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IMAGES OF POWER

Byzantium and Nordic Coinage *c.* 995–1035

KYIV · LAURUS

PARIS · ACHCByz

2016

OCCASIONAL MONOGRAPHS · 5

published by
THE UKRAINIAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE
FOR BYZANTINE STUDIES

This study is devoted to a group of Scandinavian imitations of a type of miliaresia of Basil II and Constantine VIII struck between AD 977 and 989. The imitations were produced during the first half of eleventh century, i.e. later than the circulation of their Byzantine prototypes. Apart from Scandinavia, similar imitations were struck in the area of the Taman peninsula in southern Russia. What was the reason for imitating these Byzantine coins? Did the imitators and people of Scandinavia understand the effigies on these coins? Why were some Anglo-Saxon and Byzantine coins chosen as the prototypes for the oldest Scandinavian coinage? Is there any connection between the Scandinavian and Russian imitations of Basil II and Constantine VIII's coins? This book addresses these questions and contains a catalogue with descriptions of all of the types of Scandinavian imitations of Byzantine coins, and details relating to dating and find circumstances, as well as plates with enlarged photographs of the coins studied by the author.

Composed in PT Serif Pro and PT Sans Pro.
Typeset by Nova Storinka, Kyiv, Ukraine.
In Book We Trust

Printed and bound in Ukraine

ISBN 978-966-2449-88-4 (Laurus)
ISBN 978-2-916716-60-2 (ACHCByz)

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THERE is a well-known aphorism that states: 'Imitation is the sincerest [form] of flattery'.[1] Of course, this might be true, but adoration, admiration, idolatry and envy are just some of the other traditional reasons for copycat behaviour. Surrounding cultures regarded Byzantium as a successor of the Roman Empire as well as an economic, social and cultural capital. This is supported by archaeological evidence in the form of Byzantine gold coins, amethyst beads, silk and jewellery dating from the sixth to eighth centuries AD. Most of this material derives from two areas: Middle Sweden and Gotland.[2] Many objects are from richly furnished graves, the burials of individuals who enjoyed a distinctive, high-status social position in society. Clearly the Empire had been viewed as an exemplary aristocratic centre and was worthy of imitation by local Scandinavian elites.[3] In the eleventh and twelfth centuries both original Byzantine objects and their copies circulated in Scandinavia. The copies included some types of glass beads, crosses, vessels and circular pendants as well as coins.[4]

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1 Ch. C. Colton, *Lacon: Or, Many Things in Few Words: Addressed to Those who Think*, London, 1837, p. 113.

2 J. Ljungkvist, '*Influences* from the *Empire: Byzantine-related Objects* in Sweden and Scandinavia – *560/570-750/800 AD',* in D. Daim and J. Drauschke (eds.), *Byzanz - das Römerreich im Mittelalter Tl. 3,* Mainz, 2010, pp. *419-441.*

3 F. Androshchuk, 'What does material evidence tell us about the contacts between Byzantium and the Viking world c. 800-1000', in F. Androshchuk, J. Shepard and M. White (eds.), *Byzantium and the Viking World*, Uppsala, 2016, pp. 91-93.

4 W. Duczko, 'Byzantine Presence in Viking Age Sweden: Archaeological Finds and their Interpretation', in M. Müller-Wille (ed.), *Rom und Byzanz im Norden. Mission und Glaubenswechsel im Ostseeraum während des 8.-14. Jahrhunderts*, vol. I, Mainz and Stuttgart, 1997, pp. 291–311; F. Androshchuk, 'Rus' i vizantiiskie kontakty Skandinavii v XI-XIV vv.', *Stratum plus,* no. 5, 2014, pp. 1-14.

The idea of reproducing a certain Byzantine prototype could have emerged both while visiting the Byzantine Empire and after returning home. It may also have occurred to individuals who had never been to Byzantium but had adopted a certain oral narrative or received visual information from a native or perhaps a visitor to Greece. The role of intermediaries should not be underestimated, and needs to be investigated. These were the translators of Byzantine culture who helped to explain the social world of the centre for those on the periphery in a comprehensible language of symbols. Such translators included single individuals of Scandinavian origin living among the Greeks and local Scandinavian interpreters of available Byzantine prototypes.

It is possible to distinguish two main kinds of imitations. The first comprises direct imitations, i.e. copies of the original with smaller deviations such as slightly misunderstood decorative details and/or inscription. We may suppose that the producer of a direct imitation was aware of both the function of the object and a customer's cultural background. It is also possible that the maker understood the language of symbols and the place of the imitation manufactured in the hierarchy of surrounding objects. The second category is characterized by derivative imitations – objects that correspond only partly to prototypes. Sometimes they combine traits of quite different prototypes. In this case, the producer is unlikely to have understood the original meaning of the copied artefact, and in effect actually created a completely new object, strange and possibly even unrecognizable in the context of its prototype. Here we come to a central question, the crux of this study: how should an imitation be interpreted in the milieu of its prototype? Could it be considered an original?

In Byzantium the discussion about the relationship between an original and a copy has developed within theological disputes on the veneration of holy images.[5] St John Damascene defined this issue in the following way:

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5 L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680–850): The Sources, An Annotated Survey,* Burlington, Ashgate, 2001.

> First, what is an image? An image is a likeness, an exemplar or a figure of something, such as to show in itself the subject represented. Surely, the image is not in all respects similar to its prototype, i.e., its subject; for the image is one thing and the subject another, and there is necessarily a difference between them...[6]

Thus, it seems that a copy, or likeness, is not an original or a prototype. The Byzantines seem to have been aware of this difference, but what was their view on visual messages transmitted by an imitated object? The observations of St Theodore the Studite are revealing in this respect:

> Every artificial image is a likeness of that whereof it is the image, and it exhibits in itself, by way of imitation, the form of its model, as expressed by Dyonysius, learned in divine things: the truth in the likeness, the model in the image, the one in the other, except for the differences of substance. Hence, he who revers an image surely revers the person whom the image shows; not the substance of the image, but him who is delineated in it. Nor does the singleness of his veneration separate the model from the image, since, by virtue of imitation, the image and the model are one...Or take the example of a signet ring engraved with the imperial image, and let it be impressed upon wax, pitch and clay. The impression is one and the same in the several materials which, however, are different with respect to each other; yet it would not have remained identical unless it were entirely unconnected with the materials...[7]

Judging from this explanation there is no difference between prototype and imitation for an iconophile. That means that all direct imitations might be viewed by the Greeks and other Orthodox Christians as Byzantine objects. In such a way visual messages transmitted by imitations become crucial criteria for their acknowledgment and acceptance. If the visual messages were executed in a proper and correct way, they should be considered and understood by the receiver as original information.

Where coins are concerned, however, how can we draw the line between imitation and forgery? Indeed, within the borders of a given country imitations of low quality can be considered forgeries or local issues of coinage. Very few examples of imitations of coins have been traced within the territory of Byzantium. Those that are known are limited to crude-styled imitations of gold coins struck in southern Italy and

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6 C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1972, p. 171.
7 Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 173.

Sicily in the ninth century as well as copper folles minted in Asia Minor and Syria in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Byzantine imitations struck outside the Empire are recorded in regions such as Georgia, Rus, Italy, Germany, Bohemia, Scandinavia and possibly England.[8] They are an important source for evaluating the influence and contacts of Byzantium beyond its imperial borders. These imitations reveal not only sources of inspiration for the local elite, but also a visual language of their social and cultural identities.

This study is devoted to a group of Scandinavian imitations of a type of miliaresia of Basil II and Constantine VIII struck between AD 977 and 989. The imitations were produced during the first half of eleventh century, i.e. later than the circulation of their Byzantine prototypes. Apart from Scandinavia, similar imitations were struck in the area of the Taman peninsula in southern Russia. What was the reason for imitating these Byzantine coins? Did the imitators and people of Scandinavia understand the effigies on these coins? Why were some Anglo-Saxon and Byzantine coins chosen as the prototypes for the oldest Scandinavian coinage? Is there any connection between the Scandinavian and Russian imitations of Basil II and Constantine VIII's coins?

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With very few exceptions, all of the photographs in this book were taken by Gabriel Hildebrand. I am indebted to Dr Cecilia von Heijne,

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8 P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine coins in the Dumbarton Oaks collection and in the Whittemore collection*, vol. 3: *Leo III to Nicephorus III (717-1081)*, Washington, D.C., 1973, pp. 101-102; C. Morrisson, 'Le rôle des varanges dans la transmission de la monnaie byzantine en Scandinavie', in R. Zeitler (ed.), *Les pays du Nord et Byzance (Scandinavie et Byzance), Actes du colloque nordique et international de byzantonologie, Tenu à Upsal 20-22 avril 1979*, Uppsala, 1981, pp. 131-140. Anglo-Saxon imitations of Byzantine coins are very few. Traits that reveal imitating are the use of monograms, linear inscriptions and a facing bust, which could have been borrowed from the Ostrogoths and Lombards in Italy. See P. D. Whitting, 'The Byzantine Empire and the Coinage of the Anglo-Saxons', in R. H. M. Dolley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Coins,* Studies presented to F. M. Stenton on the occasion of his 80th birthday 17 May 1960, London, Methuen & Co. LTD, 1961, pp. 33-34.

who helped me with many technical questions and shared her expertise in Viking Age numismatics. My thanks also go to Professor Kenneth Jonsson and Frédéric Elfver (Stockholm); Professor Tuukka Talvio and Frida Ehrnsten (Helsinki); Dr Konstantin Babaev (Moscow); Nikolai Dutkinskii (Saint Petersburg); and Alexei Sheremetiev and Zinaida Zraziuk (Kiev). I am also very grateful to Dr Jonathan Shepard (Oxford) and Professor Cécile Morrisson (Paris) for critical comments and other help, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection for providing photographs and for the Athena Ruby font used for inscriptions and Dr Kristin Bornholdt Collins for revising the English language. This study and its publication would not have been possible without generous support from the Sven Svensson foundation for numismatics.

CONCLUSION

DURING the Viking Age it was mostly foreign coins that circulated in Scandinavia. In the ninth and tenth centuries Islamic dirhams were important currency while at the end of tenth and eleventh century German and English coins circulated in considerable numbers. In contrast to these Byzantine gold, silver and copper coins are a rarity hardly comprehended by numismatists. Careful study of the secondary treatment of Byzantine coins has revealed their extraordinary value as objects of not only economic wealth but also as items charged with social prestige and status. Indigenous coinage began in Denmark, Norway and Sweden simultaneously, at the end of 990s. Moreover, coins for Sven Forkbeard, Olaf Tryggvasson and Olav Skötkonung respectively, kings of these countries, were minted by moneyers of English origin. Despite inscriptions with identifiable names of kings, these coins bear portraits and symbols characteristic of the coinage of the contemporary king of England, Æthelred II. There are very few such coins known; only three hundred, mostly Swedish, have been recorded.[283] This limited issue might be explained by the nature of power exercised by Scandinavian kings, who may have lacked the necessary political ideology and motivation to create original and sophisticated images. This is in stark contrast to the coins of Rus Princes Vladimir and Sviatopolk, which undoubtedly reflect the overt political ideology of the rulers. Images of their coins allude to important events they wished to commemorate. One more reason for the absence of the names of kings on Scandinavian coins was the lack in Scandinavia of a literate social environment, able to understand the meaning of inscriptions on

283 Malmer, *King Canute's Coinage*, p. 6.

the coins. Obviously in everyday practice people were willing to accept money that was guaranteed by a trustworthy authority, for instance English kings and Byzantine emperors. This explains why coins with identifiable names of Scandinavian kings were shortly replaced by about 2000 imitations of English coins, mainly those issued by King Æthelred II (the so-called *Long Cross* type). These imitations were made by illiterate Scandinavian moneyers, whose blundered letters completely changed the original meaning of English inscriptions and transformed the legends into decorative motifs. It is exactly on this stage that the idea to imitate some Byzantine coins emerged. Compared with imitations of English coins, this group is considerably smaller and did not attract much attention except in two detailed works by Brita Malmer, where all anonymous coins were collected, described and published. However, a range of important issues such as the chronological relationship between various types of imitations, their iconography, connections to Byzantium and coinages of surrounding countries were beyond the scope of her studies. Nevertheless, without a discussion of these aspects it is impossible to understand the phenomenon of the appearance of imitations in Scandinavia.

All imitations might be subdivided into two main groups: direct and derivative. The first ones represent coins that are copies of their original prototypes. They might have small differences in the copying of effigies, symbols, ornaments and inscriptions, but generally indicate an understanding of the meaning and function of the coin. Derivative imitations include coins that absorb elements from different prototypes, which might be combined or partly changed.

Brita Malmer demonstrated that the primary prototypes for Scandinavian imitations were Byzantine coins of Constantine VII (945-959) and Basil II and Constantine VIII's coins issued between 977 and 989.[284] She also suggested that the latter represented direct imitations, while the Anglo-Saxon mules are derivative imitations.[285] With some corrections, I have developed Malmer's observations in the following way.

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284 Malmer, 'Imitations of Byzantine Miliaresia'; Hamarberg et al., *Byzantine Coins*, p. 10.
285 Hamarberg et al., pp. 9-10.

Through an analysis of the changing iconography and inscriptions, I have subdivided all imitations into twenty-two types. Only two of them (I and II) are direct imitations and were made outside Scandinavia. Type I is an imitation of Taman origin and might be a prototype for the appearance of Scandinavian copies. Strictly speaking, none of these represents a direct imitation because the images and inscriptions are copied from blundered prototypes. Thus, it might be concluded that the most characteristic feature of Scandinavian imitations is their derivative character revealing a combination of Byzantine and English effigies, symbols and letters. The earliest types of imitations were made in Sigtuna (types V-VI, XIV, XVI and XVIII) during Olav Skötkonung's reign. A heterogeneous group of derivative imitations was minted in Denmark. One group of such coins was based on blundered copies of Taman origin of Basil II and Constantine VIII's miliaresia (types VII-XII) while another group was created based on the blundered coins of Constantine VII (types XVa-b, XX). A further group of Danish imitations is represented by a combination of English obverses with reverses that were executed in a Byzantine style (types XVIIa-d, XIX). Finally, there is one type (XXI) that is a Scandinavian interpretation of Basil II's nomisma. The Danish group of imitations is lighter than the Swedish one and probably dates to the reign of Cnut the Great.

A comparative analysis of Scandinavian imitations with Rus coinage is another important aspect highlighted in this book. It has been shown that the Rus princes used coinage of two main types: coins with identifiable images and inscriptions (Vladimir, Sviatopolk and Iaroslav) issued in Kiev and imitations of Basil II and Constantine VIII's miliaresia (Mstislav) minted in Taman. The weights of Vladimir's, Sviatopolk's and partly Iaroslav's (type I) silver coins are heavier because this was connected to the weight of Islamic dirhams (*c.* 3.00-4.25 g). Mstislav's coinage is lighter (1.4-1.99 g) and was based on Byzantine currency. A comparison between Nordic and Taman imitations shows the same source of inspiration (Basil II and Constantine VIII's miliaresia) in the copying of Byzantine effigies and symbols, but at the same time reveals some distinctive traits. Now it is clear that Nordic coins are made exclusively of silver. Nevertheless, as noted above, I believe that

the Taman silver imitations were the prototypes for the imitations that were struck both in Sigtuna and in southern Scandinavia. I have shown (Chapter V) that there are finds of weapons in the Taman area that indicate military contacts, and which may have led to a single Taman coin reaching Scandinavia and then inspiring the production of imitations in Sigtuna.

A comparative iconographical analysis of representations, inscriptions and the secondary treatment of coins, as well as their social and cultural contexts (Chapters VI-VII), demonstrate that these objects had value that was both economic and social. Despite the loss of their original meaning, copied Byzantine effigies and symbols were transferred on imitated coins and other objects. Regarded as images of power, they received a new significance that was adopted by the local social environment of Scandinavia. In such an intermediary way, Byzantium was interpreted, absorbed and had a certain impact on shaping the social structure of Late Viking-Age society. This process developed and extended further in Denmark through the introduction of Byzantine coin types by Sven Estridsen, as well as in Finland, where apparently several types of local imitations based on Byzantine prototypes emerged toward the end of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. However, these particular subjects are beyond the chronological scope of the present volume and warrant studies of their own in future research.