

THE COINS IN THE OSUM RIVER VALLEY BETWEEN THE 4TH AND 14TH CENTURIES AD

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Abstract

The study of coins that has been attracting the attention of historians and archeologists for many years is still interesting because the coins are not only items of exchange. They also are reflections of the history. The coins as an historical object and a source for history, provide valuable information about economy, trade, monetary policy and currency system. The coin's iconography contains much information about the historical and cultural aspects of the region. It shows a glimpse of the historical individual like the emperors and the other important personality of the time. The transformation of the coinage is also fascinating because it is partly a consequence of financial and economic change. The goal of this study is to examine the traits of the coins in the Osum river valley during the Late Antiquity from an archaeological and historical standpoint. This territory has been ruled by The Byzantine Empire that was responsible for the minting of numerous different coins, many of them which bore the images of the emperors and figurative religious representations. As the result, the Byzantine coins are the main coins used in this region. But the Venetian coins are also present. Various historical aspects of the region will be touched in the light of numismatic facts. In addition to analysing the physical characteristic features of them such as the design, the size, the historical context, the attribution, the quality of the workmanship, these coins were compared to the coins of other regions of Albania. This study, which analyzes archaeological studies and source materials, use descriptive research method to give a description of several coins of this region, considering the vital importance of coins in constructing the history of the Osum river valley.

Keywords: coin, archeology, Osum Valley, Byzantine, economy .

Osum river valley is one of the most interesting region in Albania in terms of its economic and cultural characteristics. Maintaining its significance throughout the Roman and Byzantium periods it was always important especially for strategic purposes and in the trade relations between Apollonia and Korca. The coins of this territory constitute an interesting subject for the archaeological and historical studies of nowadays. In fact the datas that exists about the coinages of this region are the result of some archaeological excavations completed undertaken in this territory during the last centuries because no new archeological excavation is been undertaken in the 21st century.

The aim of this study is to provide a framework of the several Byzantine and the Venetian coins found in Osum river valley, concentrating in the traits of the coins and transformation of them during the years. It use descriptive research method and suggest that the coinage has an important place in the history of the region as a valuable tools for reconstructing the history and understand the chronological order of the events of this area.

A lot of coins are found during the excavation in the 1960s and the 1990s. It seems the axiom “money talks” is true. These coins provide important chronological, historic and economic information. Much information can come from an ancient coin: the name of a king or emperor as well as his regnal titles, the names of governors or elite citizens and a city’s symbols, local gods and goddess and foundation myths.

Albania was for a long time under Roman and Byzantine rule as the most part of Balkan territory. The studies shows that the the most coins found in the Osum river valley belong the Late Antiquity and mediaval period. The coins founds is linked to fifteen byzantine emperors with center in Constantinople, two emperors of Thessaloniki, one Nicean Byzantine emperor, latin emperor, Republic of Venice and Principality of Achaea. The coins bear the images of Byzantine emperors. They often advertise the posts and honours that the Emperor has held. The bulk of coins are found in Berat Castle, but there are some other found in the village of Peshtan, in Illyrian town of Dimal (Krotina), Gjegjova (Skrapar) (Spahiu & Çuni, 1988).

These are bronze coins. They are different from the other Albanian regions or the other territory under Byzantine rule that are golden or silver. (Spahiu & Komata, 1974).

The Justinian coins dominated among the other coins. His reign marked a blossoming of Byzantine power that has been associated to political stability and economic development. He tried to restore the Byzantine Empire and to make it the most powerful economic, cultural, and military power in Europe. Attempting to the territorial extent of the Old Roman Empire, Justinian's aims were those of nearly every Byzantine emperor, even though such plans were generally doomed to failure.

There are no data for the coins of the period between the seventh and ninth centuries. But the archaeological excavations provide dates on the coins of the tenth century. The lack of the data is connected with the interrupting of the relationship among the Balkan region during the Barbarian incursions. During these 'Dark Ages' many 'barbarian' tribes passed through Balkans. The Europe regressed culturally and economically. The Byzantine Empire withdrew its borders more and more in an attempt to consolidate its waning power. The territory of actual Albania remained under Roman (Byzantine) control until the Slavic migrations of the 7th century, and was integrated into the Bulgarian Empire in the 9th century (Spahiu, 1979-1980).

The coins often have expressed the names of the emperors and the imperial titles employed by themselves. *Dominus Noster Pius Felix Augustus* is abbreviated as *DN. ARKADIVS PF. AVG* in the coins of Arcadius. The words *pius* and *felix* are eliminated in the coins of Anastasius I, Justinus I and Justinianus I. The words *perpetuus*, *Dominus Noster Perpetuus Augustus* is appeared (*DN. IVSTINIANNVS. PP. AVG*). The term *basile* associated with the Jesus Christ name is used in the coins of John I Tzimisces. The title *Despot* is appeared in the coinage under Romanus IV Diogenes and Isaac II Angelus. It is used the abbreviation *C.P.R.D* (God helps the Roman Despot).

The wide range of the coins bear the reigning emperor's image. The coins of the period between the fourth and sixth century have on the observe the emperor's bust wearing diadem. Justinianus I is shown with the helmet and the shield, revocating the Roman emperors. The emperors often hold a *globus cruciger* (Justinianus I, Alexius I Comnenus, Manuel I Comnenus) or a cross (Alexius I Comnenus, Isaac II Angelus, Manuel Angelus, John Angelus Comnenus,

Michael VIII Palaeologus, Andronicus II Palaeologus). The cross is long, double or it is Greek. These symbols are used with the laborum (flag) and the volume (a coated manuscript, a scroll).

The emperors wearing halos often are accompanied by the Virgin, Christ, the angels or saints. Saint George, Archangel Michael, Saint Demetrius are among the most popular figures used on each face of the coins. It is usual that sometimes the coins show a glorifying hand over the emperor. Sometimes that hand holds a crown over the emperor's head. The emperors are shown associated with their spouses, their children as the heirs of the throne or the co-emperors. In this case we can mention Justinus II and Sophia, Alexius I and John I or Constantine Porphyrogenitis.

Sometimes the emperors are shown with military clothing (Flavius Claudius Constantinus), pulling along or drag a captive by hair (Arcadius). The cross is occurred in some type of coins (Flavius Placidius Valentinianus).

The coinages of Anastasius I, who is famous for carry out the monetary reform in the 498s, begin the put of distinguishing marks on the reverse of the coins. A lot of these coins featured the mark M that is accompanied by the different Greek letters such as β, C, ς, Ϸ. These letters show the number of officina letter where they were minted. The mark M represent the follis. It is surround by small stars or small cross.

The abbreviations like CON, CART, NIK, NIKO, KH, CONOB that are linked to the minted places such as Constantinople, Carthage, Nikomedia, Cyzicus were presented on the reverse. The coins of Justinianus I in addition to the marks that were mentioned before appear the inscription ANNO and Roman numerals X, XII, XIII that point out his regnal years.

The follis is frequently discovered in this area. Other types of coins are also found as the half follis, a denomination of 20 nummis. It had used the mark K. Another type of coins was pentanummium, a denomination of 20 nummis bore the letter E.

A specific Christian element of the Byzantine and coins is the usage of the nimbus. It derived from the Antiquity. The poets, mythology scholars and the painters embellish the heads of gods, heroes and famous figures. The nimbus is the symbols of the power and the glory, too. The Roman and Byzantine Emperors and the Christianity revive and adapt this component. This symbol became the attribute of the Christ, the Virgin and the saints. After that the Byzantine

Emperors, (especially Constantinus Great) made it a element of their coins, it began to represent the triumph.

The chief characteristic of tenth century coins is the putting of Christ`s bust wearing a nimbus, holding book of gospels or leaning against the cross (John I Tzimisces, Romanus IV Diogenes, Manuel I Comnenus, John Angelus Comnenus). It is common the appereance of the Virgin seated, facing and wearing a medallion with the infant Christ (Alexius I Comnenus, John II Comnenus, Isaac II Angelus Aleks I Komnen). Some coins contains the Archangel Micheal , Saint Eugen (Manuel I Comnenus), Saint George (Andronicus II Palaeologus). Their appearance is accompanied by the monogram of Christ. IC –XC (John I Tzimisces, Romanus IV Diogenes, Manuel Angelus) and the monogram of the Virgin MP- V (Alexius I Comnenus, John II Comnenus, Manuel I Comnenus, Isaac II Angelus). The tends of the period between the 4th and 14th centuries consisting of the predominance of Christian symbolism in each field of human life doesn`t miss in the coinage.

The emperors were depicted with important Christian figures. They asserted their the divine right for the royal and political legitimacy. They were not the subject of the earthly authority. The right to rule derived directly from the will of God. According to this, the God had bestowed earthly power on the king.

The latine cross on the reverse or on the obverse is presented in the coinage issued by the latine Byzantine emperors. It must be noted that a new element is added in the coins of the Principality of Achaea: the stylised castle. The Venetian coins bored Saint Marcus giving Doge flag on the observe and the Christ wearing nimbus seated in front of the throne.

At the end, I would like to emphasize that it is pretty sure that monetary finds introduced in this paper are very precious for the numismatic studies but it is time to conduct new archeological excavation in Osum river valley.

Table 1

The statistical table of coins

Nr.	The ruler	Material	The quantity of the coins	Place				
				Berat	Dimal	Peshtan	Gjegjovë	Potom

1.	Arcadius	Æ	2	2				
2.	Flavius Claudius Constantinus	Æ	2	2				
3.	Flavius Placidius Valentinianus	Æ	1	1				
4.	Anastasius I	Æ	3	1			2	
5.	Justinus I	Æ	5	3			2	
6.	Justinus I and Justinianus I	Æ	1	1				
7.	Justinianus I	Æ	18	8	1	1	8	
8.	Justinus II Flavius Justinus	Æ	1	1				
9.	John I Tzimisce	Æ	2	1				1
10.	Romanus IV Diogenes	Æ	1	1				
11.	Alexius I Comnenus	Æ	1	1				
12.	Alexius I Comnenus and Constantine Porphyrogenetis	Æ	1	1				
13.	John II Comnenus (the Good)	Æ	3	3				
14.	Manuel I Comnenus (the	Æ	2	2				

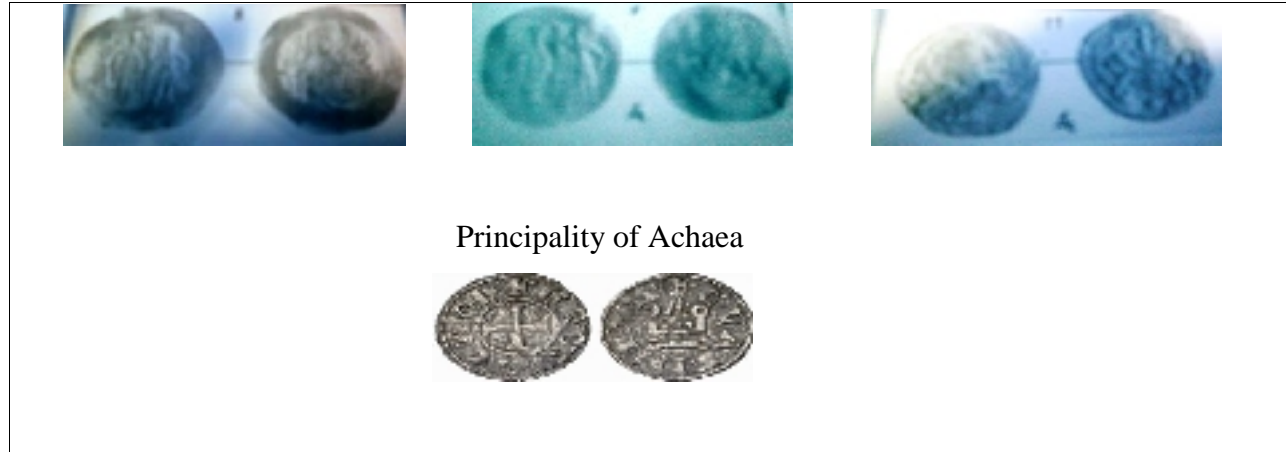
	Great)							
15.	Isaac II Angelus	Æ	7	7				
16.	Michael VIII Palaeologus	Æ	3	3				
17.	Andronicus II Palaeologus	Æ	3	3				
18.	Manuel Angelus	Æ	2	2				
19.	John Angelus Comnenus	Æ	1	1				
20.	Theodore III Vatatzes Dukas Laskaris	Æ	1	1				
21.	Latine Empire of Bizantium	Æ	1	1				
22.	Principality of Achaea (Philip of Savoja)	Æ	1	1				
23.	The republic of Venice (John Saranzo)	Æ	2	2				
			62	49	1	1	10	1

Table 2

Table of coins¹

Arcadius	Anastasius I	Justinus I
		
Justinianus I	Justinus II and Sophi	John I Tzimisce
		
Romanus IV Diogenes	Alexius I Comnenus	Alexius I and Constantine Porphyrogenitis
		
John II Comnenus	Manuel I Comnenus	Isaac II Angelus
		
Manuel Angelus	Theodore III Vatatzes Dukas Laskaris	Latine Empire of Bizantium

¹ For more information see: Spahiu H. & Çuni, N., (1988). The antique and Byzantine coins of the Upper Osum Valley (Skrapar region). *Illyria* 1, 248-252; Spahiu H. (1979-1980). Byzantine coins of 5th-8th centuries found in Albanian territory. *Illyria*, 9-10, 353-422; Spahiu H. & Komata, D., (1974). Shurdhahu-Sarda, Albanian mediaval fortified town. *Illyria*, 3, 257-328



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