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## The Coinage Reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan and Its Impact on Zakat in Islam

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### Abstract

The coinage reforms of the Umayyad Caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan in 77 AH (696/697 CE) in Damascus resulted in the redefinition of the Makkan *mithqal*, the officially sanctioned weight of the gold dinar during the Prophetic period of Islam, and the basis for the determination of the *Nisab* of *Zakat*, the minimum wealth held in one lunar year before one is obligated by *Sharia* law to pay the poor due. At 4.25 grams, the weight of the Damascus *mithqal* was 5.5% lighter and this resulted in the *Nisab* of *Zakat* for gold (20 dinars) being adjusted in terms of modern weights and measures from about 90 grams to 85 grams. Two years later in 79 AH (698/699 CE), the Caliph minted a Damascus silver dirham that weighed 25% less than the standard weight of the silver dirham in Makkah. The *Nisab* of *Zakat* for silver (200 dirhams) was then reduced from 800 grams to 595 grams, and Muslims for over 1,320 years since then have been paying the poor due with less currency in hand. This paper also highlights the injustice that happened during the imposition of the revised gold and silver coinage weight standards, the same inequity that incurred the wrath of Prophet Jesus upon the moneychangers. Information was gathered from 7 years of empirical research, including key literature from world-renowned numismatists, identification of relevant verses regarding weights and measures from the Holy Qur’an and verified Prophetic Traditions, and visits to prestigious international museums and coin fairs to examine actual gold dinars and silver dirhams from the Prophetic era. All efforts were made with the resolve to return the *Nisab* of *Zakat* to its original foundation in Islam.

### Introduction

*Zakat* refers to the purification of a believer’s wealth and soul. A fixed share is collected from surplus wealth to ensure the blessings of Allah in all earnings. *Zakat* is mentioned along with *Salat* (prayer) in 30 verses of the Qur’an. It was first revealed in Surah al-Muzzammil 73:20, “... *So recite what is easy from it (Qur’an) and establish prayer and give Zakat and loan Allah a goodly loan. And whatever good you put forward for yourselves, you will find it with Allah. It is better and greater in reward. And seek forgiveness of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.*”

The canonical *Nisab* of *Zakat* for gold and silver was determined via *Wahy* or Islamic Revelation received by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him [SAW]) in the month of Zulhijjah in 2 AH (624 CE) in Madinah. The following *Hadith* or Prophetic Tradition has been authenticated by the consensus of Muslim scholars worldwide: “*There is nothing due upon you in gold, until it reaches [the weight of] 20 dinars. Thus, if you have [the weight of] 20 dinars at the end of the [lunar] year, then there is ½ dinar levied on it [as Zakat]. Any additional amount will be calculated in this way. There is no Zakat on property until it has been owned for one [lunar] year.*” (Hadith related by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and al-Baihaqi).

The minimum amount of silver upon which *Zakat* is obliged is [the weight of] 5 *uqiyyah* (ounces) as noted in the *Hadith*: “*There is no Sadaqah (poor due) on anything less than [the weight of] 5 uqiyyah.*” (Hadith related by Ahmad and Muslim).

Its amount is counted as [the weight of] 200 dirhams because each ounce of silver is the weight of 40 dirhams. From ‘Ali bin Abi Talib who stated: “[*Weight of] 5 dirhams [are due as Zakat] on every [weight of] 200 dirhams.*” (Sunan Abu Dawud).

Before the coinage reforms of Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan (685-705 CE), Muslims relied on the weights and measures of the Byzantine gold dinar and Sasanian silver dirham to determine if they had surplus currency beyond their basic needs to support their families for a whole lunar year. These currency benchmarks were then changed by ‘Abd al-Malik under the guise of coinage reforms to declare as illegal and idolatrous, gold and silver coinage bearing symbols of faiths other than Islam. In this case, it was the Christian cross and the fire altar of the Zoroastrians. However, the redefinition of weights and measures of the dinar and the dirham during his coinage reforms raises the ethical question of whether a religious measure could be altered.

### **The Story of Prophet Jesus and the Moneychangers**

According to biblical sources, Prophet Jesus and his disciples journeyed to the holy city of Jerusalem along with thousands of pilgrims from other parts of the world. Entering the Temple courts, Jesus saw the moneychangers, along with merchants who were selling animals for sacrifice. Pilgrims carried coins from their hometowns, most bearing the images of Roman emperors or Greek gods, which the Temple authorities considered idolatrous. The high priest ordered that only Tyrian shekels would be accepted for the annual half-shekel Temple tax because the coins contained a higher percentage of silver, so the moneychangers exchanged “unacceptable” heavier coins for the lighter shekels, and they extracted a handsome profit. Pilgrims were unfamiliar with Jerusalem so the Temple merchants sold sacrificial animals at a higher price.

The high priest received a percentage of the profits from the moneychangers and the merchants, so their removal from the Temple precinct would have caused a huge financial loss to him. Jesus was so filled with anger at the desecration of the holy place that he took some chords and wove them into a small whip. Jesus ran about, knocking over the tables of the moneychangers, and spilling coins to the ground. He drove out the moneychangers, along with the men selling pigeons and cattle. As he cleansed the Temple courts of greed and profit, Jesus declared that a House of God is a house of prayer, and it is an act of sacrilege to turn it into a den of robbers.

### **Objectives**

Exactly what were the types of gold and silver coinage in the possession of the Holy Prophet (SAW) that were classified in history as a dinar (gold) and a dirham (silver) during his travels as an international trader over 1,400 years ago? Weights and measures play a vital role in shaping common commercial interactions and assigning quantifiable value to religious acts including *Zakat*. The primary objective of this paper is to present rational and conclusive arguments for the canonical definition of a dinar and a dirham throughout the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (SAW) in Makkah and Madinah. This will help determine a just and accurate measure of the canonical *Nisab* of *Zakat* for gold and silver. It is also hoped that this paper will provide an impetus for Muslim scholars to study the adverse effects of the two coinage reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan and to call for the reversal of using the Damascus gold dinar and silver dirham standards of weights and measures for all religious rulings in Islam as

they would have been judged to be unjust during the era of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and the *Rashidun* (Rightly Guided) Caliphate of Abu Bakar, Umar, Uthman and 'Ali.

### Methodology

Numismatics is one of the most valuable sources of ancient history. This paper provides concise but valuable data to promote the further study of numismatics of the early Islamic era and the reconstruction of the metrology of gold and silver currencies at the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the *Rashidun* Caliphs that remained canonical until the coinage reforms of 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwan. Coins provide authentic information about metallurgy, weights and measures, apart from knowledge about the political and cultural history of the empires that issued them. They are important pieces of evidence for the reconstruction of events of their times and they help in substantiating a known fact. In this case, it is the just weights and measures of the gold dinar and the silver dirham as referred to in Prophetic Traditions. The author studied actual dinars and dirhams from this era at the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum and at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

### Findings

With respect to the canonical weight of the dinar of the era of the Holy Prophet (SAW), there is only one *Hadith* that sheds light as narrated by Jabir bin 'Abdullah al-Ansari: "*The weight of the dinar is 24 qirats.*" The *isnad* or the list of authorities who transmitted this *Hadith* as recorded in *Kitab at-Tamhid (Sharh al-Muwatta')* by Imam Ibn 'Abdil Barr al-Andalusi al-Maliki (d. 463 AH) is not classified as being *Sahih* or authentic, but the *ijma'* (consensus) of Muslim scholars have accepted its ruling.

Upon the death of his grandfather, the young Muhammad was taken into the care of his uncle, Abu Talib, at the age of 12. The Quraysh were a mercantile tribe that controlled Makkah, and Abu Talib soon took his beloved nephew on trade caravans to Bilad al-Sham ("northern country") in the summer and to Yemen in the winter. Parts of Bilad al-Sham were under the Byzantine empire, while some areas of Yemen were held by the Sasanians. Hence, the young Muhammad would have been familiar with the weights and measures of the currencies of both empires. By the time he was 25 years of age, he was already an accomplished merchant and was known in Makkah as *Al-Amin* because he was truthful, honest and trustworthy in all his undertakings, especially in doing business. His character was exemplary and he was chosen to lead a very successful trade commission to Bilad al-Sham on behalf of the rich widow, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid who would later propose to him to become her husband.

The Holy Prophet (SAW) did not mint any coins as the gold and silver currencies in circulation in Makkah and Madinah were of the finest quality. The Byzantine and Sasanian currencies co-existed independently of each other in their respective currency zones, and the Arabs adopted them as their coinage of choice because of their reliable minting standards. The only correlation to be found between these two monetary systems is the canonical ratio of 10 dirhams being equal in value to 1 dinar as inferred by the *Nisab* of 20 gold dinars being equal in wealth to 200 silver dirhams.

### The Carob Seed (Qirat) and the Gold Dinar



Figure 1. Carob Fruit and Seeds

According to *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936*, the metrology (science of systems of weights and measures) of the gold dinar or *mithqal* at the time of the Holy Prophet (SAW) was based on the weight of the carob or kharrubah (*ceratonia siliqua linn*) seed. Its unit weight was known as the carat or qirat, and each qirat was theoretically equal in weight to 4 barleycorns. The *solidus* (short for *solidus aureus*) was the standard gold coin created by Constantine the Great (306-337 CE), and was also known in Greek as the *nomisma* (gold coin). The *solidus* weighs 24 Greco-Roman carats (qirats) or *siliquae*. The qirat was too small to mint as a coin, but it served as a unit of account in the Byzantine monetary system. The qirat weight differs from one place to another, depending on the region's climatic conditions and soil fertility. The Arabian qirat is classified as being 10% heavier than the Greco-Roman qirat, and 2% lighter than the Syrian qirat as summarized in the table below.

Qirat Type	Qirat Weight (milligrams)
Byzantine	189
Arabian	208
Syrian	212

Figure 2. Byzantine, Arabian and Syrian Qirat Weights

Philip Grierson (d. 2006 CE), a historian and Emeritus Professor of Numismatics at Cambridge University, noted that Ahmad bin Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892 CE), who is best known for his history of the formation of the Arab Muslim empire and who served in the Abbasid court of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861 CE), confirmed that the Heraclius dinar or *mithqal* was circulating in Makkah at the time of the Holy Prophet (SAW) at a weight of 22 Arabian qirats less a fraction. As the weight of 1 qirat is equal to 4 barleycorns, it is tenable to infer that a fraction meant here is  $\frac{1}{4}$ . Thus the Heraclius dinar would weigh about 4.5 grams [ $21\frac{3}{4}$  qirats  $\times$  0.208 grams]. The following figure of a Heraclius *solidus* is described in weight of Byzantine qirats.



Figure 3. 24 Qirats *Solidus* of Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine (610-641 CE)

The *solidus* weighs 1/72 of the Roman pound standard of about 326.6 grams (Wikipedia), and it is clearly represented on the coin by CONOB or *Constantinopoli obryzum*. “OB” is both an abbreviation for the word *obryzum*, which means refined or pure gold, and is the Greek numeral 72. Thus the exergue CONOB coin may be read as “Constantinople, 1/72 pound pure (refined) gold.” In 2005, Jean Elsen, a renowned numismatic auction house based in Brussels, Belgium published a well-documented study conducted in 1963 on a hoard of 1,434 *solidi* (plural of *solidus*) from the reign of Theodosius II (408-450 CE) that was discovered in Szikáncs, Hungary, to determine a Roman-Byzantine weight standard. The results have been tabled below.

Table 1

*A Study of 1,434 Byzantine Solidi Weights*

<i>Solidus</i> Weight (grams)	Numbers	Percentage of Total
4.23	1	0.07%
4.26	1	0.07%
4.31	1	0.07%
4.33	1	0.07%
4.34	1	0.07%
4.37	1	0.07%
4.38	2	0.14%
4.39	1	0.07%
4.40	6	0.42%
4.41	2	0.14%
4.42	2	0.14%
4.43	4	0.28%
4.44	5	0.35%
4.45	29	2.02%
4.46	5	0.35%
4.47	35	2.44%
4.48	231	16.11%
4.49	124	8.65%
4.50	677	47.21%

4.51	126	8.79%
4.52	145	10.11%
4.53	16	1.12%
4.54	2	0.14%
4.55	11	0.77%
4.56	2	0.14%
4.57	2	0.14%
4.58	1	0.07%
Total	1,434	100.00%

Table 2

*A Study of Byzantine Solidi Weight Ranges*

<i>Solidus</i> Weight Range (grams)	Numbers	Percentage of Total
4.23-4.27	2	0.14%
4.28-4.32	1	0.07%
4.33-4.37	3	0.21%
4.38-4.42	13	0.91%
4.43-4.47	78	5.44%
4.48-4.52	1,303	90.86%
4.53-4.57	33	2.30%
4.58-4.62	1	0.07%
Total	1,434	100.00%

Results of the study found that 47.21% of the *solidi* weighed 4.50 grams, and an overwhelming 90.86% of the coins were in the weight range of 4.48-4.52 grams. Hence, it can be deduced that the standard weight of the Byzantine dinar throughout the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (SAW) is 4.5 grams. Based on this weight standard, a metrological table of dinar weights and measures is reconstructed by the author.

Table 3

*Metrological Table of Dinar Weights & Measures in Makkah and Madinah*

<i>Nabawi and Rashidun</i> Caliphate era (570-660 CE) Arab and Byzantine Gold Dinar Weights & Measures (Makkah and Madinah Standard)	Unit	Weight (grams)							
Nisab	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	90.00
Uqiyyah	5	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	18.00
Dinar/Mithqal ( <i>Solidus</i> )	20	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	4.50
1/2 Dinar ( <i>Semissis</i> )	40	8	2	1	-	-	-	-	2.25
1/3 Dinar ( <i>Tremissis</i> )	60	12	3	1 ½	1	-	-	-	1.50
1/6 Dinar ( <i>Half Tremissis</i> )	120	24	6	3	2	1	-	-	0.75
Byzantine Qirat ( <i>Siliqua</i> )	480	96	24	12	8	4	1	-	0.1875

However, lightweight *solidi* existed during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and they were represented by different markings. From the reign of Justinian I (518-527 CE) to Constantine IV (668-685 CE) certain gold coins issued were marked clearly as light in weight. In this respect there was no deception at all as the lighter *solidi* might have been the tail end of a batch made lighter to make up the required 72 pieces of coins minted to the weight of the Roman pound. The author presents details of the different *solidi* weight types in Byzantine qirats for ease of reference.

Lightweight Solidus Type	Distinct Markings on Coin	Weight (Qirats)	Approximate Weight (grams)
I	OBXX or BOXX	20	3.75
II	OB+* or OB**	22	4.12
III	BOFK or with * on obverse and reverse	23	4.31

Figure 4. Types of Lightweight *Solidi* and Their Corresponding Weights



Figure 5. 20 Qirats Lightweight *Solidus* of Tiberius II (578-582 CE)



Figure 6. 22 Qirats Lightweight *Solidus* of Maurice Tiberius (582-602 CE)



Figure 7. 23 Qirats Lightweight *Solidus* of Constantine II (641-668 CE)

### The Silver Dirham

There is no Hadith to be found to offer an insight into the canonical weight of the dirham. However, the approximate weight can be derived from the Arab-Sasanian coinage of Caliph Uthman bin Affan (644-656 CE), son-in-law and close companion of the Holy Prophet (SAW) who is the first Muslim ruler in recorded history to have

minted a dirham with a *Bismillah* (in the name of Allah) in the year 31 AH (652 CE). The Arab-Sasanian dirham was minted by Muslims using the weight standard of the Sasanian *drahm* of Khusrau II (590-628 CE) that circulated in Makkah and Madinah. The *drahm* was the basic coinage created by the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashir I (224-242 CE). It maintained a weight standard of about 4 grams from the very beginning until the death of their last emperor, Yazdegerd III in 651 CE.



Figure 8. Sasanian *Drahm* of Khusrau II (590-628 CE)



Figure 9. Earliest Arab-Sasanian Dirham (652 CE) of Caliph Uthman with *Bismillah*

The average weight of the silver *drahms* of Khusrau II was between 4.11-4.15 grams according to *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936*. However, Jere Bacharach, Professor Emeritus at the Department of History at the University of Washington, wrote in his research article "The Purity of Sasanian Silver Coins: An Introduction" that Ardashir I issued a new style *drachma* (dirham) that became the model for all subsequent Sasanian silver coin issues. This included standards of weight and fineness that remained relatively constant. The new coins, struck on a thin flan, weighed about 4.00 grams and were about 95% silver.

Philippe Gignoux, Director of the magazine *Studia Iranica* of *Peeters Online Journals*, and Michael Bates, Emeritus of Islamic coins at the American Numismatic Society based in New York, in a co-authored article for *Encyclopaedia Iranica* titled "Dirham," stated that a dirham was a unit of silver coinage and of weight, and the dirham retained a stable value of about 4 grams throughout the entire pre-Islamic period. Based on the scholarly findings of these world-renowned experts, the author reconstructed a dirham metrological table representative of the historical weights and measures of silver in Makkah and Madinah during the *Nabawi* or Prophetic era.

Table 4

Metrological Table of Dirham Weights & Measures in Makkah and Madinah

Nabawi and Rashidun Caliphate Era (570-660 CE) Arab and Byzantine Silver Dirham Weights & Measures (Makkah and Madinah Standard)						Weight (grams)
	Unit	Unit	Unit	Unit		
Nisab	1	-	-	-		800.0
Uqiyyah	5	1	-	-		160.0
Dirham ( <i>Drahm</i> )	200	40	1	-		4.0
Arabian Qirat	3,850	770	19 ¼	1		0.2078

**Effects of the Coinage Reforms of 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwan**

About 40 years after the incident of Jesus and the moneychangers, the Romans invaded Jerusalem during an uprising and destroyed the Temple completely. Today, on its location stands the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim mosque built by 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwan, the Umayyad Caliph who decreed not one, but two coinage reforms. The first one was in 77 AH when he replaced the Arab-Byzantine dinar of about 4.5 grams with a lighter Umayyad dinar weighing 4.25 grams. The second coinage reform was carried out 2 years later in 79 AH when the Arab-Sasanian dirham of about 4 grams was replaced by a smaller Umayyad dirham of roughly 2.97 grams in theory. Based on a study of coinage hoards from the period, the Umayyad dirhams rarely weighed 2.9 grams and were mostly found to weigh between 2.7-2.8 grams.

From a ratio of 9 Arab-Sasanian silver dirhams of 4 grams each being equal in weight to 8 Arab-Byzantine gold dinars of 4.5 grams each before the first coinage reform, the author finds that this ratio transitioned to 17 Arab-Sasanian dirhams being equal in weight to 16 reformed Umayyad dinars in 77 AH. This ratio finally settled in 79 AH at 10 reformed Umayyad dirhams being equal in weight to 7 reformed Umayyad dinars as embraced by Ibn Khaldun (d. 808 AH) who recorded in his magnum opus, *Al Muqaddimah*, "Know that there is consensus (*ijma'*) since the beginning of Islam and the age of the companions and the followers that the dirham of the *Sharia* is that of which ten weigh seven mithqals [weight of the dinar] of gold..."

Unfortunately, no companions were ever mentioned by name and no references were given to identify the type of *mithqal* of gold meant in this sweeping statement, i.e. whether it described a dinar of the Makkah and Madinah standard, or a dinar of the Damascus standard. It was just a generalization of events that happened over 650 years before Ibn Khaldun was born in North Africa, and it would have been based on Umayyad written history and their justification for the reformed coinage standards.

Table 5

Standard Metrological Table of Reformed Dinar Weights & Measures in Damascus

Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwan's (696 CE) Reformed Gold Dinar Weights & Measures (Damascus Standard)						Weight (grams)
	Unit	Unit	Unit	Unit		
Nisab	1	-	-	-		85.0
Uqiyyah	5	1	-	-		17.0
Dinar/Mithqal	20	4	1	-		4.25
Syrian Qirat	400	80	20	1		0.2125

Before the coinage reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik, the caliph’s last dinar type was the famous ‘Standing Caliph’ that copied standard *solidi* design of Byzantine emperors. It was minted for only 2 years from 693-695 CE weighing 24 Byzantine qirats before a lighter and fully epigraphic gold dinar design was introduced in 696 CE.



Figure 10. ‘Abd al-Malik Gold Dinar (circa 693 CE) Weighing 24 Byzantine Qirats



Figure 11. ‘Abd al-Malik Gold Dinar (circa 696 CE) Weighing 20 Syrian Qirats

Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233 CE), a historian, wrote that ‘Abd al-Malik fixed the weight of the new dirham at 14 Syro-Arabian (Syrian) qirats, the average of supposedly three different weight standards of the Sasanian dirham in circulation at the time of Caliph Umar bin al-Khattab (634-644 CE). These dirhams were the *Baghli* (20 qirats), the *Maghribi* (12 qirats), and the *Tabari* (10 qirats). In the history of coins, the *Tabari* dirham was first minted in 711 CE by the Dabuyid Ispahbads in the denomination of a *half-drachma* or half-dirham only. What actually constitutes a *Maghribi* dirham is still unclear, but the *Baghli* dirham definitely refers to the Sasanian *drachm* that represented the standard dirham weight of Makkah and Madinah. It is unethical and contrary to the tenets of Islam to combine the weights of two half-dirhams with a full dirham and to subsequently take their average weight as the standard of a reformed dirham.

Table 6

*Standard Metrological Table of Reformed Dirham Weights & Measures in Damascus*

Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan’s (698 CE) Reformed Silver Dirham Weights & Measures (Damascus Standard)					
	Unit	Unit	Unit	Unit	Weight (grams)
Nisab	1	-	-	-	595.0
Uqiyah	5	1	-	-	119.0
Dirham	200	40	1	-	2.975
Syrian Qirat	2,800	560	14	1	0.2125



Figure 12. Umayyad Silver Dirham (circa 698 CE) Weighing 14 Syrian qirats

In his book, “A History of the Early Islamic Law of Property: Reconstructing the Legal Development, 7th-9th Centuries,” Hiroyuki Yanagihashi, a Professor at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology at The University of Tokyo, wrote that the city of Basra was under the governorship of al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf (d. 714 CE) who carried out the Umayyad monetary reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan. Basran moneychangers were under his strict control and exchanged new Umayyad dirhams for old Sasanian *drahms* at their face value [one for one]. In the past, people used to evaluate dirhams according to their weight, but the Umayyads subsequently made it a rule to exchange them by number. Sa’id ibn al-Musayyab (d. 715 CE) who was one of the foremost authorities in jurisprudence among the *Taba’een* (those who were born after the passing of the Holy Prophet but were contemporaries of his companions) in Madinah was reported to have practiced *muratal* (exchange by counter-weighing) and did not support the actions of al-Hajjaj. Ibn al-Musayyab was 7 years old when Caliph Umar died and he lived throughout the caliphate of the remaining *Rashidun* caliphs.

Abu Sa’id al-Khudri reported the Prophet (SAW) as saying: “Do not sell gold for gold except when it is like for like, and do not increase one over the other; do not sell silver for silver except when it is like for like, and do not increase one over the other; and do not sell what is away [from among these] for what is ready.” (Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Nasa’i and Musnad Ahmad)

In *al-Muwatta’* of Imam Malik bin Anas, Ibn al-Musayyab stated: “Clipping gold and silver is part of working corruption in the land” and this may allude to the actions of the Umayyads in forcing the exchange of heavier coins for lighter ones. In Islam, *Riba al-fadl* is described as an unlawful excess in the exchange of two counter-values where the excess is measurable through weight or measure.

In a similar saying, Ibn al-Musayyab declared, “Clipping gold and silver is part of working corruption in the land once [the quantity of] *mithqals* have been fixed among the Muslims and they are familiar with them.” This statement also does not seem to refer to individual coin clippers, but to the Umayyad redefinition of the *mithqal* in terms of 20 Syrian qirats in place of 22 Arabian qirats less a fraction for the dinar and 14 Syrian qirats in place of 19 Arabian qirats plus a fraction for the dirham.

Ibn al-Musayyab also said, “I sent gold bullion to Damascus, and it was coined for me according to the weight of the *mithqal* in the *Jahiliyya*.” He may have been recounting his experience when the Umayyads used to follow the Byzantine dinar standard before the gold coinage reform, but it is also plausible that he was proud of having imposed his position by having made the Umayyads coin his bullion according to the early Islamic standards that the Holy Prophet (SAW) was familiar with.

To summarize, in the course of monetary reform, the Umayyads tried to exploit people in two ways. First, when they gave new coins to people in return for bullion and spurious coins, they took a commission for the minting. Second, they tried to exchange the new lighter coins for the older heavier ones at face value, i.e. without making up the difference in weight, contrary to the traditional practice according to

which gold and silver were sold and bought by their weight. Some Syrians seem to have accommodated themselves to the unjust Umayyad policies, but the same policies met with strong opposition from the people of Madinah, represented by Sa’id ibn al-Musayyab. Jabir bin ‘Abdullah al-Ansari who narrated the *Hadith* of the weight of the dinar as being 24 qirats, was poisoned by al-Hajjaj in 697 CE, not long after the first coinage reform that involved the redefinition of the *mithqal*. Jabir would have surely stood by Sa’id ibn al-Musayyab in staunch opposition to the Umayyad policies.

“... *So do not fear men, but fear Me, and do not sell My signs for a small price. Whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed - such are the disbelievers.*” (Surah al-Ma’idah 5:44)

None of the Imams of the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali schools of Islamic jurisprudence were born yet during the Umayyad coinage reforms. Thus, they would have naturally accepted the reformed Umayyad coinage standards as being canonical.

Imam Abu Hanifah Nu’man bin Thabit	80 - 148 AH / 699 - 767 CE
Imam Malik bin Anas	93 - 179 AH / 715 - 796 CE
Imam Muhammad bin Idris al-Shafi’i	150 - 204 AH / 767 - 820 CE
Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal	164 - 241 AH / 780 - 855 CE

Figure 13. Lifetimes of the 4 Great Imams (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali)

### Conclusion

Coinage from the era of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the *Rashidun* Caliphate are the best sources for determining the canonical *Nisab* of *Zakat* for gold and silver. The Holy Prophet (SAW) himself has clearly implied that the weight of the full gold dinar must be 24 Byzantine qirats, which is definitely not 20 Syrian qirats. Muslims have accepted the *Mushaf* of Uthman as the standard text of the Holy Qur’an, but they have not recognized the dirham of Uthman as being the standard silver weight and measure. The Holy Prophet (SAW) was very familiar with weights and measures of gold and silver having been trained to be a knowledgeable trader at a very young age by his uncle, Abu Talib. Standardization of weights and measures started in the early Islamic period with the Qur’anic injunction, “*Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight; that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination.*” (Surah al-Isra 17:35)

The Holy Prophet (SAW) also stated: “*Standard weights are according to the weights of the people of Makkah, while standard measures are according to the measures of the people of Madinah.*” (Kitab al-Buyu’, Sunan Abu Dawud)

With the resurgence in the popularity of the gold dinar and the silver dirham in Malaysia and other parts of the Muslim world, it is time we corrected their definition in the context of what the Holy Prophet (SAW) actually held in his hand during the buying and selling of goods that the trade caravans of the Quraysh were famous for. It is time to reverse the nefarious coinage reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan, and to return to the canonical weights and measures of the time of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

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