

A new popal imperial issue : not from "the find of Byzantine silver from the Mint of Rome"!

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A NEW POPAL IMPERIAL ISSUE:
NOT FROM "THE FIND OF BYZANTINE SILVER
FROM THE MINT OF ROME"!

Michael Dennis O'Hara

Constantine IV, 668-685

Obv. Bust facing wearing crown and chlamys (presumably holding a gl. cr., although this is off the flan). The usual triangular hair style.

Rev. To left, C over N separated by a bar; to right, O; above, a division sign (probably an incomplete cross). Border of extended triangular wedges anti-clockwise.

0.33 gm. †↓. In uncirculated condition.

This coin is not believed to be the thirty third and final coin from "The Find of Byzantine silver from the Mint of Rome"¹ - this is apparently still to come! It is thought to be a single find. The beautiful blue toning on the reverse suggests an old collection. The area of Ostia is said to have been the original find spot. Since publication of these historically important coins, it seems that many people are actively looking for further specimens, and it is perhaps worth quoting a remark made by Professor Grierson in private correspondence - "unfortunately the fact that one has waited so long for this number of new coins to be found carries with it the implication that much time may well go by before anything comparable comes to light".

The parallel between this coin and the last Ravenna issues of Constans II is striking, to say the least. These Constans II "long beard" issues² with the reverse type CON or KCON around a cross have been distinguished as denominations of two hundred and fifty nummi³ or "siliquae" (albeit on the miserable reduced standard of the time), in a most interesting article by J.P.C. Kent⁴. At this point it is also interesting to note some observations made by Kent in Appendix 2 of the SNR article in relation to the copper thirty nummi coins. "It has been suggested - although this is against the very slight analytical evidence - that the 'coppers' were in fact made of a very base billon. If this were the case, the value of the silver coins in terms of nummi would be substantially reduced⁵. Billon of around three per cent silver would give a silver piece of about two hundred and fifty nummi."⁶ It has been suggested by Grierson that the doubling of

¹ The main papers on this find so far are as follows: M.D.O'Hara, A Find of Byzantine Silver from the Mint of Rome for the period A.D. 641-752, SNR 64 (1985), pp. 105-140. M.D.O'Hara, The Thirty Second Coin from the Find of Byzantine Silver from the Mint of Rome, Spink, Numismatic Circular, February, 1987, pp. 4-5. Dr. C. Morrisson and Dr. J.N. Barrandon, La Trouvaille de monnaies d'argent byzantine de Rome VII^e-VIII^e siècles: analyses et chronologie; and M.D. O'Hara, Further to the Find of Byzantine Silver from the Mint of Rome for the Period 640-750. These last two were papers presented at the 10th International Numismatic Congress, London, September 8th-12th, 1986. There are also several popular accounts either already published or due to be published.

² DO 204; BMC 399 and BMC 383 = DO 205.

³ CN = 250.

⁴ Contributions to Studio Paulo Naster Oblata, Numismatica Antiqua (1982), The Italian Silver Coinage of Justinian I and his Successors, pp.275-282, especially pp.275 and 280. Cf. also O'Hara, SNR appendix 2 by J.P.C. Kent.

⁵ For example, from 750 nummi.

⁶ O'Hara, SNR p. 139 - Appendix 2 by J.P.C. Kent.

CON with KON refers to the co-rulership of the two Constantines after 654⁷. Given the Byzantines' love of double meanings⁸, both of these suggestions are probably correct – especially when one considers the evidence of the layout of the letters on the reverse of the coin published here, which clearly appears to refer to both the emperor Constantine IV and the denomination. From the foregoing it would seem that the existence of this coin supports both Murari's and Grierson's contention that the "copper" thirty nummi were indeed meant to circulate as a coinage in billon⁹. One may note from the combined monogram of the emperor Tiberius III and Roma¹⁰ that it is not only papal monograms and signatures which appear on this fascinating series of coins.

There has recently been published in Switzerland an informative article on other aspects of early mediaeval coinage of the Mint of Rome by W. Hahn, *Das Römerreich der Byzantiner aus numismatischer Sicht*¹¹, where the coins with the "Vitalian" monogram¹² have been listed after Pope Zacharias (741-752), and the "star" coins¹³ have been retained under Constantine IV, their traditional attribution¹⁴. If, bearing in mind that the treatment of the pendants of the fibula¹⁵ and the treatment of the busts, with the distinctive triangular hair style is exactly the same on all these coins, then one of these attributions must be wrong. This new coin fits precisely and exactly with these two types¹⁶ and all three groups should clearly remain together; in my view, and now confirmed with the additional evidence of the coin published here, under Constantine IV.

⁷ DO II, 2, p.508.

⁸ Cf. comments by C. Morrison, O'Hara SNR p. 138.

⁹ O'Hara, SNR p. 114 and note 32.

¹⁰ Ibid., type 13, numbers 23 and 24.

¹¹ SNR vol. 65, 1986, pp.175-186.

¹² O'Hara, SNR type 7, numbers 14, 15 and 16.

¹³ Ibid., type 6, numbers 11, 12 and 13.

¹⁴ The type was previously only known from a line drawing in Sabatier (cf. O'Hara, SNR p.108. and p.105, note 2).

¹⁵ O'Hara, SNR p.108; note to number 13; and p.109, note to numbers 16, and 17 (Adeodatus).

¹⁶ Also with the Adeodatus coin, O'Hara, SNR type 8, number 17.



Fig. a (7:1)



Fig. b (2:1)



Fig. c (1:1)