
STOYAN MIHAYLOV*

SEVENTH-TO-EIGHTH CENTURY BYZANTINE BRONZE COINS FROM NORTHEASTERN BULGARIA

Rezumat: Sunt prezentate patru monede de bronz bizantine descoperite în nord-estul Bulgariei. Monedele au fost emise în timpul împăraților Heraclius (2 ex.), Constans II (1 ex.) și Tiberius III (1 ex.). Sunt discutate o serie de aspecte ale prezenței monedei bizantine în Dobrogea și nord-estul Bulgariei în secolul al VII-lea și începutul secolului al VIII-lea.

Keywords: Byzantine coins, follis, Dobrudja, Bulgaria.

Subject of the following report are four bronze Byzantine coins from the 7 century and the early 8 century AD. The coins are a part of a private collection and according to the owner they come from the North-eastern Bulgaria, without more precise descriptions. The reason to present them, although without any given archaeological or topographic context, is the big rarity of Byzantine coins minted after 616 AD.

The description of the coins is the following:

1. Heraclius (610 – 641)

obverse: No inscription. Heraclius standing on the left and Heraclius Constantine on the right. Heraclius wearing military dress, holding a long cross in his right hand. His son wearing chlamys and crown with cross, holding a globus cruciger in his right hand. Cross between their heads (picture 1a).

reverse: Capital letter M, on the left (A)NN(O), on the right the year of reign (X)XVI (twenty-sixth), above a part of a monogram, beneath B (picture 1b).

Constantinople, 635 – 636 AD, weight 6.00 gr., diameter 19-24 mm, die position ↘.

DOC, II, 1, 112a1-4, 113a.

2. Heraclius (610 – 641)

obverse: No inscription. At the centre Heraclius, on the right Heraclius Constantine, on the left Heraclonas. The figure of Heraclius wearing military dress and holding long cross is best preserved. The figures of his sons are more obscure and there can't be seen any details (picture 2a).

* Muzeul Regional de Istorie Veliko Târnovo. E-mail : stoyan_mihaylov@abv.bg

reverse: Capital letter **M**, on the left (A)NN(O), on the right the year of reign is missing, above a part of a monogram, beneath A or Δ (picture 2b).

Constantinople, 639 – 641 AD, weight 5.09 gr., diameter 20-21 mm, die position ↓.

DOC, II, 1, 125a1-2.

3. Constans II (641-668)

obverse: Separate letters from the inscription. Bust facing, beardless. There can be seen the globus cruciger in his right hand and the collar of the chlamys (picture 3a).

reverse: Capital letter **M**, on the left (A)NA, on the right the year of reign (I)/II, above E, in exergue NEO(Σ) (picture 3b).

Constantinople, 643 – 644 AD, weight 4.51 gr., diameter 21-22 mm, die position ↘.

DOC, II, 2, p. 397,5e1-4 (related to Heraclonas).

4. Tiberius III (698-705)

obverse: The inscription is not visible. Emperor standing, wearing military dress, paludamentum, holding a globus cruciger in his right hand and a long cross in his left one (picture 4a).

reverse: only capital letter **M** can be seen and beneath the officina mark β (picture 4b).

Constantinople, 701-705 AD, weight 3.25 gr., diameter 19-29 mm, die position ↓.

DOC, II, 2, p. 630, 11b.

From the region of Lower Danube there is no published follis from V class (629-639) of the emperor Heraclius¹. From VI class (639-641) has been published only one coin minted in 639-640 AD (Oberländer-Tărnoveanu 1996, 119). To the parallel samples of the reported here coins of emperor Heraclius (610-641) we can assign also the report for a follis from the period 630-640 AD found at Novae, but without any description or a picture of the coin (Dimitrov 1992, 87, note 24). Follis of Constans II from the reported here type is not found in any published so far bronze coins of this emperor, from Bulgaria (Mushmov 1934, 446; Penchev 1991, 3-4, 5-8; Lazarov 2001, 50; Theoklieva-Stoytcheva 2001, 44-45; Zheкова 2006, 82)², as well as from Romania (Iacob 2000, 490-495). The follis of Tiberius III is the second published sample from this type in Bulgaria (Peykov 2004, 217). The coin from Varna is also from the second (β) officina, but there can be seen the year of reign – fourth (Δ) (701-702). There is also a published follis from Constanța of

¹ There is a report of a follis of Heraclius of class V, minted in 629-630 AD (Ocheșeanu 1981, 312), but in a later publication the coin is assigned to class II (613-616) (Poenaru Bordea et al. 2004, 127, note 315). There is a reported coin from the same class of 20 nummi from Hirshova (Custurea 1986, 277).

² In Bulgaria there are reports for bronze coins of Constans II without any detailed description of them from the region of Shumen. (Jordanov 1987, 189, tab. 2), Ahtopol (Jordanov et al. 1998, 69, 74, table 9) and Starmen in the Ruse District (Stefanov 1956, 12).

the II class of Tiberius III from the fourth (Δ) year of reign, but of the fourth (Δ) officina (Poenaru Bordea et al. 2004, 128)³.

All four presented coins were minted after 616 AD, in which begin a period of enormous decrease in number of finds of Byzantine bronze coins (Gândilă 2003-2005, 120-121; Mihaylov 2007, 212-213). In the presented table below (Tab. 1) the number of post-616 coin finds decreases over 30 times in comparison with those from the first years of Heraclius' reign. Likewise, the coins minted after 616 AD with a few exceptions are not from archaeological excavations, but are found by chance. For this reason is very interesting the matter for the way of distribution of the post-616 coins. Most of the authors, who have studied these finds, interpret them as coins which came in the region of Lower Danube right after the mint of the relevant samples as a proof for the continuing of the organized supply of the region with newly minted coins, even though in limited numbers (Custurea 1986, 274-276; Chiriac 1995, 135; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1996, 104-106; Iacob 2000, 488-490). Studying the pattern of the coin circulation on the territory of the whole Byzantine Empire, there are settlements in which the entrance of new emissions continued well after 616 AD, such as Aphrodisia, Pergamon, Sardi, Priena, Ephesus in Asia Minor, Constantinople, Athens (Morrisson 2002, 955-958, figs. 6.1-2, 6.4-8) and Mesembria (Youroukova 1980, 186-190; Penchev 1991, 5-9; Theoklieva-Stoytcheva 2001, 26-28) on the Balkan Peninsula. Up to the present moment there are not known settlements on the territories of provinces Scythia and Moesia Secunda, in which are found groups of coins minted after 616 AD. This fact as well as the unusually big decrease in number of the found samples minted after 616 AD, do not allow the support of any hypothesis, which holds assumptions for the continuation of the organized supply of the mentioned territories with new emissions of bronze coins. But the cessation of organized supply of the lands of lower Danube with Byzantine coins, according to me is not a sure proof that this region had been lost from Byzantium (Lazarenko 2003, 156-159; Ivanišević 2006, 83). The coin circulation is one of the characteristic features of the Byzantine state organization, but its presence or absence should not be the only argument for a political belonging of a given territory to Byzantium, especially for a border area such as the region of Lower Danube.

Most probably the coins minted after 616 AD came to the area of Lower Danube through dispersion from regions where the Byzantine coins continued to be spread in an organized manner (for example from Constantinople, Mesembria) as a result of trade, private journeys or military actions. In this way the specimens of Heraclius and Constans II could be spread in the examined territory soon after they have been minted as well as after quite a long period, comprising several decades, which includes the time after 680 AD, when Bulgarian state has been established on the Balkan Peninsula. For example in the coin hoard from Obârșeni there are coins from Phokas (602-610), Heraclius (610-641) and Constans II (641-668) (Dimian 1957, 196), i.e. the coins of Phokas have been in circulation about 50

³ From Romania are reported two more bronze coins of Tiberius III – from Mediaș and Berezeni, as well as a silver coin from Dobrudja (Iacob 2000, 492-494).

years after their minting. In a collective find of bronze coins from Nesebar the earliest coin has been minted in 655/6 AD, and the latest one in 689/90 AD (Penchev 1991, 5-9), i.e. some of the coins of Constans II (641-668) have been in circulation at least for 3-4 decades. Correspondingly the coins of Tiberius III were possible to be in circulation even during the second half of the 8 century.

Table 1. Bronze coins found in the provinces Scythia and Moesia Secunda minted in the period 610-705.

emperor	period	nominal				coin/year	follis/year
		M	K	I+B	I		
Heraclius	610-616	96	6			17,00	16,50
	616-641	6	3	4		0,52	0,35
Constans II	641-668	18	1	1		0,70	0,66
Constantine IV	668-685	3	1		1	0,29	0,22
Justinian II	685-695	1				0,10	0,10
Leontius	695-698						
Tiberius III	698-705	3				0,43	0,43

APPENDIX:

Catalogue of the bronze coins from the provinces Moesia Secunda and Scythia, minted in the period 610-705.

Cherkvitsa, Pleven district, Bulgaria – 1M (610-616) (Regional museum of history – Pleven, inv. No.3039).

Svishtov, Veliko Tarnovo district, Bulgaria – 1 M (610-616), 1 M (616-641) (Dimitrov 1992, 87 note 24).

Starmen, Ruse district, Bulgaria – 1M (641-668) (Stefanov 1956, 12).

Veliko Tarnovo and Veliko Tarnovo district, Bulgaria – 15 M (610-616) (Dochev 2002-2003, 297), 4 M (610-616), 1 K (616-641) (Mihaylov 2005, 153-154).

Silistra and Silistra district, Bulgaria – 16 M + 2 K (610-616), 2 M + 1 K + 3 IB (616-641), 6 M + 1 IB (641-668), 1 M + 1 I (668-685) (Oberländer-Tărnoveanu 1996, 119-120).

Vinitsa, Shumen district, Bulgaria – 1 M (668-685) (Zhekova 2006, 82).

Shumen, Shumen district, Bulgaria – 1 M (641-668) (Zhekova 2006, 82).

Madara, Shumen district, Bulgaria – 1 M (641-668) (Mushmov 1934, 446).

Kostena reka, Shumen district, Bulgaria – 1 M (641-668) (Zhekova 2006, 82).

Drumevo, Shumen district, Bulgaria – 1 M (610-616) (Zhekova 2006, 82).

Cherni vrah, Shumen district, Bulgaria – 2 M (610-616) (Zhekova 2006, 81-82).

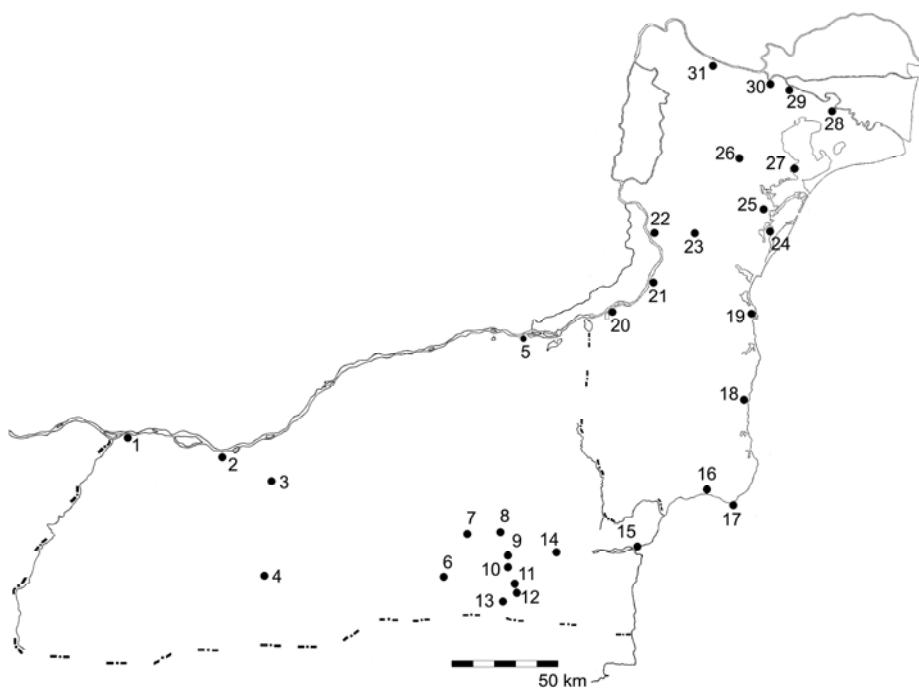
Arkovna, Varna district, Bulgaria – 1 M (610-616) (Lazarenko 2003, 150, 161 note 7).

Polyatsite, Varna district, Bulgaria – 1 M (610-616) (Lazarenko 2003, 150, 161 note 7).

- Provadia, Varna district, Bulgaria – 1 M (641-668) (Lazarov 2001, 50).
- Varna and Varna district, Bulgaria – 23 M (610-616) (Lazarenko 2003, 150-151, 153-156, 161 note 7), 1 M (698-705) (Peykov 2004, 217).
- Northeastern Bulgaria – 2 M (616-641), 1 M (641-668), 1 M (698-705)⁴.
- Kavarna, Dobrich district, Bulgaria – 1 M (610-616) (Lazarenko 2003, 150, 161 note 7).
- Kaliakra, Dobrich district, Bulgaria – 9 M (610-616) (Parushev 1991, 31).
- Mangalia, Constanța district, Romania – 2 M (610-616), 1 IB (616-641) (Ocheșeanu 1981, 312; Poenaru Bordea et al. 2004, 127, note 315), 1 M (668-685) (Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1996, 105-6 бел. 41-1).
- Constanța, Constanța district, Romania – 3 M + 2 K (610-616) (Poenaru Bordea, Popeea. 1976, 219.), 1 M (610-616) (Vertan, Custurea 1992, 388), 3 M+1 K (641-668), 1 K (668-685) (Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1996, 104 note 34-1, 105 note 41-2).
- Muzait, Constanța district, Romania – 1 M (610-616) (Custurea et al. 1999, 354).
- Cernavoda, Constanța district, Romania – 2 M (610-616) (Poenaru Bordea, Ocheseanu 1983-1985, 191; Poenaru Bordea et al. 1989, 72.).
- Topalu, Constanța district, Romania – 1 M (685-695) (Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1996, 106 note 44).
- Pantelimon, Constanța district, Romania – 1 M (610-616) (Mitrea 1966b, 413.).
- Istria, Constanța district, Romania – 2 M (610-616) (Preda, Nubar 1973, 227).
- Sinoe, Constanța district, Romania – 1 K (616-641) (Dimian 1957, 200).
- Slava Rusă, Tulcea district, Romania – 1 M (610-616) (Vertan, Custurea 1995-1996, 318).
- Jurilovca , Tulcea district, Romania – 3 M + 1 K (610-616) (Gândilă 2003-2005, 130).
- Murighiol, Tulcea district, Romania – 2 M (610-616) (Poenaru Bordea 2003, 156).
- Nufarul, Tulcea district, Romania – 1 K (610-616) (Mitrea 1966a, 425.).
- Tulcea, Tulcea district, Romania – 1 M (610-616) (Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1980, 163.).
- Isaccea, Tulcea district, Romania – 1 M (641-668) (Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1996, 104 note 34-2).
- Dobrudzha, Bulgaria and Romania– 2 M (610-616) (Mitrea 1966a, 425), 1 M (610-616) (Poenaru Bordea, Bauman 1973-1975, 157), 1 M + 1 K (616-641), 3 M + 1 K (641-668), 1 M (698-705) (Custurea 1986, 277; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1996, 103 note 23-19; 104 note 34-4; 106 note 43).

⁴ Specimens presented in this article.

Map 1. Bronze coins from the provinces Moesia Secunda and Scythia, minted in the period 610-705: 1. Cherkvitsa; 2. Svishtov; 3. Starmen; 4. Veliko Tarnovo; 5. Silistra; 6. Vinitsa; 7. Shumen; 8. Madara; 9. Kostena reka; 10. Drumevo; 11. Cherni vrah; 12. Arkovna; 13. Polyatsite; 14. Provadia; 15. Varna; 16. Kavarna; 17. Kaliakra; 18. Mangalia; 19. Constanța; 20. Muzait; 21. Cernavoda; 22. Topalu; 23. Pantelimon; 24. Istria; 25. Sinoe; 26. Slava Rusă; 27. Jurilovca; 28. Murighiol; 29. Nufarul; 30. Tulcea; 31. Isaccea.



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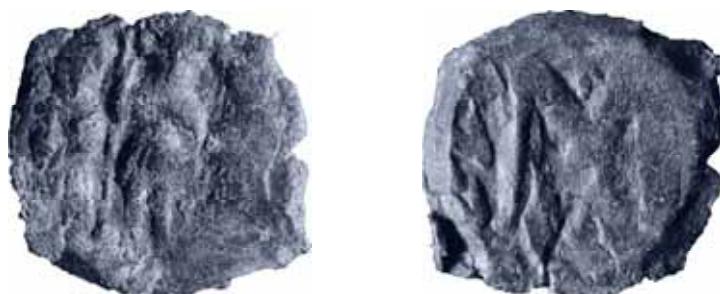
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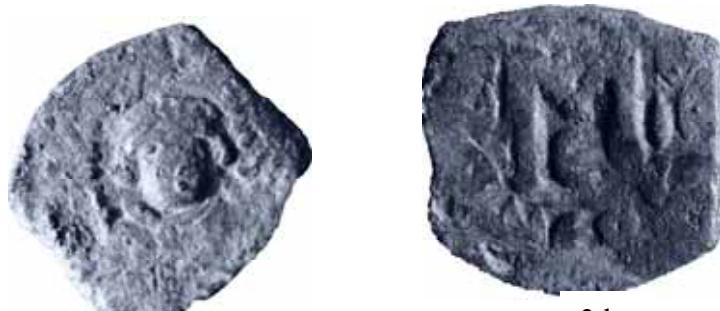
Pl. I: Seventh-to-eighth century Byzantine bronze coins from northeastern Bulgaria.



1 a 1 b



2 a 2 b



3 a 3 b



4 a 4 b

