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THESSALONICAN HYPERPYRA OF MICHAEL VIII?

Simon Bendall

In the Schweizer Münzblätter of February 1982, the writer ended his article¹ on the gold hyperpyra from the mint of Thessalonica by noting that there appeared to be no contenders for Thessalonican hyperpyra of Michael VIII.

There are four varieties of hyperpyra of Michael VIII, already published, which seem to form a small group which have certain similar characteristics comparable with those of the Thessalonican issues of Andronicus II. The coins are all of the standard design:

Obv. Bust of the Virgin, *orans*, within city walls with six groups of towers.

Rev. Michael, left, kneeling before Christ, holding scroll, right; Emperor supported by St. Michael.

There are four varieties, all with their sigla or distinguishing marks in the upper reverse field.

A. † in field; DO; F. Kovacs list 12, May 1981, No. 4 (fig. 1)

B. * in field; DO; ANS; Hoard 19 (fig. 2)

C. ∴ in field; ANS; BMC 4 (fig. 3)

D. B in field; DO; Goodacre lot (fig. 4)

The characteristics that tie this group together are as follows:

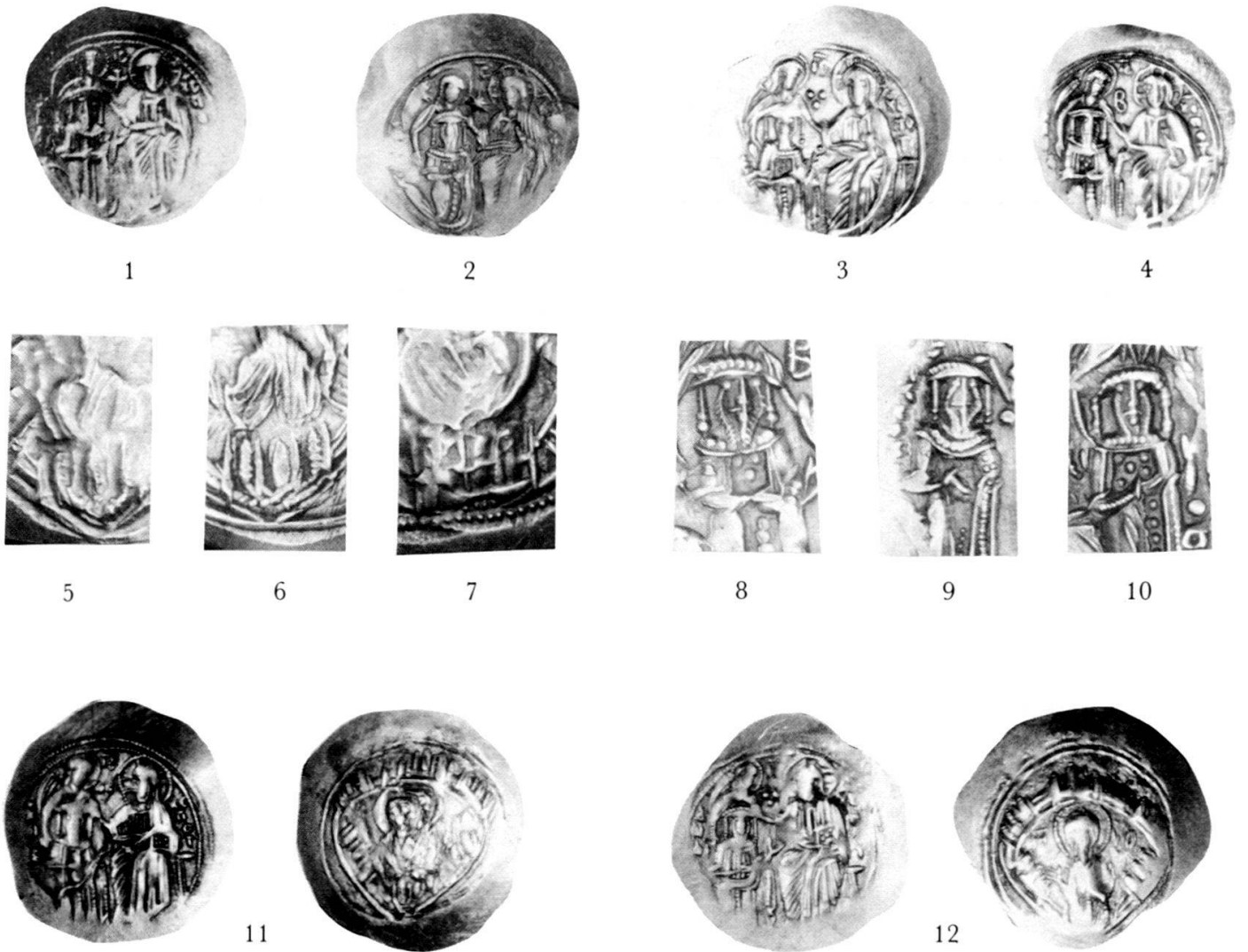
1. No sigla on the obverse as on early Thessalonican hyperpyra of Andronicus II.
2. Accentuated point to foot of lowest group of towers as on Thessalonican issues of Andronicus II (fig. 5 = Michael VIII, Var. D; Fig. 6 = Andronicus II, Thessalonica; fig. 7 = Michael VIII, Constantinople).
3. Reverse sigla only in upper field. It should be noted that the earliest hyperpyra of the joint reign of Andronicus II and Michael IX have sigla on the reverse.
4. Short reverse legend $\text{XM}\Delta\text{E}\text{C}\Pi\text{O}\text{T}\iota\varsigma$ with no mention of the family name Palaeologos.
5. The features of Michael on Vars. A–D approximate more to those of Andronicus II on his Thessalonican hyperpyra than those on other undoubted Constantinopolitan hyperpyra of Michael VIII (fig. 8 = Michael VIII, Var. D; fig. 9 = Andronicus II, Thessalonica; fig. 10 = Michael VIII, Constantinople).

Because of the form of portrait, which seemed rather “Nicean” in style, and the spread flans, the writer at first considered these coins to be early in the reign of Michael VIII and struck at Constantinople. However, variants of Var. B seem to indicate a slightly later date. Figures 11 and 12 depict coins where Christ holds not a

¹ Palaeologan gold coins from the mint of Thessalonica, SM 32, (1982), pp. 15–21.

² S. Bendall, An Early Palaeologan Gold Hoard, Numismatic Chronicle, Vol. 142 (1982), pp. 66–82.

scroll but the Gospels. The change from Christ holding a scroll to holding the Gospels appears, judging by the relative numbers of sigla known for each group³ to occur approximately half way through the reign. It seems unlikely that the two variants of Var. D could appear before the change from scroll to Gospels had occurred at Constantinople. Thus Vars. A-D seem to belong to the middle years of Michael VIII and thus the large flan size of these four varieties, when compared to the smaller mid-reign flans of Michael's Constantinopolitan hyperpyra, is yet another feature which points to a Thessalonican origin for this group of coins.



³ S. Bendall, *Sigla on Byzantine hyperpyra*, RN 1984, pp. 163-192.