

A HOARD OF BYZANTINE 16-NUMMI COINS MINTED AT THESSALONIKI 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 successors 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 *nummi*. The *nummi* were, presumably, the little fifth-century coins, which continued to circulate alongside the new *folles* and their halves and quarters. The Anastasian reform was not immediately implemented in every province of the Empire: the original (small-module) *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 Γ—12, 6, and 3 *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 *folles* and half-*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 quantities, and were discontinued. Pieces of 3 and 2 *nummi*, marked Γ 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 Thessaloniki mint, marked IS, H, and Δ—16, 8, and 4 *nummi*.¹ Elsewhere, a fourth denomination, the *pentanummium*, marked Ε, had been added to the coin-

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, *Catalogue of the Byzantine coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, vol. I, *Anastasius I to Maurice*, Washington, 1966.

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-€ and the local IS -H-Δ-B. A half-hearted attempt at integration was made by inserting a 10-nummi (I) 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 interpretation of which has given rise to much discussion. *Anno primo* has been suggested, and also ἀρχότιον. One remarkable specimen in the Dumbarton Oaks collection² reads APISΨ—that is, presumably, IS flanked by APΨ—with Θ€ above and T€S below. Provided this coin is of an official character (as it seems to be) and is not some sort of contemporary fabrication, one's interpretation 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 metrological 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 "folles" 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.³

The IS folles of Thessaloniki can be found in all the better-known collections of Byzantine coins. They have been catalogued by Wroth, Bellinger, and other students. But hardly any hoards containing them have been published. 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.⁵ 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," *Congresso Internazionale di Numismatica, Roma 11-16 Settembre 1961*, vol. II, *Atti*, 521-30.

4. I. Dimian, "Cîteva descoperiri monetare bizantine pe teritoriul RPR", *Studii și Cercetări de Numismatica* I (1957), 189-216.

5. D. M. Metcalf, "The currency of Byzantine coins in Syrmia and Slavonia", *Hamburger 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 IS-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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