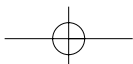


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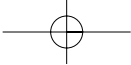


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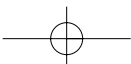
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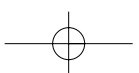
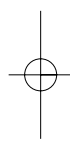
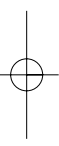
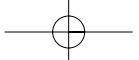
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THE IMITATIVE GOLD COINAGE OF BYZANTINE TYPE FROM THE LATE 12th AND THE EARLY 13th CENTURY

Ernest
OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU

Since my first meeting with Dr. Iannis Touratsoglou, in September 1976, in Plovdiv, during the *International Symposium on the History and the Culture of the Thracians*, my wife Irina and I got a close friend. Later, my visit to Athens, during the autumn of 1977, thanks to Iannis became a cornerstone in my future professional carrier. Then I was a young archaeologist interested in the archaic and classical Greek civilisation, and dealing, only as a secondary task, with the important coin collection of my museum (the Danube Delta Museum in Tulcea).

On the occasion of my visit to Athens, Iannis told me about his researches on the 12th and 13th century Byzantine coin finds in Greece, and showed me his first freshly published study on this topics (TOURATSOGLOU 1973, p. 132-66). One day Iannis asked me if I could translate some of Ivan Jordanov's articles on 12th century Byzantine finds from Bulgarian. This was also my first direct contact with the numismatic literature regarding the publications of the late Byzantine hoards in the Balkans written in a local language.

I have to confess that in 1977, I was not almost totally ignorant about the late Byzantine coinage, but my knowledge was rather vague. In 1972, when I was student, I was asked by Professor Eugen Stănescu to prepare an essay on the Byzantine economic and social life during the 10th-15th century. Among other special studies regarding this topic I also used for the seminar the work D. M. Metcalf's book *Coinage in the Balkans 820-1355*, and the old contribution of Zakythinon on the devaluation of the hyperperon. Later, in 1975 I read Cécile Morrisson's catalogue of the Byzantine coins in the collection of Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, which dealt also with the 12th century issues. A copy of the book was then available in the library of the Danube Delta Museum in Tulcea.

Ernest OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU With such a limited knowledge about such a large topic, one could easily understand why I remained, even after reading Iannis and Jordanov's articles, far from being convinced that these 'ugly' late Byzantine or Byzantine type issues could represent a "decent or useful scholarly topic" at all. To a certain extent, my judgement was also influenced not only by my training and prejudices as a classical archaeologist, but also, in a quite large degree by the realities in the Romanian numismatics during the 1970's. At that time, except for Octavian Iliescu, no Romanian numismatists were dealing with such issues, which, when not totally ignored, were just labelled as "scyphate Comnenian coins", regardless of their real minting authorities or dating. Facing my quite strong 'scepticism' (to be kind), Iannis recommended me to read two important works on this topic: Hendy's book of 1969 (HENDY 1969) and David M. Metcalf's large study on a Southern Serbian hoard, published in *Situla* (METCALF 1967).

Coming back to Romania, I searched for Hendy's book (because Metcalf publication was missing in our libraries, Iannis provided me a photocopy of it). When finally I spotted Hendy's volume in the libraries of the Archaeological Institute and of the Romanian Academy and I could borrow it, I start to read them (several times!), before starting to fully understand how revolutionary matters happened in the late Byzantine numismatics, compared to other fields of the numismatics during the mid 1970's. Soon after, pushed by these scholarly revelations, I proceeded to catalogue the rather large collection of late Byzantine coins of the Danube Delta Museum. During the autumn of 1978, I was daring enough to write my first study about the 12th century Byzantine finds in the area of the Danube mouths, published in the 23rd issue of the most important Romanian archaeological periodical *Dacia* (1979) (OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1979, p. 265-273).

This study represented the first step in a long term scholarly adventure, which changed my professional life entirely. Since then I have been dealing more or lesser with the classical archaeology and I started to be more and more interested in the 12th-15th Byzantine coinage. Soon after I realised that if I wanted to understand the economic and social phenomena that happened in the huge area of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world, from Anatolia to the Lower Danube and Crimea, and from Caucasus to the Adriatic Sea, I had to study also the Balkan medieval coinages, the Golden Horde coinage, as well as the coinages of the Frankish lordships from the Levant.

The publication of this volume, dedicated to Dr. Iannis Touratsoglou's anniversary, offers me a good opportunity to pay a small tribute to a dear friend and respected colleague, to whom I owe so much. He has an essential contribution to the renewal of the studies on the late Byzantine numismatics not only in his country, but also all over the Balkans. For this special occasion, I would like to draw the attention of the numismatists and historians on the imitative gold coinage of Byzantine type issued during the late 12th - early 13th century.

Among the numerous gold coins kept in the National Bank of Romania in Bucharest I had the chance to find a rather unusual hyperpera. The coin was only shortly mentioned in 2002 (the CD version of OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 2001, a and foot-note no 118), but it was never properly published.



Here is its full description:

Obv. IC - XC in upper filed, Jesus Christ bearded and nimbed, facing, wearing tunic and colobium, sitting on throne with back, blessing with his right hand and holding the Gospels in the left hand.

Rv. Circular inscription: ΝΑ Η Κ - Μ - ΘΔΕΣΤΟ Emperor on left, standing, facing wearing stemma with prepedilia, divitision and chlamys with tablion and loros, holding a labarum in his right hand and the orb in left hand, crowned by the Virgin, wearing tunic and maphorion.

AV 3.51 g ↑↓ 28.8 × 28.3 mm (fig. 1a-b)

The coin was not very carefully pierced “ab antiquo”. Quite likely, its unknown owner intended to use it as a religious medallion. In spite of the major significance of the image of Jesus Christ engraved on the obverse, the presence of the hole above the reverse representation, prove that the mounting of the coin was intended to render visible the image of the Emperor crowned by the Virgin.

Although being pierced and mounted as a pendant, the coin does not show traces of a too intense wearing. Quite likely, it was used only for a short while, before being lost or concealed.

The XRF analyses were made in the Laboratory of the Office for Costumers Protection in Bucharest, by Madame Eng. Rodica Nicola. Because the well known lack of uniformity of the ancient alloys we did several measurements on both sides of the coin. The first type of analyses put in evidence only the main components of the alloy: Au, Ag and Cu.

Obv. I: Au = 837 ‰ = 20 1/10 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).

Ag = 77 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats Cu = 86 ‰ = 2 1/10 carats

Obv. II: Au = 825 ‰ = 19 4/5 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).

Ag = 79 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats Cu = 96 ‰ = 2 1/3 carats

Obv. III: Au = 836 ‰ = 20 1/10 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).

Ag = 75 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats Cu = 89 ‰ = 2 1/10 carats

Obv. IV: Au = 841 ‰ = 20 1/5 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).

Ag = 72 ‰ = 1 3/4 carats Cu = 87 ‰ = 2 1/10 carats

Obv. V: Au = 834 ‰ = 20 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).

Ag = 78 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats Cu = 88 ‰ = 2 1/10 carats

Ernest OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU	Rv. I:	Au = 843 ‰ = 20 1/4 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).	
		Ag = 79 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats	Cu = 78 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats
	Rv. II:	Au = 838 ‰ = 20 1/10 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).	
		Ag = 78 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats	Cu = 83 ‰ = 2 1/10 carats
	Rv. III:	Au = 866 ‰ = 20 3/4 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).	
	Ag = 74 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats	Cu = 60 ‰ = 1 1/2 carats	
Rv. IV:	Au = 858 ‰ = 20 2/3 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).		
	Ag = 77 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats	Cu = 65 ‰ = 1 2/3 carats	
Rv. V:	Au = 847 ‰ = 20 1/3 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).		
	Ag = 76 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats	Cu = 77 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats	
Mean finesses of the obv.			
		Au = 834.6 ‰ = 20 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).	
		Ag = 76.2 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats	Cu = 89.2 ‰ = 2 1/10 carats
Mean finesses of the rv.			
		Au = 850.4 ‰ = 21 2/5 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).	
		Ag = 76.8 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats	Cu = 72.6 ‰ = 1 3/4 carats

The coin was checked also with a set of analyses that were able to put in evidence all the major elements represented in the coin. The result shows that the hyperperon of the National Bank of Romania contained not only Au, Ag, Cu but also few Zn.

Au = 842 ‰ = 20 1/5 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).
 Ag = 73 ‰ = 1 3/4 carats Cu = 69 ‰ = 1 2/3 carats Zn = 17 ‰ = 2/5 carats.

The medium contain of the coin is:

Au = 842.33 ‰ = 20 1/5 carats (according to the Byzantine metrological system).
 Ag = 75.33 ‰ = 1 4/5 carats Cu = 76.9 ‰ = 1 2/3 carats Zn = 5.66 ‰ = 1/10 carats.

Obviously, the above-described coin is an imitation of the Constantinopolitan issues of the electrum aspra of Manuel I Comnenus (1143-80), belonging to the type E or to the fifth coinage?, var. C, according Hendy's classification (HENDY 1969, p. 114-115, pl. 14, no 4; HENDY 1999, p. 304, no 6d, pl. XIII, no 6d). However, it is rather difficult to explain why such a very rare variant of electrum aspra was selected by the minting authorities to be the prototype of this imitation, and why it was made in gold. So far, the variant C is known only by two specimens; one kept in Dumbarton Oaks collection (HENDY 1999 304, no 6d, pl. XIII, no 6d) and another, from Eng. Constantine C. Orghidan's collection (The Coin Room of the Library of the Romanian Academy, inv. O. 892). The finding of a gold replica of an electrum issue is very unusual, in fact a unique situation, because, more often one could found gilt electrum aspra, coated with a tiny gold layer, quite likely produced by private forgers to deceive naïve people, passing them as genuine hyperpera.

The fabric of the coin preserved in the National Bank of Romania is rude enough and its lettering is clumsy. The obverse inscription has uneven letters while that of the reverse is largely wrong or schematic. Only a part of the imperial surname and title are still legible, and the common monogram **M-P ΘV** is rendered only as **M Θ**. The monetary design is linear, being rendered more as a sketch. All these details could indicate that the die cutter was neither too skilled, nor familiar with the Greek writing. However, he was familiar enough both with the basic principles of Christian religious representations or with the Imperial monetary iconography, and succeeded to render them rather correctly.

The amount of the gold contain measured for this coin fits very well with the data about the title of the hyperpera of Manuel I so far published (MORRISSON 1985, p. 253). In fact, the finenesses of the coin kept in the National Bank of Romania ranges among the highest titles of the hyperpera of Manuel I measured by the Paris team (they vary from 840 ‰ = 20 1/5 carats to 853 ‰ = 20 1/2 carats), being even slightly higher than average title, which is about 826 ‰ (19 4/5 carats). However, its copper contain is far larger than the normal one found in the hyperpera struck during the entire period of 1092-1204 so far analysed, which never exceeded 45 ‰ (>1 carat). The quite important quantity of Zn (17 ‰) found in the coin proves that most of the Cu present in the coin was the result of a deliberate addition of metallic copper or brass in the alloy, and not the consequence of a fault in the refinement technology used for the gold purification by the masters of the mint.

The analyses of the genuine electrum aspra of type E have shown that these coins contain about 5.5 carats of gold, though about 50 % of the analysed specimens yielded to contain only 5 carats (HENDY 1999, p. 282), so there is no possibility of confusion between the real denomination of the imitative coin and that of its prototypes. It was intended to be used as a hyperperon and not an aspron. For the contemporary currency users, the gold contains as well as the concave/convex shape of the coin were valid guaranties to ensure them that the issue was a genuine hyperperon. Quite likely, nobody cared about the peculiarity of the monetary design, which, however, contained also the most common representations of the repertoire of the Byzantine monetary designs: Christ on throne and the Emperor crowned by a saint.

In spite of its rather high gold contain the imitation of Manuel I coin kept in the National Bank of Romania has a very light weight of only 3.51 g. That is lower than the average of 4.26 g, measured for the hyperpera of Manuel I preserved in collections of Dumbarton Oaks, British Museum and Bibliothèque Nationale (MORRISSON 1985, p. 250). Among the hyperpera of Manuel I published so far, which are not clipped, only one specimen has very light weight of 3.26 g (HENDY 1999 293, no 1d.4). Unfortunately, the above mentioned coin was neither analysed nor illustrated, so it is impossible to check its genuineness.

The reduced weight of the imitative coin of Manuel I type could be explained not only by its wear, as result of its subsequent use as a medallion, which as I mentioned above, is not so important. It is mostly due to its very thin and small blank (the average diameter of Manuel's I hyperpera is 31 mm). The light weight is also a consequence of the high proportions of silver, copper and zinc contained in the alloy. All these metals have a density almost less than half of that of the gold ($Ar = 10.5 \text{ g/cm}^3$, $Cu = 8.92 \text{ g/cm}^3$, $Zn = 7.14 \text{ g/cm}^3$ and $Au = 19.3 \text{ g/cm}^3$).

The coin presents another important peculiarity. It was not issued according to the normal technology used during the late 12th century by the Byzantine mints. It was struck using two monoblock dies. It is well known that the entire 12th-13th century Byzantine coinage, as well as the Latin and the Bulgarian imitative and signed billon coinage from the late 12th and during the 13th century were produced according to a quite innovative minting technology for that period. After the reform of Alexius I of 1092/3, during John II reign (1118-43) a very sophisticated technique was adopted in the Byzantine mints, in which the production seems to be 'mechanised'. The striking of deep and large concave/convex coinage ('trachy') coins, especially of those struck in rather hard alloys, such as the billon or the electrum, was no longer possible using the traditional technology, based only on two monoblock dies. To produce the new type coins with a diameter of around 30 mm and a depth of 3-4 mm, two pairs of half obverse and reverse dies were needed. Not only that the engraving of the concave and convex half dies was an extremely difficult task, but it seems that they were integrated in

Ernest OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU a mechanical device. The role of the mechanic device was not only to concentrate enough energy to achieve the imprint of the hard blank, but also to distribute this energy fairly uniformly on the entire concave or convex surface of the blank. To imprint the coin blank, each of the half die had to describe independently a 180° movement and to release an important quantity of energy, of some tents kgf/cm², enough to transfer the engraved images from the die to the blank (BENDALL and SELLWOOD 1978, p. 93-104 and HENDY 1999, p. 123-127).

Despite the fact that during the 12th-13th century several states adopted the concave/convex shape for their own coinages: Norman Sicily, Cyprus, Bulgaria, the Latin Empire of Constantinople, the Latin Kingdom of Thessalonica, the Lordship of Adrianople, the Nicaean Empire, the Empire of Thessalonica, Serbia, Epirus and Hungary, only a few were able to own the normal technique to strike “genuine trachy” coinage. Of course, the most successful of them were the inheritors of the old 12th century imperial mints of Constantinople and Thessalonica, or those who benefited from skilled personal trained in these mints, which fled the capital after 1204 (the Nicaean Empire and the Empire of Trebizond). Others, like Serbia, Epirus and Bulgaria have benefited, at least in part, from the help of the personal of Thessalonica mint to strike their coins. But even in such happy cases, it seems that the task of engraving a new half dies, in case that the old one was broken, turned out to be such a complicated work, that not everybody was able to perform it. The best illustration of this case was provided by the coins of the Serbian king Stephen Radoslav struck only with a half reverse die, after the original one was out-of-work, found during the archaeological researches in the fortress of Ras (POPOVIĆ 1976, p. 115-119).

Others mints, like those of Sicily, Cyprus, the Lordship of Adrianople (where, according to Dochev, were struck the so called issues of Theodore Mangaphas or Theodore-Peter ‘Belgun’, in fact, belonging to Theodore Branas (DOCHEV 1990, p. 29-38) or Hungary never achieved to produce real ‘trachy’ coinage. Their issues, like this imitation in gold of the aspra of Manuel I preserved in the National Bank of Romania, were struck only with two slightly concave or convex monoblock dies, because, otherwise it was a real danger to break the coin blank, or to imprint only the central part of the coin designs. For this reason, the ‘trachy’ coins of the above-mentioned states present only a lightly concave shape.

Unlike the 6th-11th century imitations or forgeries of the Byzantine gold issues, which are rather often mentioned in the numismatic literature (JORDANOV 1979, p. 8-15; VLADIMIROVA-ALADZOVA 2000, p. 45-8; OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 2002, p. 197-200), only very few 12th century Byzantine forged or imitated gold or electrum coins are so far published (MORRISON 1970, p. 711, 61/Cp (E1) 12, Manuel I, electrum aspron; HENDY 1999, p. 348, no 2c, Andronicus I, electrum aspron; MORRISON 1970, p. 741, no 64/Cp/AV/02, Isaac II, hyperpera). Another gilt bronze imitation of the hyperpera of Alexius I of 2.33 g is kept in the collection of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest (inv. 188/1882.47). The coin was found at Pančevo, in the region of Banat, north of the Danube (now in Serbia). Unfortunately, only the supposed imitation of the hyperpera of Isaac II was illustrated. Quite likely it is a more rude specimen than the normal hyperpera of Isaac II, but obviously, its style is far better than that of the imitation of Manuel I aspra discussed here. On the other hand, the weight of 4.34 g of the coin kept in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale fits well in the normal range of the genuine hyperpera of Isaac II, which is not the case of our imitation. For these reasons I consider that no clear imitations of the 12th century gold issues were published so far. However, one could suppose that such coins might exist in other collections too, but were not properly identified.

The rather high quality alloy use for striking the coin, as well as its careful enough style and technique could prove that the specimen kept in the National Bank of Romania was not a private forgery, but an official issue, produced by a contemporary political entity. Quite likely this political entity had a certain minting experience, though it was not fully able to control the genuine Byzantine monetary technologies.

Unfortunately, there are not too many proofs available to locate the issuing authority, which was behind the strike of the imitation in gold of Manuel's I aspra. However, some data regarding this matter could be offered by the area in which the coin was found. The coin was previously part of a small private collection, owned until the mid 1980s by a collector from Câmpina (Prahova County). This collection contained only a few ancient and early modern issues, rather typical for the circulatory medium in the Central-Northern areas of Wallachia. Quite likely, the imitative issue, as well as all other coins of the collection come from local finds, found in the northern parts of Prahova County.

In the Romanian territories situated in north of the Danube, in Wallachia and Moldavia, the finds of 12th century hyperpera and electrum aspra are extremely rare (OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1992 48-9, no 13 and 51, no 18; OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU and CONSTANTINESCU 1994, p. 333, no 40; OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1998-2001, p. 345-7 and OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 2001b, p. 340 and 348) and quite likely all of them arrived beyond the Danube River through the political or economic relationships established between the imperial territories from Dobrudja and Bulgaria and the local population or the nomadic tribes of the Cumans settled there. There are no reasons to suppose that the imitation in gold of the aspron of Manuel I did not arrive from the same direction, more exactly from the Bulgarian territories, located next to Wallachia. Câmpina is situated in an area very rich in salt mines. The salt produced in this region was carried since the pre-historical times until the early 20th along the Prahova, Dâmbovița and Ialomița Rivers to the Danube and from there, all over the Northern Balkans, which are totally lacking this basic natural resource. On the territory of Prahova County there were found several 12th and early 13th Byzantine coin hoards, as well as single finds, more than in any other Wallachian area situated so far from the Danubian shores (OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1992, p. 45, no 6; OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU and CONSTANTINESCU 1994, p. 94; OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1997, p. 121-122, no 6 and OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 2001b, p. 341-354 and 374-384. One could suppose that such a high density of the finds should be explained only by the flourishing salt trade underwent in the region during the 12th-13th century with the northern Balkan Byzantine provinces, and later with the territories of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom.

Otherwise, the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, re-established as an independent state after the rebellion of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians led by Peter and Asen in 1185-6 could be the best candidate for the location of the mint responsible with the issuing of the imitation in gold of Manuel's I coin kept in the National Bank of Romania. In spite of the rather fierce scholarly dispute around the question of the attribution of the so-called Bulgarian imitative coinage, inspired from the 12th century Byzantine billon issues of Manuel I (Constantinople, 4th coinage), Isaac II and Alexius III (HENDY 1969, p. 218-222, pl. 24, nos 1-15 and pl. 25, nos 1-5; METCALF 1973a, p. 418-21, METCALF 1973b, p. 144-172, METCALF 1979, p. 114-117 and 127-130 and METCALF 2000, p. 396-401; TOURATSOGLU 1973, p. 132-166; JORDANOV 1977, p. 3-22, JORDANOV 1978, p. 3-18 and JORDANOV 1984,

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Ernest OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU p. 52-53 and 59-66; MORRISSON 1978, p. 95 foot-note no 2; OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1980, p. 248-80, OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1989, p. 114-52; ILIESCU 1989, p. 103-113; METCALF 1989, p. 49-67; CARAMESSINI-OEKONOMIDES 1981, p. 223-241; GRIERSON 1982, p. 237-238; PENCHEV 1990, p. 191-194 and DOCHEV 1992, p. 22-6; HENDY 1999, 66-80 and 136 and METCALF 2000, p. 396-401) it is hard to deny the correctness of most of Hendy's first suppositions. Of course, the finds of such issues in a certain geographical area did not prove always the presence of the political and administrative control of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom over that territory, because at the beginnings of 13th century all the imitative Byzantine coins spread beyond the political boundaries, as a result also of the economic and cultural relationships between the inhabitants of the former Byzantine territories, or due to the frequent migratory movements between the Balkans, Western Anatolia and the Aegean Islands. However, one could easily remark that more than 90 % of the so far published hoards or single finds of Bulgarian imitative stamena are concentrated within the political borders of the Second Kingdom or in their close neighbourhood. Only a few finds are reported in the territories controlled by the Latin authorities in Central and Southern Greece, in the Aegean, in the Nicaean Western Anatolia, as well as in the neighbouring Serbian and Hungarian Kingdoms, or in the southern and eastern regions of the contemporary Romania (in Wallachia and Moldavia). Quite likely, the diffusion of the Bulgarian imitative issues was only a part of a larger post-1204 monetary phenomenon which occurred in the former Byzantine world, and led also to the rapid spreading of the Latin imitative, Nicaean or early Trapezuntine coins all across the Balkans during the last years of the first or at the beginnings of the second decade of the 13th century, pretty far beyond their political frontiers.

As the hoards structure and chronology prove, the production of the imitative Bulgarian coinage lasted longer than it was thought previously by Ivan Jordanov (JORDANOV 1978, p. 3-18). Their small module versions (which remained unnoticed by Hendy's last catalogue), especially those of types B and C, continued to be struck even during the second quarter of the 13th century, after the beginning of the signed coinage of John Asen II (ca. 1230/5-1241) (OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU and CUSTUREA 2003-2005, p. 183-191). Such coins were an important part of the hoards concealed during the 1230's or early 1240's in the northern parts of Bulgaria, in Dobrudja, Wallachia and Transylvania.

According to me, the attribution of the imitative gold coin inspired by the issues of Manuel I to the early rulers of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom seems the best solution for the problem of the issuing authority responsible for its strike. Since the early 10th century Bulgaria had the tradition of producing imitative gold coins of Byzantine type (OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 2005, p. 183-214). During the Byzantine rule (ca 971-1203) some provincial mints were established in the themata of Paradounabon, Macedonia-Adrianople and Bulgaria and produced anonymous or signed folles as well as stamena and hyperpera. Later, during the battles between the Asenides and the imperial authorities other local mints were established to insure the cash needed to support the intensive military activities. Some of them were able to use the normal Byzantine minting technologies; meanwhile other used less sophisticated ones, such as the monoblock dies or even the casting.

Although, like all over the former Byzantine world during the late 12th and early 13th century, most of the military and administrative payments in the Second Bulgarian Kingdom were made in devaluated billon stamena, the local authorities could not totally avoid the

expenditures in gold. One could suppose that for a while the most important source of gold issues were represented by the stock of the old, pre-1204 Byzantine hyperpera. Thanks to T. Bertelè contribution (BERTELÈ 1973, *passim*) we are fairly well informed about the use of the Byzantine hyperpera in the former imperial areas controlled by the Latin authorities during the 1210s to 1240's. However, such phenomena took place also in the Bulgaria of the first Asenides rulers. One of the most eloquent sources about the presence of such practices is represented by a letter sent in 1204, by Ioanitzia Coloian to the Pope Innocence III. In this letter four pounds of hyperpera (288 coins) are mentioned among other very valuable presents sent by Bulgarian ruler to the Pope: "Misi sanctitati tue examita duppla tria, et cupam auream et *yperperorum libras quator*, scutellas argenteas tres et gradale [i. d. graduale] argenteum". (THEINER I 29; HURMUZAKI I 31 and LIZBI III 340).

The large number of 12th century clipped hyperpera preserved in the major public and private collection, could witness about one the major makeshifts used by the post-1204 authorities to increase the gold currency supplies or to adapt the old gold coins to the various local accounting monetary systems based on "virtual hyperpera", developed after the disintegration of the Byzantine Empire.

However, quite likely, as in the case of the shortage of the billon issues, the newly established administrative officials were pushed also to imitate the old pre-1204 issues for insuring the needed gold currency. The uncovering of the imitation in gold of Manuel's I issues, kept in the National Bank of Romania, should be an important proof about the early 13th century monetary developments undergone in Bulgaria. Such a possibility is not as unlikely as one could presume, if we are considering that similar coinages, based on the imitation of John II hyperpera, have been quickly developed during the 1220's and the 1230's in the Nicaean Empire or in the Latin Empire of Constantinople (MORRISSON 1985, p. 166; OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 2000 499-562). I consider that the complete publication of the hoard Tvărdica II (distr. of Sliven) (JORDANOV 1984, p. 214-216, no 178) could offer further information about the existence of a rather important imitative coinage all over the territories of the former Byzantine Empire during the early 13th century, inspired by the proto-types of the hyperpera of John II Comnenus and Manuel I. Based on the structure and the dating of this hoard, one could suppose that most of the so-called Thessalonicaean hyperpera of John II, as well as the rare hyperpera of Manuel I attributed to the same mint by Hendy (HENDY 1969, p. 129 and 171; HENDY 1999, p. 295-296, nos 1f.1-2) were, in fact, post-1204 imitative issues.

It seems that the third way to insure the required gold currency by striking signed coinages was never too popular among the authorities of the post-1204 states. Quite likely, the rulers of the Nicaean Empire were the first among 'successor' states to strike their own gold coins bearing the surname, the imperial title and the portrait of the emperor. However, the amount of the issue was a very limited one, so far the hyperpera of Theodore I Lascaris (1204/8-1222) being preserved only by a single coin, found in Bulgaria. According to Ivan Jordanov, the unique coin of Theodore I Lascaris was struck from an alloy containing about 750 ‰ gold or 18 carats, but one should take this figure with caution, because it was established with a rather imprecise measuring technique, the touch-stone (JORDANOV 1989, p. 107-109).

The second signed gold coinage struck in the post-Byzantine area during the first half of the 13th century is represented by the famous hyperpera of John Asen II (1218-41), bearing Slavonic inscriptions (GERASIMOV 1934, p. 361-368; GERASIMOV 1961, p. 35-36; HENDY 1969, p. 296-7; PENCHEV 1977, p. 29-45; METCALF 1979, p. 127; JORDANOV 1984, p. 89-90;

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OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1989, p. 120-121, foot-note no 35; PENCHEV 1990, p. 78-84, pl. IV nos 34a-b; PENCHEV 1996, p. 105-112; HENDY 1999, p. 639-643, no 1) (fig. 2a-b).

Gerasimov, who published the first and so far unique specimen of the series, already remarked their Thessalonicaean and Nicaean stylistic and iconographical connexions. According to him, these coins were struck after 1230, in Tärnovo by mint masters sent from Thessalonica. Penchev and Dochev considered that both the signed hyperpera and stamena of John Asen II were struck in Thessalonica as a part of the tribute due by Manuel Comnenus-Angelus to the Bulgarian ruler, after the crushing defeat suffered by the Thessalonicaean army in 1230, at Klokotnica (PENCHEV 1977, p. 29-45; DOCHEV 1992, p. 65; PENCHEV 1996, p. 105-112). Such an assertion is contradicted by the geographical pattern of the diffusion of the signed issues of John Asen II. Most of the finds of signed stamena as well as the unique find of hyperpera of John Asen II came from the territory of the F. Y. R. of Macedonia, though a few single finds of signed stamena are reported in also in Epirus, Thrace, northern Bulgaria and in Dobrudja (MATTINGLY 1923, p. 31-46; GERASIMOV 1966, p. 213; CARAMESSINI-OEKONOMIDES 1967, p. 252-67; PENCHEV 1977, p. 29; JORDANOV 1984, p. 90; OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1989, p. 121, DOCHEV 1992, p. 226, no 1; PENCHEV 1996b, p. 340-343; PENCHEV 1998, p. 17-19; PENCHEV 1999, p. 95-97 and RAZMOVSKA-BACHEVA 2001, p. 119, no 10). Since 1989, I supposed that the signed coinage of John Asen II was actually struck in a mint located in Western Macedonia, quite likely at Ochrid, using the coin-dies produced by the mint personnel in Thessalonica (OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1989, p. 120-121), and later, the same assertion was made by Hendy (HENDY 1999, p. 640). I considered that the beginning of the Bulgarian signed gold coinage should be dated only after 1235, when the autonomy of the Patriarchy of Tärnovo was fully recognised by the Nicaean ecclesiastical and political authorities. According to the Byzantine political tradition from the 13th century the right to strike gold issues was reserved only to the rulers legally crowned by a Patriarch, and such conditions were missing in Bulgaria before 1235 (OBERLÄNDER-TÄRNOVEANU 1989, p. 120). As in the case of the signed hyperpera of Theodore I Lascaris, the gold coinage of John Asen II has very limited amount, having a

ceremonial purpose. Quite likely, it seems to be struck to emphasize the connexions of the Asenid dynasty with the political traditions of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, for which the area of Western Macedonia and especially the town of Ochrid had a particular importance, being one its last strongholds. The signed coinage played only the role of a regional currency, while, the rest of the country relayed on the use of anonymous imitative issues. However, due their extreme rarity, despite their strong propagandistic goal, the signed hyperpera of John Asen II had virtually no impact on the monetary circulation of the period.

At the end of my considerations, I would like to emphasize once again the importance played by the imitative gold coinage in the post-1204 Byzantine world. In fact, with only few exceptions, the entire gold coinage struck on the former territories of the Byzantine Empire during the period 1204-1254 had an imitative character. In fact, a lot of imitative features survived even in the gold issues of Theodore II Lascaris (1254-1258), as well as in the 'Nicaean' coinage of Michael VIII Palaeologus (1258-1261), in spite of the presence of the real imperial surnames and dynastic names of the issuing authorities on the coins.

For a better understanding of the monetary realities in a crucial period in the history of Byzantine Commonwealth, I hope that a time will come when numismatists pay more attention to the so long neglected imitations and various kinds of so-called 'forgeries' inspired by the 12th or 13th century Byzantine gold and electrum issues.

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