

This is a large and varied group of coins. As the introduction to chapter 9 makes clear, coins which appear to copy the regular enthroned coinage of Justin and Sophia are commonly found. In some areas significant work has been done¹; in others, there is much still to be discovered. Within the anomalous coinage there are some smaller groups that possess considerable coherence, while at present only a loose relationship between other sub-groups can be discerned. The aim should be, through the use of robust and consistent criteria, to identify where one sub-group ends and the other begins. The commentary in this chapter is, hopefully, a contribution, but no more than that.

The first author to notice any unusual features on some of the enthroned coins was Shaw² who discussed their peculiar overall style associated with the depiction of the double throne without the large stops on the throne arms characteristic of the normal coinage. No provenances were given and it was thought that the coins might be western. Four years later, Hahn suggested a connection with the Revolt of Heraclius. Our knowledge of find spots makes this out of the question, as recognised by the same author in MIBEC (p. 8).

Military issues.

Hahn had already returned to the question by 1975³. His term for the coins “*Moneta Militaris Imitativa*” (sometimes MMI) has stuck. His argument is that only the army possessed the administrative and operational resources to produce such a large and coherent coinage over a very wide area. It is supposed that mint workers were attached to the army. *Moneta* may be translated as “mint” or as “money”. The second of these is perhaps the more helpful as it is the coins rather than the mints that were being imitated. A better term might be “military imitative money” or perhaps just military issues – the term mostly used here. Hahn (MIBEC p. 33) talks of a single central mint but this is questionable. In the same place, he concedes that the mint might have been mobile. It seems quite possible that there was more than one mobile military mint.

Military issue coins are marked with the mint signatures of Constantinople; Thessalonica; Nicomedia; Cyzicus; Carthage (MIBEC N94 – unique); Rome and Ravenna (the last also unique). The question of whether the coins bear actual (that is real) dates cannot yet be answered with any authority. Mansfield (see A.6.2) asserts the possibility that some rare military folles dated year 11 may have been struck at the beginning of Justin’s attempt to recover Italy from the Ostrogoths during 575-577 and Hahn (in MIBEC, p. 33) suggests that that the military production of coins may have commenced in year 8 (572/3) when hostilities resumed on the border with Persia. Military-looking coins are known with earlier dates, however (see A.4 and A.5). There is only limited hoard evidence⁴.

¹ By Hahn, of course, on the military issues and by Pottier on the Syrian mint.

² Shaw, A. B., The “armless throne” coinage of Justinus II and Sophia, *The Numismatist* 85 (1972), pp. 5-16.

³ Hahn, W., *Moneta Imperii Byzantini*, Volume 2 - Justin II to Phocas (565-610), Vienna, 1975, pp.49-51.

⁴ Number 9.1 was part of a hoard published in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1995, pages 348-354, no. 101, plate 57, 67:101. Several examples of MIBEC 90 (KYZ) are illustrated in Kiwan, K., *Trésor monétaire en cuivre*

A.1-2. The major military mint (9.1-9.12).

These coins, observed by Shaw, belong to what is easily the most numerous group and they were the object of Hahn's initial focus in MIB Volume 2. The A.1. group of folles portray figures that are squat in shape, somewhat skittle-like, with bulging waists (accentuated by the way in which the figures are depicted with their knees extended and the manner by which Sophia holds her transverse sceptre) tapering towards the neck and in some cases towards their feet also. For some of the half folles, this style is retained but a sub-group has a much more sinuous, mummy-like, appearance with distinctive cross-banding on the robes⁵. The squat style half folles are generally the heavier.

The figures are often, but not always, shown nimbate without any obvious pattern to the appearance of the nimbus. MIB/MIBEC distinguishes between coins with a cross between the rulers' heads (MIBEC 89b and 90b) and those without (MIBEC 89a and 90a). It is not certain that this has much significance.

Obverse legends are often neat and accurate reflections of the prototypes although retrograde letters can be observed (9.4). Officina **A** is much more common than **B**. The form of the letter for the first officina is conventional. In "**ANNO**", however, the **A** is often unbarred or straight-barred. This is sometimes associated with production in the west and its appearance here cannot easily be explained.

All of these coins are common, especially those (and particularly the half folles of group A.2) marked **KYZ**. They were obviously struck in very large numbers and, for this reason, the term "major military mint" is used. They are routinely found in parcels of coins accumulated in the Lebanon. The prevalence of the **NIKO** and **KYZ** mint marks, both much more common than **CON**, leads to the suggestion that mint workers were drawn from these two mints (and the similarity of the portraiture on the folles 9.1 (**NIKO**) and 9.5 (**KYZ**) is obviously of note in this regard). The coins can easily be distinguished from, the products of the regular mints, however, and this is hard to explain. In the absence of any other primary source material, the reasons for their issue can only be guessed at. The fact that the coins from the major military mint and its associated mint (A.3; see below) are all dated years 8 and 10 provides some grounds for suggesting that they might actually have been struck in those regnal years (that is 572/3 and 574/5). While it seems that Justin II, having broken the peace with Persia, concentrated his military resources on the eastern frontier, there seems to be no concrete evidence that he launched major offensives in those years. In any case it would be strange if the two Propontine mints, rather than Antioch, provided the prototypes for military coins produced in connection with operations so far to the east.

The precise relationship of coins belonging to this group with those in A.3 is uncertain but close. MIBEC seems to dismiss the latter without sufficient attention – despite their

découvert au village d'as-Sanamein, in Hauran V: la Syrie du Sud du néolithique à l'Antiquité tardive: recherches récentes. Vol. 1. Actes du colloque de Damas 2007, pp. 505–11, nos. 28–33. The latter hoard is said to consist of about 6,000 coins. The military coins are not discussed.

⁵ They are reminiscent of Henry Moore's engravings of people sleeping in the underground during the London blitz of 1940-41.

observable differences (see below) merely folding them into a “single central mint”⁶. That there is a close relationship between the two groups is clear, however; the elaborate decoration of 9.9 (KYZ; X) points towards other half folles (CON and NIKO; Ϛ/II). (As, similarly, the style of some coins in the next group to be described will point backwards to A.1-2.)

A.3. An associated large scale military mint (9.13-23).

The coins are marked CON and NIKO or NI (the denominational mark K making up the mint signature in the case of some of the half folles) and all bar one (9.13) with Ϛ/II (for year 8). The latter, which has CON and X (for year 10) is a very rare coin⁷. Although placed for convenience within this group of coins its style is rather different. It may have represented a short-lived trial issue at the major military mint, the form of pseudo-mint mark being quickly abandoned.

With the exception mentioned above, coins belonging to this sub-group are also quite common and it is tentatively suggested that they formed the output of a quite major operation that was closely associated with the organisation producing the coins described at A.1-2. The association with the major military mint is robust via the half folles⁸. The coins show a strong consistency of style: like the folles, all are nimbate; the shape and style of the portrait on 9.11 and that on 9.23 are similar; and there is what D. O. calls the depiction of the Imperial robes with unusual care⁹ on 9.9 (KYZ), 9.20 (NI) and 9.22 (CON). Those marked NI usually have a cross above the K and those marked CON have a star.

A half follis marked KYZ; Ϛ; II was present in a group offered for sale by Byzantium Coins (2008-2014)¹⁰. These factors combine in a way that permits a conclusion that many of the military half folles were produced together by some of the same workers and probably at around the same time.

While the majority of the coins have the date arrangement for year 8, the folles are problematic. With one exception (9.14)¹¹ these coins are marked NIKO; ϚII. Although the style of the portraiture of the folles and half folles is similar, the reverses of the former show some peculiarities. Compared with the bold engraving of the folles at A.1, the letters of the mint signature and officina are disproportionately small. By contrast, the Ϛ of the date arrangement is oversized and clumsy. Both officinae are recorded. This second military mint (if it existed) was perhaps less well managed than the first. But it is still difficult to explain the anomalous nature of the follis reverse dies.

⁶ MIBEC, p. 33.

⁷ MIBEC records two examples and (other than 9.12) I can recall only one example in trade in more than 30 years.

⁸ In D. O. Volume 1, Bellinger proposed that the CON half folles belonged to the north African city of Constantine in Numidia (Constantia). Grierson (in *Byzantine Coins*, p. 76) described their appearance as eastern and pointed out that two specimens are known to have come from Asia Minor.

⁹ D. O. 110.1 (p. 233).

¹⁰ I have only seen a poor quality image but the coin does seem to be military.

¹¹ CON; ϚII; this appears to be unpublished.

A.4. Further associated military issues (9.24-27a).

These five coins, to a greater or lesser extent, resemble the *Moneta Militaris Imitativa* stylistically. Number 9.24 with the very early date of year 1 (assuming that it is not arbitrary) is the least easy to fit into the scheme. The figures are nimbate and the stops of the throne arms are missing. The lower part of both figures is oddly engraved as if the thrones have some form of front. The coin cannot be from the Constantinople mint but may be a well produced contemporary forgery.

There are stronger grounds for attributing the other four coins to a military mint. The appearance of the figures on 9.25-27 points towards a military origin. They too display letters in the form of the date arrangement and the officina number that are large relative to those of the mint mark. Only the prominent throne arm stops shown on 9.27 depart from the military style; this may have been the work of a die-cutter drawn from the regular mint. The dates given represent regnal years 6 and 7; perhaps a logical lead-up to the beginning of a substantial military coinage in year 8 (9.14-9.23). Number 9.27a (see chapter 38) is known from a single pair of dies. Pottier¹² illustrates a specimen which he describes as “Atelier militaire sous Justin II”.

A.5. A military mint in the Balkans (9.28-30).

These coins imitate the regular coins of the mint of Thessalonica. Coins with Δ (for year 4) and H (for year 8) are known. They can be distinguished reasonably easily from the prototypes – the figures are a little broader with (where they can be seen) less accentuated horizontal banding on the robes, and the stops of the throne arms do not appear at all. MIBEC (p. 33) confirms that they are found in the Balkans. The location of the military mint is not known and a mint may have been based at Thessalonica itself.

A number of apparently imitative half folles with a TЄS mint signature are known and these are described in section A.10. They seem to be contemporary (i.e., sixth century) forgeries.

A.6. Italy.

A.6.1. Rome (9.31-32).

The figures on these half folles with the mint mark **ROM** are nimbate and conform closely to the normal military style. No half folles appear to have been issued by the regular mint at Rome.

A.6.2. Ravenna (9.33-34).

Numbers 9.33 and 9.34 are die-linked by obverse with reverses that read, respectively, **RAV; XI; B** and **KYZ; X/I; B**. It is proposed that these coins (five others are known of the second, **KYZ**, type¹³) are the product of a military mint workers associated with which

¹² Pottier H. *Le Monnayage de la Syrie sous l'Occupation Perse (610–630)*, Cahiers Ernest-Babelon 9 (Paris, 2004).

¹³ In addition to 9.34: Tolstoi 152; ex Leimonstoll collection; Penn-Mansfield no. 2 collection (two specimens).

accompanied the expeditionary force dispatched by Justin II to recover Italy from the Goths in 573 or 574¹⁴.

A.7. KYZ – year 11 (9.35-38).

The date arrangement for year 11 occurs on the coins examined in chapter 9 with a frequency that seems more than simply random.

Number 9.35 strongly resembles 9.34 but lacks the curious decoration in the obverse exergue that ties it in to the **RAV/KYZ** military mint.

Numbers 9.36 and 9.37 seem to be degenerate copies of 9.35 with very garbled legends and crudely drawn figures. There is a juxtaposition of the Imperial insignia; here, the figure to the left holds a cruciform sceptre transversely, and the figure to the right holds a globus cruciger. They are, without much question, the work of the same hand. Two other examples of this type are known: MIB 90a³ (National Museum, Warsaw) and a coin formerly in the Pavlos S. Pavlou collection. Number 9.36 is probably die-linked by obverse to the MIB plate coin while 9.37 is struck from the same obverse die as the Pavlou collection coin. The anonymous cataloguer of the Pavlou collection¹⁵ suggests that the coin might be an early Arab-Byzantine issue from the mint of Abila on the basis that both **KYZ** and **X/I** feature on a coin thought to come from a mint at that location¹⁶. While this seems unlikely, the possibility that this unusual coin did serve as a prototype for an early Umayyad issue cannot quite be ruled out.

Number 9.38 is a very curious coin for which no explanation can be offered at present. It is of good manufacture and very heavy for a half follis. It seems unlikely to be a modern forgery¹⁷.

A.8. Anomalous enthroned coins: “**NIKO**” and the Syrian mint (9.39-9.49).

Pottier¹⁸ describes the production of coins of this type at an unofficial mint probably located in Syria during the 20 years war between Byzantium and Sasanian Persia (610-630; the “Syrian mint”). In that work, and in subsequent analyses that have been published less formally, he includes a type of coin that shows a number of distinct and consistent features that mark it out from other coins at the mint¹⁹. They are well engraved and struck on neat, round, flans. The figures have distinctive triangular faces and Sophia holds her transverse sceptre in a characteristic way - it emerges at an angle from her lower torso. There is also an easily noticeable gap between the figures’ lower bodies and their knees. The lettering

¹⁴ Mansfield, S. J., A Byzantine Temporary Mint and Justin II’s Lombard Campaign, *Numismatic Chronicle* 174 (2014), pp. 205-212.

¹⁵ Baldwins Islamic sale number 9, 12 October 2004, lot 3140.

¹⁶ Oddy, W. A., A New Proto-Umayyad Mint in Syria, *Numismatic Chronicle* 164 (2004), pp. 236-240. The coin in question is no. 15 on plate 27.

¹⁷ I have seen a follis with a similar obverse. This purports to be from the mint of Antioch and is dated year 3. It weighs 8.4 gms and is 25mm in diameter.

¹⁸ Pottier, H., *Le Monnayage* (op. cit.).

¹⁹ The Justin II imitations are Pottier class V, see especially pp. 35–9, 71–83 and plates 11–14. The coins discussed here are class V, series 3.

(including the mint signature **NIKO** and the officina letters) is accurate. The letters often have exaggerated ligatures. No die-links between series 3 and other Syrian mint coins have been found²⁰. On pages 117-118 (part of the summary in English), Pottier addresses the specific circumstances of series 3. He cites similarities in production standards, metrology and die-axes between series 3 and the Syrian folles as a whole that make probable their inclusion in the mint's output. Nevertheless, he suggests that series 3 might have come from a different department or workshop of the mint (thus accounting for their better production standards) and/or that they might have been made for a different customer.

Pottier rejects an association with the *Moneta Militaris Imitativa* on grounds of metrology and style (p. 118). He points out that MMI coins are found in sixth century hoards.

It is preferable to leave this question open. The A.8 coins in this catalogue form a coherent group²¹. They could be military issues from the time of Justin II. Justin promoted a more aggressive (although largely unsuccessful) policy towards Persia. Although other evidence is lacking, year 6 (as represented by the quite common series 3 folles; that is 570/71) might have been the earliest date at which Justin was able to begin to concentrate sufficiently powerful forces in the east to commence hostilities after the long truce. And, as we have seen, there are military folles dated year 8 (9.14-18) and marked **NIKO**, that might have been struck after the discontinuation of the "series 3" issues in that year, perhaps by a different part of the army and at a different location.

There are quite distinctive stylistic differences between the MMI and series 3 issues, however. It seems unlikely that both the MMI and the series 3 coins (if the latter can be placed in the 570s) were made by workers drawn from the regular mint itself. Where the boundary (or boundaries) rests in relation to anomalous coins issued in the eastern theatre of war in the sixty years between 570 and 630 is hard to determine and reliance on style is thwart with difficulty²². Hoard evidence might, in time, settle aspects of the question.

A.8.1-9. Possible military issues and contemporary imitations (9.50-9.59).

Few coins require comment additional to that in the specific notes. The boundaries between the products of some non-official (but nevertheless organised) mints and imitations made to meet a specific need, or just to deceive, are vague and shifting.

²⁰ This, of course, marks them out from the generality of Syrian mint issues where quite incongruous links appear, for example, reverses that link obverse types based on Justin II and Heraclian prototypes.

²¹ My first purchase of such specimens seems to have occurred in 1990, coins that were almost certainly part of a Lebanese dealer's stock acquired in quite large numbers by an intermediary. It was very easy to pick the coins out as anomalous. At this time, I doubt that I was aware of either Pottier's work or the idea of *Moneta Militaris Imitativa*. See chapter 9 (Addendum; 9.49a) a coin with the mint signature **THEUP** and year X/II.

²² There are Justin II coins that I have catalogued as Syrian (in Chapter 20) that bear a strong resemblance to those described here. I would also be tempted to attribute two specimens (20.60-61) marked **NIKO; X** - die-linked to Pottier 78.2 - to some kind of military activity during the reign of Justin. Whether such anomalous coins are broadly contemporary with their prototypes or were made decades later, it is important to remember that the imitators would have the prototype coins to hand and that there are only so many ways in which to depict a couple seated on a double throne. On clearly regular coins (see D. O. 101c for a good example), Justin's robes are engraved in such a way that a roundel appears in the centre of his lower torso. This feature transfers to several types of apparently non-regular coins.