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**THE CHARITY OF THE EMPRESSES FROM THE FIFTH CENTURY
ACCORDING TO DATA FROM BULGARIA**

**БЛАГОДІЙНІСТЬ ІМПЕРАТРИЦЬ 3 V СТОЛІТТЯ ЗА ДАНИМИ З
БОЛГАРІЇ**

Summary

The sources speak eloquently about the extreme charity of the empresses from 5th century. They built temples, orphanages and supported their work. Their mission was spread all over the empire, which is proved by the discovered coins of theirs. The golden coins which they donated not only supported the church financially, but also helped their activity in disseminating and establishing the Christian religion. The signs of Christ complement and in separate cases prevail over their pragmatic properties. The difference about the view about the role of the monetary units of the empresses is that their “spiritual value” in 5th century was also an important means for the state politics not only a medium of exchange. The support of the religion life at places had not only financial dimensions, which for that age was of extreme importance. That process underwent in an atmosphere of impoverishing of the town population, as the church advanced economically with the help of the state. That explains the fact why in the church buildings and around them such a great amount of coins from 6th century has been found, but near the public ones they decreased at the end of 4th century. The discovery location of the coins of the empresses clearly shows the area and the sites, connected with charity and religious activities of the Augusts. At the dissemination and establishing the Christianity the state used all possible means. It was imperative because of the heterogeneous ethnic structure of the population of Trace and Dacia during 4th-6th centuries, which created conditions for arising of various diversions from the Christian religion – the heresies.

The inspection of the location of findings golden coins of empresses shows that they were discovered in/or at a short distance from the region of the Late Antiquity

settlements and fortresses: Abrittus (now Razgrad), Beroe – Augusta Traiana (now Stara Zagora) Nicopolis ad Istrum – the old settlement near the village of Dichin, Kyustendil, Nicopolis ad Nestum (now Gotse Delchev), Strogovia (Kailuka – Pleven), Ryahovets, Sadovets, Tuida (now Sliven), Philipopolis (now Plovdiv), the fortress of Shumen. The listed places coincide with the territories with bishop centers, significant population and outstanding Christian temples from 4th and 5th centuries. It gives a good reason to search the connection between the gold in question, the cult artifacts and their religious meaning.

During the Late Antiquity the role of the bishop institution increased rapidly, not only in the church life, but also in the civil ruling system. The area bishops began to take active part in the control of the towns, occupying a great deal of the town curia functions. That happened with the blessing of the emperor's power, which gave such authority to the bishops, so that they were able to control and inspect various decisions of the non-clerical authorities.

The topography of the monetary unit subject of the article is a good token in their interpretation as a means of propaganda of the still new Christian religion where the preliminary and dictatorial reasons of the emperor institution could be seen. The coins are subject of this study; they concentrate the ideological power in the image of empresses. Coupled with the Christian symbols they outline a spiritual vector in their dissemination. Thus the commercial role of money was combined with their spiritual mission to help the church establish the faith in Christ.

Key words: *coin find, treasure, Late Antiquity, empresses from 5th century, Christian symbols.*

Анотація

Джерела красномовно свідчать про надзвичайну благодійність імператриць, починаючи з V століття. Вони будували храми, сиротинці та підтримували їхню діяльність. Їх місія була поширена по всій імперії, про що свідчать знайдені монети. Золоті монети, які вони жертвували, не тільки підтримували церкву фінансово, але й допомагали їхній діяльності у поширенні та утвердженні християнської релігії. Знаки Христа доповнюють, а в окремих випадках переважають прагматичні властивості монет. Відмінність у погляді на роль грошових одиниць імператриць полягає в тому, що "духовна цінність" даних монет у V ст. була також важливим засобом державної політики, а не лише засобом обміну. Підтримка релігійного життя на місцях мала не лише фінансовий вимір, який для тієї епохи був надзвичайно важливим. Цей процес відбувався в атмосфері зубожіння міського населення, оскільки церква економічно розвивалася за допомогою держави. Саме цим пояснюється той факт, що в церковних будівлях і навколо них знайдено таку велику кількість монет із VI століття, тоді як біля громадських забудов їх кількість зменшилася наприкінці IV століття.

Розташування знахідок монет імператриць чітко показує територію та об'єкти, пов'язані з благодійною та релігійною діяльністю Августів. При поширенні та утвердженні християнства держава використовувала всі можливі засоби. Це було необхідно через неоднорідний етнічний склад населення Трапезунда і Дакії протягом IV–VI століть, що створювало умови для виникнення різних відступів від християнської релігії – єресей.

Огляд місця знахідок золотих монет імператриць показує, що вони були виявлені в регіоні пізньоантичних поселень і фортець та/або на невеликій відстані від них: Абріттус (нині Разград), Берое – Августа Траяна (нині Стара Загора), Нікополіс ад Іструм – городище біля села Дичин, Кюстенділ, Нікополіс ад Нестум (нині Гоце Делчев), Строговія (Кайлука – Плевен), Ряховець, Садовець, Туїда (нині Слівен), Філіпполіс (нині Пловдив), фортеця Шумен. Перелічені місця збігаються з територіями з єпископськими центрами, значним населенням і видатними християнськими храмами IV–V століть. Це дає вагомий підстави для пошуку зв'язку між золотом, про яке йдеться, культовими артефактами та їхнім релігійним значенням.

У період пізньої античності стрімко зростає роль інституту єпископату не лише в церковному житті, але й у системі цивільного управління. Місцеві єпископи почали брати активну участь в управлінні містами, перебираючи на себе значну частину функцій міської курії. Це відбувалося з благословення імператорської влади, яка наділила єпископів такими повноваженнями, щоб вони могли контролювати і перевіряти різні рішення нецерковної влади.

Топографія грошової одиниці, про яку йдеться у статті, є добрим знаком у її інтерпретації як засобу пропаганди ще нової на ту пору християнської релігії, де можна побачити попередні та диктаторські причини імператорської інституції. Монети, що їх обрано предметом цього дослідження, концентрують ідеологічну силу в образах імператриць. У поєднанні з християнською символікою вони окреслюють духовний вектор їх поширення. Таким чином, комерційна роль грошей поєднувалася з їхньою духовною місією – допомагати церкві утверджувати віру у Христа.

Ключові слова: монетна знахідка, скарб, пізня античність, імператриці V ст., християнська символіка.

The extensive charity of the empresses from the 5th century is well known from the sources. They build temples, orphanages, support their activities financially and organizationally. Their mission extended throughout the empire, and a proof of this are their discovered individual and collective coin finds. The gold and silver coins which they donate have usually their images, and along with the financial support they provide to the church, the coins help the spreading and strengthening of the Christian religion. The symbols of Christ on the coins complement, and in some cases even prevail over,

their pragmatic qualities¹. The support of the local religious life has not only a financial dimension, but also an ideological one, which for this era is of great importance. In the 2nd century, the flow of the state surplus funds poured into the construction of public buildings, in the 4th century they are used for glorifying the emperors, and from the 5th century onwards, the flow of wealth began to flow into the Christian church - "for forgiveness of sins". Thus, the economic situation of the church strengthened suddenly and dramatically². The analysis and the discovery location of the gold coins of the empresses from the 5th century on the territory of Bulgaria show that they are found in/or near the late antique settlements and fortresses: Abrittus (Razgrad), Beroe – Augusta Trayana (Stara Zagora), Nicopolis ad Istrum – the settlement near the village of Dichin, Kyustendil, Nicopolis ad Nestum (Gotse Delchev), Strogozia (Kaylaka – Pleven), Ryahovets, Sadovets, Tuida (Sliven), Philippopolis (Plovdiv), Shumen Fortress (Shumen Fortress). (Fig. 1) The listed localities coincide with the territories of Episcopal centers and significant settlements from the 4th-6th century, which is a reason to search for a connection of the gold coins in question with the cult monuments and the religious practices in them.

The largest number of empresses gold coins – eight, were found in the ancient city of Abrittus (nearby Razgrad). Written sources report that in the 5th century the city was an episcopal center. The bishop of Abrittus Marcianus is listed first in the epistle of the six bishops sent by Valerian the bishop of Marcianopolis to the Byzantine emperor Leo I in 458³. The name of the spiritual pastor Marcian of Abritus⁴ is also mentioned in the Council of Ephesus⁵. Among the results of the long-term archaeological investigations in ancient Abrittus, an early Christian estate with a three-nave basilica and its premises was discovered⁶. In Abritus was found the largest gold treasure in Bulgaria from the 5th century, which includes 835 solidi⁷. Five of them are empresses solidi – 1 of Pulcheria and 4 of Verina. From the ancient city originate 3 single coins found in 1953 and 1961 – 1 of Eudokia and 2 of Licinia Eudoxia.

The ancient city of Augusta Trayana (now Stara Zagora) was established in the beginning of the 2nd century and is the second largest in Thrace after Philippopolis. After the 4th century, a larger territory, which also included the city of Augusta Trayana, received the name Beroe⁸. With the establishment of the new Christian religion, Beroe - Augusta Trayana became an important religious center in Thrace and is included in the

¹ Владимирова-Аладжова 2011: 78–86.

² Браун 1999: 114.

³ Бешевлиев 1962: 1–18; Иванов 1980: 2.

⁴ Марков 1995: 46.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Иванов, Стоянов 1985: 1985; Радославова, Дзанев 2003:134; Радославова, Дзанев 2007: 373–375; Радославова, Дзанев 2008: 356–360; Радославова, Дзанев 2009: 348–351.

⁷ Стоянов 1985: 5.

⁸ Янков 1994: 189–195.

diocese having the same name. The archaeological studies⁹ provide information regarding the existence of several churches and church estates¹⁰ and a 4th century women monastery¹¹. A large number of coins were found during excavations in the city, among which is a tremissis of Empress Verina, wife of Emperor Leo I (457–474)¹².

In the “Guide of Hierocles”, Nicopolis ad Istrum is mentioned as one of the eight cities of the province of Moesia¹³. After the decisions of the 4th Ecumenical Council (451), when dioceses were created, the city became an episcopal center. As a result of the archaeological excavations in the so-called *castellum*, two basilicas were discovered¹⁴, one of which is identified as an episcopal. According to another opinion, there is no definite evidence for this and the episcopal estate was located on/around the ruined part of the Roman city¹⁵.

The Settlement near the village of Dichin is situated ten kilometers west of Nikopolis ad Istrum. According to the conducted studies, the emergence of the fortified settlement can be attributed to the beginning of the reign of Emperor Theodosius II (408–450)¹⁶. The beginning of the second period of the Settlement can be dated to around 540, and its end in 578 or 581¹⁷. The chronology of the events is also confirmed by the coins found during the excavations in Nikopolis ad Istrum and the Settlement near the village of Dichin. Between them (from the Settlement) is a gold coin tremissis of Eudocia. It was found together with a tremissis of Tiberius II Constantine¹⁸, which suggests that it remained in circulation to a later time. The proximity of the two sites – Nikopolis ad Istrum and the Settlement near Dichin gives me a reason to assume that the specimen of Eudokia was initially connected to the episcopal center in the late antique Nicopolis ad Istrum and later reached the Settlement.

Nikopolis ad Nestum is the most important urban center, economic and spiritual center of the western Rhodope from antiquity to the middle ages¹⁹. It was mentioned by the Christian author Socrates as one of the seven episcopal centers of the Rhodope province²⁰. Nikopolis was leading the Christianization in the area, which led to significant increase in the construction of church buildings in the 5th-6th century. The number of early Christian cult monuments between Struma and Mesta rivers exceeds thirty. They are concentrated around the two largest urban centers of the region – the

⁹ Иванов 2002: 226–228.

¹⁰ Калчев 1992: 49–69.

¹¹ Delehaue 1912: 194–207; Пилингер 1992: 59–67.

¹² Минкова 2005: 93.

¹³ Гръцки извори да българската история 1958: 90.

¹⁴ Poulter 1995: 145–166; Динчев 2002: 45–55.

¹⁵ Владкова 2003: 242–253.

¹⁶ Динчев 2009: 20.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 26.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Assist. Prof. Stoyan Mihaylov for the provided information and picture of the coin of Eudokia. According to him, both coins can be regarded as a collective find.

¹⁹ Димитрова-Милчева 2002: 265–294; Dimitrova-Milčeva 2002: 311–317; Димитрова-Милчева 2005: 44–49.

²⁰ Гръцки извори да българската история 1958.

ancient city nearby Sandanski and Nikopolis ad Nestum²¹. For now, there are archaeological data for one church in Nikopol ad Nestum²², but in the surrounding area there are at least five churches with a mosaic floor, as well as one on the hill "Hisarluka"²³, and these facts are not accidental, since the city is a seat of diocese²⁴. A find of 95 gold coins originates from the Gotse Delchev area (old Nevrokop), which included coins of the emperors Honorius – 1, Theodosius II – 24, Marcian – 2, Valentinian²⁵ – 2 and 1 of Pulcheria²⁶. It is very likely that the mentioned find is connected to the establishment of Nicopolis as an episcopal center. In addition, associated with this center is an extremely rare silver coin - heavy miliarensis²⁷ of the wife of Emperor Theodosius II (408–450) Aelia Eudocia (Fig. 2). It was cut on the occasion of her proclamation as an Augusta in 423, one year after the birth of her daughter Aelia Licinia Eudoxia²⁸. The fact that this rare coin reached this area confirms the idea that it had a special mission, namely a tribute gift to the bishopric from the empress.

The Rachovets fortress is located 3 km west of the present-day Gorna Oryahovitsa. A treasure of solids of the emperors Arcadius and Honorius (395–408) was discovered in 1956²⁹. Most probably, from this fortress originates a small gold coin – a tremis of Empress Eudokia, which presently is kept in the collection of the Veliko Tarnovo museum.

Early Byzantine fortresses are registered in the immediate vicinity of the present day village of Sadovets – Sadovsko Kale, Golemanovo Kale, Kozhuharsko Kale, Goranovsko Kale, an early Byzantine church, an early Byzantine rampart³⁰. The conducted archaeological studies have established the connection between the listed fortresses, which form a common defense system³¹. Single and collective coin finds, mainly from the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century, originate from these objects³².

²¹ Димитрова-Милчева 2005: 44.

²² Ваклинова, Комитова 2013: 311–313.

²³ Попова 2011: 263–294.

²⁴ Марков 1995: 46.

²⁵ Valentinian III (425–455).

²⁶ Герасимов 1937: 322. The denomination of the coins is not reported, but most likely they are solidi, otherwise they would note that they are small gold coins.

²⁷ Владимирова-Аладжова 2014: 106–126.

²⁸ In 424, Licinia Eudoxia, then two years old, was engaged to her cousin and future emperor of the West – Valentinian III. On the occasion of the engagement between the representatives of the imperial families of the Eastern and Western empires, a heavy miliarensis with the name of Licinia Eudoxia was also minted. For details, see Владимирова-Аладжова 2014: 106–126.

²⁹ Герасимов 1959: 356–366.

³⁰ Велков 1927: 169–172; № 30, 31, 32, 34; Welkov 1935: 149–151, № 203; Митова-Джонова 1979: 63–64; Uenze 1992.

³¹ Велков 1927: 169–172; Welkov 1935: 149–1958; Митова-Джонова 1979: 63–64.

³² Герасимов 1937: 321; Герасимов 1950: 318; Jurukova 1992: 279–353; Werner 1992: 329–333; Werner 1992a: 335–337; Mackensen 1992: 340–349.

Also, in Sadovets was discovered a find from the 5th century³³, which is supposedly "from the ruins of the medieval settlement near this village". "It contains solidi of Arcadius – 5 copies (bust of the ruler en face and 5 – in profile). Honorius – 8 and Elia Eudokia – 1". Two gold coins of empresses (Eudoxia? and Eudokia) originate from the "early Byzantine" sites near the village of Sadovets – a solid (from a collective find) and a semis (?). The nature of the archeological sites in question, whose population consists mainly of federates, makes it possible to connect the mentioned specimens with the implementation of the state policy for the establishment of the Christian religion during the 5th century.

The Storgozia fortress is situated in the locality Gradishteto – Kaylaka nearby Pleven and became an object of scientific interest in the second half of the 19th century³⁴. It was established around the middle of the 1st century, as a station on the Oescus-Philippopolis road. It was followed by the formation of an unfortified urban-type settlement from the middle of the 2nd-3rd century in the limits of the present-day city of Pleven and ends up as a late antique settlement in the locality of Gradishteto-Kaylaka. It was fortified during the early Byzantine era and lasted until the beginning of the 7th century³⁵. Among the studied sites are two early Christian basilicas. During their examination, 123 single copper coins³⁶ were found, as well as one gold coin- solid of Empress Galla Placidia.

The fortress in the area of Hisarlaka near Sliven is located next to important old mountain passes through which important roads have passed during the antiquity and Middle Ages. They connected the lands from the north with the lands of Thrace and the Mediterranean³⁷. On the southern slope of the hill, the foundations of a large basilica with a baptistry were discovered, to which later additional rooms were added from north and south³⁸. A tremis of Eudokia was found in Tuida-Sliven³⁹

During the 4th-6th century period, Philippopolis was a rich city with a significant real estate upper class. Evidence of the existence of such an elevated upper class are the large and rich premises in Philippopolis with impressive dimensions – administrative, private and cult buildings⁴⁰. Among the cult buildings, the most prominent is the "Episcopal Basilica"⁴¹, which is located in immediate vicinity of the eastern side of the forum. Two other smaller basilicas from the same early period were also found in this area⁴². The second great basilica was built in honor of the emperor Basiliskus (471)⁴³.

³³ In the report of Todor Gerasimov, he notes "a small find of gold Byzantine coins from the 6th century".

³⁴ Ковачева 2008: 102.

³⁵ Ковачева 2005: 53–78.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Щерева 2001: 27.

³⁸ Бацова 1964: 52–58.

³⁹ Владимирова-Аладжова 2006: 187–190.

⁴⁰ Данчева-Василева 2005: 60.

⁴¹ According to the legend, Philippopolis had a bishop as early as the 1st century – Bishop Erm or Hermes.

⁴² Кесякова 1989: 20–33; Мартинова, Боспаджиева 2002: 193.

The collected data on ecclesiastical building in the city fully correspond to the eventful religious life in Philippopolis, as an episcopal center and metropolis⁴⁴. Among the rich numismatic material found in Philippopolis is a tremis with the name of Eudokia⁴⁵.

Shumen Fortress is located 3 km west of the city of Shumen. It has been archaeologically proven that the life here continued from ancient times until the 15th century. In the 4th–6th century period, the settlement had a leading role in the area. From the late antiquity of the Shumen fortress, a complex has been studied, which includes a three-nave single-apsed church with a baptistery, built on an earlier Christian temple⁴⁶. A large number of coins from the 4th-6th centuries were found in the fortress, among them significant number are the ones dated from the 5th century. Among the gold specimens is a tremis of Empress Eudokia⁴⁷.

The review of the locations where the gold coins of the empresses of the 5th century were found shows that they are episcopal centers, late antique settlements with church complexes of importance in the respective area. The topography of the coins is a serious marker in their interpretation as a tool of the imperial institution in the propaganda of the Christian religion, a testimony of their distribution. Thus, the commercial role of the money is combined with their spiritual mission, to delicately support the state and the church in affirming the Christian faith. The activity of the empress, which supports the church institution, shows to some extent her emancipation in this direction.

Charity in which ideological and authoritarian considerations lay behind. The examined coins with the names and images of empresses concentrate the ideological power in her image. The empress images, combined with the Christian symbols, are the spiritual vector.

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⁴³ Кесякова 1999: 21.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Кисьов, Прокопов, Дочев 1998: 61.

⁴⁶ Антонова 1987: 53–69; Антонова 1995; Владимирова-Аладжова 2002: 156, 375–377.

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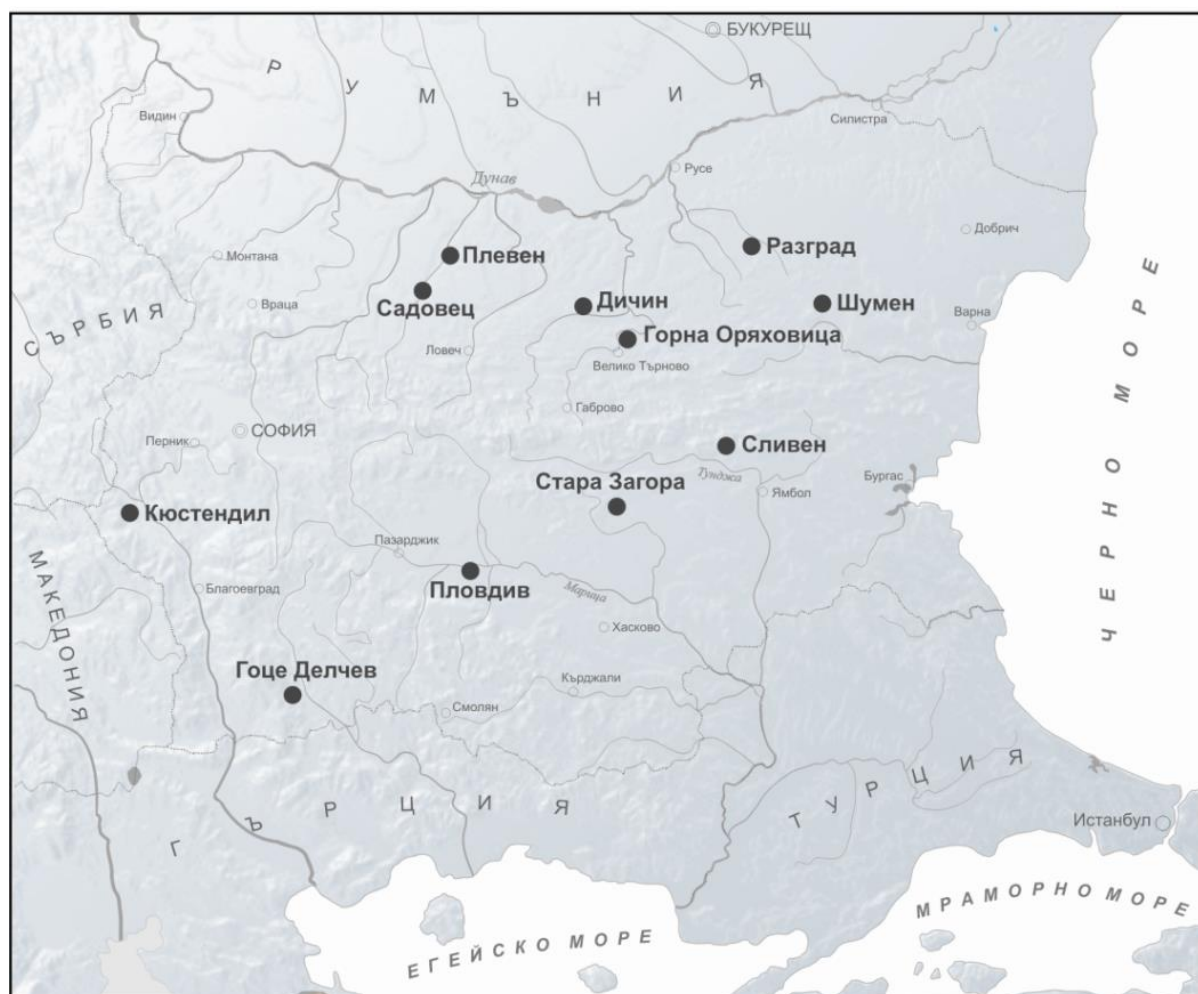


Fig.1. Map of the topography of gold and silver coins from the 5th century in Bulgaria.pography of 5th century coin finds.



Fig. 2a,b. Silver coin, heavy miliarence of Licinia Eudoxia.