A HOARD OF BYZANTINE 16-NUMMI COINS
MINTED AT THESALONIKI IN THE TIME
OF JUSTINIAN

Before the currency reform of Anastasius in 498 the petty currency of
the eastern Empire consisted of tiny scraps of metal, the degenerate succes-
sors of the late Roman copper coinage. Anastasius introduced large token
coins, clearly marked with their values—\(M\), \(K\), or \(I\), for 40, 20, or 10 \textit{nummi}. The
nummi were, presumably, the little fifth-century coins, which continued
to circulate alongside the new \textit{folles} and their halves and quarters. The Anas-
tasian reform was not immediately implemented in every province of the Em-
pire: the original (small-module) \textit{folles} seem never to have been issued, for
example, in central Greece. And in Egypt, where the mint of Alexandria
supplied local needs, we find, instead of coins marked \(M\), \(K\), and \(I\), a quite
different series of smaller size marked \(IB\), \(S\), and \(\Gamma\)—12, 6, and 3 \textit{nummi}. Egypt was never brought into line with the rest of the Empire; it was allowed
to retain an irregular system of petty currency right up to the time of the
Persian and Arab conquests. In Macedonia, too, where the imperial mint was
located at Thessaloniki, a local currency system was not suppressed until about
60 years after the Anastasian reform. Under Justin I, large \textit{folles} and half-
\textit{folles}, marked in the standard fashion \(M\) and \(K\), were introduced, but it seems
that they were not a success, for they were struck in relatively small quanti-
ties, and were discontinued. Pieces of 3 and 2 \textit{nummi}, marked \(\Gamma\) and \(B\), were
also struck, and the issue of \(B\) coins was apparently continued into the reign
of Justinian. In his time, a plentiful petty coinage was produced at the Thes-
saloniki mint, marked \(IS\), \(H\), and \(\Delta\)—16, 8, and 4 \textit{nummi}. 1 Elsewhere, a fourth
denomination, the pentanummium, marked \(E\), had been added to the coin-

\begin{footnotesize}
1. The most up-to-date and authoritative summary of what is known about the mint
of Thessaloniki in the sixth century will be found in A. R. Bellinger, \textit{Catalogue of the
Byzantine coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection},
\end{footnotesize}
age. It will be seen that, taking the 2-nummi coins into account, there is an
exact parallel in the relationship of values between the standard M-K-I-Ε and
the local IS -Η-Δ-Β. A half-hearted attempt at integration was made by in­
serting a 10-nummi (Ι) denomination into the series; it is a rare coin today.
The marks of value IS, I, H, and Δ are flanked by the letters A-P, the inter­
pretation of which has given rise to much discussion. Anno primo has been sug­
gested, and also ἄργυριον. One remarkable specimen in the Dumbarton Oakes
collection reads ΑΠΙΣΨ—that is, presumably, IS flanked by APΨ—with ΘΕ
above and ΤΕΣ below. Provided this coin is of an official character (as it
seems to be) and is not some sort of contemporary fabrication, one's inter­
pretation of the letters A—P will need to take it into account. The IS-system
is unique to Thessaloniki, and remains something of a mystery. No metro­
logical parallels from sixth-century Macedonia have been brought to light.
It would be interesting to know whether folk-lore studies or hagiography
could still yield some reference which might elucidate the problem. There can,
meanwhile, be no doubt that the local “follis” was valued at only four-tenths
of the metropolitan follis. It was eventually replaced by the slightly larger
K or 20-nummi coins, in 562/3 (Justinian's regnal year 36)—K rather than M
presumably as a continued concession to local preference—and an effort was
made in 568/69 to sweep away the old IS coins by re-striking their flans with
a K and re-issuing them thus in the name of Justin II.8

The IS folles of Thessaloniki can be found in all the better-known col­
lections of Byzantine coins. They have been catalogued by Wroth, Bellinger,
and other students. But hardly any hoards containing them have been pub­
lished. The Topalu hoard from the Dobruja included 2 specimens among a
total of 55 coins;4 and 4 specimens of which the provenance is recorded as
Stari Slankamen in Syrmia are in all probability from a single discovery.6 Our
purpose is to add a little to this meagre record by listing and illustrating 8
coins from another hoard. They were in the hands of a London dealer a short

2. Bellinger, p. 106, no. 98,i.
3. The theme of regionalism, exemplified by the mint of Thessaloniki, is discussed in
D. M. Metcalf, “The Byzantine bronze coinage in the east Mediterranean world,” Congres­
4. I. Dimian, “Cîteva descoperiri monetare bizantine pe teritoriul RPR”, Studii și
Cercetari de Numismatica I (1957), 189-216.
5. D. M. Metcalf, “The currency of Byzantine coins in Syrmia and Slavonia”, Hambur­
ger Beiträge zur Numismatik IV (1960), 429-44.
time ago, and it may be presumed that they were brought to light originally somewhere in Greece, although their exact find-spot is not known. It seemed desirable that an account of the group should be made before their inevitable dispersal. There is nothing to show whether or not these 8 coins constitute the whole of the original find, but they were all that were to be seen when the hoard was bought in Athens. Their chief characteristic is their excellent state of preservation; they show little or no sign of wear. All 8 are of the large denomination: this is normal in hoards of Byzantine copper coinage, from which fractional issues were by preference excluded.

The distinctive coinage of Thessaloniki was struck within the 35-year period 527-562, and the coins cannot be dated with certainty more closely than that, although it is very likely that their issue began before 538/9. In that year Justinian reformed the coinage at the metropolitan group of mints (Constantinople, Nicomedia, Cyzicus) and at Antioch, dating the copper coins by regnal years. As has been said, there was a time-lag of 24 years before the mint of Thessaloniki was brought into line; but if the 16-nummi coinage had been introduced after 538/9, it would most probably have been dated. There are a dozen or more minor varieties among the 16-folles, which are differentiated by sigla such as a cross or a christogram above the numeral I. The style of the obverse, likewise, is variable. The varieties may have been struck successively over a period of years; or different marks may have been used concurrently. To reconstruct the order in which the coins were issued it will be necessary to gather up a larger number of specimens and analyse them comparatively. Our little hoard will eventually contribute something to the answer, but there is no point in making generalizations from it in isolation. The sequence into which the varieties have been arranged should therefore be regarded as provisional. The first coin, which is the only one with a cross above the I, shows signs of wear, and the lettering on its reverse is in a flatter style, as is usual on this variety. On the second coin, the mark above the I is missing, because the flan did not fully receive the impression of the die. The small, neat circle of the obverse border matches that on the first coin. On both of them the obverse die is appreciably smaller than the reverse die. Next, there are two specimens, of which one looks slightly worn, with a cross and two stars as sigla. There is one coin with the rather scarce mark A and there are three with a christogram.

The details of the coins' designs and inscriptions can be studied from
the plate. Their weights and die-alignment are as follows. Die-axis is given in degrees of arc in accordance with the conventional system.

1. 7.38 gm. 180°.
2. 6.12 gm. 225°.
3. 6.73 gm. 185°.
4. 6.28 gm. 195°.
5. 7.10 gm. 210°.
6. 7.45 gm. 185°.
7. 6.52 gm. 180°.
8. 4.51 gm. 185°.

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