

COUNTERFEIT GOLDPIECES IN THE HOUSE OF EXCHANGE

(In the 1070's)

Two central monetary institutions are constantly mentioned in this document: the mint and "the house of exchange."

The caliphal mint was headed by a high Muslim dignitary, referred to in the last line of the document as mutawallī al-sikka, "superintendent of coinage." It was actually run by a Jew, styled sāhib dār al-dārb, "manager of the mint," who probably was not a salaried government official, but an agent, ʿāmil, namely, a capitalist who farmed out its revenue. For money was not "issued" by the government, but sold in "the house of exchange."

The proprietor of the counterfeit money was a highly respected merchant and certainly himself the victim of a fraud. But this did not protect the persons involved from severe punishment and even the danger to lose their lives, had it not been for the intervention of the powerful manager of the mint.

The purpose of our document, which, ~~although written by a court clerk,~~ ^{before a notary} was not a deposition in court, but a ~~private~~ declaration, was to shield its issuer from any accusations which might be brought against him by the proprietor of the counterfeit money.

The document bears no date. But on its reverse side several drafts are written, one of which is dated October, 1081. Our document must therefore be earlier and cannot refer to Nizār, so famous in the history of the Ismaʿīlī sect, who claimed the throne of his father al-Mustansir after the latter's death in 1094. The proper name of the second Fatimid caliph of Egypt, al-ʿAzīz (975-996), was also Nizār;