

THE TREASURE OF GOLDEN BYZANTINE COINS FROM PROFESSOR ISHIRKOVO, SILISTRA REGION

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Autorul discută împrejurările descoperirii în localitatea Profesor Isshirkovo, regiunea Silistra, a unui tezaur de monede bizantine din sec. XI, din care numai 22 de piese sunt cunoscute.

Este contestată opinia unor specialiști care stabilesc o legătură între existența tezaurului și așezarea medievală aflată în apropierea locului decoperirii.

În anul 1087 împăratul Alexios I Comnenos a hotărât să întreprindă o campanie militară împotriva pecenegilor de la Durostorum. Luptele au avut un final nefast pentru armata bizantină, iar autorul consideră că în urma acestei înfrângeri, în timpul retragerii bizantinilor, un ofițer a ascuns monedele.

Pentru a-și argumenta opinia, autorul amintește că din aceeași zonă provin și alte tezaure, datate tot în perioada premergătoare campaniei bizantine împotriva pecenegilor.

A treasure of gold Byzantine coins from the 11th century was found in 1964 during farming works on the land of Professor Ishirkovo village, Silistra region. The village is located 15 km South-West from Silistra. The exact amount is unknown, however, 22 coins have been traced and delivered to the History museum in Silistra¹. The treasure consists of: 5 histamenon nomismata of Romanos III Argyros (1028–1034), 15 histamenon nomismata of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055), 2 histamenon nomismata of Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081). Different authors give information about the treasure but it still has not been published separately and interpreted in the context of the historical events on the Lower Danube during the second half of the 11th century².

¹ The coins are written in the inventory book of the museum with inventory numbers: 5223–5244 (missing – 5223, 5225, 5235).

² GERASIMOV 1966, p. 215; METCALF 1979, p. 75, n. 21; JORDANOV 1981, p. 64; JORDANOV 1987, p. 207; HRISTOVA 1987; GEORGIEVA, BACHVAROV 1994, p. 5; CUSTUREA 2000, p. 163; MĂNUCU-ADAMEȘTEANU 2001, p. 134; YOTOV 2008, p. 262; YOTOV, NIKOLOV 2009.

In the mentioned authors' short notes there are opinions on the reasons why the treasure was hidden.

R. Georgieva and I. Bachvarov believe that the find is connected with the situation of the medieval settlement about 300 meters West from the center of the village³.

This opinion is unacceptable. The in-depth reading of the written sources and especially the archaeological investigations during the last decades, show that life in the settlements between Hemus mountains and the Danube and on the East and West of the main road from the capitals Great Preslav and Pliska to Drastar ends "around the third quarter of the 10th century (from the time of John Tzimiskes (969–976) onwards"⁴.

The local population, probably with small garrisons, inhabited the fortresses (and not all of them). As a consequence of the Pecheneg invasions from the end of the first third of the 11th century the fortresses around the main road from the capitals to Dristra like those at Tsar Asen, Skala, Ruino, Okorsh, etc. were also abandoned⁵. During the invasion in 1036 Drastar was partially demolished but life in it was quickly restored because the Pechenegs remained there just for a short while⁶.

The Romanian numismatist G. Custurea connects the hiding of treasures similar to the coins - Dinogetia (1959), Păcuiul lui Soare (1978), Silistra (1948), Gyurgendzhik (1911), most generally with the insecure political and economical situation in Dobrudja⁷.

D. Metcalf believes that the treasure from Ishirkovo was concealed around 1080⁸.

The last two opinions are too general. I think that the concealing of the treasure can be connected to the military-political situation at the Lower Danube in the second half of the 11th century. The presence of coins of Nikephoros III Botaneiates points to an even more concrete event – the campaign of Alexios I Comnenos (1081–1118) against the Pechenegs in Dristra in 1087 and most of all the route of the Byzantine army after the defeat at the Danubian town (see the map)⁹.

This military campaign is well described by Anna Comnena¹⁰. In summer of 1087 Alexios I Comnenos organizes a campaign against the Pechenegs inhabiting the lands at the Lower Danube. Alexios makes arrangements for the campaign in the towns situated south of Hemus mountains – Adrianople, Lardeia, Goloe¹¹. After crossing the mountains the Byzantine army has several small clashes with Pechenegs but reaches Dristra quickly. Here the army sets camp at a river near

³ GEORGIEVA, BACHVAROV 1994, p. 5.

⁴ ATANASOV 1991, p. 76–78; RASHEV *et alii* 1995, p. 157.

⁵ Best in YOTOV, ATANASOV 1998, p. 137.

⁶ ATANASOV 2001, p. 188.

⁷ CUSTUREA 2000, p. 119.

⁸ METCALF 1979, p. 75.

⁹ YOTOV 2008, p. 262; YOTOV, NIKOLOV 2009.

¹⁰ COMNENA 1928, p. 169–178.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

the town and after that lays siege to the fortress defended by the Pechenegs¹². After several battles with varying success, the emperor, pushed by some of his young army officers, decides to give the decisive battle in the Dristra area. The Byzantine army suffers a great defeat and Alexios flees to Goloe and from there to Beroe, where he starts to collect money to buy off the hostages¹³.

The Byzantines suffer heavy losses during the battle and a vivid description of the retreat was made by Anna Comnena. One of the most curious cases is the desertion of a group of Byzantine soldiers lead by the military commander George Palaiologos. As Anna Comnena says, many of the soldiers were killed by the Pechenegs but George Palaiologos and others managed to survive by hiding in a woodland¹⁴.

I think that it is entirely possible that the treasure from Professor Ishirkovo was hidden by a Byzantine officer during the fleeing action after the defeat at Dristra¹⁵. According to some pieces of information from the middle of the 10th century 30 nomismata were awarded to a tourmarque for taking part in an expedition¹⁶ – a rule or a principle that could have hardly changed a century later.

There are other known treasures of gold Byzantine coins from the second half of the 11th century which can also be connected with the campaign and especially to the retreat after the defeat near Dristra (see the map).

The first one is from Gyurgendzhik village (Pop Kralevo). The village is located 15 km Southeast from Silistra and 15 km East from Professor Ishirkovo. The treasure was found in 1911. It consists of a silver bracelet and 22 nomismata of Michael VII Ducas (1075–1080), while only three of the coins were bought off by the Archaeological museum in Sofia. Information on the treasure can be found in one of the first publications of the Bulgarian Archaeological Association¹⁷ and later it is mentioned in almost all studies on the monetary circulation at the Lower Danube¹⁸. D. Metcalf believes that the treasure from Gyurgendzhik is unlikely to have been concealed before 1072–1073¹⁹.

The second treasure (or find) is from Kirkovo village, Shumen region. It consists of 2 nomismata from the second half of the 11th century, according to I. Yordanov the coins are from the period 1059–1081²⁰.

In the course of my work on this article I was also shown treasures of gold coins from the second half of the 11th century which are in private collections. They have been found around old roads in the Silistra region. The treasures include stamenon and electrum nomismata of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055), Michael VII Dukas (1075–1080), Roman Diogenes (1068–1071) and Alexios I

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 172–173.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 173–178.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 178–179.

¹⁵ YOTOV 2008, p. 262–263; YOTOV, NIKOLOV 2009.

¹⁶ CHEYNET 2006, p. 172.

¹⁷ IBAD, II, 1912, p. 281.

¹⁸ METCALF 1979, p. 75, n. 21; JORDANOV 1981, p.64; JORDANOV 1987, p. 207; CUSTUREA 2000, p. 162; MĂNUCU-ADAMEȘTEANU 2001, p. 134; YOTOV 2008, p. 262; YOTOV, NIKOLOV 2009.

¹⁹ METCALF 1979, p. 75, n. 21.

²⁰ JORDANOV 1981, p.64; YOTOV 2008, p. 262; YOTOV, NIKOLOV 2009.

Comnenos. The number of coins in these treasures is 6, 12, 36–40. There are no other archaeological artifacts around the finds – pottery, weaponry, equipment. According to the owners of these small treasures, the coins, especially those of Alexios I Comnenos are very well preserved which shows that they have been distributed at one and the same time and have not been put in circulation. It can also be assumed that these small treasures were officer or soldier payments and were hidden during the fleeing action after the defeat in Dristra in 1087²¹.

In the region of the Dulovo municipality, Silistra region, close to the treasures from Ishirkovo and Gyurgendzhik 4 treasures with follises from the second half of the 11th century were also found, which could also be connected with the campaign of Alexios I Comnenos to Dristra in 1087²². Another coin hoard is from the region of the Hemus mountain passes – Varbishki pass or Rishki pass.²³ I am not familiar with similar treasures being discovered in medieval settlements or towns.

The coins in the catalogue are described in Ph. Grierson's catalogue

Romanos III Argyros (1028–1034), all coins are very fine – 24 carat; DOW III, 2, p. 715 – 717.

No.	Gram	M _M	↓	Description	Inv. No.	Figs.	Other
1.	4.31	25	?	–	5223	–	missing
2.	4.31	24.7	↓	Flattened	5224	Plate I-2	
3.	4.35	24.4	?	–	5225	–	missing
4.	4.41	25	↓	Flattened	5226	Plate I-4	
5.	4.32	26	↓	Flattened	5227	Plate I-5	

Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055), all coins are very fine – 24 carat; DOW III, 2, p. 740 – 741, class III.

No.	Gram	M _M	↓	Description	Inv. No.	Figs.	Other
6.	4.33	26.7	↓	Flattened	5228	Plate II-6	
7.	4.32	26.5	↓	Concave	5229	Plate II-7	
8.	4.14	27.6	↓	Concave	5230	Plate II-8	
9.	4.32	27	↓	Flattened	5231	Plate II-9	
10.	4.33	28.5	↓	Flattened	5232	Plate II-10	
11.	4.34	28	↘	Flattened	5233	Plate II-11	
12.	4.34	29.2	↘	Concave	5234	Plate II-12	
13.	4.36	28	?	–	5235	–	missing

²¹ YOTOV 2008, p. 262; YOTOV, NIKOLOV 2009.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ YOTOV 2004, p. 445-460; YOTOV 2008, p. 262; YOTOV, NIKOLOV 2009.

14.	4.26	28	↓	Flattened	5236	Plate II-14	
15.	4.36	27	↓	Concave	5237	Plate II-15	
16.	4.41	27.8	↓	Flattened	5238	Plate II-16	
17.	4.28	27.4	↘	Flattened	5239	Plate II-17	
18.	4.32	27	↓	Flattened	5240	Plate II-18	
19.	4.33	27	↓	Flattened	5241	Plate II-19	
20.	4.34	27.6	↘	Flattened	5242	Plate II-20	

Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081), all coins are very fine – 8 carat (electrum); DOW III, 2, p. 824, class I.

No.	Gram	M _M	↓	Description	Inv. No.	Figs.	Other
21.	4.30	31	↓	Concave	5243	Plate III-21	
22.	4.35	29.3	↓	Concave	5244	Plate III-22	

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Map. Coin hoards which could be connected to retreat of the Byzantine army.

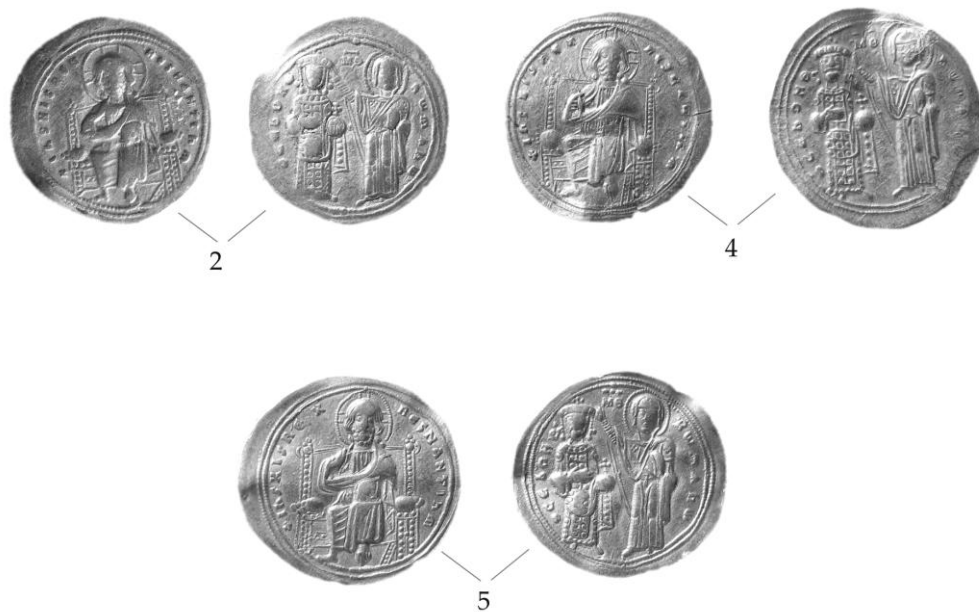


Plate I - The coins of Romanos III Argyros (1028–1034).

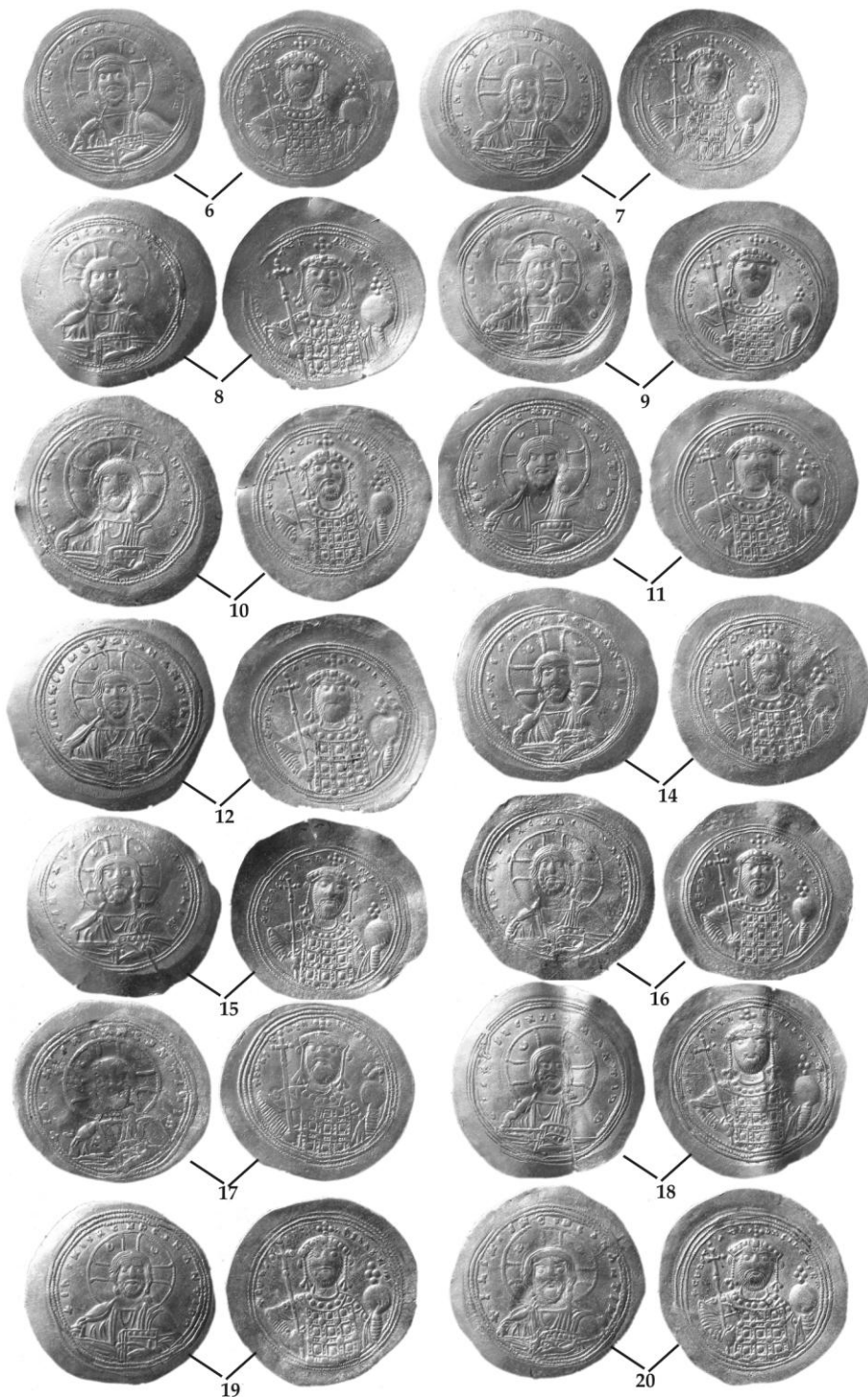


Plate II - The coins of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055).



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Plate III- The coins of Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081).