

## AN INTERESTING EARLY BYZANTINE LEAD SEAL

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### ABSTRACT

The paper presents an Early Byzantine lead seal, belonging to Theodor, Prefect of the islands, who was in charge of the Quaestura exercitus sometime between 536 and 575.

**Key words:** bulla, Quaestor exercitus, Praefectus insularum, Quaestura Iustiniana exercitus, Theodor, 6<sup>th</sup> c.

The topic of this paper is an interesting Early Byzantine lead seal (bulla). It was exported illegally from Bulgaria to Canada together with a large number of other antique and medieval items. After they were confiscated by the police there, under the provisions of the existing international agreements, the materials in question were returned to Bulgaria and submitted to the National Museum of History – Sofia.

### Description of the bulla (fig. 1):

**Obverse:** Inscription in three lines (Fig. 2: 1).

**Reverse:** Inscription in three lines (Fig. 2: 2).

**Material:** Lead.

**Condition:** Well-preserved specimen.

**Dimensions:** Diameter 18 – 22 mm. Weight 13.92 gr.

The complete reading of the Latin inscription on the two sides is as follows: Theodoro, pr(a)efecto insul(ari)s. Inscription translation: Theodor, Prefect of the islands.

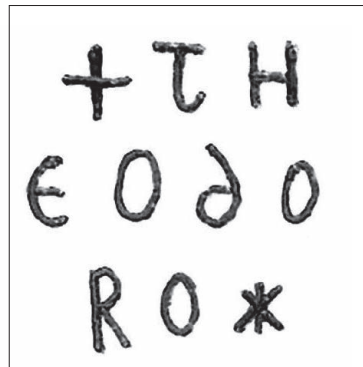
From this Theodor, Prefect of the islands, six bullae are known until now, struck with two different boulloterions (Gkoutzioukostas 2008, 111 – 112). From these, two



Fig. 1. Lead seal of Theodor, Prefect of the islands.  
Obverse and reverse

Обр. 1. Моливдовул на Теодор, префект на островите.  
Лице и опако

1.



2.



Fig. 2. Inscriptions on the obverse and the reverse of the lead seal of Theodor, Prefect of the islands

Обр. 2. Надписи върху лицето и опако на моливдовула на Теодор, префект на островите

specimens originate from the present-day territory of Bulgaria (Jordanov 2009, 442 – 443, Nos. 1280 – 1281). The third bulla, which is the subject of this paper, originates from Bulgaria, and was struck with the same boulloterion as one of the other two “Bulgarian” specimens (Jordanov 2009, 443, No. 1281).

G. Zacos established that the Latin “*praefectus insularum*” is equivalent to the Greek “ἐπαρχος τῶν νήσων” (Zacos, Veglery 1972, 1659, № 2928). An Early Byzantine legal document (Nov. Iust. LXIX, Epil.) dated to 538 makes it clear that “ἐπαρχος τῶν νήσων” is the Greek equivalent of the Latin “*quaestor exercitus*” (Gkoutzioukostas 2008, 112). Thus, “*praefectus insularum*” and “*quaestor exercitus*” refer to the same position. This is confirmed by another Early Byzantine written source from the 6<sup>th</sup> c. (Iuliani Epitome XXXVIII, 166), which explicitly states that “*De quaestoribus, id est praefectus insularum*” (Gkoutzioukostas 2008, 113). Currently this identification is accepted as established with complete certainty by all scholars working on the topic.

*Quaestura Iustiniana exercitus* was established with a special legislative act (Nov. Iust. XLI), dating from 18<sup>th</sup> of May 536 (Gkoutzioukostas 2008, 110). We will not discuss in detail the purpose, structure and functions of this institution here since this has been done many times in other studies, including Bulgarian ones (Torbatov 1997, 78 – 87). However, some facts need to be mentioned.

The *Quaestura exercitus* was a newly established administrative unit which included five provinces: Moesia Inferior, Scythia, Caria, Cyprus and the Cyclades. The seat of this provincial union was in Odessos. The main purpose of establishing the *Quaestura* was to support, both financially and with food and other supplies, the two northern provinces of Moesia Inferior and Scythia, which had been devastated by barbarian raids. Part of the *annona militaris* given out annually to the Byzantine military units stationed in Moesia Inferior and Scythia was delivered from the rich southern provinces, part of the *Quaestura exercitus*. The *annona* included different types of supplies (mainly food) and money for the salaries of the military. The capital of the *Quaestura*, Odessos, was the main distribution center for the supplies (Torbatov 1997, 80). This was also the city where the *Quaestor* resided and managed the functioning of the specialised administrative unit in question (Torbatov 1997, 79). The selection of Odessos as the capital of the *Quaestura exercitus* was not accidental. Water transport played a very significant role in delivering the supplies. This was due to a number of factors: the insecurity of land communications due to frequent barbarian raids; the total maritime superiority of Byzantium; the well-developed port system, both along the western Black Sea coast, and in the Danube delta and along the southern coast of the Lower Danube (Torbatov 1997, 80).

The bullae of Theodor, Prefect of the islands (*Quaestor exercitus*), were probably used to seal documents, which accompanied the supplies sent from Odessos to various garrisons in the provinces Moesia Inferior and Scythia. It is also possible that some of the seals in question were used to seal pouches containing certain monetary amounts, and packages with more expensive goods.

We do not know the exact time period in which this Theodor was in charge of the *Quaestura*. This, of course, was sometime after 536, the year when the administrative unit was established. Most probably, the dating of his *quaestorship* should take into consideration the long period until the end of the reign of Emperor Justinian I (565), or the first decade from the reign of his heir, Justin II, since the last mention of the *Quaestura* is from 575 (Nov. Iust. CLXIII) (Torbatov 1997, 85).

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## ЕДИН ИНТЕРЕСЕН РАННОВИЗАНТИЙСКИ ОЛОВЕН ПЕЧАТ

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### РЕЗЮМЕ

Предмет на настоящата публикация е един любопитен ранновизантийски оловен печат (моливдовул). От латинския надпис върху двете страни се разбира, че издателят му е някой си „Теодор, префект на островите“. Въз основа на категорични данни от писмените извори е отдавна установено, че длъжността „praefectus insularum“ е една и съща с длъжността „quaestor exercitus“. Следователно, това са моливдовули на управляващия Quaestura Iustiniana exercitus.

Тази важна институция, която е учредена през 536 г., е имала за главна задача да подпомага както във финансово отношение, така и с хранителни и други припаси, двете северни провинции – Втора Мизия и Скития, които били разорени от варварските набези. Главната квартира на квестурата се намирала в град Одесос, който бил основният разпределителен център на доставките.

С моливдовулите на Теодор, префект на островите (квестор ексерцитус), вероятно са били скрепявани някакви документи, придружаващи изпращани от Одесос доставки към различни гарнизони в провинциите Втора Мизия и Скития. Не е изключена възможността с някой от въпросните печати да са били запечатвани и кесии, съдържащи определени парични суми, както и денкове с по-скъпи стоки.

Не знаем по кое време точно е ръководил квестурата въпросният Теодор. Това, разбира се, е било някъде след 536 г., когато споменатата административна единица е била учредена. Най-вероятно неговото управление трябва да се търси в дългия период до края на царуването на император Юстиниан I (565 г.) или през първото десетилетие от царуването на неговия приемник Юстин II, тъй като последното упоменаване на квестурата е в 575 г.

**Ключови думи:** моливдовул, Quaestor exercitus, Praefectus insularum, Quaestura Iustiniana exercitus, Теодор, VI в.

