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THE FIRST CONSTANTINOPOLITAN SOLIDUS OF HERACLIUS AND HERACLIUS CONSTANTINE

Simon Bendall

The coin published here seems to be the only surviving specimen of the first issue of solidi of Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine at Constantinople:

AV Solidus (figs 1 and 2):

Obv. ddNNhE RACLIYSEThE[]TPPAV

To left, bust of Heraclius facing, with short beard, wearing *chlamys* and crown with *pendilia* and trefoil. To right, a smaller bust of Heraclius Constantine, beardless.

Above, cross.

Rev. VICTORIA – AVVCYH; in right field, I; in exergue, CONOB. Cross potent on base and three steps.



Weight: 4,51 gms.

Initial reaction to the discovery of any radically new type is to attribute it to a mint other than Constantinople, but there is no doubt that this coin is a product of the capital. The reverse is almost indistinguishable from that of the sole reign solidus of Heraclius illustrated by W. Hahn¹ (fig. 3), having the same neat lettering and a border somewhat thicker than that generally found on later joint reign solidi. The obverse depicts Heraclius basically unchanged from the rather crude portrait shown on the solidi of the sole reign (fig. 4), except that his crown, and that of his son, are surmounted by trefoils. Heraclius does not hold a *globus cruciger*, since the coin has also to include the bust of Heraclius Constantine.

¹ MIB III, pl. 1,7

Heraclius was crowned on the 5th of October 610. His eldest son, Heraclius Constantine, was born on the 3rd of May 612, crowned on Christmas Day by the Patriarch and again by Heraclius on the 22nd of January, on which occasion he was publicly proclaimed Augustus². Heraclius Constantine's proclamation, therefore, occurred in the fourth month of Heraclius's third regnal year.

Folles of year three were thus struck both for Heraclius alone³ and for Heraclius together with Heraclius Constantine⁴. The sole reign folles of Heraclius for years one and two depict the emperor wearing a crown surmounted by a cross, with or without a plume behind. The rarer sole reign folles struck between October 612 and late January 613, however, show Heraclius wearing a crown surmounted by a trefoil (fig. 5).

When the commonness of the solidi of Heraclius is considered, with the vast numbers of these coins that have been found over the years, the appearance of a new type amongst such a common coinage points to an issue of extremely short duration. The joint reign of Justin I and Justinian I lasted only 17 weeks and about 80 solidi of the reign are known, while four solidi exist for the nine day reign of Justin II and Tiberius II.

The similarity of the portraits on the new coin to that on Heraclius's sole reign solidi and the trefoils on the crowns point to an issue struck at the very end of January 613.

² Doc 216.

³ MIB III, 158⁵; DOC 71.

⁴ MIB III, 159^a; DOC 76.