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PRODUCTION OF IMITATIVE BYZANTINE
FOLLES IN THE FIRST BULGARIAN
KINGDOM. „FABER“, 2022, VELIKO
TARNOVO. ISBN 978-619-00- 1586-4”

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Review: “S. Doncheva, Z. Zhekova. Production of Imitative Byzantine Folles in the First Bulgarian Kingdom. „Faber“, 2022, Veliko Tarnovo. ISBN 978-619-00- 1586-4”

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A wonderful book has appeared in Bulgarian numismatic science. Before I dwell on specific things such as era, types of coins, denominations, and archaeological context, I would like to point out what is particularly important in this book. This is the high construction of the concept, approach, and organization for this type of research literature. This is not just another good book or collection in numismatics and sphragistics. The authors Stella Doncheva and Zhenya Zhekova have realized a fundamentally different interdisciplinary scientific product, reinforced with solid, indisputable arguments. Classical archaeological and numismatic research has been carried out at the highest level, but it has been upgraded by supplementing the profile of the coins and objects with new information about the elemental composition. Something that could not be done in the recent past and which adds something completely new to the well-known research methods. Something that is super-individual for each studied object, coin, or seal, and gives it a unique identification. A fundamentally new understanding and attitude towards the study of the original is shown. Thus, after the attribution, metric data, good illustration, and the context of discovery, the data on the elemental composition, achieved through X-ray fluorescence analysis, are now available. In the book, first of all, one can feel the positive result of the fruitful cooperation between an archaeologist such as Stella Doncheva and a numismatist such as Zhenya Zhekova. The shared information, the joint work, and the analyses carried out from different professional perspectives led to the magnificent results announced in the book. Thus, the two well-known specialists, not only in our country, through this book set an excellent benchmark for further similar studies nationally and internationally.

The contributions in the book are many. I will not list them all. I will emphasize that they extend not only to the fields of history, archaeology, and numismatics but also to archaeometry, physics, and chemistry. The contribution to the theory and history of money should not be overlooked. The minting of imitations of copper Byzantine coins follis by the Bulgarian state in the AD 10th century is a special precedent and a demonstration of power and influence. In the world of money, only the very strong can afford to interfere in a foreign monetary system with-

out fear of retaliatory sanctions. Studying the production centres has categorically proven the existence of such a phenomenon as imitation in particularly large volumes of foreign currency.

The studied materials were found in situated layers and were dated with solid arguments. They are in sync with the overall studied environment. A very important argument is the discovery of the original and imitative coins together, which proves their common archaeological origin. The production workshops have also been categorically established. For completeness, the discovered objects made in the same production centres near Novosel, Zlatar, and Nadarevo were also subjected to X-ray fluorescence analysis. Much additional and accompanying information has been extracted from seals and lead impressions from the same production centers. The solid basis of the study of numismatic objects comes from the results obtained from a group of collective finds with clear context and dating.

The authors are categorical about the issuer of the imitative coins. This is the Bulgarian Preslav royal court. The Bulgarian rulers, demonstrating self-confidence, provided the necessary money for the local market to function smoothly. As the book's authors say, this is "an expression of the political stability and self-confidence of the Bulgarian rulers in the tenth century."

In particular, the important topic of imitative coinage in medieval Bulgaria is also developed. Popular types of follises were pragmatically chosen, imitating the coins of the emperors Leo VI (886 – 912), Constantine VII (913 – 959), and Romanos I (920 – 944).

The book gives a positive answer to the important question of whether there was coin circulation in Bulgaria in the Early Middle Ages.

For the rich results disclosed in this complex study, the established creative relationships of the Regional History Museum – Shumen with the Laboratory of Nuclear Physics at the Shumen University "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski", which dates back to 1998, are of great importance. To achieve the best possible results, a series of analyses of a large number of objects was carried out at the Institute of Nuclear Physics and Nuclear Energy at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia and the "Atomki" Institute in Debrecen, Hungary.

In the process of joint work, the authors use modern approaches and methods of research such as the constructive-morphological, inductive, and deductive approaches; the technical-morphological method; the applied and comparative analysis; the reconstructive model, etc.

The content of the book is in 9 chapters, and the presented catalogue is made according to the highest international standards.

An important contribution of the authors is the clarification of definitions and concepts that are still debatable in science. These are terms like imitation and forgery, for which, in addition to science, there are deficiencies in the normative bases for cultural assets.

The cited literature exceeds 140 publications in history, archaeology, numismatics, sphragistics, technology, metallurgy, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and archaeometry.

The appendices include tables with photos of all the coins studied and the elements found with them.

The publication was produced in English. The book was published with the financial support of the Municipal Fund "Culture", Shumen Municipality, and Project No. RD-08-140/1.03.2022 of the Faculty of Humanities at the Shumen University "Bishop Konstantin Preslavski". The volume is 316 pages, hardcover, colour photographs, tables, and diagrams. Excellently executed as a publishing and printing work by the "Faber" Publishing House, Veliko Tarnovo.



The book received high marks from specialists and the public.

Soon after its publication, it was highly appreciated by the Board of the Christian Archeological Society in Athens.

The authors, Prof. Stela Donscheva and Prof. Zhenya Zhekova, were awarded the "Vasso Penna Award" in 2024.

The prize is awarded annually by the Administrative Board of the Christian Archaeological Society in Greece for the best publication in the field of Byzantine numismatics and sigillography. The award is in memory of Professor Vasiliki (Vasso) Pena (1951–2018), who was among the leading Greek specialists in the field of Byzantine numismatics and sphragistics and the cultural heritage of the Balkans. The winner is announced during the Society's annual Symposium on Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Archaeology in May.

