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The Last Gold Coin of the Ostrogoths

Dr. Christian Olbrich

Recently a gold coin was sold by auction (Fig. 1) which the auctioneer called Byzantine and described as follows:

“Anastasius I. 491-518. AV Tremissis (16mm, 1.47 g, 6h). Constantinopel mint. Struck 492-518. Diademed, draped, and cuirassed bust right / Victory advancing right, head left, holding wreath and globus cruciger [...]. Scarce without star in reverse field.”¹



Fig.1: The last gold coin of the Ostrogoths (150%).

A closer inspection of the coin reveals that the attribution is incorrect. The coin is not Byzantine but Ostrogothic. This is evidenced by three peculiarities compared with Byzantine tremisses:

1. The avers legend is DNANASTA SIVSPFAVC (PF = perpetuus felix) and not the Byzantine PPAVC (PP = perpetuus)
2. The globe cruciger in the hand of the Victory is so small that it is practically omitted, leaving only a cross above the Victory's empty hand. Byzantine tremisses have a fully elaborated globe.
3. The reverse shows COMOB (comitatus obryzum) and not the Byzantine CONOB (Constantinopolis obryzum). The C of COMOB is here mostly off the flan, only the upper edge of the C is visible.

«Die Gotenkönige haben bis zuletzt die kaiserliche Oberhoheit anerkannt. Dies kommt in der Münzprägung ganz besonders zum Ausdruck. Die Vorderseite der Gold- und Silbermünzen sowie der Kupferminimi tragen Bild und Namenszug des Kaisers. Das kaiserliche Goldreservat wurde überhaupt stets respektiert.»²

1 CNG, Electronic Auction 412, Lot 717.

2 W. HAHN, *Moneta Imperii Byzantini*, Part 1 (Vienna 1973), p. 79.

Ch. Olbrich: The Last Gold Coin of the Ostrogoths, SM 68, 2018, S. 87–89.

Theoderic the Great was the first Ostrogothic king who minted gold coins in the name of Anastasius. The folds of the emperor's bust are mainly drawn in V-form or in bow-form (Fig. 2), for a smaller group falling off on the right as on Fig. 3.



Fig. 2: Bow-form bust-drawing (CNG 100, 7.10.2015, lot 335, 150%).



Fig. 3: Bow-form bust-drawing falling off on the right (Editions V. Gadoury Auction 2017, 2.12.2017, lot 118, 150%).

According to Metlich³ the folds on the emperor's bust have developed as follows:



Fig. 4: Development of the bust-drawing

We can conclude, therefore, that the avers of the reviewed coin is minted at the end of the development.

Whereas the style of Theoderic's gold coins may be described as "elegant" (see Fig. 2 and 3), the style of the reviewed coin is worse. The reverse inscription reads VICTORIA ACTOTORYM instead of correct VICTORIA AVCVSTORVM. The writing skill of the die cutter was limited.

But not only Theoderic minted gold in the name of Anastasius. «Baduila schließlich hat den Namen des verstorbenen Anastasius I. freundlichen Angedenkens auf seine Münzen gesetzt, um zu vermeiden, im Namen des feindlichen Kaisers Justinianus I. prägen zu müssen.»⁴ When the Byzantines captured Rome in 536 and Ravenna in December 539 the Ostrogothic mint had to find a new place. Finally Totila (or Baduila as he is named on the coins) could establish a new one at Ticinum, the modern Pavia.

³ M. A. METLICH, *The Coinage of Ostrogothic Italy* (London 2004), p. 20.

⁴ HAHN (fn. 2), p. 79.

In the meantime the Ostrogothic realm had become only a shadow of its former splendour. «Wenn wir von der Mache der Silbermünzen aus der neu aufgebauten Münzstätte Ticinum ausgehen, können wir annehmen, daß Baduilas Gold-

münzen ebenfalls einen leicht verwilderten Charakter haben müssen.»⁵ Exactly this rough («verwilderter») style characterizes the reviewed coin.

Totila (on the coins: Baduila) minted at Ticinum from 541 to 552. “Besides this solidus we also know some tremisses which either, in the beginning, used the Justinian legend, or, later and more often the name of Anastasius. They still use the Roman style of garment folds, but the legends are bold.”⁶ This allows us to attribute the rewied tremissis to the end of Totila’s reign or to that of his sucesor Teja and to the mint of Ticinum.

With the death of Teja in the battle at the Mons Lactarius near Salerno in autumn 552 the Ostrogothic realm ended. The remaining Ostrogoths bowed to the East Romans or joined the Franks and Langobards.

One detail of the reviewed coin is unique. Whereas all known tremisses of Ticinum – and all tremisses of the type “Victoria with wreath and globe cruciger” of Rome – have at least one star on the reverse this coin has no star. In the last years of the Ostrogoths – already in their death throes – the gold production of the last mint at Ticinum was only small as the few still existing coins demonstrate. When the type was changed from a reverse with star to a reverse without star a consequent change back to a star seems impossible. This allows the conclusion that the reviewed tremissis is in fact the last gold coin of the Ostrogoths.

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⁵ HAHN (fn. 2), p. 85.

⁶ METLICH (fn. 3), p. 34.