

WHAT THE COINS FROM THE PRES LAV TREASURE CAN TELL US ABOUT THE SOCIAL STATUS OF ITS OWNER

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the potential reason why the fifteen silver Byzantine coins (*miliarensia*) of Constantine VII with his son and co-Emperor Romanos II (945 – 959), part of the famous Preslav gold treasure buried in 971, could have found their way as a compact sum of money in the medieval Bulgarian capital of Preslav. Arguments are provided in support of the assumption that they were a monetary gift (or part of such a gift) bestowed by the Byzantine government to a Bulgarian aristocrat who was a member of an official Bulgarian delegation which visited Constantinople at some date between 945 and 959. The traditional diplomacy practice of the Byzantine government in that era (described in the treatise of Emperor Constantine VII “On Ceremonies”) to present the members of official foreign delegations to Constantinople with monetary gifts, the amounts of which corresponded to the ranks of the delegation members, is well-known.

Key words: Preslav Treasure, *miliarensia*, Constantine VII with Romanos II (945 – 959), social status.

The numismatic material, part of the famous Preslav Treasure discovered in 1978 in the Kastana area near Veliki Preslav, comprises fifteen silver Byzantine coins (*miliarensia*) from the 10th c. They are all of the same type, bearing the names of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and his son Romanos II (Grierson 1973, 557 – 558, Pl. XXXVII, 21). The introduction of this type of *miliarensia* into the coin production of Byzantium is related to Constantine VII crowning his son, Roman II as coemperor and the official coronation held on Easter day, 6th April, 945 (Grierson 1973, 529, 537).

The coins from the Preslav Treasure were published in detail and discussed by Iv. Iordanov as early as 1983 (Йорданов 1983, 8 – 11). A description of this type, together with an illustration of one of the specimens from the Preslav Treasure (Fig. 1), will be provided here for illustrative purposes:

Constantine VII and Romanos II (945 – 959). *Miliarensia*

Obverse: A large cross with a long vertical arm, on three steps, to front. The ends of its arms are crossed and decorated with prominent dots (precious stones). In the centre, where the vertical and horizontal arms cross, there is an X forming an eight-point star with the arms. A cross of this shape

is interpreted as a depiction of the Cross of Golgotha. Inscriptions on the circumference (Table I, 1). The inscription and the image are encircled by three granular circles inscribed in each other, on which sixteen large heads of grain are depicted at equal distances.

Reverse: Five-line inscription (Table I, 2). The inscription is encircled by three granular circles inscribed in each other, on which sixteen heads of grain are depicted at equal distances.

Table 1. Inscriptions on the miliarensia of Constantine VII and Romanos II
Таблица 1. Надписите върху милиаренсиите на Константин VII и Роман II

1. IH SCS XPI STY S NICA

2. + C O N S T, T,
P O R F Y R O C,
C E R O M A N O
E N X W E V C E B,
b, R W M E O H

Silver. Diameters are between 22 – 23 mm. Weights vary between 2.50 – 2.80 g.



Fig. 1. Silver Byzantine coin (miliarensia) of Constantine VII with his son and co-Emperor, Romanos II (945 – 959), from the Preslav Gold Treasure (photo: Iv. Iordanov)

Обр. 1. Сребърна византийска монета (милиаренсия) на Константин VII с неговия син и съуправител Роман II (945 – 959 г.) от Преславското златно съкровище (снимка: Ив. Йорданов)

The silver miliarensia from that era were minted exclusively for propaganda purposes, and in smaller amounts than the gold coins (nomismas) and the copper alloy coins (folles). They were practically not used in circulation, although in theory twelve miliarensia were equal in value to a gold nomisma. For the purposes of clarity, the author will oversimplify things by providing an example from modern times. In the past 5 – 6 decades BNB has put in circulation numerous issuances of the so-called “commemorative” coins, mainly minted from silver, propagandizing various important events from Bulgarian history and in recent days. Although these coins have their nominal value expressed in leva, they are never part of daily circulation, but are kept by the people who have somehow acquired them.

The silver miliarensia of Constantine VII with Romanos II are practically not found in present-day Bulgarian territory. Apart from the fifteen specimens from the Preslav Treasure reviewed

here, only two such coins are kept in Bulgarian museums. One is part of the numismatic collection of NAIM – Sofia, and was probably purchased abroad (Йорданов 1983, 11, бел. 2). The second one is a fragment from a miliarensis of the type in question, discovered during the archaeological excavations of the Medieval Bulgarian production centre for artistic metal near the village of Novosel, Shumen region (Бонев, Дончева, 2011, 202, № 194). Therefore, as Iv. Iordanov established categorically in his time, the miliarensia of Constantine VII with Romanos II “are not widespread on our lands” (Йорданов 1983, 8).

The only significant exception, for the time being, is undoubtedly the Preslav Treasure. The date of the burial of this treasure has not been disputed by the scholars who have commented upon it. They all connect this burial with the conquest of the Bulgarian capital Preslav by the Byzantine armies led by Emperor John Tzimiskes in 971 (Тотев 1993, 12; Йорданов 1983, 9; Алладжов 2019, 132). The opinions about what kind of owner it had are more diverse. T. Totev believes that the find should be connected with “the palace or the family of a close boyar or dignitary” (Тотев 1993, 14). Iv. Iordanov tries to be more specific and states that “the owner of the treasure at the time it was buried was probably one of the daughters of the Bulgarian tsaritsa [meaning Tsaritsa Maria, the wife of Tsar Petar I]” (Йорданов 1983, 11). A. Aladzhov, however, states unequivocally: “The jewels from the Preslav Treasure can belong only to the Bulgarian tsar and his family... Some could have been part of the ceremonial dress of the ruler, and others – from that of his wife in the Bulgarian royal court” (Аладжов 2019, 134).

As was pointed out above, all fifteen coins (silver miliarensia) that form part of the Preslav Treasure are of the same type, a type which was first minted for the coronation of Romanos II on the 6th April 945. However, this does not mean that they were minted only on this occasion. Their production was undoubtedly longer, probably until the death of Constantine VII in 959. This is evidenced by the fact that the fifteen specimens from the treasure were struck with “15 different pairs of coin dies” (Йорданов 1983, 8). It is evident that all fifteen miliarensia from the treasure were not in circulation and are entirely preserved (Димитров 2019, 161). They were most probably held for safekeeping in the imperial treasury in Constantinople until they somehow found their way to Preslav – without having been in circulation.

In the treatise “On Ceremonies” (book II, chapter 15) by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, there is an extremely interesting description of the welcoming of the famous Russian Knyaginya Olga in Constantinople, which most probably took place in 946. We will quote some passages from the description which we have used from their Russian translation (Голубинский 1901, 99 – 102), a translation generally believed to be extremely accurate:

“On Wednesday, 9th September [946], a reception was held... on the occasion of the arrival of the Russian Archontissa [Knyaginya] Olga. The archontissa entered with her relatives archontissas [knyaginyas] and the most prominent of her servants. She marched in front, all the other women walking in a row after her. She stopped at that spot where the logothete usually asks his questions...”

Then follows a description of the different ceremonies related to the viewing of the imperial palace and the lunch Knyaginya Olga had with the imperial family. What is of interest in this case is the following: “Another ceremonial lunch took place in the Gold Hall. It was there that all apocrisarii of the Russian princes [i.e., the members of the Russian diplomatic mission who accompanied Knyaginya Olga] were served lunch. The people and relatives of the knyaginya, as well as the [Russian] merchants, [who accompanied her] received [as follows]: her nephew – 30 miliarensia; 8 of her entourage – 20 miliarensia each; 20 apocrisarii – 12 miliarensia each; 43 merchants – 12 miliarensia each; the priest, Gregory – 8 miliarensia; Svetoslav’s entourage – 5 miliarensia each; 6 of the apocrisarii entourage – 3 miliarensia each; the knyaginya’s interpreter – 15 miliarensia.”

At the same time, Knyaginya Olga and her closest people had lunch with the emperor and his family in Justinian's triclinium. After the emperor left the table, dessert was served in another hall. There, the knyaginya was presented with a "gold tray decorated with precious stones", on which there were "500 miliarensia". And "six of her female escorts were given 20 miliarensia each, and 18 of her maids – 8 miliarensia each".

On the 18th October, 946, another ceremonial lunch took place in the Gold Hall of the palace, where the emperor dined together with the Russians, while the empress, together with her "porphyrogenitus" children dined in another hall with Knyaginya Olga and some of the Russian aristocrats accompanying her. Monetary gifts were bestowed once again after that: to Olga – "200 miliarensia; to her nephew – 20 miliarensia; to the priest, Gregory – 8 miliarensia; to 16 of her entourage – 12 miliarensia each; to 18 of her female slaves – 6 miliarensia each; to 22 apocrisarii – 12 miliarensia each; to 44 merchants – 6 miliarensia each, and to two interpreters – 12 miliarensia each."

It should be noted that we believe it is absolutely certain that all these miliarensia, handed out so generously by the Byzantine emperor to the Russian knyaginya and different members of her entourage on this visit, which took place in 946, were of the type "Constantine VII with Romanos II", whose production had begun only about a year and a half earlier. In other words, they are of the same type as that of the fifteen coins from the Preslav Treasure. The conclusion which can be made is self-evident. The coins from the treasure were most probably a gift to a member of a Bulgarian delegation that visited Constantinople in the period 945 – 959. Obviously at that time, during official receptions of foreign delegations in the imperial palace, it was a tradition to present the different members of these delegations (according to their ranks) with different amounts of commemorative Byzantine silver coins (miliarensia).

The Preslav Treasure, whose make-up clearly shows that it is of the type "family treasures", must have belonged to a Bulgarian aristocrat (even a Bulgarian female aristocrat) who, at least once in their life, took part in an official Bulgarian mission that visited Constantinople in, or more probably, not much later than 945. The number of the miliarensia – fifteen, – even if we assume that some of them were given away before its burial or were just not discovered by the archaeologists due to their scattering in the ploughed land, in the author's opinion, is unequivocal evidence that its owner could not have been a member of the Bulgarian royal family. The amount is such that it would have corresponded to the rank of an interpreter or the "court ladies" from the delegation of the Russian Knyaginya Olga. There are no grounds to doubt that the principle of bestowing monetary gifts to the different members of official Bulgarian delegations visiting Constantinople at the time was different from that applied in the case of the Russian delegation led by Knyaginya Olga.

In 927, a lasting "thirty-year" peace, which actually continued uninterrupted for forty years until 967, was established between Bulgaria and Byzantium (Златарски 1971, 501 – 512). One of the clauses of the peace treaty stated that the empire is obliged to pay annual tribute to the Bulgarian Tsardom (Златарски 1971, 504). An official Bulgarian delegation visited Constantinople to receive this tribute and take it to Preslav. The last time such a delegation arrived in the Byzantine capital was in the spring of 967 (Тъпкова-Займова 1981, 389).

There is no doubt that these annual official Bulgarian state delegations to Constantinople were met by representatives of the Byzantine imperial government, observing all traditional rules of the Byzantine ceremonial practice. In particular, the members of the Bulgarian delegations were also given monetary gifts, similar to those presented to the Russian Knyaginya Olga and her entourage. Most probably, the miliarensia which are part of the Preslav Treasure were such a gift (or part of such a gift), presented to its owner or, perhaps, the father of this owner, who was a member of one of the official Bulgarian delegations visiting Constantinople each year.

The miliarensia were gifted either in the year 945, or not much later. In addition to everything else (for example, creating sympathy and goodwill towards the Byzantine Empire and its rulers in the particular Bulgarian aristocrats who received the gifts, i.e., bribing them), these coins had to promote among the Bulgarian aristocracy the newly created situation in the ruling imperial family. What we mean is the complete removal of the Lekapenoi family from power, which took place in the very beginning of 945, and the complete overtake of supreme power by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, supported by his son and co-Emperor, Romanos II.

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КАКВО МОГАТ ДА НИ ПОДСКАЖАТ МОНЕТИТЕ, ВЛИЗАЩИ В СЪСТАВА НА ПРЕСЛАВСКОТО СЪКРОВИЩЕ, ЗА СОЦИАЛНИЯ СТАТУТ НА НЕГОВИЯ СОБСТВЕНИК

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Нумизматичният материал, влизащ в състава на известното Преславско съкровище, се състои от 15 милиаренсии от Х в. Те всичките са от един и същи тип и са с имената на Константин VII Багренородни и сина му Роман II.

Всички изследователи свързват укриването на Преславското съкровище с превземането на Преслав от войските на Йоан Цимисхи в 971 г. По-разнообразни са мненията относно неговия собственик. Докато Тотев смята, че находката трябва да се свърже „с двореца или със семейство на някой от приближените нему боляри“, Йорданов свързва съкровището с „...някоя от дъщерите на българската царица“, а Аладжов отсича категорично, че може да принадлежи „...само на българския цар и семейството му...“.

В съчинението „За церемониите“ на император Константин VII Багренородни има описание на посрещането на руската княгиня Олга в Константинопол (вероятно 946 г.), в което подробно е разказано за различните суми в сребърни монети, дарявани на членовете на придружаващата я делегация според техните рангове.

Според нас е напълно сигурно, че всички тези милиаренсии, раздавани от името на византийския император на руската княгиня и придружаващите я лица, са били от същия тип, от който са и 15 екземпляра от Преславското съкровище. Изводът, който се налага, е, че монетите от съкровището най-вероятно са били подарени на някой член на българска делегация, посетила Константинопол някъде в периода 945 – 959 г.

Преславското съкровище е от вида на т. нар. „семеини съкровища“ и трябва да е принадлежало на някой български аристократ, участвал в състава на официална мисия, посетила Цариград през или скоро след 945 г. Броят на съдържащите се в него милиаренсии категорично свидетелства, че собственикът му не може да е бил член на българското владетелско семейство. Сумата по-скоро съответства на някой от ранга на преводачите или на „придворните дами“ от състава на делегацията на княгиня Олга.

Ключови думи: Преславско съкровище, милиаренсии, Константин VII с Роман II (945 – 959 г.), социален статут на собственика на съкровището