A sixth century hoard of solidi of the fabric of the mint of Ravenna

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Il tetradramma ora descritto di Ariarathes VII Philometor è l'esatta riproduzione (cambiando, naturalmente, il nome del sovrano, il suo attributo e le lettere nel campo) di questi tetradrammi. L'estrema rassomiglianza, anche stilistica, con taluni di essi (ed in particolare con taluni tetradrammi di Antiochus Cyzicenus) suggerisce anzi come molto probabile l'ipotesi che il tetradramma di Ariarathes non sia stato coniato in Cappadocia, ma in una zecca di Siria [3]. È opportuno a questo proposito ricordare come, dopo Ariarathes V ed Orophernes (i cui tetradrammi è probabile siano stati coniati in Cappadocia), nessuna zecca di Cappadocia ha più coniato tetradrammi, i pochi di Ariarathes IX essendo stati coniati ad Amphipolis in Macedonia.

La pubblicazione di queste due monete inedite mi offre anche l'occasione di aggiungere tre rettifiche a quanto è scritto nel mio libro già citato.

La prima è relativa all'obolo coniato all'inizio del regno di Ariarathes VI (p. 34): la descrizione che avevo fornito si basava su di un esemplare della mia collezione in cui il punzone del R/ era stato applicato un po' eccentrico, e pertanto non vi appariva nessuna parola al di sopra del cavallo in corsa. In base ad un esemplare perfettamente centrato apparso all'Asta Numismatic Fine Arts 25–26 Marzo 1976, 278, al di sopra del cavallo vi è la parola ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ.

La seconda rettifica riguarda le ultime 2 righe apposte alla fine della «key to plates» (p. 54); esse sono così concepite: «Except for pl. I, 6, 10 and 11, pl. III, 11 and pl. VII, 1 and 6, the coins reproduced are in the author's collection». Il tipografo è incorso in un errore che a me, in occasione della correzione delle bozze, è sfuggito inquantochè la bozza della «key to plates» mi è stata inviata separatamente ed a distanza di tempo da quella delle tavole. Il periodo deve essere così modificato: «Except for pl. I, 6, 9, 10 and 11, pl. III, 11 and pl. VII, 1–8, 10 and 11, the coins reproduced are in the author's collection».

Infine, a p. 47, III capoverso, le parole da «such a theory» a «his nephew Ariarathes III» vanno cancellate: si tratta di una mia inesplicabile distrazione!

[3] Potrebbe non essere una semplice coincidenza anche il fatto che i monogrammi nel campo a s. del tetradramma di Ariarathes siano così simili a quelli che si ritrovano nella stessa sede in un tetradramma di Antiochus Cyzicenus ( nel primo e nel secondo) da rendere non inverosimile l'ipotesi che essi possano indicare la medesima zecca od i medesimi magistrati (figg. 3 e 4).

A SIXTH CENTURY HOARD OF SOLIDI OF THE FABRIC OF THE MINT OF RAVENNA

Michael Dennis O'Hara

Justin II A.D. 565–578

1. Obverse, ONI–VST–NVS PP AVC, helmeted and cuirassed bust of Justin facing, holding figure of victory in left hand; shield with horseman device on left shoulder.

Reverse, VICTORI–A AVCCCZ:, Constantinople seated facing, holding spear in right hand and globus cruciger in left; in exergue, CONOB.
4.39 g. ↑↓ (DO 210 var. / Hahn 20 d) Mint of Ravenna.

Tiberius II A.D. 578–582

2. Obverse, OM TIB CONS–(TΔ)N(T) PP ΔVI, crowned and cuirassed bust facing, holding globus cruciger in right hand; shield with horseman device over left shoulder.

Reverse, VICTORI–(Δ) (Δ)VCCC Δ, cross potent on base and four steps; below, CONOB.
4.40 g. ↑↓.

3. Obverse, type as number 2.

Reverse, type as number 2 (VICTORI–Δ ΔVCCC Δ).
Ex Sale Kunst und Münzen, 13, 1974, 620.

4. Obverse, OM TIB CONS-TΔNT PP ΔVI, type as previous.

Reverse, VICTORI–Δ ΔVCC Δ, otherwise as previous.
4.39 g. ↑↓.

5. Obverse, die-link with number 4.

Reverse, die-link with number 4.
4.43 g. ↑↓.

6. Obverse, die-link with numbers 4 and 5.

Reverse, VICTORI–A AVCC Π, otherwise as previous.
4.41 g. ↑↓.

7. Obverse, die-link with numbers 4, 5 and 6.

Reverse, die-link with number 6.
4.43 g. ↑↓.

All the coins have a high annular border on both obverse and reverse.



1 2 3



4 5 6 7

The seven solidi described above (all in uncirculated condition) are thought to have been part of a hoard found twenty years ago on a bank of the River Po near Sermide in Northern Italy (cf. Map). The hoard is said to have consisted of nineteen solidi, one of Justin II (figure 1); and eighteen of Tiberius II, with reverse legends ending only in Δ or Π. It is unfortunately not possible to determine how many with Δ and how many with Π. The provenance [1] was noted by a serious collector who took the details from an old man of eighty who originally found the coins. They were, it seems, divided up between a number of brothers, and it is one or more of these shares which, in ca. 1974, became available for study. The nineteen gold coins may, of course, have been only part of a military chest [2], possibly part of a subsidy from the Byzantines to the Lombards or the Franks [3], which in some violent incident in those unsettled times came to rest on the bed of the River Po [4].

The solidi of Tiberius, all three varieties hitherto unpublished, would seem to constitute a distinct group, with some characteristics of the Mint of Ravenna, in particular a high annular border, but with one variety with a legend ending not normally associated with that mint – a Greek Pi. The delta is not otherwise known on Italian gold of Tiberius II. The group also have an unusual representation of the letter A which takes the form Δ. It has been suggested, regarding Ravenna, that Latin letters may indicate officina marks (P for Prima) and the Greek letters dates, either regnal, indictional, or immobilised, or some may be identification or control marks whose significance is unknown [5]. A date would fit as far as the delta is concerned. The reign of Tiberius II is considered to have commenced with his

[1] The importance of noting find spots has previously been indicated by W. Wroth, Western and Provincial Byzantine Coins (1911), p. LXII, and more recently by P. Grierson, Numismatics (1975), p. 138.

[2] Cf. P. Grierson, Numismatics, p. 130 ff. on the various classes of hoards.

[3] In ca. 579 the Romans appealed to Tiberius II against the inroads of the Lombards and obtained no help other than the advice to try the effect of bribing the Lombards or to induce the Franks to attack them. Gibbon, Decline and Fall, Bury's Edition, Vol. V, 21.

[4] In an earlier period (572/573) Longinius (successor to Narses) is said to have sent vessels up the Rivers Po and Adige to intervene in an internal dispute of the Lombards (Cotterill, Medieval Italy, p. 212; Gibbon Vol. V, p. 14). It was, it would seem, a not uncommon occurrence for Byzantine vessels to navigate these rivers at this period.

[5] Grierson, Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks and in the Whittemore Collection (1966 f.); Vol. 2, Part 1, p. 53; p. 127 (Phocas); and p. 238.

association as Caesar under Justin II, and therefore the first year of his sole reign is his fourth regnal year, A.D. 578/579. Further confirmation of this early date is given by numbers 2/3, which have three C's on the reverse, as on solidi of previous reigns, instead of two C's which is the norm under Tiberius II [6]. The same early date for the coins with II is confirmed by the obverse die-link between numbers 4/5 and 6/7. A Latin P is not unusual as a terminal letter at Ravenna, especially in the sixth century [7]. A reverse legend ending III occurs on Alexandrian solidi of Heraclius [8]. These letters are so far unexplained, but it is suggested (in relation to Alexandria) that the II could stand for polis, «the city». Alexandria is commonly referred to as «the city», or «the great city», in contrast to the Royal city (Constantinople) [9]. Bellinger suggests in relation to a group of half-folles of Justinian I attributed to Perugia that the P on these bronzes could stand for ΠΟΛΙC, that is city par excellence, but goes on to say that it is hardly conceivable that a Latin initial would stand for a Greek word [10]. A Greek Pi also occurs in the field of Carthaginian solidi of Heraclius [11] and on solidi of Naples under Anastatius II, and of Rome under Leo III [12].

The only solidi of Tiberius II listed under Ravenna, and which differ stylistically in some details from those described above, have the reverse legend ending with H [13], for regnal year eight (A.D. 581/582) or T [14]. One feature which separates the Δ and Π pieces from the H and T group is that on the pieces with the reverse legend ending Δ, the A's on both obverse and reverse have the form Δ, on the specimens with Π only the obverse has Δ for A, the reverse has the form Ⱥ. The usual form for A on the products of the Mint of Ravenna appears to be Ⱥ, or Λ. The form Δ for A does not seem to have been noted previously for any mint [15].

There is one other solidus which may be linked to the group published here. It has an annular border, similar style and workmanship, particularly on the obverse, with Δ replacing the A's. On the reverse the A's are shown as Ⱥ and Λ, and the terminal letter appears to be a malformed Theta, or a cancellation mark. It should be said that the workmanship of the cross on steps could be Constantinopolitan, whereas on the group under consideration the treatment of the cross on steps is distinctively different from that of Constantinople. This coin is listed by

[6] In the late fourth or fifth centuries the traditional formula on the reverse of the gold solidus and semissis was VICTORIA AVCCC – the number of C's varying according to the number of associated emperors. This practice in Byzantine times became stabilised with three C's irrespective of the number of emperors, and reduced under Tiberius II to two C's (cf. D. O. Vol. 1, 1, p. 102). The practice of two C's (with some exceptions) continued until the rebellion, real or otherwise, of Priscus in the reign of Phocas (602–610), when the formula changed to AVGG.

[7] Justin II: W. Hahn, Moneta Imperii Byzantini (1975), Vol. 2, Pl. 3, 21; Ratto, Sale Catalogue, Lugano 1930, 761; D. O. Op. Cit. 210 b; C. Morrisson, Catalogue des monnaies byzantines de la Bibliothèque Nationale (1970), Vol. 1, Pl. XXXIII 4 and Pl. XXXIX 4; J. Tolstoi, Monnaies byzantines (1912–1914), 19.

[8] D. O., Op. Cit. Vol. 2, 1, p. 332–333, Nos. 186 and 187.

[9] D. O. Vol. 2, 1, p. 233.

[10] American Numismatic Society, Museum Notes 12, 1966, p. 98.

[11] D. O., Vol. 2, 1, 221, p. 346.

[12] D. O., Vol. 2, 2, 15, p. 680 and Vol. 2, 1, p. 123 chart.; Vol. 3, 1, 272, 63 (Leo III.).

[13] D. O. Vol. 1, 62 a.

[14] D. O. Vol. 1, 62 b and 63 lightweight; W. Wroth, Catalogue of the Imperial Byzantine Coins in the British Museum (1908), p. 124, Pl. XVI, 16; cf. also Hahn, Op. Cit. p. 54, where it is suggested that T stands for regnal year 3 (Tertia) starting from Tiberius' real accession to power at the death of Justin II.

[15] Cf. Under Epigraphy, D. O. Vol. 2, 1, p. 103; also Vol. 2, 12 and p. 683, note to No. 22.

Ricotti Prina [16] under Cyzicus from the Bibliothèque Nationale Collection [17] where it is catalogued under Constantinople. Although Cyzicus is not likely, it has been recognised by Ricotti Prina as stylistically different from the work of Constantinople, a difference not noted by Mrs. Morrisson.

Early Lombard coins are of a very similar fabric (high annular border) and as the main strength of the Lombard state lay in the North, it has been assumed that its coins were modelled on those of Ravenna [18]. Any other Imperial Mint in the North would also presumably be modelled on that of Ravenna. There is documentary evidence for a mint at Ravenna, but there is no evidence for a mint elsewhere in the region. Although this does not mean that it is a certainty that Byzantine Mints in Italy were limited to only three at this period – Rome, Ravenna and Naples [19]. As the Tiberius II pieces published here and the later year eight specimens of Ravenna are noticeably different, the possibility of another mint not unnaturally suggests itself.

In A.D. 568 Italy was invaded by the Lombards under Alboin (568–578) and within a short time most of the country was in their hands [20]. In eighteen months many of the chief cities of Northern Italy had surrendered or were captured (cf. Map). Pavia, which became an important Lombard centre, was besieged for three years and fell in 572. The cities which still acknowledged Byzantine supremacy and nominally formed the Byzantine exarchate at the time of Tiberius II were Ravenna and surrounding territory, Padua, Bologna, Duchy of Venetia, Venice, part of Istria, the coastal Pentapolis (Rimini, Pesaro, Fano, Senigallia, Ancona), the inland Pentapolis (Iesi, Fossombrone, Urbino, Cagli, Gubbio), Genoa, the Ligurian Riviera, Rome and its Duchy, Naples and its territory including Cumae, Amalfi, heel and toe of Italy, Sicily and Sardinia. During the reign of Tiberius II (578–582) times were very unsettled in Italy. Cleph the Lombard successor to Alboin died, and in the interregnum which followed (574–584) no less than thirty Lombard Dukes were struggling for power. In 579 the Duke of Spoleto captured Classe (the port of Ravenna) which he held for nine years. In short, as Bellinger puts it [21], affairs in Italy were allowed to take their own course. It would seem then that the only probable alternative mint or mint authority to Ravenna at this time with a name commencing with P would be Patavium (Padua) or the Pentapolis (inland or coastal). Ricotti Prina has already listed coins under the heading Pentapolis, with the main mint city at Ancona [22].

However, interesting as the possibilities of other mints being in operation may be, it would probably seem best in the light of the present evidence to simply explain the group as an early issue of Ravenna struck in the first year of Tiberius' sole reign (Regnal year 4, A.D. 578/579), perhaps only in the first few months, concurrently with the II coins, and then production was apparently discontinued until year eight (A. D. 581/582). The military governor in Ravenna was usually liberally supplied from the imperial treasury at Constantinople, and it seems that

[16] D. Ricotti Prina, La Monetazione Aurea Delle Zecche Minori Bizantine (1972), Pl. 3, 4 and p. 40, 4 – described there as unique.

[17] Morrisson, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 162/08.

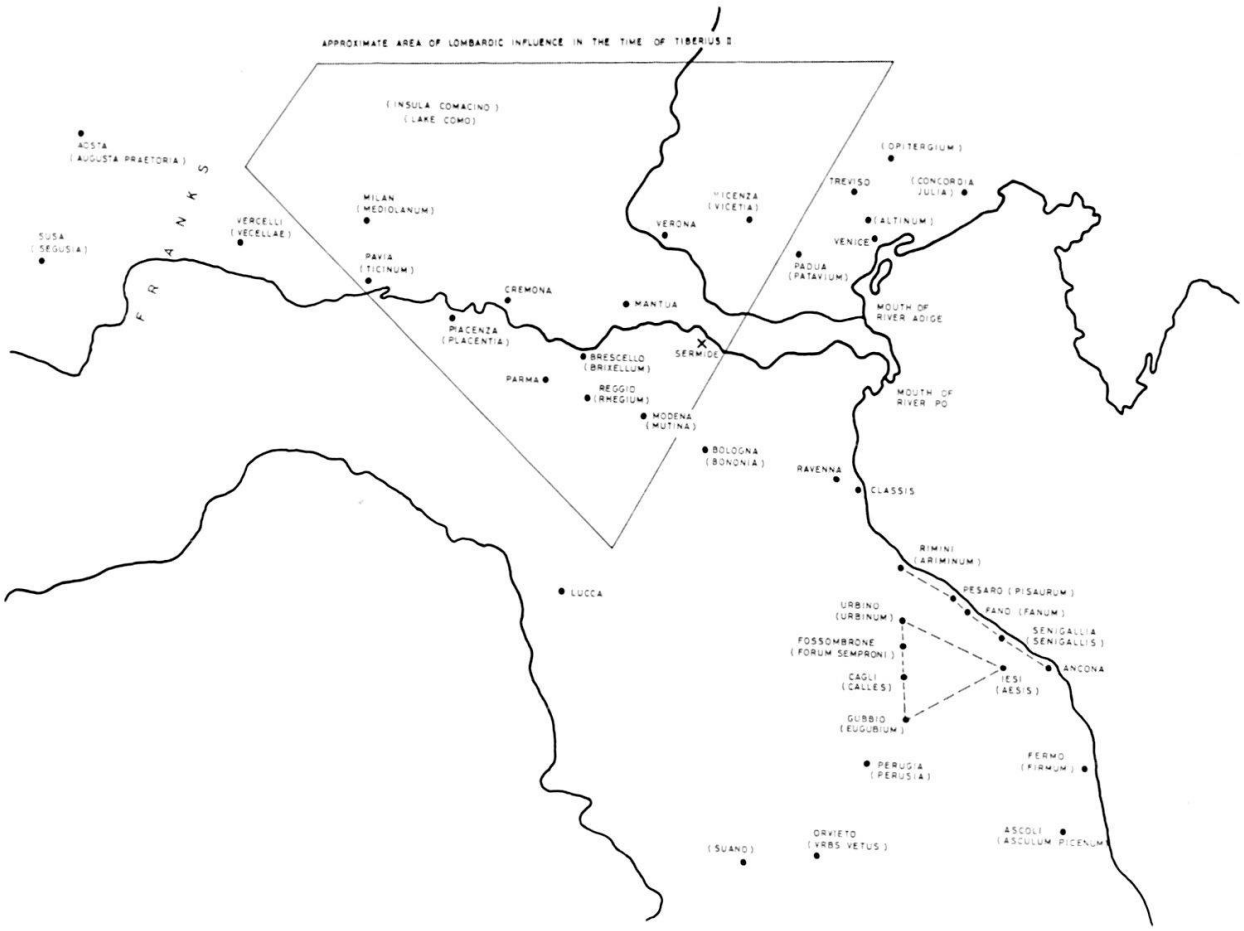
[18] D. O., Vol. 2, 1, p. 46.

[19] D. O., Vol. 2, 1, p. 47 with reference to the following century. See also the remarks on identifying mints.

[20] G. Ostrogorsky, History of the Byzantine State (1968), p. 79.

[21] D. O., Vol. 1, p. 264.

[22] Ricotti Prina, op. cit. Pl. 26, p. 98 f.



For the Geography of Italy in ca. A.D. 600, and the chronology of the Lombard conquest, see J. R. Bury in Edward Gibbon's Decline and Fall (Bury's Ed.), Vol. 5, Appendix 3, pp. 517–518.

in A.D. 577 three thousand pounds of gold were sent to him [23]. The Duke of Spoleto's occupation of the port of Ravenna from 579 onwards would certainly have hampered further deliveries. This gap in minting would to a large extent explain the differences in style between this group and those normally attributed to Ravenna. All the Byzantine domains in Italy were nominally subject to the military governor [24] of Ravenna and it could be therefore that the II simply refers to Polis, for Ravenna, the most important Byzantine city in Italy during this period.

I am indebted to Dr Morrisson for drawing my attention to Hahn's explanation for the letter T. Also for suggesting the following as a possibility.

Regnal years

From nomination as Caesar, 7. 12. 574			From actual accession, 26. 9. 578		
26. 9. 574 – 7. 12. 574	4	– Δ			
7. 12. 574 – 6. 12. 575	5	– II			
	6				
	7		26. 9. 580 – 25. 9. 581	3	T
7. 12. 581 – 13. 8. 582	8	– H			

[23] Cf. W. Wroth, Op. Cit. p. 103, Note 1 where it is noted from Ch. Diehl, L'Exarchat de Ravenna p. 164. It is interesting to note that the Ravenna solidi of Justin II are less scarce than those of a later period.

[24] The Greek title Exarch was given to the military governors in Africa and later from ca. 584 to those in Italy.