and political expansion. It continues the workshop of October 2021 as a publication workshop. The economic sphere between North Africa and southern Italy was identified as a crucial node between two streams of slave trade, one from the European North to the Aghlabid South and one from the Maghreb to the East. It was also the only region in the western Mediterranean where Islamic gold and silver circulated, following broadly the same lines. Islamic legal sources include provisions for Byzantine or foreign merchants in general. North Africa and Italy was a region of intense conflict, not only between Christian and Muslim groups. The entanglement of the regions becomes more discernable when different documents and sources in different languages are combined. This requires a variety of skills and expertise.

The hypothesis to be tested is that the Aghlabid or Arab expansion to Sicily and southern Italy might not have been driven by state actors, but by mercantile associations, which were engaged in slave trade from Europe via Venice and southern Italy, accompanied by a flow of silver and gold coins.

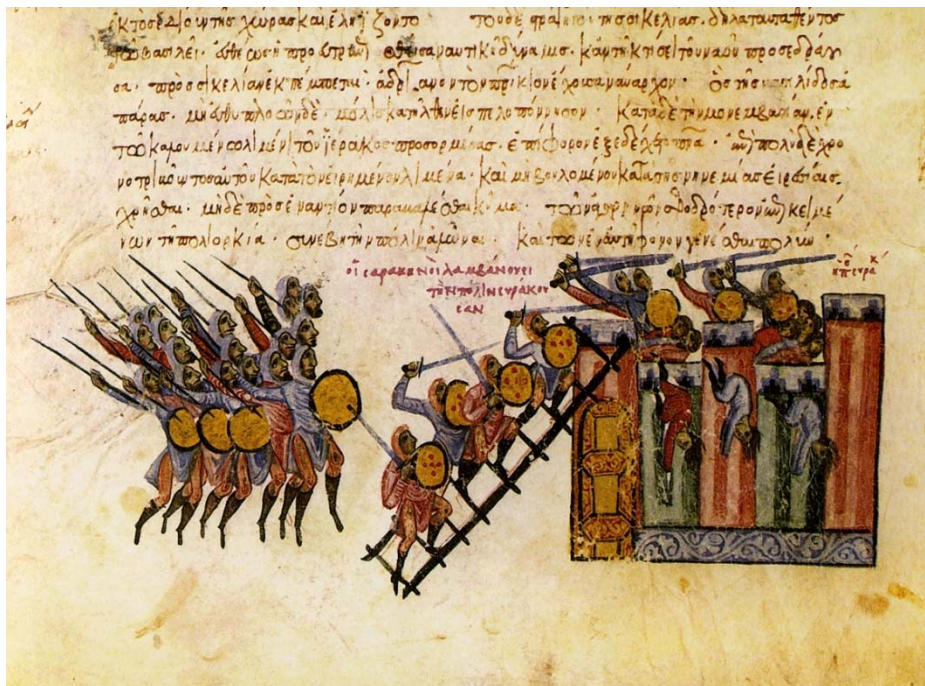
Front page : Al-Idrisi's world map (North Africa and Italy) ©Wikipedia Commons



Aghlabid quarter dinar, minted in Sicily,
879 ©Wikipedia Commons

Contents

1. Program	3
2. Abstracts	6
3. Contact	11



The Fall of Syracuse to the Arabs ©Wikipedia Commons

Room AS-SAAL, ESA 1

- 9.30 **Antonia Bosanquet and Stefan Heidemann**
(Universität Hamburg)
Welcome
- Stefan Heidemann** (Universität Hamburg)
Introduction: Trade and Empire
- 10.15 **Dana Katz** (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid - Casa de
Velázquez/ Universität Hamburg)
An Island of Crops, Livestock, and Slaves: A
Reconsideration of Sicily's Significance in the Aghlabid
Political-Economic Sphere
- 11.00 Short Coffee Break
- 11.15 **Kordula Wolf** (Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom)
Raiding, Trading – Subduing? Dynamics of (Booty)
Economy and Conquest in Ninth-Century Southern Italy
- 12.00 **Antonia Bosanquet** (Universität Hamburg)
Protecting the Outsider. What Legal Texts and Institutions
Reveal About Trade in Early Islamic Ifriqiya
- 12.45 Lunch Break

- 14.30 **Stefan Heidemann** (Universität Hamburg)
North African Silver: Money for Western Eurasia - Its Rise
and Demise
- 15.15 **William Day** (Independent Scholar)
Southern Italy in Trans-Mediterranean bullion flows, 600-
1000
- 16.00 Round Table, Plans for Publication



Aghlabid Dirham ©Universität Hamburg

Abstracts

Dana Katz (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid - Casa de Velázquez/
Universität Hamburg)

An Island of Crops, Livestock, and Slaves: A Reconsideration of Sicily's Significance in the Aghlabid Political-Economic Sphere

Among the inhabited islands of the Mediterranean, wrote the tenth-century geographer al-Iṣṭakhrī in his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms*, the largest is Sicily, which was so “abundant in crops, livestock, and slaves” that it surpassed any other Muslim realm bordering the sea. For the island’s significance to the Aghlabids a century earlier, modern historians have understood Sicily as everything from a colony to an immense raiding zone. Sicily was undeniably a frontier space, whose internal boundaries shifted frequently, with several cities on the island recurrently changing hands in the ninth century. Aghlabid attacks on Byzantine strongholds brought booty and captives back with them to Palermo. After their distribution to members of the army, slaves were sold in the emiral capital on the island. This paper considers several questions: was the great urban development of Palermo, most certainly in evidence by the later Fatimid period, tied to the slave trade? If so, can we consider slavery as an engine of economic growth in this geographical region? What other commodities might have been traded on these same maritime routes of Ifrīqiya-Sicily (and southern Italy)? Were the raw materials of the island also a draw for the Aghlabids? Finally, a consideration of Aghlabid-Byzantine pacts and accords points to the necessity of comparative studies to expand our understanding of ninth-century Sicily beyond the standard triangle in the scholarship of slaves/booty/guerilla warfare.

Kordula Wolf (Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom)

Raiding, Trading – Subduing? Dynamics of (Booty) Economy and Conquest in Ninth-Century Southern Italy

After the formation of an Aghlabid (sub)emirate in Sicily, also several parts of southern Italian mainland came under Islamic control, but only intermittently. What we can observe in the – mainly Latin – sources is a decade-long transitional period, characterized by massive looting and the establishment of settlements strategically located along coastal and inland routes. By analysing (to the extent that this is possible at all) who the actors were and how these new constellations during the ninth century affected the slave trade with North Africa, practiced long before, the paper delves into the question of the correlation between booty-making, trading posts, and conquest.

Antonia Bosanquet (Universität Hamburg)

Protecting the Outsider. What Legal Texts and Institutions Reveal About Trade in Early Islamic Ifrīqiya

Little is known about the development of Mediterranean trade between the Islamic conquest of North Africa in the late 1st/7th century and the thriving commercial landscape of the mid-4th/10th century. This paper will examine the relevance of legal sources and institutions for understanding economic practices in the Arab province of Ifrīqiya in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th century, using the example of the *amān* or guarantee of safe passage to an outsider. An analysis of how this institution is treated in legal texts from early Islamic Ifrīqiya is helpful for understanding the context in which cross-Mediterranean trade took place, the factors and structures driving this, and the expectations of regularity that governed both sides of the relationship. It is also important for understanding the role of the slave trade in the evolution of

commercial relations and the complex interplay between attacks organized by “state” agents, autonomous or pseudo-autonomous raiders, and independent traders. How did these forms of acquisition and exchange contribute to economic interaction between Ifrīqiya and southern Italy and what does their integration into legal structures tell us about the interest in collaboration on both sides?

Analyzing the discussion of the *amān* in early legal texts also offers an insight into the more abstract question of how practices and relations that were already familiar to inhabitants of the Mediterranean coastal regions were integrated into legal structures characteristic of the Islamic Empire, following the conquest of North Africa and the region’s political-cultural orientation towards the east.

Stefan Heidemann (Universität Hamburg)

North African Silver: Money for Western Eurasia - Its Rise and Demise

North African silver played a crucial role for the economic growth of the highly monetized Islamic Empire and even far beyond: the Carolingian Empire and from the Caucasus to Gotland/Sweden and from the Levant to Central Asia. The key evidence for its importance is only visible by its struck coins. In less than thirty years from 150/767-8 North African dirhams rose to prominence within the circulation until its production dropped almost instantly in 178/794. After this its importance can no longer be measured by coins, because the silver might have been melted to bullion and traded in another form. The rise of the North African silver mines went along with the rise of the North African slave trade. Were these independently observable phenomena connected?

William Day (Independent Scholar)

Southern Italy in Trans-Mediterranean Bullion Flows, 600-1000

To appreciate the extent to which gold bullion and coinage of trans-Mediterranean provenance flowed into Southern Italy during the early Islamic period, this paper first notes the importance of differences in gold-silver ratios between regions in helping to determine the direction of precious-metal flows. It then juxtaposes the material numismatic evidence in Southern Italy, in the form of coin finds, and the documentary record, in the form of references to payments in commercial contracts. The different forms of evidence have their own peculiarities and limitations, and they are each in their own way imperfect measures of the circulation and use of gold, but taken together, they paint a picture of an economy based overwhelmingly on gold, even after Charlemagne's advance into Southern Italy. In Late Antiquity, Byzantine gold predominated. Alongside the Byzantine coins of Rome, Ravenna, Syracuse and trans-Mediterranean mints such as Constantinople, there were also 'barbarised' Italian imitations and pseudo-imperial Lombard coins in the names of Byzantine emperors from Justinian I (r. 527-565) to Justinian II (r. 685-695, 705-711) as well as issues in the names of Lombard rulers. With the spread of Islam, the Aghlabid conquest of Sicily and the establishment of Berber outposts in peninsular Southern Italy, it is plausible that the new Islamic commercial networks exploited pre-existing Byzantine lines of trade, perhaps especially in the area of human trafficking. The spatial analysis of single finds of Byzantine, Lombard and Islamic coins may help to reveal patterns that go some distance towards substantiating this hypothesis. It is notable, too, that the denominational structures of the Byzantine, Lombard and Islamic coinages were entirely compatible, even if not identical. Documentary references to payments are also suggestive. The richness of the evidence for Salerno and the Amalfi coast already points towards a robust administrative framework, which was a necessary condition for the preservation of ecclesiastical records. It is also

noteworthy that references to *mancosi*, which denoted Islamic dinar and their Continental imitations, were most conspicuous in the evidence for Amalfi and its environs. It was in this context that the existing mint in Salerno and a new one in Amalfi evidently began to strike their own *tari* in imitation of the Islamic quarter-dinar. The imitations bore corrupt Kufic epigraphy but were initially struck to a good standard of weight and fineness, comparable to that of the originals. Most of the *tari* that have come to light in peninsular Southern Italy appear to be imitations, even if identifications are often uncertain. This perhaps suggests that the underlying motivation for the imitations was to supplement supplies of imported Aghlabid and Fatimid quarter-dinar in the area, where demand exceeded supply, and to recycle and monetize other forms of imported gold, whether coined or uncoined. Finally, the references to *mancosi* in the evidence for the Amalfi coast and the production of imitation *tari* in Salerno and Amalfi perhaps suggest that these were among the principal ports in the Southern Italian slave trade, importing Islamic gold and exporting human cargo.



Tari from Amalfi or Salerno ©Photo Heritage

Contact

Prof. Dr. Stefan Heidemann

DFG Center for Advanced Study

“RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies”

Universität Hamburg

F: +49 40 42838-3181

E: stefan.heidemann@uni-hamburg.de

Katharina Mewes

DFG Center for Advanced Study

“RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies”

Universität Hamburg

F: +49 40 42838-2944

E: katharina.mewes@uni-hamburg.de

www.romanislam.uni-hamburg.de

