

COINS FROM PALMYRA (POLISH EXCAVATIONS 1959–2001)

Summary

MICHAŁ GAWLIKOWSKI

This volume is a comprehensive publication of all the coin finds from Polish excavations in Palmyra carried out between 1959 and 2001 (including a few pieces from the Palmyra Museum, which were acquired independently by the Museum and which were read at the request of the Director, but were not given an inventory number). The first part, by Aleksandra Krzyżanowska with a contribution by Stefan Skowronek, discusses Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins as well as Arab imitations, whereas the second, by Michał Gawlikowski, concentrates on a hoard of about 700 Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian coins that was discovered during excavations in 2001.

Polish excavations commenced in 1959 with the investigation of the so-called Camp of Diocletian. The late Roman military installations were explored through 1973, the sanctuary of Allat from 1974 to 1979 and again the barracks and granary of the Roman camp from 1981 to 1987. In 1988 a residential sector of the 2nd through early 9th century, located north of the Great Colonnade, was opened. Some tombs were excavated as well as 3rd century *khan* converted into a military post in the Valley of Tombs.

Most of the coins that were discovered in the course of these excavations are bronzes of the Roman imperial period and for the most part they are poorly preserved. All were evidently in local circulation and can give an idea of the city's outside relations (Krzyżanowska 1981). Part One of the volume includes all the Greek and Roman coins, encompassing also two hoards: a Byzan-

tine hoard of 27 *solidi* from Phocas to Constans II (published by Stefan Skowronek in 1960 and now included here with only editorial changes) and a 4th century hoard of 45 bronzes found in 1975 in the Allat temple (Krzyżanowska 1981). Islamic issues have been excluded, as were also the illegible pieces which form about 20% of the collection.

The coins have been classified chronologically and by the relevant mints. Most are so-called Imperial Greek (Eastern provincial issues with emperor's head, inscribed in Greek). Imperial issues in Latin appeared concurrently in the second half of the 3rd century and become exclusive from the 4th. There are also a few coins of various Oriental dynasts (n^{os} 199–205, 209–218). Owing to the poor state of preservation, the coins are simply listed after a general description of each type. The number of coins of each city or emperor, with a breakdown by mints, is presented in tabular form.

The catalogue opens with the coins minted in Palmyra itself. They are very small and only a few bear inscriptions. These coins were found allegedly in great quantities (Saulcy 1874, Mordtmann 1875, *BMC GCS*: VI), but the mission found not more than 46 during all the years of its fieldwork. A study of these coins does not give a certain chronology, falling instead in the general period between the Antonines and Aurelian (Krzyżanowska 1979).

The most numerous among the provincial issues were the coins of Antioch: 83 coins from Augustus to Valerian, compared to only eight

Seleucid. Other Syrian cities provided only scattered specimens of their minting in the same period, 36 coins altogether. Among them, only Damascus can boast as many as 17 coins. The production of other Roman provinces is negligible, with the relative exception of 3rd century Mesopotamia.

Imperial coins were extremely rare in the 1st–2nd centuries (seven in all). Silver-coated *antoniniani* became numerous from the reign of Valerian and up to the Tetrarchy (35 coins). Coins minted in the 260s (Valerian, Macrianus, Claudius II) dated the military use of the *khan* in the Valley of Tombs; rare coins of Salonina of the same period are often mistaken for Zenobia's. In the 4th century imperial issues replaced all other types. Coins of Constantius II, of Valentinian and Valens (mostly in the Allat hoard) were especially abundant, as were the coins of Theodosius and his sons (a coin of Aelia Flaccilla providing an approximate date of destruction for the Allat temple). Up to one third of all imperial coins, and probably more considering those without a preserved mark, were minted in Antioch; other mints were represented mostly by single coins and those of the western part of the Empire were practically absent.

Of the 95 Byzantine coins found most had been minted in Constantinople, reversing the centuries-old pre-eminence of the Antioch mint. The last in the series are coins of Constans II, imported from the Empire into the province of Syria, which had recently been lost to the Moslem. However, seven Byzantine coins of the 11th and 12th centuries were also found.

In comparison with another published collection of coins found in excavations, that of Antioch (Waage 1952), Palmyra was much less connected with the West and even with Asia Minor and Alexandria. Suffice it to say that Palmyra yielded no local issues from Greece or the Black Sea region, which were found, for example, in the garrison town of Dura-Europos (Bellinger 1949).

The silver Sasanian hoard found in Palmyra in 2001 is presented in Part Two of this volume. This large hoard of Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian coins was discovered in a downtown residential sector of ancient Palmyra, north of the Great Colonnade. The quarter was founded in the late 2nd century, but we know it better only at a much later date, evolving around a number of churches which flourished until the first half of the 9th century. Three of these churches, situated

close to one another, were entered from the same street branching from the Colonnade to the north. It was in this street that a cluster of silver coins was found directly on the pavement, covered only by windblown sand. The context of the discovery leaves no doubt that the coins had been placed in a cloth purse and dropped in what appears to be the entrance, between columns, to an unexcavated building adjoining one of the churches. Eighteen coins of the same lot were found dispersed on the pavement in the near vicinity. Assuming the purse of silver was abandoned (concealed?) in the street in some dramatic circumstances at the very end of the occupation of the site, the coins must have been kept untouched for over a century as bullion reserve.

A sample of 24 coins was studied immediately upon discovery, giving a good idea of the content (Gawlikowski 2003: 266–269). In 2002 and 2003 metal conservator Tomasz Myjak separated and cleaned the coins and in 2007 conservator Aleksandra Trochimowicz treated again a selection of 70 best preserved pieces to be placed on display in the Palmyra Museum.

Each coin has been presented in the catalogue with full details (wherever possible) of diameter, weight and reverse axis symbolized by the corresponding clock hour. Coins described as “*complet*” have the margin symbols intact, but could very well have had some metal clipped intentionally to reduce weight; “*rogné*” means that such clipping is well in evidence. R. Göbl's extremely detailed typology (1971: Pls X–XII) was used as a reference instead of descriptions. The transliteration of Iranian royal names and year numbers written in pehlevi appeared superfluous as well. The Arab-Sasanian coins were referred to Gaube 1973.

The collection includes three poorly preserved coins of Kavad I (second reign, 499–531), 35 coins of Xusrō I (531–579), most later than his 25th year, and 79 coins of Ohrmazd IV (579–590). The greatest number, 546 coins, belongs to Xusrō II (590–628). There are no coins of the first reign of this king; during his second reign, the years 2 to 10 (591–599) are represented by 104 pieces with the reverse type Göbl 23: II 2, and the years 11 to 38 (600–628) by 383 bearing the reverse Göbl 23: II 3 (401 coins of both types preserve a date); in 59 cases the reverse type could not be identified. The coins minted during the Sasanian occupation of Syria (611–628) total 269 pieces, that is, 67% of those dated.

A table listing the relevant mints is given after each reign. For the identification of the mints, see Gyselen 1983, though a few divergent interpretations are signaled. The mint marks of Fars, Khūzistān and Mesopotamia constituted altogether 74% of the readable marks. This is without counting the BBA mint (the Court), which may have been itinerant.

The hoard included 32 Arab-Sasanian coins. All reproduce the type of Xusrō II. Some bear additional Arabic formulas on the margin. Those bearing a legible date were minted between 43/663 and 76/695. However, the date of 38 (No. 692), if counted from Hijra, would correspond to AD 658; it should be rather reckoned according to the Yazdgard era (AD 669) or even post-Yazdgard (AD 689).

With two exceptions these coins always bear the name of a caliph or governor written in pehlevi (the full list in Gaube 1973: 7–8): 12 of ʿUbaydallah b. Ziyād, minted in Baṣra and Nišāpūr, and only one or two of each of the other rulers. The latest, dated between 683 and 695, were all minted in Dārābgird. Considering that the caliph ʿAbdelmalik took power in 65/684, the date 60 of Nos 681–684 must refer to the Yazdgird era as was usual in this mint, and so to 72/691. A coin of ʿAbdallah b. Zubayr of the same year (No. 681) proves that ʿAbdelmalik took control of Dārābgird and Fars in that very year.

It is likely that this part of our hoard was assembled in Dārābgird or its environs not later than ʿAbdelmalik's introduction of Islamic coinage. Indeed, the first experimental issues of Islamic dirhams were minted in 75/695 and none are present in the hoard. The lot was joined to a more voluminous hoard formed during the Sasanian occupation of Syria, but not necessarily in Syria itself, as all hoards containing coins of Xusrō II, wherever found, show a marked increase after AD 614 (Malek 1993).

As is well known, the Sasanian drachm kept a stable standard weight of about 4 g from the

beginning to the end of its history. The regular Islamic dirham introduced by ʿAbdelmalik in 79/698 weighed only 2.97 g (Broome 1985). No doubt as a result of this difference, old issues would have been clipped in order to conform to the new standard. The so-called mixed hoards from the late 7th century on show always an average weight of about 3 g with important deviations sometimes (Gyselen 1981).

The weight of most coins in this hoard varies from 2 to 3 g, but a few are heavier: 63 coins between 3 g and 3.85 g, and eight coins even heavier, up to 4.18 g, with margin symbols intact. The 117 coins that are evidently clipped are always below 3 g (2.4 g on the average). The general average is 2.8 g, showing no difference in this respect between Sasanian and Arab-Sasanian issues. Most coins, that is over five hundred, are damaged however and therefore unfit for calculations. The variations invite one to think that clipping was not applied piece by piece, but by larger lots weighed together.

The total weight of the hoard after cleaning amounts to 2195 g, including the 694 catalogued coins, seven coins adhering to some of them, and 60 illegible pieces omitted from the present catalogue, that is, 761 coins altogether, as well as minute useless fragments. The average weight per preserved coin is 2.88 g, practically the same as that of the catalogued coins. It appears thus that originally the hoard counted about 760 coins of which 694 could be read at least partially.

The Palmyra hoard is the fifth Sasanian hoard known from Syria: two were found in Damascus and two in the Syrian Jazirah (al-Ush 1972; Gyselen, Nègre 1982; Gyselen, Kalus 1983). The other four are later, having been collected between 130/748 (Bab Touma) and 200/815 (Qamishli). The Palmyra hoard of 75/695 is also the oldest among those known from outside Syria. Other publications contain only complete and well readable coins, presumably due to the selection being done by anonymous dealers.

