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### **Byzantine Coins from the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> Century Found in Poland and their East-Central European Context**

In this paper we discuss coins from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, passing over the Pomeranian finds from the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. A small series of coins (up to 20 items; up to 14 locations) comes from the period that we are interested in. The coinage of Justinian I is clearly dominant (up to 13 items), coins of later rulers constitute issues of Justin II (2 items), Maurikios (1 item) and Heraclius (3 items); chronology of one coin has not been determined (for full description of Polish finds see: Wołoszyn 2005).

In the material that we analysed (20 items) bronze coins (15 items) dominate considerably, the only exception being some silver issues (4 items - 3 items of Justinian I – Rabka [2], Chełm and one item of Heraclius in Szadzko) and golden ones (one item of Heraclius in Żółków).

Such a small group of finds would not have been worth much attention if it was not for the fact that we have to deal with material that is accumulating rapidly – in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century only few (up to eight) items were known from this group (based on very general remarks about coins in the Bielsko-Biała hoard [2 items], Kończyce Małe and the so-called *stray finds* from Biecz, Chełm, Przemyśl, Sulejów and the vicinity of Żywiec [collections of K.W. Halama]). It is necessary to emphasise that at that time not even a single issue from the 7<sup>th</sup> century was known.

Therefore, numismatists are not only faced with the problem of a significant shift in the chronology of arrival of coins, but also with the question regarding historical implications of the new finds. The issue of economic and cultural functions of the coin emerges, as well as its reference to the ethnic groups which inhabited the Polish lands between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In the recent years we have been observing an increase in the number of studies devoted to finds of Early Byzantine coins in Central and Eastern Europe (Hahn 1990; Bóna 1993; Fiala 1995; Curta 1996; Kiss 1996; 2001; Somogyi 1997; Winter 2000; Ciołek 2003; Militký 2004; Militký in print; Prohászka 2004). Among the most important centres

generating influx of coins to Central Europe was the Avar Khaganate – it is necessary to notice a huge progress in research on Avars – this refers both to our historical (Pohl 2002) and archeological knowledge (Daim 2002). The above facts facilitate presentation of the Polish finds against a wider comparative background.

Almost all the coins were registered by persons who are not professional archaeologists, and very often the exact details of their discovery are unknown. Only one coin (Grodzisko Dolne) was discovered in an early-Slavonic settlement (Czopek, Morawiecki, Podgórska-Czopek 2001). The coin from Szadzko was discovered in the course of surface archaeological research (Siuchniński 1961). It is difficult to unambiguously identify the ethnic character of the remaining finds.

In principle, the location of coins from the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century in Poland corresponds to geographic distribution of the oldest finds related with the Slavs; the coins were found in South-Eastern Poland, they are absent from Silesia, Masovia or areas located to the North (the only exception is the coin from Szadzko in Pomerania). In Central Poland, from where two Byzantine coins derive, early-Slavonic cremation cemeteries were also discovered (cf. Wołoszyn 2005, fig. 1, 2).

However, a closer comparison between the location of settlements and places of discovery of coins requires certain cautiousness whilst formulating conclusions. A comparison of archaeological sites and finds of coins from South-Eastern Poland (Parczewski 2003, fig. 4) allows for observing that the coins are discovered beyond the zone inhabited by the Slavs in the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century – they appear in areas located further than Slavonic settlements.

It is also worth reminding that settlements from the Roman period lasted the longest in the mountainous areas of South-Eastern Poland (until the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century) and in Central-Eastern Poland (until the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century; Mączyńska 1998, p. 88; Godłowski 2005). However, one has to state clearly that there is no evidence that “Roman” settlements lasted until the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century in the territory of South-Eastern and Central Poland. In this situation, the coins which appeared after the issues of Justinian should be connected with Slavonic settlements.

Issues from an earlier period (until approx. the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century or until 568) could

have been left by the Germans, who wandered sporadically through Poland or by the Slavs, who were settling down here. The barbarians could have got hold of them either during the invasions of the Provinces of the Empire or during military service in the Byzantine army. Written sources testify to constant presence of Germans in the Byzantine army, at least until the capture of the Carpathian Valley by the Avars. On the other hand, the Slavs start to appear in the emperor's army from the 30's; however, their importance increases in the 40's (Ditten 1976; Pohl 1996). In relation to this, M. Salamon (2004) draws attention to a very specific character of two coins found in the vicinity of Rabka. Both items were minted by an identical stamp and could have constituted payment for a mercenary (the chronology would point out to a Germanic mercenary). On the other hand, emergence of an entire group of bronze coins from the 40's in South-Eastern Poland, in the vicinity of the most numerous Early Slavonic settlement (Przemyśl [3 items], Besko), is quite puzzling. According to M. Salamon, the coin whose origin with respect to the find is only hypothetical – a Justinian follis from the collection of K.W. Halama from Żywiec (date of issue 541/542) - should also be examined in this context

Later coins (the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century – the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century) should be identified, without much hesitation, with the Slavs. They reached Poland through the Avars; they constitute a part of the stream of coins that reached the Middle Danube area as tributes; they could also possibly authenticate the participation of Slavs in the Avar expeditions to the Balkans.

The Avar mediation is most certain in the case of the so-called light weight solidus of Heraclius found in Żółków – it belongs to the category of coins which were used as payment of tributes and this seems to have been one of the main purposes of their issue in the Western Empire (Salamon 1996).

It is more difficult to interpret bronze coins, which were not included in the tributes. M. Wołoszyn (2005) paid attention to the emergence of bronze Byzantine coins in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century in Central Poland, which indicates a shift in monetary phenomena to the North, accompanying the Slavonic expansion in this direction. The lack of continuation with respect to finds in South-Eastern Poland is puzzling; however, it may result from unsatisfactory documentation of finds (it is possible that a coin of Justin II and not Justinian was found in Chełm). The break is not complete, which is testified by a Heraclius follis from Grodzisko

Dolne from 613/614. Minted shortly before the great Avar and Slavonic invasions, which hit the Danube provinces in the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it could derive from booty appropriated at that time, similarly to coins from Hungarian (sepulchral) finds dated at the same time from the Veszprém County (Várpalota Gymnasium from 612/613), as well as a Focas follis from Jutas (Somogyi 1997, Cat. No. 33, 84).

A very interesting find is the last of the Heraclius coins – a hexagram discovered in Szadzko. The absence of coins of this type in the area of Scandinavia (Hammarberg, Malmer, Zachrisson 1989, 25) seems to indicate that the coin from Szadzko is the most northern find of this type in Europe. E. Gąssowska (1979, 56, 61) seems to connect this item with Avar influences; this opinion is opposed by M. Salamon (1996, footnote 32).

Archaeological arguments (absence of Avar imports in the areas along the Baltic coast and absence of traces of Early-Slavonic settlements in this area) are also supported by a numismatic observation. Among the Heraclius coins known from the territory of the Avar Kaganate, only one item is a silver coin (Sînnicolaul / Nagyszentmiklós, Romania; P. Somogyi 1997, Cat. No. 64). Taking into account a significant concentration of golden issues of this ruler in these areas, the presence of only one silver coin makes it necessary to exclude the argument that the Szadzko item constitutes a splinter of the wave of silver coins of Heraclius which reached the Middle Danube – such a wave did not exist at all.

Examining the circumstances in which the Heraclius coin emerged at the Baltic Sea, it is necessary to pay attention to Persian drachmas known from Central and Northern Europe – the find which is geographically closest to Szadzko derives from the city of Menzlin (Schoknecht 2001), where a coin of Chosroes II (591-629) was found among burial accessories from the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The Sassanid coin constituted an admixture to Arabian coins appearing in Central, Northern and Eastern Europe starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Kiersnowski 1960, 91 – 95). It seems that the coin of Chosroes II found its way to Europe along such a northern route – this is confirmed by the presence of Persian drachmas in the hoards from Northern Europe (cf. e.g. *Corpus*, Cat. No. 1; 21; 30; Talvio 2002, 18). Along with the wave of Arabian silver, much older coins also found their way to our part of Europe, e.g. drachmas of Alexander the Great (Mielczarek 2004, 33-34). From Czech Republic we have two drachmas (Uherský Brod, Chosroes I [531-579], Pochitonov 1955, 296 and Praha 5 – Radotín, Chosroes II [591-629], Militký in print, Cat. No. M-34, C-21). The Coin from Praha 5 –

Radotín was supposedly trimmed in order to adjust it to the weight of Arabian coins. Therefore, it seems that the coin from Szadzko reached the area of Pomerania as late as the 8<sup>th</sup> century, either with silver Arabian coins, or with Byzantine coins (also silver).

A vast majority of the coins analysed by us are the *so-called* stray finds; unfortunately, they do not give us any indication as to the functions performed by coins when the people who lived in the Polish territory and not the visitors got hold of them.

Attention should be paid to a small amount of coin hoards. This feature clearly distinguishes Polish finds from the coins of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, known to be found in Scandinavia and Pomerania – the last ones come almost exclusively from treasures. A certain role of thesaurisation is characteristic for Central Europe in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, and particularly of the Avar Khaganat, that is, the area from which Byzantine coins arrived to Poland. Among Polish finds there are no hoards of golden coins similar to those which are known from various areas of Central Europe, e.g. Transylvania. On the other hand, there are bronze deposits; however, they are grouped within one small region.

Two hoards are known from the Cieszyn Silesia from such places as Bielsko-Biała and Kończyce Małe. The circumstances of finding these hoards and their composition are not known in detail. There was a definite dominance of bronze coins from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there were also Roman silver coins from the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Kończyce) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Bielsko-Biała). What is more, in each of the hoards one follis of Justinian I was found.

Cases analogous to two deposits from the Cieszyn Silesia may be noticed in the area of the Czech Republic, where a whole series of bronze coin hoards was discovered and dated at the 6<sup>th</sup> century: Praha 6 – Nebušice, Hlinsko, Bohouňovice, as well as Červený Hrádek, Turnov (Militký in print, Cat. No. C-10, C-16, C-17, C-7, C-15).

It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that in the neighbouring area of the Opava Silesia, in Hrozová in the Czech Republic (very close to the Polish border), a small deposit of bronze coins was discovered, the oldest of which derives from Carthage from the 3<sup>rd</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., whereas the three remaining ones also come from Carthage, yet from the Byzantine period (6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> century), minted by Justin II, Heraclius and Constans II (Pochitonov 1953; Militký in print, Cart. No. M-37).

The hoard from Hrozová differs from the two hoards from the Cieszyn Silesia by its later date

(2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century), and the fact that all the items have their origin in Africa. The influx of coins from Africa, similarly to Italy or Sicily, is not surprising in the region – the researchers observe it in the Western edges of the Avar Khaganate (Wołoszyn 1999). Single coins from these areas also occur in the Czech hoards: the bronze hoard referred to above from the 6<sup>th</sup> century from Turnov (Vandal coin) and a hoard from Poděbrady dated at the same time as the Hrozová find (Justinian I from Rome, Justin II from Catania and 2 coins of Constans II from Carthage; Militký in print, Cat. No. C-15, C-25).

These few examples of hoards in the border area between Poland and the Czech Republic discussed here constitute a peculiar phenomenon in the Polish lands. Their similarity to Czech deposits is to be connected with cultural influence of our southern neighbours. Until the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century the people inhabiting the Czech Valley and Moravia were Germanic Lombards, and later Slavonic people who remained in some specific relations with the Khaganate (the exact nature of these relations is impossible to trace). The fact that the Opava Silesia and the Cieszyn Silesia are located along the route connecting the Czech and the Danube areas with the Polish lands makes it necessary to pose a question about their impact on the situation in Southern and Central Poland. So far, no hoards have been found there; however, there are few coins issued in the Western provinces of Byzantium: a dekanummion of Justinian from Rome found in Przemyśl (South-Eastern Poland) and a dekanummion of Justin II from Carthage found in Łódź (Central Poland). The fact that the eastern issues are mixed with the western ones does not have to be a result of the impact from the Czech lands or from the pre-Alpine areas. The coins from Western mints also appear in the Balkans and in the Carpathian region; however, they are a great rarity there (Butnariu, 1983-1985, 230; Duncan 1993). In the light of the material discovered so far it is difficult to consider these coins as numerous in the area north of the Carpathians.

Very small number of coin finds in the period of almost 200 years requires a sceptic approach to their presence as evidence for the existence of the so-called monetary circulation (money economy) in Poland in the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Although these coins arrived to Poland as a result of contacts with the countries that still had coin circulation, especially Byzantium, it is likely that the majority of the coins reached Poland through such areas as the Basin of the Middle Danube, where coins performed cultural functions (cultic, ceremonial circulation). Therefore, one can suspect that the role of coins in the Polish lands was similar. Unfortunately, there is no proof for that. So far, no items have been found in burial places.

Only one coin from Łódź was drilled through, which may signify that it was meant to be an ornament. None of the Polish finds has features similar to the hoard from Zemanský Vrbovok in Slovakia (Radoměský 1953; Kolníková 2004), where a large number of silver coins was found next to ornaments and silver scrap used as production material at a jeweller's shop. This Slovakian complex testifies to the fact that in the Avar and sub-Avar area the coins could have been stored as potential material for luxurious goods. This primarily refers to ore coins; however, in the Slavonic culture, which was very poor with respect to metals, this manner of using bronze (copper) should not be excluded.

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