

REVUE BELGE  
DE  
NUMISMATIQUE

ET DE SIGILLOGRAPHIE

IN MEMORIAM TONY HACKENS

BELGISCH TIJDSCHRIFT

VOOR NUMISMATIEK EN ZEGELKUNDE

PUBLIÉE  
SOUS LE HAUT PATRONAGE  
DE S. M. LE ROI  
PAR LA  
SOCIÉTÉ ROYALE  
DE NUMISMATIQUE DE BELGIQUE

UITGEGEVEN  
ONDER DE HOGE BESCHERMING  
VAN Z. M. DE KONING  
DOOR HET  
KONINKLIJK BELGISCH  
GENOOTSCHAP VOOR NUMISMATIEK

ÉDITEURS

GHISLAINE MOUCHARTE et FRANÇOIS DE CALLATAÿ,

AVEC LA COLLABORATION DE

PIERRE COCKSHAW et JOHAN VAN HEESCH

CXLV - 1999

BRUXELLES

BRUSSEL

STANISŁAW SUCHODOLSKI (\*)

## AN UNKNOWN TYPE OF THE MILIARESION OF BASIL II

The first coin of the regency  
of Theophano

Byzantine coinage, of the golden age of the state in particular, might be thought to have been fully studied, with the establishment of all of the elementary types. There is even slighter possibility to discover coins of entire reigns or the separate periods thereof which so far have not been known from numismatic materials. This article concerns, however, such an exceptional situation. Unfortunately the material that makes the discovery possible has been preserved in a poor condition, let alone the fact that it is fragmentary. Nevertheless it is very significant.

In the first place this is a fragment (weight 0.85 g; 19.4 x 9.1 mm) of a silver coin which makes up approximately a third of the whole, discovered in the hoard of Arab dirhams from Maurzyce near Łowicz, Poland (Fig. 1, 2). The locality lies in Mazovia, about 90 km west of Warsaw. The hoard was found in 1933 on a sandy hill near the road from Warsaw to Poznań. In a small pot — save for the fragment of the Byzantine coin — there were 2 complete dirhams, 180 dirham fragments, a piece of a silver drachm of Hindu Shahis from the turn of the 9th century from Kabul or its vicinity, 2 fragments of the Bavarian type and 25 fragments of different silver ornaments. The total weight of the entire complex, which found its way to the collection of the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw, amounts to 143.38 g. According to the report of the finders, this is supposed to be the whole contents of the pot (1).

The youngest Arab dirhams on which it was possible to make out the date had been struck by Mansur ben Nuh (961-976) in A.D. 971/2. Yet,

(\*) Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Al. Solidarności 105, PL-00-140 Warsaw.  
email: suchodol@iaepan.edu.pl

(1) M. GOZDOWSKI, A. KMIETOWICZ, W. KUBIAK and T. LEWICKI, *Wczesnośredniowieczny skarb srebrny z Maurzyce pod Łowiczem* [Le trésor d'argent du haut Moyen Âge de Maurzyce près de Łowicz], Wrocław, 1959. The Byzantine coin (p. 83, no. 183) after hesitation has been attributed to the beginning of Basil I's reign. Only Arab coins have been attributed correctly therein. Likewise in A. GUPIENIEC, T. & R. KIERSNOWSCY, *Wczesnośredniowieczne skarby srebrne z Polski Środkowej, Mazowsza i Podlasia. Materiały* [Trésors d'argent du haut Moyen Âge de la Pologne centrale, de la Masovie et de la Podlaquie. Inventaire], Wrocław, 1965, p. 36f., No. 57.

Fig. 1

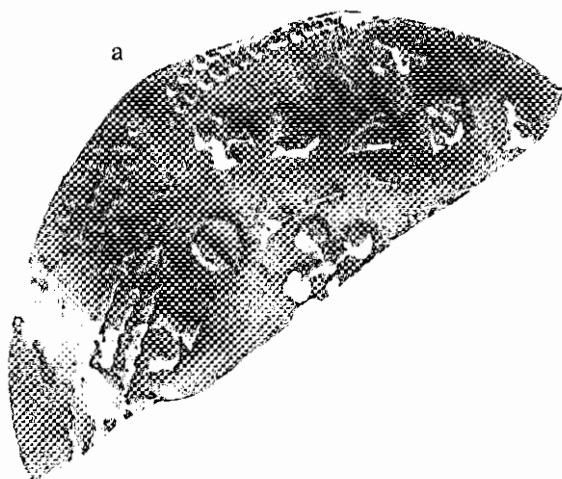


Fig. 2

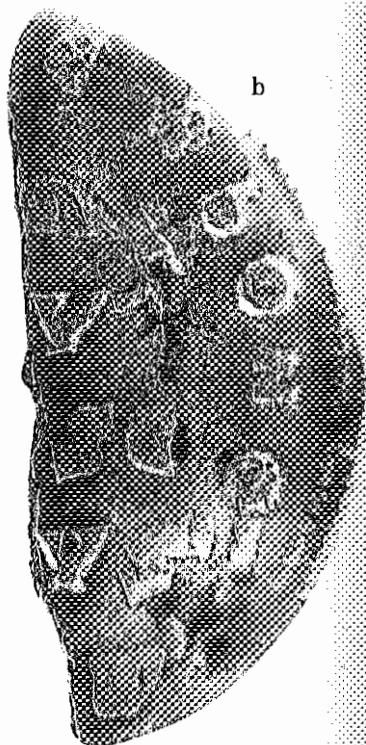
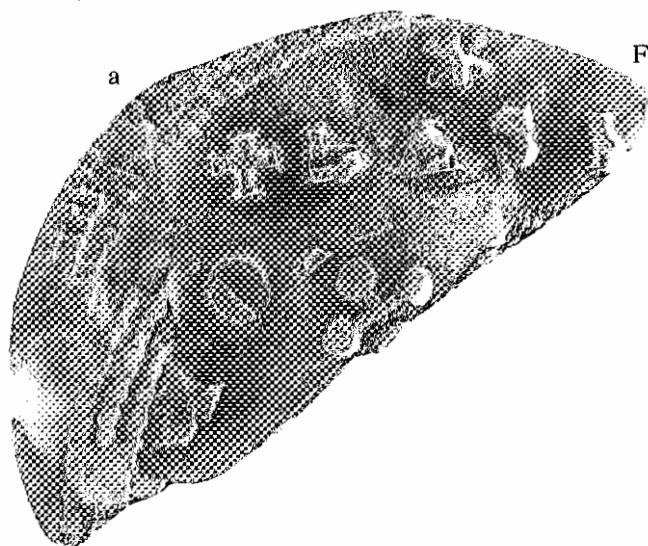


Fig. 1. Fragment of a silver Byzantine coin discovered at Maurzyce, Poland (State Archaeological Museum, Warsaw).

Fig. 2. Photograph of the same coin made under different lighting conditions.



Fig. 3a, b. Miliaresion of John Zimisce.

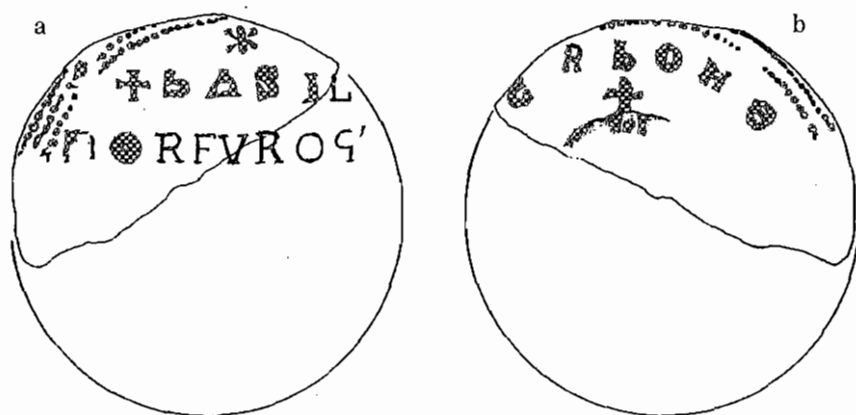


Fig. 4a, b. Miliaresion of the regency of Theophano.

there was also a specimen roughly dated to the years 971-976 and two others from the years 967-976. Coins of the next Samanid amir Nuh ben Mansur (976-997) were not recorded. Thus at the basis of the oriental coins, the hoard's hiding time (*terminus post quem*) may be defined as after 971/2. One of the western coins might be of later origin. A small piece of the Bavarian type may belong to prince Henry I (948-955), or Henry II (955-976). However, Henry, bishop of Augsburg (973-982), seems to have been the most probable emitter, the emission dating to the years 973-978. On the basis of the western coins the hoard should thus be dated to the time after 973. This period was rather short, which is pointed out by no larger number of western coins being present in the hoard, particularly deniers of prince Otto of Swabia (976-983), common in Polish finds.

Analysis of the types of the Byzantine coin itself is hindered not only by the relatively small size of the fragment, but also by the fact that it has been struck by two pairs of dies. Owing to that, however, additional information on the chronology of the coin has been obtained.

One pair of dies has been impressed eccentrically. It belongs to the well known type of *miliaresia* of Nicephorus Phocas (963-969) and John Zimisces (969-976) (Grierson 806-807). Only single letters of the right part of a five-line inscription have remained of the obverse:

[€ηX'ωA]V[τO]  
 [CRAT,€V]S€[b']  
 [bASIL€]VS  
 [RωωAI]ω'

Remnants of a border of dots (Fig. 3a).

The remnant of the impression of the reverse die is a small cross with points at the ends of its arms, which is located on the right side of a medallion with the emperor's head. Out of the circular inscription only one letter Ψ is easy to read, four further ones are only partly legible: [+IhSΨS XRIS](τ)Ψ[S] (ηIC)[A]. Triple border of dots with one larger globe (Fig. 3b).

The preserved fragments of designs are hardly characteristic, this is why it is difficult to decide whether Nicephorus or John is referred to. Analysis of the position of the letters in relation to the small cross speaks for the latter emperor: upon the *miliaresia* of Nicephorus the letter Ψ is closer to the cross, on John's — in the same way as on the specimen of the Maurzyce hoard — it is rather detached from it (2).

More interest is aroused by the other pair of dies. On the obverse there is a star, a horizontal inscription consisting of a few rows below it. Only

(2) Cf. I. HAMMERBERG, B. MALMER and T. ZACHRISSON, *Byzantine Coins found in Sweden* (CNS, nova series 2), Stockholm, 1989, pl. 6-11.

its first line is plain to see: +BASI[L]. Just a single letter (O) has been preserved from the second line, appearing below the initial cross, *i.e.* in the second place. The border of dots is a triple one, with one larger globule (Fig. 4a).

Yet, it is the reverse that is especially amazing. Here the design has been preserved merely in the form of a border of dots and fragment of the circular legend: [ ]€ R bOHΘ[ ]. In the field there is a vague oval outline crowned with a cross (Fig. 4b).

Types of coins struck with the latter pair of dies are not on the whole unknown in Byzantine numismatics. They do not, however, occur exactly in the same form or in the same arrangement. The obverse resembles miliaresia of both Basil I (867-886) (Grierson 978) and Basil II (976-1025) (Grierson 950-951). Closer similarity — due to the sign above the inscription and epigraphy — occurs in the coins of the younger emperor, his Class I in particular (Grierson 950; D.O. 16), dated to 977. It is only upon the oldest miliaresia of Basil II that borders are dotted, not linear, the letter O in the name of younger brother Constantine VIII not having been replaced by ω. There are certain differences, though. The sign above the inscription in the new specimen, instead of a four-dot cross, has the form of a six-arm star. Such a star was known from the younger variants of the miliaresia of Basil II [Class IIA 4, 5 (°); D.O. 17d, e], from the miliaresia of John Zimisce (Grierson 807; D.O. 7a1) and from the copper coins of Basil I (Grierson 815; D.O. 10d, e, 11). Another difference is the fact that upon the coin of Maurzyce the letter O in the second line of text is closer to the left edge than on Basil II's coin of Class I. This is due to the conjunction και (CE, C or S in abbreviation) being present or absent between the two names. Upon Basil II's coins the link is always present. Yet, it does not always appear on those of Basil I (Grierson 815, 816; D.O. 10, 11), namely when there is a third name. If so, of course, it is the latter one that is preceded by the conjunction. It is more probable, however, that the letter O comes not from COηCτAη' but from ΠOΡFV-ROG'. The very weak outline of the letter Π preceding the letter O speaks for that. This does not change the question of the presence of a further name or names. This problem, as well as the tentative answer to the question what second or third name could have been upon the coin just discovered, will be referred to again further on.

The call for assistance addressed to Christ (KVRIE BOHΘEI) or to the Virgin (ΘEOTOKE BOHΘEI) is known from gold and silver Byzantine coins starting from the 9th century. A certain regularity is plain to see at that: upon gold there are both Christ and the Virgin, whereas it is only the Virgin that occurs upon silver. This suggests that on the coin

(3) Ph. GRIERSON, *The Gold and Silver Coinage of Basil II*, in *ANSMN*, 13, 1967, p. 167-187.

in question the inscription had the form: [ΘΕΟΤΟΚ]Ε or [ΘΚ]Ε ΒΟΗ-Θ[ΕΙ]. It remains unknown whether that invocation was followed by the name of the emperor (names of emperors) or rather his title (their titles) only. As it is, there have been examples of a longer or shorter version of the inscription and its continuation on the other side (4).

The meaning of the sign that resembles the letter R, which separates the first two words of the legend, has no explanation. This is the way the letter B used to be depicted; it might have stood for the whole word ΒΟΗΘΕΙ. Here, however, it had been written in its full or slightly shortened form. Can a mistake have been made here, the same word having been marked twice? Or perhaps this is not a letter at all, but for example a deformed representation of *Manus Dei*, which is to be found upon the coins of John Zimisces? (e.g. Grierson 792).

The main problem, however, is to guess what type there is in the field. Traditionally, a representation of the Virgin might be expected here. The upper part of her head might be possibly depicted by the oval outline to be seen under the letter V of John Zimisces' legend. The issue, however, is complicated by dint of the fact that above the outline, and beneath the letter b of the circular legend, there is a barely visible small cross. It cannot have been over the Virgin's or Christ's head, but only above the emperor's. Yet, such a representation would stand in opposition to both the contents of the legend and the tradition of the *miliaresia* types.

Regardless of how the designs should be reconstructed, it is evident that what is to be dealt with here is a *miliaresion* of Basil II of an unknown type with a devotional formula addressed to the Virgin or Christ. All we have to do now is to closely specify the coin in time and assign it to one of the periods of Basil II's reign. The emperor is known to have ruled alone (nominally with his brother Constantine VIII) in the years 976-1025. However, he was appointed Augustus as early as in 960 and since then he would co-rule with his father Romanus II (960-963), next with his mother Theophano, while she was a regent (March 15-August 16, 963), during the reign of her second husband Nicephorus Phocas (963-969) and finally that of John Zimisces (969-976). From those 16 years Basil II is known upon numismatic material from a single type of nomisma of Nicephorus Phocas (Grierson 790; D.O. 1-3). Busts of two nominal co-rulers had been presented here, holding a cross together; one figure represents the emperor, the other his stepson. This example proves that the name of Basil II might have appeared on coins long before 976, theoretically as early as starting from 960.

In order to appropriately classify the coin of Maurzyce, it is crucial to agree upon the chronology of the impressions of both pairs of dies. Since

(4) Ph. GRIERSON, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, 3, Washington, 1993<sup>2</sup>, p. 877, 881f. (= D.O.).

Basil II reigned after John Zimisce, it may seem obvious that the coin was issued by the latter ruler, only to be overstruck by Basil. This is also the opinion that comes to the fore while analyzing the face of the coin bearing the name of Basil. Apparently it covers the inscription  $\eta\text{ICA}$  from John Zimisce's die. The opposite sequence is implied while studying the other side. Here it is obvious that the circular inscription calling for God's assistance has been preserved due to the mere fact that the new die with John's inscription in the field was not impressed strongly enough at the margin. Exactly in the same place, on the other side, the beginning of a horizontal inscription with the name « Basil » has been preserved. This part of the coin is supposed not to have been effaced by new dies due to their eccentric impression. There was, however, another cause too: the flan here is thinner than elsewhere. In effect the upper part of the letters of the inscription  $\eta\text{ICA}$  had not been impressed, together with the right margin of the horizontal inscription upon the opposite side. In case of the reverse situation, that is to say, if Basil's dies had been used as second, the impression thereof only on the margin of the coin would have had to be accounted for by the fact that they were not perpendicular to the flan. The central and lower part of the dies not having been impressed would have had to bring about a very conspicuous marking of the upper edge, which is not to be seen upon the fragment in question.

Since Basil's coin is older than that of John Zimisce, it must have been struck before December 969. However, this came about also before August 15, 963, for it is hardly possible that Nicephorus Phocas put there the names of his infant stepsons before his own. This cannot have been done by their father, Romanus II, either. Therefore the only time before 969 in which the young co-rulers could have found themselves at the beginning of the list was their mother's regency during the five months of 963. This is why I am of the opinion that it was the name of empress Theophano that was in the third place in the horizontal inscription, after Basil and Constantine, or in the second place after Basil alone. No authentic coins from the time of her regency have, so far, been known; different specimens regarded as such have turned out to be either counterfeits, or later coins, or — last but not least — the identification thereof resulted from misunderstandings <sup>(5)</sup>.

(5) D.O., p. 578f.; *Id.*, *Byzantine Coins*, London, 1982, p. 184 (= Grierson). Cécile Morrisson is of a different opinion - she defends the authenticity of the follis from the ancient Lagoy collection (cf. J. SABATIER, *Description générale des monnaies byzantines*, Paris, 1862, p. 133f., pl. XLVII, 9; C. MORRISSON and G. ZAKOS, *L'image de l'empereur byzantin sur les sceaux et les monnaies*, in *La monnaie miroir des rois*, Paris, 1978, p. 59, 65 and 67; C. MORRISSON, *Monnaie et finances à Byzance: analyses, techniques*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS 461, 1994, p. I 15, II 262). However the inversion of the designs may result from the imitation of both: the seal of Theophano (obv.) and the anonymous follis Class G (rev.).



Analogous coins issued by other empresses on behalf of their infant children are beyond any doubt. Both upon solidi and folles of Constantine VII, grandfather of Basil II and Constantine VIII, in the years 914-919 his mother Zoe appears as the regent (Grierson 779, 821; D.O. 2, 22). Let us also add that on the obverse of the pattern coin (D.O. 1; Sear <sup>(6)</sup> 1740A) there is the bust of the Virgin. Likewise upon the gold coins of Eudocia struck in 1067 during the regency wielded on behalf of Michael VII and Constantius (Grierson 922, 943; D.O. 1, 2). Yet, the closest analogy is to be found on the miliaresia issued in the nominal reign of Michael III (842-867), during his mother's, Theodora's, regency. Beside the names of the emperor and the regent, there is also the name of her second child — her daughter Tekla (D.O. 5; Sear 1690; cf. also the miliaresia of Constantine VII and Romanus II, Class VI, 945-959, Grierson 805, D.O. 21).

Now let us come back to the design of the reverse side, bearing the invocation to heavenly forces to aid the emperors. Once the date of the coin has been agreed upon as 963, the problem of the patterns that the author of the designs would face may be glanced from a different standpoint. He did not know the histamena of Nicephorus Phocas and John Zimisceus, bearing the representation of the emperor and the Virgin, or the miliaresion of Class III with Virgin Nicopoios, associated with the battle of Abydos and dated to 989 <sup>(7)</sup>. Earlier than the coin in question are only: the solidus of Theophilus (829-842) with the cross and inscription CVRIE BOHΘH τO SO ΔOVLO (Grierson 765; D.O. 1) and the one of Romanus I, Constantine VII and Christopher from 921 with the image of Christ crowning Romanus I and the legend ΚΕ BOHΘΕΙ ROMAηω ΔΕCΠOτH (Grierson 782; D.O. 5, 6). The Virgin appears just twice: upon the solidi of Leo VI (886-912) with the inscription +MARIA+ (Grierson 776; D.O. 1) and on the already mentioned unique silver pattern coin of Zoe and Constantine VII (D.O. 1; Sear 1740A). The inscription on it, starting on the obverse and continued on the reverse, reads: +VΠEPAΓIA ΘEOTOKE R' - CONSτAητ CE ZωH b'ROM', which Grierson translates as « *O Most Holy Mother of God, aid Constantine and Zoe, Emperors of the Romans* » <sup>(8)</sup>. At the same time this is the first case of the type of the Virgin Mary to have been used by a regent. Such examples are known from later times too. This was not by any means the rule, albeit one may observe that motifs of the Virgin were used more often by em-

(6) D.R. SEAR, *Byzantine Coins and their Values*, London, 1996.

(7) Ph. GRIERSON, *A Misattributed Miliaresion of Basil II*, in *Mélanges G. Ostrogorsky*, I, Beograd, 1963, p. 111-116.

(8) D.O., p. 533 and 541.

presses than emperors. Moreover the bust of the Virgin *orans* appears with the inscription ΘΕΟΤΟC on the seal of Theophano <sup>(9)</sup>.

The foregoing examples prove that an invocation to Christ or to the Virgin alongside the appropriate representations upon a coin from 963 was fully possible, although this was only the beginning of the custom that developed further on in the second half of the 10th century to become popular in the following one.

The context of other coins occurring in the hoard in question, quoted at the beginning of this paper, also speaks for the relatively early date of our coin (deposition shortly after 970/1 or 973). This is better correlated with the first period of Basil II's nominal reign with his mother in 963 than his sole rule starting from 976.

Definition of the date of the coin and partial reconstruction of its designs do not by any means end the investigations into the phenomenon. Now one should answer the questions on the character of the unique specimen, *i.e.* probably issued in a very small number. Was it a pattern coin a set of which Philip Grierson managed to specify? <sup>(10)</sup>. They come from the same epoch (9th-10th c.), yet they pertain chiefly to gold coins and only two miliaresia. What is more important, however, is the fact that they have been made from metals which do not comply with their nominal values: gold have been replaced by silver and copper, copper having been substituted for silver. The coin of Maurzyce, however, is a silver one and its type does not considerably differ from that of the miliaresia. We should rather consider whether we are dealing with a kind of an ostentatious coin, though meant for circulation (Romanus II alone did not strike silver at all). Its rarity may result not merely from the limited time of emission or its size, but from the coinage policy of the two following rulers (John Zimisce in particular?) as well. The infant, although legal emperors Basil and Constantine, provided a potential threat to him, therefore he was not interested in manifesting their rights to the throne by means of coins. Due to that, he might have withdrawn the coins from circulation to remelt or even overstrike them with his dies. The result of that might be for example the fragment discovered at Maurzyce. It could reveal its secret to us merely because overstriking has been done hastily and carelessly, and also because the coin has been exported beyond the borders of the Empire. There are no doubts that it has taken active part in monetary circulation there.

Is discovery of further coins of the time of Theophano's regency to be expected? This is obvious as far as silver coins are concerned. If so, it will be possible to verify the theses set forth herein and explain in the

(9) C. MORRISSON and G. ZAKOS, 1978.

(10) D.O., p. 99. One could mention here also the copper pattern miliaresion of John Zimisce discovered in Cracow, M. SALAMON, *Próbna moneta bizantyńska znaleziona w Krakowie*, in *VII Sesja numizmatyczna w Nowej Soli*, Zielona Góra, 1983, p. 34-41.

first place the problem of the reverse type. However, I would not exclude the possibility of finding coins of other metals, chiefly gold. The current investigations will be easier, as a certain psychological barrier has been overcome. Besides, fortunes never come alone (\*\*).

*Post scriptum*

After further analysis of the coin and new enlarged photographs made under different lighting conditions [Fig. 2], several new observations may be made. The presence of the letter Π before O [ΠΟΡΦΥΡΟΓ'] is undoubted [Fig. 4a]. The first letter in the marginal legend on the reverse is a C (and not an E) [Fig. 4b]. The legend should thus be reconstructed in the form [ΘΕΟΤΟ]C R ΒΟΗΘ[ ]. It does not correspond to the representation in the field, of which the top of an imperial crown with a cross is just visible. Both this crown and the inscription are executed less carefully than the inscription on the obverse. Maybe therefore, we really are dealing with an experimental design which should not have left the mint. Such a solution (though in a different form) has been suggested to me by professor Philip Grierson.

(\*\*) The author wishes to express his thanks to Professors Philip Grierson, Cécile Morrisson and Maciej Salamon for the reading of this paper and their valuable remarks. This does not mean that they wholly agree with the views expressed here. The author alone is responsible for any errors.