

## Notes and News

### BYZANTINE COINS IN RUSSIA

Russia did not develop a proper indigenous coinage until the end of the middle ages, partly no doubt because there were adjoining areas whose currency could be borrowed. The fluctuations and varied source of origin of the inflow of coins over the period of about 1,500 years from 200 B.C. to A.D. 1300 throw a flood of light not only on trade in Russia but also on the general influences at work on trade in Europe as a whole. The most constant and permanent source of coins throughout the period was the Roman, and later Byzantine, empire. For this reason the two issues, Nos. G 4/4 and E 4/4, of *Archaeology of the U.S.S.R., a Corpus of Archaeological Sources*, which are comprehensive surveys by V. V. Kropotkin of hoards, respectively, of Roman and Byzantine coins found in the U.S.S.R., are of particular interest.<sup>1</sup>

Some 172 hoards and hundreds of single examples of Roman coins have been found in the Soviet Union. The Caucasus and Crimea were virtually part of the Roman Empire, and so hoards are to be expected in these areas. However the largest number of hoards, predominantly of silver, occurs in the wooded steppe between the Prut and the Dnieper; hoards are rare in the forest proper to the north and in the open steppe to the south. As in Germany and Scandinavia the hoards are predominantly of the 2nd century and fall off sharply during the later empire. This was partly due to the retreat of the imperial frontier back to the Danube, and partly due to the disturbance of the native tribes in the Dnieper area by the arrival of the Goths. At all events there was a period when imported coins were so numerous that they must have formed a currency and then there was reversion to barter in the later empire, abundant products of which occur in Russia. Although most leading Russian authorities regard the coins as being payment for cereals exported to the empire, Kropotkin believes the exports much more resembled those of medieval times, that is slaves, furs and so on. For the medievalist the distribution of the hoards and single coins (*op. cit.*, fig. 23) is of great interest. The dense concentration in the middle Dnieper basin, the centre of later Kievan Russia, prompts the question whether the bearers of the contemporary 'burial-field' cultures in this area were Slavs, a central problem in Russian archaeology. The scatter of single coins along the waterways, notably in the upper, middle and lower Volga, suggests that the famous early medieval trade routes were already in use in Roman times.

There are three important changes in Byzantine times in the character of the inflow. First is the absolute reduction of the quantity of coins. We tend, quite rightly no doubt, to think of the permanent influences on Russia as Byzantine and Greek, yet the numismatic evidence suggests that the most intensive influence was Roman and Latin in the 2nd century A.D.! Secondly the relationship of the precious metals has changed; gold from being relatively unimportant in Roman times has become more or less as important as silver (in the early Byzantine centuries no silver entered Russia). Here there is an important regional difference between south Russia of the Dnieper area, where gold was in use (for international trade according to Kropotkin), and north Russia where non-Byzantine silver was the main currency. As Kropotkin shows in an important map (*op. cit.*, map 2), there is a complete absence of gold hoards in north Russia.

Thirdly, and most important, is the fact that Byzantium was no longer the sole—indeed it became only a subsidiary—source for coins entering Russia. First Persian and

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1961 and 1962, in folders, with a descriptive text and loose maps and figures. The letter in the index number refers to the period, in the Russian alphabet: A, palaeolithic; B, neolithic; V, bronze and iron ages; G, classical; D, Slav; E, medieval.

then from c. 800 Arab silver in the form of dirhems from Central Asia poured into Russia along the Volga, and from Russia spread westwards into Europe, reaching, as Biddle has shown, even as far as Winchester (the 10th-century reconstruction of Winchester is contemporary with the foundation of Kiev and Novgorod). From about 1000 there was a great reverse flow of silver into north Russia, largely pennies from England. The movements are well recorded at Novgorod, where, it will be remembered, two substantial 10th-century Kufic hoards occurred in the second street, there was a scatter of western coins in the 11th- and 12th-century streets, and a practically coinless period from the 13th century onwards. The flow of Byzantine coins into Russia almost ceased after the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, while the Mongol conquest of south Russia in the 1240s cut off the north from further contact.

The distribution of coins as shown in map 2 of Kropotkin's work reveals various interesting points. The concentration in the middle Dnieper valley around Kiev indicates one of the main trade routes with Byzantium, while the single finds on the lower Volga, particularly on its elbow, reflect its importance as a trade-route and the transshipment between this river and the Don. The absence of gold hoards in the north has been noted above. The silver hoards shown in the north are misleading, since they normally consist of merely one or two Byzantine coins among several hundred dirhems and pennies. The reader should perhaps be warned that the maps accompanying these two studies have been very carelessly compiled, as obvious mistakes, or checks against the inventory, show; it is a very great pity that such a worthwhile piece of work should be so wretchedly marred in this way.

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#### A PORTION OF AN INSCRIBED PRE-CONQUEST CROSS-SHAFT FROM LANCASTER (PLS. IX, A-D, X, A)

In 1963 I was asked by the Ministry of Public Building and Works to watch the contractor's excavations for the building of a new vicarage at Lancaster, W. of the previous vicarage, and N. of the parish church, formerly the church of the alien priory.<sup>2</sup> It was hoped that some traces would emerge of the other buildings of the priory, of which nothing was known, except that they presumably lay N. of the church, since the adjacent castle precluded their having lain to the south. It was also hoped to find further evidence for the course of the N. wall of the late Roman fort, known as the Wery Wall, which, as the *vetus murus*, formed one of the features defining the land with which the priory was endowed at its foundation in 1094.<sup>3</sup>

Work began in March, 1965, and its nature, which involved cutting a platform in the hillside before orthodox foundation trenches could be laid, made observation difficult. The only structure revealed was a substantial stone-built drain, running on a line a few degrees out from that postulated by Richmond for the Wery Wall.<sup>4</sup> The filling of this drain contained only medieval pottery. This does not, of course, preclude its having been Roman in origin, and Sir Ian Richmond, who saw a small portion of it, thought that it probably was. In addition, the positions were noted of a number of areas in the sections which may have represented robber-trenches or pits. One of these, in particular, was noted in the N. section of the platform.

The site was not visited again for some weeks, as digging ceased when building began. On 16 June, I was told by Mr. G. M. Leather that excavations for drains surrounding the house had revealed an inscribed stone. Mr. Leather secured the stone, and it was immediately recognized as a pre-conquest monument. The following day I visited the site, and was shown exactly where the inscribed stone was found. Masonry

<sup>2</sup> NGR SD(34)/4747 6198.

<sup>3</sup> W. O. Roper, *Materials for the History of the Church of Lancaster* (Chetham Soc., 2 ser., 26, Manchester, 1892), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> I. A. Richmond, 'Excavations on the site of the Roman fort at Lancaster, 1950', *Trans. Hist. Soc. of Lancs. and Ches.*, 105 (1954), fig. 1 (upper).