A PURSE OF LATE ROMAN COINS IN TECDE, MALATYA

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Abstract: This article discusses a hoard of five solidi and two tremisses unearthed during a construction project for the former Zirai Araştırma İstasyonu Müdürlüğü in 1985. These coins, which are now being exhibited in the Museum of Malatya, were minted between 424 - 468 CE by the eastern Roman emperors in Constantinopolis.

Ancient Melitene was one of the prominent cities on the eastern frontier of Rome, with an increased importance in the medieval times. This growing affluence can also be observed by the various rural settlements dispersed around the surrounding plain of Malatya. However, the finding spot could not provide any other archaeological information save the Hoard of Tecde.

Although 5th century CE solidus hoards are common throughout the Empire, Turkey is not well represented in that pool. There are only three hoards dated to the period in subject from Turkey. Hopefully, this small group of coins, which were discovered in an unknown ancient settlement until 1985 will be a path for the further studies related with the region’s history and economics.

MALATYA TECDE’DE BULUNAN BİR GRUP GEÇ ROMA SIKKESİ

Özet: Bu çalışma ile 1985 yılında eskiden Zirai Araştırma İstasyonu Müdürlüğü olarak bilinen Meyvecilik Araştırma Enstitüsü’nün havuz kazı esnasında tesadüfen bulunan beş solidı ile iki tremisses’ten oluşan bir define incelenmiştir. Bugün, Malatya Müzesi’nde sergilenen ve MS 424 - 468 yılları arasında tarihlenmiş sikkelerin tümü Constantinopolis darphanesince darp edilmiştir.

Roma’nın doğru sınırında askeri bir yerleşim olan Melitene, Euphrates üzerinde Armenia içlerine ilerleyen bir geçiş noktası yakınında bulunmaktadır ötürü stratejik bir öneme sahipti. Bu önemini Ortaçağ boyunca da koruyan kent, Geç Roma ve Bizans Dönemleri boyunca gelişme göstermiş ve genel olarak tarımsal nitelik taşıyan çok sayıda yerleşim antik kentin bulunduğu ovaya yazılmıştır. Ancak Tecde Defi

nesi’nin bulunduğu alanda herhangi bir arkeolojik veri ele geçmemiş ve çalışma yapılmamıştır.

Imparatorluk genelinde özellikle MS 5. yüzyıla tarihlenen solidus definerleri oldukça yaygın olmakla beraber maalesef Türkiye’den söz konusu dönemde ait yalnızca üç define bilinmektedir. Malatya Tecde Semti’nde, henüz keşfedilmemiş ufak bir yerleşimden ele geçtiği düşünülen bu ufak definenin, bölgenin sosyal ve ekonomik tarihi ile ilgili çalışmalarına ışık tutması beklenmektedir.

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A Purse of Late Roman Coins Found in Tecde, Malatya

In 1985, during a construction project in Malatya - Tecde district, a small purse of coins was unearthed. This article aims to promote our knowledge of late Roman economics via information from the Tecde Hoard, which is now preserved and exhibited in the Museum of Malatya.

This small collection of seven gold coins was dated to the first three quarters of the 5th century. These were all minted in Constantinoplis under the authority of the eastern Roman emperors and an emperor regent. Coins represented in this group are three solidi of Theodosius II (Cat. Nr. 1-3; fig. 1), a solidus of Pulcheria as Theodosius II’s regent (Cat. Nr. 4; fig. 1), two tremisses of Marcianus (Cat. Nr. 5-6; fig. 1) and a solidus of Leo I (Cat. Nr. 7; fig.).

In recent years, there has been a growing concern on Roman provincial and frontier studies. In consequence, especially in modern Europe, researches on roman hoards and related corpora of site finds have been increasing steadily. Unfortunately, however, despite all this geographical and cultural dynamism, studies in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, which cover the eastern frontier zone of the Roman Empire, are scarce. Throughout the Empire, hoards dated to the late Roman era that were composed out of precious metals are only 419 in number and only 3 of them can certainly be attributed to Turkey.

Dating to the period of time when the Roman Empire was having fiscal breakdowns, stray finds or hoards of solidi were not uncommon. However, the Tecde find does not give us any information about the actual number of the coins. Still, in contrast to the wide hoarding patterns of the empire, the Tecde Hoard has an essential position for building up knowledge to the numismatic studies in Turkey.

CATALOGUE

Theodosius II (408 - 450)
424 - 425
1) O/ DN THEODO - SIVS PF AVG; Helmeted, pearl diademed, cuirassed, bust facing, spear in right hand held over right shoulder behind head, in left arm decorated shield with horseman rides down enemy.
R/ GLOR ORVI - S TERRAR; Emperor standing, facing, holding standard and cross on globus; star in left field; “CONOB” in exergue.
AV Solidus, 4.47gr, 21.58mm, 12h, inv. no: 3132
RIC X p. 257 no: 232.

3 See also: Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire Project (http://oexrep.classics.ox.ac.uk/coin_hoards_of_the_roman_empire_project/); Bland 1997, 30 n. 9.

4 RIC X, lxxxix-cxxvii; Bland 1997, 43-55; for other late Roma hoards from Turkey see: Mosser 1935, n. 2 & 99; Morrison et al. 1985, 144 n. 11; Ebcioğlu 1967.
441 – 450

2) O/ DN THEODOSI - VS'P'F'AV''; Helmed, pearl diademed, cuirassed, bust facing, spear in right hand held over right shoulder behind head, in left arm decorated shield with horseman rides down enemy.

R/ IMP.XXXI'COS - XVII'P'P'; Constantinopolis enthroned to left, holding cross on globe and sceptre, by the throne a shield; star in left field, “CONOB” in exergue.

AV Solidus, 4,48gr, 20,90mm, 6h, inv. no: 3134
RIC X p. 262 no: 292.

3) O/ DN THEODOSI - VS'P'F'AV''; Helmed, pearl diademed, cuirassed, bust facing, spear in right hand held over right shoulder behind head, in left arm decorated shield with horseman rides down enemy.

R/ IMP.XXXI'COS - XVII'P'P'; Constantinopolis enthroned to left, holding cross on globe and sceptre, by the throne a shield; star in left field, “CONOB” in exergue.

AV Solidus, 4,48gr, 21,48mm, 6h, inv. no: 3136
RIC X p. 262 no: 299.

Pulcheria (408 - 450)

430 – 440

4) O/ AEL PVLCH - ERIA AVG

Pearl diademed, draped bust to right, wearing necklace and earrings, crowned by the Hand of God.

R/ VOT XXX MVLT XXXXI

Constantinopolis enthroned to left, holding cross on globe and sceptre, by the throne a shield; star in right field, “CONOB” in exergue.

AV Solidus, 4,47gr, 21,36mm, 6h, inv. no: 3131
RIC X p. 259 no: 261.

Marcianus (450 - 457)

Undated

5) O/ DN MARCIA - NVS PF AVG

Pearl diademed, draped and cuirassed bust to right.

R/ VICTORIA AVGVSTORVM

Victoria advancing to front, head left, holding wreath and cross on globe; star in right field, “CONOB” in exergue.

AV Tremissis, 1,51gr, 15,52mm, 12h, inv. no: 3137
RIC X p. 280 no: 519.

6) O/ DN MARCIA - NVS PF AVG

Pearl diademed, draped and cuirassed bust to right.

R/ VICTORIA AVGVSTORVM

Victoria advancing to front, head left, holding wreath and cross on globe; star in right field, “CONOB” in exergue.

AV Tremissis, 1,51gr, 15,02mm, 6h, inv. no: 3135
RIC X p. 280 no: 519.

Leo I (457 - 474)

457 - 468

7) O/DN LEO PE - RPET AVG

Helmeted, pearl diademed, cuirassed bust facing, spear in right hand held over right shoulder behind head, in left arm decorated shield with horseman rides down enemy.

R/VICTORI - A AVCCC

Victoria standing to left, supporting long jewelled cross; star in right field, “CONOB” in exergue.

AV Solidus, 4,50gr, 20,35mm, 6h, inv. no: 3133
RIC X p. 285 no: 605.

From the 2nd millennium BCE onwards, the advantageous key position of Melitene, on the invasion route from Caucasus to Anatolia and nearby one of the exceptional crossing points on the Euphrates, has attracted attention. The inhabitants
of the region mainly used the area as a garrisoned settlement. This military character did not change much when Rome arrived on the banks of Euphrates in 92 BCE. From that day until the organisation of the eastern frontier of the Empire and the deployment of Legio XII Fulminata in Melitene by Vespasianus in 71/72, this settlement and its environs was used as a seasonal encampment for legions or a post for auxiliary forces. Although there is no archaeological evidence from the site itself, there are plenty of epigraphic sources as convincing proof that XII Fulminata was based on Melitene and lasted at least until the 5th century. Further study has shown that a fortified settlement -eight kilometres east of modern Malatya, named Karamil- dan, might be an early garrison with its late Hellenistic and Roman surface finds.

According to Procopius, Melitene, which was neighbouring this stronghold received the rank of municipium and became the metropolis of the region from the end of the 1st century onwards. In the course of time, the city became larger and highly populous with buildings scattering around the surrounding plain. Probably within the Byzantine period the legionary garrison moved to Battalgazi (Eski Malatya) under the reorganisation of the frontier by Emperor Iustinianus where only the medieval remains of the southwest corner of the castrum can be seen now.

The finding spot of Tecde hoard, which is now within the boundaries of the present “Meyvecilik Araştırma Enstitüsü” and is situated on the southwest of Malatya was probably settled during these times of prosperity. The founding spot itself was never excavated after 1985. However, various rural settlements dated to the late Roman and Byzantine periods are within the vicinity (Map 1). It is known today that through the 5th century, populations of these agricultural based settlements increased along with economic activities. The finding spot, which stood on the entrance of one of the fresh valleys of the Taurus Mountains, might have been a smaller settlement. To understand the nature of this small group of coins found in such a small rural settlement, it would be more convenient to look at the development of the precious metal coinage from the beginning of late Roman period.

After Diocletianus’ intervention to the fiscal units of the empire at the end of the 3rd century when the previous Roman monetary system collapsed, a new monetary system was introduced. Subsequently, Constantinus’ adaptation of monetary standards as equal to the market values from 309 onwards further strengthened the system. The gold coin, namely, solidus, began to be struck at an adapted weight with high level of purity. However, wars led the successors of Constantinus to appropriate a debasement in the 350’s, followed by an inflation, which was later re-

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5 Garstang 1942, 451; Sinclair 1989, 3.
6 Mitchell 2001, 118.
7 Mitford 1980, 1186.
8 Gregory 1996, 51; Mitford 1980, 1186.
9 Sevin – Derin 1989, 437-440
10 Procop., Aed. III.4. 15.
11 Procop., Aed. III.1.16; Mitford 1980, 1186.
12 Gregory 1996, s. 51.

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13 Research Institute of Fruit Growing.
14 Satellite image obtained from Google Earth, information of coordinates mostly derived from Malatya Kültür Envanteri 2014.
15 Perkins-Ward 2008, 321, 328; Ceylan 2009, 46-47.
16 Michell 1947, 1-9.
formed by Valentinianus I and Valens in 36717. Through the end of the century until the mid 5th, Barbarian attacks made the soli-di a crucial medium of war18.

The increasing number of gold solidi in the 5th century also resulted from a series of events following the defeat of Emperor Valens by Goths in 378 after the Battle of Hadrianopolis. Thodosius I tried to reorganize the army by recruiting barbarians who accepted payment in gold only. Soon after, between the end of the 4th century and the beginning of 5th, the migrations of Visigoths affected imperial revenues and currency19. The accumulation of great a plenty of coinage to meet the costs of war by the emperors caused a breakdown of the fiscal administration and created the 5th century crisis that made silver and bronze species very rare in circulation. On the other hand, this does not mean that there was a silver shortage. Vast amounts of silver both in the form of coins or silverware were hoarded in churches, by the aristocrats and all the more by the emperors themselves20.

R. Bland investigated more than 300 precious metal coin hoards from the 4th and 5th centuries and arrived at significant conclusions21. When he compared the hoarding patterns of the periods in question with the previous century’s data22, he noticed that hoards which include only gold solidi doubled in number probably due to the fact that gold coins regained their nominal values as opposed to the diminution in value in the 3rd century, where gold coins were merely a prestige object rather than a medium of payment23.

Although it is known that there was a debasement of solidus in the mid 4th century, increase in the use of gold could also be related with the discovery of a new gold mine around 350’s, though the provenance of that mine is still unknown. It is known however that the chemical analyses of coin alloys show different ratios than the previous terms’ coinage24.

The increased use of gold coinage can also be observed by the pattern of taxes in correlation with Codex Theodosianus. According to the analyses of the distribution of the coins between 330 and 380 fines were charged mostly in silver but from 380 onwards they were only levied in gold25.

During the 5th century, in such an economic atmosphere, our small collection from Tecde may be regarded as a totally insignificant purse of coins whereby its owner(s) used them in minor transactions.

According to a thorough research by Kent in the “tenth band of Roman Imperial Coinage series”, there are 165 hoards dating to the 5th century unearthed throughout the empire consisting only from gold species26. Within this context, there are only 14 hoards save one sample from Turkey27, which were deposited between the death of Honorius in 423 and

17 Harl 1996, 158-159; Bland 1997, 34.
18 Harl 1996, 175.
19 Harl 1996, 175.
20 Harl 1996, 176-177; e.g. Kaiseraugst, Sevso, Vinkovci, Water Newton, Mildenhall Treasures and Hoxne Hoard.
21 Bland 1997, 29-42.
22 Bland 1997, 36 Table 2.
23 Bland 1997, 35.
24 Morrison et al. 1985, 92-95; Bland 1997, 35-36.
25 Depeyrot 1983, 86-87; Bland 1997, 37.
26 RIC X, lxxxi9 ff.,
27 Ebcioglu 1967, 166-177.
the last quarter of the 5th century. In the light of these 14 hoards, which were all unearthed within the western part of the empire, it is still possible to estimate the hoarding patterns of the Tecde Hoard despite its founding spot. For instance, hoards that contain coins of Zeno (474-491) as the latest sample, rarely include specimens as early as Honorius’ period (395-423) but quite often they begin with Theodosius II (408-450) and/or Valentinianus III’s (425-455)28 coins. Also, due to the short lifetime of the gold coinage from the mid 4th century onwards29 and the fine state of our small collection, 480 CE could comfortably be suggested as the date of burial of the Tecde Hoard.

28 RIC X, lxxxiv.
29 Bland 1997, 38.
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Figure 1