

A DAY WITH MACEDONIAN ARCHAEOLOGY – HOARD OF BILLON TRACHEA FROM THE SKOPJE FORTRESS

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The copper hoard from the XIII century was discovered as a whole X.9.5.1, in a pit from Block: XXI, in the course of archeological excavations at the Skopje Fortress in 2009. It contained 50 copper coins, including 5 items of Bulgarian imitations (no. 1-5) and items presenting rulers, namely 2 items presenting Ivan Asen II (no. 6-7), 2 items presenting Theodore Comnenus-Ducas (no. 8-9), 2 items presenting John Comnenus-Ducas (no. 10-11), 9 items presenting John III Ducas-Vatatzes with (no. 12-20), 4 items presenting Theodor II Ducas-Lascaris (no. 21-24), as well as the most numerous, 24 Latin imitations (no. 25-47). The 24 items are grouped with 2 additional items that are illegible and cannot be linked to any ruler, including a new variant under no.48. This coin diversity is an excellent indicator about the coin circulation on the territory of Macedonia that marked the first half of XIII century.

The time the hoard was buried may be linked to specific historical and political circumstances at the Skopje Fortress in the mid XIII century. Judging from coins which were produced the latest and belong to Theodor II Ducas-Lascaris (1254-1258)[1], the time the hoard was buried chronologically corresponds to events in 1258 and 1259[2]. This was the period when Skopje was firstly conquered by the Bulgarian Constantine Tikh, and the same year by the Nicaeans and the Serbs afterwards.

In the following 1259, the city fell under the Nicaeans, led by Michael VIII Palaiologos, to remain under his rule until 1282[3]. Lack of coin series of Michael VIII Palaiologos in the hoard, whose share in the total monetary quantity found at the Skopje Fortress is 8.37%[4], only confirms this possible historic date.

Bulgarian imitations, chronologically speaking, were the earliest to be produced and may be dated in the

[1] M. F. Hendy, Byzantine Coins, D.O.C. vol. 4 part 2 ,T XLVI Theodore II Ducas Lascaris, Washington D.C.1999; 615-617

[2] Latin imitations have not been taken into account due to their illegibility and common chronological framework from 1204 to 1261.

[3] I. Mikulic, Medieval Cities and Fortresses in Macedonia, Book 5, Skopje 1996, 309

[4] J. Kondijanov, Review of the total numismatic material from the Skopje Fortress, MAND, Dojran 2012

period between 1195 and 1215, judging from the hoards from Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, where almost no such coins have been discovered together with Byzantium coins prior to Isaac II Angelos(1185-1195) [1]. The same representation has been confirmed in this hoard, providing similar chronological indication regarding the period when the coins were produced.

Items found in the hoard correspond to items from other hoards discovered on the Balkans, which are characteristic and linked to the final stage of placing underground, which according to M.F. Hendy may be dated within a time frame of ± 1215 until c. 1250. Most frequently discovered in these hoards are items of later type A variants with an asterisk on the obverse, and most dominant numeric pattern of representation in this period in the collective monetary findings is A, followed by C and B[2] variants. This grouping, in addition to this hoard, is specific also for hoards found in Aiani, Livadion, Macedonia ('58), Trace, Vrasta (Vraca)[3].

What has been known from historical sources regarding the possible beginning of monetary production is linked to the Pope Innocent III, who apart from the crown, gave Kaloyan rights to produce his monetary series[4] in 1204, however the evidence points out that Bulgarian imitations of Byzantine trachea were in circulation prior to this date. Generally accepted chronological framework for the latest produced Bulgarian imitations is 1215, which corresponds to the reign of Coloman and to the period of brief prevention from the Bulgarian invasion of the Balkans. What becomes clear from this hoard is that production of the series could continue also during the reign of Ivan Asen II, but not later than 1230[5] , when the sphere of his influence also covered Ohrid[6] and Thessalonica[7], considered to be possible mints that initially produced new Bulgarian monetary series. This argument is supported by a unique Bulgarian imitation (no.1) from this hoard, where the obverse pictures Christ seated on a throne with a high back, with a netted decoration, seen for the first time in Bulgarian coins, and according to style presentation, it resembles coins of John III Ducas-Vatatzes from Magnesia, produced after

[1] M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C. vol. 4 part 1, T XXVI Bulgarian imitations, Washington D.C.1999; 66-80

[2] Variant B is not represented in the case of this hoard

[3] M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C.vol. 4 part 1, Washington D.C.1999; 70-72

[4] P. Grierson, Byzantine coins, London 1982; 238

[5] 9 March 1230: The Battle of Klokotnica, Chronica Alberici monachi Trium Fontinum; Izvori za Bъlgarskata Istorija XXIV; 183

[6] M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C.vol. 4 part 2, T XLVII Ivan II Asen, Tsar of Bulgaria, Washington D.C.1999; 639-643

[7] V. Penčev, Where have the coins of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan II Asen been struck? Macedonian Numismatic journal No.2; 105-109

1221. This hypothesis is still impossible to prove with certainty, since the coin is partially damaged, however this item could be the key to clarifications regarding Bulgarian coin manufacturing in the period between 1215 and 1230.

The hoard discovered contained two items (no. 6 and 7) of exceptionally rare trachea of the Bulgarian Czar Ivan Asen II (1218-1241), which according to numeric representation and concentration of the hoards, are most frequent at the territory of modern Macedonia. Most of these billon tracheas, 24 items, were found at the hoard in Ohrid[1], but there were also 8 items discovered during the excavation of St. Achilles at Prespa[2], and 8 items found at the Skopje Fortress including the two items from this hoard.

Arguments regarding geographical representation of these variants have been supported by the discovery of the unique piece of golden hyperpyron of Ivan Asen II which was found in Prilep[3], but now is an item of the numismatic collection at the Archaeological Museum in Bulgaria[4]. The location of the mint to manufacture coins of Ivan Asen II is still disputed, by Hendy claiming it was in Ohrid[5] while Penchev claiming it was in Thessalonica[6], basing his claim on stylistic similarities with the coins of Theodore Comnenus-Ducas (1224-1230).

The second in size quantity of monetary types found at the hoard presents the Nicaean emperors with 13 items (26%), with a special place given to the Thessalonica variants of John III Ducas- Vatatzes[7], produced in the period 1246-1254 to which 9 of the 13 (18%) items belong. A real rarity are the remaining 4 coins of Theodor II Ducas-Lascaris [8](1254-1258), produced in Thessalonica, which apart from this hoard discovered at the Skopje Fortress, are only represented by another single item. The 4 items are a chronological indicator to date the period the hoard was buried, corresponding to historical events in the period 1258-1259. Yet another significant data is the discovery of a new type of Theodor's billon

[1] T. Gerasimov, Kolektivni nahodki na moneti prez 1965g. IAI, XXIX 1966; 213

[2] M. F. Oicononomides, Monnaies trouves les fouilles de la basilique de Saint Achilles, RN 1967; 252-265

[3] I. Yourukova, V.Penčev, Bulgarian Medieval Seals and Coins, Sofia 1990; 78-84

[4] V. Penčev, Where have the coins of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan II Asen been struck? Macedonian Numismatic journal No.2; 105-109

[5] M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C.vol.2, T XLVII Ivan II Asen, Tsar of Bulgaria, Washington D.C.1999; 639-643

[6] V. Penčev, Where have the coins of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan II Asen been struck? Macedonian Numismatic journal No.2; Skopje 1996; 105-109

[7] M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C.vol. 4 part 2, T XLV John III Ducas, called Vatatzes, Washington D.C.1999; 601-614

[8] M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C.vol. 4 part 2, T XLVI Theodore II Ducas-Lascaris , Washington D.C.1999; 615-617

trachea, notably item no. 22, where instead of a labarum, the emperor is holding a spear. An interested item is coin no.18 of John Ducas-Vatatzes, which was re-coined with new design, also belonging to this ruler.

The remaining 4 legible items belong to Epirus rulers, 2 of which (no.8-9) to Theodore Comnenus-Ducas (1224-1230), who other than this hoard, has been identified only in another hoard in Macedonia from the Plaoshnik-Ohrid[1]locality. Also, here we can add two items (no. 10-11) of the despot John Comnenus-Ducas[2] (1237/1242-1244),the son of Theodor Ducas, who is represented in many XIII century hoards discovered at the territory of Macedonia.

The hoard is clearly dominated by Latin imitations, 23 in number or 46% of the monetary quantity, providing a realistic picture for their monetary representation both in this hoard as well as other hoards from the XIII century. Their series are some of the most numerous judging from their concentration at the Balkans and point out to political and economic instability, and most probably to inflation that was caused by their overproduction evident from their representation in almost all discovered hoards dated back to 1206-1261.

Nicetas Choniates[3] a contemporary, who witnessed the fall of Constantinople in 1204, wrote about the large quantities of copper coins and about the fact that all city statues of the Hippodrome were melted down into coins. However, this was not the end, since almost all series manufactures by the Latins in Thessalonica[4] between 1204 and 1224 or in Constantinople [5] between 1204 and 1261, more or less resemble series of emperors of the XII century and even carry their names such as Alexios, John, and the most frequent Manuel[6]. Later types of official series are less similar to XII century designs, and may be found in several variants coined with new iconographic presentations. These iconographic changes are probably due to the Byzantine (Nicaean)-Venetian treaty of 1219[7], including a clause that obliges both parties to restrain from imitating the other party

[1] D. Razmovska-Bačeva Hoards of the Late Byzantine coins of Theodore Angelus Comnenus Ducas, Numismatic journal No.4, Skopje 2000; 121-135

[2] M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C. vol.2, John Comnenus-Ducas , Washington D.C.1999;

[3] Nicetas Choniates, Historia, ed. Jan Louis van Dieten; Berlin 1975 ;(Corpus Fontium Historia Byzantinae #11)

[4] P. Grierson, Byzantine coins, Latin coinages, Plate 79, London 1982 267-270; M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C. vol. 4 part2, T LII The Latin states-Thessalonica, Washington D.C.1999; 668-669

[5] P. Grierson, Byzantine coins, Latin coinages, Plate 77-78, London 1982 267-270; M. F. Hendy, B.C., D.O.C. vol.4 part 2, The Latin states-Constantinople, T XLVIII-LIII Washington D.C.1999; 664-667

[6] M. F. Hendy, Coinage and Money, 191-201, 215-217

[7] Nicetas Choniates, Historia, ed. Jan Louis van Dieten; Berlin 1975 ; (Corpus Fontium Historia Byzantinae #11)

hyperpyrons[1], manouelaton [2] and stamenon[3] (it is clearly implied that the Byzantines needed to protect themselves from imitations of the Latins, not vice versa)[4].

The fact that the treaty fails to also note copper tetarterons implies that they were not a factor worth mentioning, or they considered the coins made by the Latins in gold, silver or billon to be real counterfeits that were almost identical to the Byzantine[5].

Latin imitations may be divided into two basic groups according to dimensions that differentiate them into large module and small module, a fact that is evident also in this hoard, where items no. 25-32 belong to coins of large module, whereas items no. 33-48 are coins of small module. Coins of large module found at the hoard were produced in the mints in Constantinople and Thessalonica, and were manufactured between 1204 and 1261, which chronologically corresponds to coins of small module; however, the mint where they were produced is still a mystery and leaves room for debate.

It is significant to mention item no. 48, which is a new copper trachea of a small module, but so far cannot be correctly prescribed to any ruler. This item demonstrates similarities to Latin imitations of Manuel I, of a small module, however, rather than labarum or sword the ruler here holds a three-pronged scepter. However, despite similarities, in terms of iconography and style, the design at the reverse is different and cannot be safely placed in the group of other Latin imitations.

[1] Hyperpyron – gold trachea

[2] Manouelaton – electrum or silver aspron trachea

[3] Stamenon – Billon or copper trachea

[4] Tafel and Thomas, *Urkunden*, II, pp. 205-7, esp.207; S.Brezenanu, *RESEE* 12 (1974), 143-146

[5] Examples are hyperpyrons of John III Vatatzes, who are different from the Latin by the sigilla and the nimbus of Christ on the obverse.