

#### 40. Two lines of enquiry.

Two topics referred to in other parts of the catalogue are expanded here on account of the interesting questions posed by the coins which other students of the series may wish to pursue.

#### THE ITALIAN COINAGE OF JUSTINIAN I: RAVENNA AND A POSSIBLE MILITARY MINT (5.51-5.65)

Two separate groups of anomalous coins are known that exhibit internal die-links only (that is, the two groups are not die-linked to each other) while also displaying the signatures of both eastern and western mints. The two groups are:

- half folles of Justinian of the armoured bust facing type with NIK and P mint marks;<sup>1</sup> and
- folles of Justin II of the enthroned type with KYZ and RAV mint marks.

Both groups appear to be associated with military campaigns in Italy – the first against the Gothic kingdom during the period 535 to about 562 and the second against that of the Lombards (575-577 and, probably less intensively, later). Specifically, they may have been produced by moneyers from the east who accompanied the army to Italy.

The second group is covered in detail elsewhere<sup>2</sup>. Examination of the first group may shed some light on the relationship (if any) between the Ravenna mint and the possible mint at Salona<sup>3</sup> (modern day Split) on the Dalmation coast.

Anomalous half folles naming Justinian and dated regnal year 26 (552/3) are known that, while sharing a similar style for the obverse and with obverse die-links known, were struck with reverse dies signing both P and NI (in the latter case, the denominational mark K is also part of the mint signature)<sup>4</sup>; see Figure 1. Among the specimens observed by Hahn are those die-linked and he comments "so there is no doubt that they derive from the same source"<sup>5</sup>. Dekanummia of year 26 and marked P are also known.

The coins marked P are problematic, having been variously assigned, including to Perugia<sup>6</sup> and to Constantinople (the P standing for *polis*)<sup>7</sup>.

The years 552-553 marked a significant point towards the end of Justinian's war against the Gothic kingdom in Italy. Teias, the last Gothic king, was defeated and killed by the army

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<sup>1</sup> Bellinger, A. R., Anomalous Coins of Justinian's Year 26 (552/3), *Museum Notes* 12 (1966).

<sup>2</sup> Mansfield, S. J., A Byzantine Temporary Mint and Justin II's Lombard Campaign, *Numismatic Chronicle* 174 (2014), pp. 205-212.

<sup>3</sup> See D. O. Volume 1, pp. 187-189 and Grierson P., *Byzantine Coins*, London and Los Angeles (1982), pp. 75-76.

<sup>4</sup> Hahn, W., *Money of the Incipient Byzantine Empire (MIBE)* (Vienna 2000), plate 35, numbers 97 and 116.

<sup>5</sup> Hahn, MIBE, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Bellinger, DOC, p. 186, number 356.

<sup>7</sup> Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (1982), p. 76.

under the command of Narses probably in the autumn of 552<sup>8</sup>. Narses, the imperial Chamberlain, seems to have been appointed to this command two years earlier and to have left Philippopolis (the modern Bulgarian city of Plovdiv) sometime in 550, although, given his exalted civilian post, it is probable that he began his march from Constantinople. The bulk of his troops seems to have been made up of Thracian and Illyrian contingents, together with Lombards and Heruls, but it is again probable that he brought some units normally stationed in the capital, or further east, with him. Thus Narses possessed a sizeable, multi-national, army and for these reasons, it appears likely that he marched overland with different contingents joining him on the way. While he may have joined up with the Byzantine fleet at Salona, it seems that he again marched overland from Salona to the head of the Adriatic and on towards Ravenna.

Whether mint workers and their equipment accompanied the army or were transported by sea is not particularly important, but it is certainly not implausible that the year 26 coins can be associated with the start of Narses' campaign. Before his descent into Italy, Salona served as his headquarters and issues of Justinian in three denominations (40, 20 and 10 nummi) with no mint signature have been assigned<sup>9</sup> to a mint in the city.

No entirely satisfactory explanation seems possible for the origin of coins that display both eastern and western attributes. Both Justinian's and Justin's Italian campaigns were initiated by the movement of troops eastwards from Asia Minor and/or the Balkans to the west. Given the geographical challenges and attendant difficulties and risks of transporting large amounts of copper coinage to Italy, it seems logical to suggest that mint workers accompanied the armies and established one or more mints in the west.

Any specially produced currency would, on the face of it, need to serve two purposes: provide an acceptable means of paying the soldiers; and, provide a means of exchange between those soldiers and local economies in Italy. Why though (and seemingly on two separate occasions) should these workers have produced reverse dies naming both eastern and western mints? One possibility is that dies naming Nicomedia/Cyzicus were used initially but the coins proved to be unacceptable to local tradesmen. They were then replaced with coins with more familiar mint signatures - P for the issue under Justinian and RAV for that under Justin II.

While the alternative - that the coins marked P were struck at Constantinople by western moneyers dispersed at the end of the Gothic war, seems, given the historical circumstances, almost counter-intuitive<sup>10</sup> (and for it to occur twice, that is under Justin II also, seems far fetched) - it is the case that the lettering on the coins is generally more characteristic of western mints than eastern ones.

Nor does Grierson's view that the year 26 P coins were struck at Constantinople bear close scrutiny. The As of the P/NI coins are Ravennate in form and Hahn comments that find

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<sup>8</sup> Bury, J. B. *History of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, New York (1958) pp. 270-274.

<sup>9</sup> Bellinger, *DOC*, p. 187. It is stated that a number of such coins have been found at Salona; see also MIBE, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> Grierson (1982), p. 76.

spots are predominantly, although not exclusively, Italian<sup>11</sup>. In respect of the half follis, the denominational mark K could have stood for Constantinople without the need for anything more explicit, while CON could easily have been inserted below the I mark of the dekanumium. The P is more likely to stand for Ravenna since the initial capital R is given in its Greek form Π – appropriately where mint workers from the east were cutting the dies<sup>12</sup>. Or it could stand for *polis* if the coins were made in the environs of Ravenna.

It is possible that the coins belong to Ravenna. They may also be associated with a larger group of coins, variously mint marked, that appear, mainly on grounds of style, to be attributable to Ravenna<sup>13</sup>.

Further, it is possible that the military mint either commenced operations at Salona or that it produced coins both there and in Italy at the same time. Once the Adriatic was cleared of Gothic ships there would have been no bar to the passage of vessels carrying the various *materiel* of war, including currency. The evidence of finds for the anonymous issues is hardly conclusive. Many of the coins at Dumbarton Oaks were “acquired by their previous owner from a collector at Salona, having been found locally”<sup>14</sup>, but quantities of all denominations have also been found at Ravenna<sup>15</sup>.

Figure 1. Justinian I: half folles of year 26 with mint signatures NI and Π (not die-linked by obverse).



MIBE 116 (catalogue 5.53)

MIBE 97 (catalogue 5.54)

The stylistic similarities between the portraits on the anonymous issues and on those that may be attributed to Ravenna seem not to have been much commented upon. The style of the profile bust of Justinian is quite distinctive in style with a rather un-Imperial looking turned up nose (see Figure 2).

<sup>11</sup> Hahn, MIBE, p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the date (XX/VI) is completely Latin in form.

<sup>13</sup> See Ercolani Cocchi, E., *Imperi Romano e Bizantino Regni Barbarici in Italia Attraverso Le Monete del Museo Nazionale di Ravenna* (Bologna 1984), pp. 72-77.

<sup>14</sup> D. O. Volume 1, p. 187, footnote.

<sup>15</sup> Ercolani-Cocchi, pp. 76-77.

Figure 2: Stylistic similarities between the Salona, Ravenna and P mints.



MIBE 250 (Salona).  
(Catalogue 5.57.)



MIB 236 (Ravenna).  
(Catalogue 5.56.)



MIB 101 (imitative mint in Italy).  
(Catalogue 5.62.)



If these coins all belong to Ravenna, the earliest dated coins for the mint should be brought forward from regnal year 34 (560/1) to regnal year 26 (552/3). This seems to reflect the known historical framework as, prior to the triumph of Narses, the city had been under Gothic control since 541. Following his victory in 552, the Imperial administration, and within it the mint workers, would probably have been moved there. In the years to 560/1 the operation might have undergone gradual changes (including a turnover in personnel) that eventually gave it the character of a regular Imperial mint.

In those eight years it is quite possible that the mint continued to issue various anomalous looking coins but this is not the place for that possibility to be investigated further<sup>16</sup>. Whatever the specific circumstances, however, it seems likely that Ravenna provided the bulk of the local currency once Byzantine control of north east Italy was firmly in place.

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<sup>16</sup> The reader is referred to catalogue 5.58-61 and 5.64-67 for such possibilities.

## THE ANONYMOUS EASTERN FOLLES OF MAURICE

Constantinople: catalogue 11.79-108; Nicomedia: catalogue 11.153-165; Cyzicus: catalogue 11.197-209.

The majority of the 20 nummi issues struck at the eastern mints under Maurice bear no mint signature and the coins are often referred to as “anonymous”. They are the products of the great metropolitan mints of Constantinople, Nicomedia and Cyzicus and can be difficult to tell apart. Half folles from Antioch are easily distinguishable and bear mint marks in any case.

Before regnal year 20 (which is a special case) there are some criteria that can be quite easily recognised and explained.

An early attempt to organise objective criteria by which to set the three mints apart was made by Schindler<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless, in D. O. Volume 1 (almost twenty years later), Bellinger pointed out that the “safest guide to recognition of the various styles should be comparison with folles of the same years, but it must be admitted that resemblance is not always as close as one could wish”. MIBEC discusses possible criteria for attribution but only in passing (p. 54) and briefly covers aspects of the shape of the bust and relevant features, such as the eyes, and the position and form of the cross (in the case of a crowned bust) or the plume (in that of a helmeted bust).

More comprehensive criteria have been developed by Henri Pottier who has been kind enough to share them<sup>18</sup>.

Of the three mints only that of Constantinople was divided into five officinae (workshops) and half folles marked Γ, Δ and Ε must, therefore, belong to the capital. Coins of Cyzicus are relatively easy to distinguish<sup>19</sup>. It is telling apart Constantinople and Nicomedia (in respect of the first and second officinae) that is the greater challenge.

Portrait criteria for identification (Figure 3).

The shape of the head is not an altogether reliable guide although coins of Cyzicus have a rather distinctive appearance resembling that of a rather sad looking dog. The eyes are shown in a particular way characteristic of the mint although the Emperor’s face is often flatly struck, presumably as a result of some kind of minting practice, and can be difficult to make out.

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<sup>17</sup> Schindler, L., Die halben folles ohne Munzstättenbezeichnung des Mauricius Tiberius, NZ , 73 (1949), pp. 111-114.

<sup>18</sup> As M. Pottier may yet publish his work, only certain aspects of the portraiture (those of which I was already aware) are discussed here.

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps, but on grounds of honesty it should be admitted that a half follis (catalogue 11.162 – see below) was, in an earlier edition, given to Cyzicus. On Pottier’s advice the coin has been reattributed to Nicomedia along with three other coins of unusual appearance. D. O. (142) makes a similar mistake.

The manner in which the globus cruciger is shown is a much more reliable guide. On coins of Constantinople, the fingers of the Emperor's right hand (in which he holds the globus cruciger) extend upwards forming a regular cup, or sometimes a lozenge, shape with the globus sometimes clearly visible inside. Coins of Nicomedia are also quite distinct in this regard; two or three of the fingers are shown individually and are often splayed with the thumb in the "up" position sometimes in an S shape. The globus is not shown and the cross appears from the palm. The general effect is that of the opening of a rather sinister looking flower. This is quite clear on catalogue 11.155 particularly. At Cyzicus, the Emperor's hand is shown quite clearly in an open cup shape.

Figure 3: Anonymous half folles of Maurice: basic identifying criteria from portrait.



Catalogue 11.98.

- i. Triangular face with rounded chin.
- ii. Button eyes under flattened eyebrows.
- iii. Fingers closed in circle around globus.



Catalogue 11.157.

- i. Oval face with rounded chin.
- ii. Button eyes under arched eyebrows.
- iii. Fingers splayed – globus not usually clearly shown.



Catalogue 11.201.

- i. Droopy face with pointed chin.
- ii. Well defined eyes with pupils.
- iii. Cupped hand with globus shown clearly within.

Nicomedia – regnal years 10 and 11 (catalogue 11.160-11.163).

These are four interesting coins (three of which are also shown at Figure 4) that, while they conform in certain respects to the criteria set out above, also possess some unusual features of their own. The abbreviated legend consists of crudely engraved letters - **ANMA** at most and which - in three out of the four cases - is positioned entirely on the left of the Imperial bust with nothing else of the legend visible. The cause of this unusual placement of the legend is the peculiar appearance of the globus cruciger.

In a form closest to its normal appearance (catalogue 11.160 and 11.162), the globus cruciger is surmounted by a circle (detached from the top of the cross). On 11.163, the shaft of the cross resembles that of a spiraled caduceus and the circle above has been embellished with a downwards stroke. On 11.161, the device is missing from the hand altogether (the first part of the legend is in the way) although part of the globus cruciger can perhaps be seen to the left.

While this small group possesses several anomalous features, the coins are probably regular. On the basis of Pottier's complete set of criteria they are attributed to Nicomedia. A possible explanation for their unusual appearance is that they are simply the products of

one or more workers added to the personnel of the mint in those years. As noted in the catalogue, three out of four were bought from the same dealer in 2013 and perhaps formed part of a larger group acquired by him as a single lot.

Figure 4: Half folles of Maurice of anomalous style (Nicomedia; regnal years 10 and 11).



Regnal year 20 (catalogue 11.213-11.226).

The D. O. catalogue lists only two half folles for this year (Constantinople and Cyzicus). The coins as a whole are common<sup>20</sup>, however – in marked contrast to those issued during the half dozen or so previous years. MIBEC divides the year 20 half folles between those with a cross above the K and those with a Christogram. The former are the less common – only the first, second and fifth workshops are listed in MIBEC for Constantinople (this collection contains a specimen for the third) and none are known for Cyzicus. Coins with the Christogram are more readily found and it seems possible that there were instructions given to produce them as part of a sizeable issue at all three mints in 601/2.

Maurice assumed the office of consul for the second time in 602, probably early in that year<sup>21</sup>. Consular folles are, of course, known that are dated regnal year 20 (601/2) for all three mints and are marked with a Christogram on the reverse. August 602 would mark the twentieth anniversary of his accession.

If a special issue was put in hand to mark the anniversary, it does not seem likely that a supplementary mint was involved. The coins retain more or less the individual style of the three mints in previous years and similar criteria can be used to differentiate them. There are stylistic variations applying, however, to both the cross and Christogram coins struck in year 20. This might have occurred as a result of the influx of new workers required to boost output.

<sup>20</sup> I have taken the trouble to put together a small collection of the year 20 half folles and to catalogue them separately. There are six coins of Constantinople; three of Nicomedia and five of Cyzicus.

<sup>21</sup> MIBEC, p. 45, footnote 97.

Both types of coin are struck on broad flans and more care seems to have been taken with the engraving than in the years before. The Christogram coins appear to have been produced to a generally heavier standard<sup>22</sup>. It is possible that the special issue began with the coins marked with a cross and that those with the Christogram were struck subsequently, being the counterpart of the consular folles. The reign of Phocas aside, consular half folles are unknown for any mint apart from Antioch.

Figure 5: Half folles of Maurice of regnal year 20.



It is an interesting aside that two rare coins, catalogue 11.213 and 11.214, of unusual appearance (they are from the third and fourth workshops and must, therefore, belong to Constantinople), show Maurice wearing a crown surmounted by a cross. The crown is not generally associated with the cuirass (armoured bust) type struck for most of the years of the reign. The two coins are something of an enigma.

Figure 6: Constantinople year 20; bust of Maurice wearing a crown with cross.



<sup>22</sup> Insufficient numbers of coins are, at present, known for anything like a full analysis. Some coins of Justin II, portraying him seated on a double throne with the Empress Sophia, are marked with a Christogram and seem to be heavier than normal.