



**Bulgarian
Numismatic
Journal**

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ЗЛАТЕН СОЛИД НА ВАЛЕНТИНИАН I ОТ
РАЗКОПКИТЕ НА СЕКТОР V В КАБИЛЕ

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15504170



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<https://bulgnj.com>
ISSN: 2815-4827

A gold solidus of Valentinian I from the excavations of Sector V in Cabyle

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Златен солид на Валентиниан I от разкопките на сектор V в Кабиле

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Abstract: A gold solidus of Emperor Valentinian I was discovered during the regular archaeological excavations in 2024 in Sector V of the archaeological reserve “Thracian and Ancient City of Cabyle”. This coin is extremely well preserved, found in a destruction layer, under fallen roof tiles. Chronologically, the devastation and the appearance of the gold coin in the deposits should be associated with the Gothic wars of Emperor Valens, when Cabyle was affected before the crucial battle at Hadrianopolis in 378.

Keywords: Solidus, Valentinian I, Gothic wars of Valens, gold coin, Cabyle.



Archaeological excavations of Late Antique buildings in the southeastern part of Sector V of the Cabyle Archaeological Reserve have been ongoing for ten consecutive seasons since 2014. These excavations form part of the field practicum for students from the Archaeology Department at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” supervised by Ivan Valchev and Veneta Handzhiiska-Yankulova. The surveys occur over three weeks each year, funded by the Ministry of Culture. Within these constraints, approximately 800 square meters of surface area have been explored over the past decade, uncovering more than 1,000 coins. Currently, over 700 coins from the 4th century dominate the surveyed area of Sector V. The investigated buildings can be accurately dated to this period, spanning from Licinius I (308–324) and Constantine I (306–337) to Valentinian I (364–375) and Valens (364–378). The discovered coins are primarily bronze and are found within burnt layers.

In 2024, while exploring a burnt layer of destruction from a Late Antique building, a gold coin was discovered under roof tiles. After an immediate and careful cleaning from the conservator from the Regional History Museum-Yambol, the coin turned out to be a gold solidus of Emperor Valentinian I, minted in Constantinople between 24 August 367 and 17 November 375 (RIC IX, 217, no. 25a). Its weight is 4.51 g, i.e. it follows the standard of 1/72 of a Roman libra for one gold solidus, established during the reign of Constantine.

The depictions on both sides of the coin are well preserved (Fig. 1). The obverse shows the Emperor wearing an ornate diadem adorned with pearls and rosettes, a necklace, military attire and a mantle attached at the right shoulder with a fibula in the shape of a rosette with pearls. The reverse is of the RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE type, featuring the Emperor standing facing, holding a labarum with a cross in right hand, and in the other, a Victoria standing on a globe.

The gold solidus was probably in circulation for a brief time, remaining among the debris of burned buildings that had suffered from the attacks during the Gothic wars of Emperor Valens. After discovering the gold coin, the area around it was carefully examined, but no other similar finds have been recorded.

We know from historical sources that the Goths of Fritigern were allowed to cross the Danube and settle within the borders of the Empire in 376. By this time, Valens was in Antioch and the appointed Roman delegation failed to settle relations with the Goths, thus fighting broke out soon after. The action initially took place between the Danube River and the Eastern Balkan Mountains and as early as 376, at the Battle of Marcianopolis, the Goths defeated the Roman army of Lupicinus, appointed as *comes rei militaris*, who managed to save himself in the city, but the barbarians plundered the area. Soon an offensive was launched south of the Balkan Mountains, with the Goths, now supported by Huns and Alans, defeating the Roman armies at Deultum¹ and Augusta Traiana² in 377. In the period 377–378, the area south of the Balkan Mountains was raided, when Cabyle also suffered. Ammianus Marcellinus reports that Gothic troops were in the vicinity of Hadrianopolis in May–June 378. Fearing a confrontation with the Roman generals of Valens, Fritigern ordered the entire army to relocate to Cabyle (Amm. Marc. XXXI.3-11; Heather 2006, 158-178; Kulikowski 2007, 132-143; Hughes 2013, 165-172, 180-183; Kolev, Valchev 2024, 153-154). By this time, it appears that Cabyle had already been captured, which may have happened in 378 or even as early as 377, when the Goths won the battles of Deultum and Augusta Traiana. Cabyle is located halfway between the two cities and served as a stronghold for the march south to Hadrianopolis.

In addition to the gold solidus, the remaining numismatic material from Sector V also confirms the burning and the disruption of life in this part of the city (Dimitrov 2023, 91). In 2015, a collective find of 21 bronze coins of Constantius II, Julian, Valentinian I, and Valens was also discovered (Димитров 2023, 210-211). During the 2024 archaeological season in Sector V, another four smaller collective finds were recorded (see the paper Dimitrov in the present volume), three of which can also be linked to the destruction of Cabyle, with the earliest coins dating to the AD 330s-340s and the latest specimens dating to the AD 370s.

Burnt layers with the latest coins of the time of Valens and Valentinian have also been registered in other sectors of Cabyle. Life in the city was restored in the first half of the 5th century AD but on a much more limited scale (Лозанов 2006, 167; Kolev, Valchev 2024, 154). As far as the 2014 to 2024 surveyed part of Sector V is concerned, the buildings do not appear to have been restored. Sporadic numismatic material has been recovered, mostly in later pits containing 6th-century material.

The gold solidus provides further evidence for the end of occupation of the late antique buildings in Sector V. Currently, no other similar solidi of Valentinian and Valens have been found at Cabyle and the surrounding area. Further research at Cabyle will reveal whether more such rare finds were lost among the remains of the burnt city in the Gothic raids.

¹ In the text of Ammianus Marcellinus the name of the city is Dibaltum (Amm. Marc. XXXI. 8, 9.).

² The name of the city in Ammianus Marcellinus is Beroea (Amm. Marc. XXXI. 9, 1.).

Fig. 1. Gold solidus of Valentinian I.

Mint: Constantinople – * CONS (wreath)

21-21.5 mm; 4.51 g.; die axis – 6 h; inventory no. 60.

Date: 24 August 367 - 17 November 375 (RIC IX, 217, no. 25a)

**Obverse:** Rosette-diademed, draped, and cuirassed bust of Valentinian I to right.

D N VALENTINI-ANVS P F AVG

Reverse: Emperor standing facing, head right, holding labarum in right hand and Victory on globe in left. RESTITVTOR REIPVBLICAE**Bibliography**

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