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Michael VIII between Nicaea and Constantinople

His Coinage



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COINAGE

Although, as we have seen in the previous paragraph, the life of Michael VIII is quite straightforward and all the main events of his life are known, the same cannot be said about his coinage, which has always been a problem for numismatists, as production began in Magnesia, and then moved to Constantinople and other minor centres, but there is no certainty about the place of production (and chronology) of several nominals. Moreover, no issue in the name of John IV is known, but all bear only the reference to Michael VIII, so one assumes a gap in production between August 1258 and January 1259 (or perhaps the same dies of the late Theodore II were still used).

With regard to the various production cities, we know for sure that during the period of exile the only active mint was that of Magnesia, and that it continued to work even in the months following the reconquest of the capital (perhaps even for a few years), only to be supplanted by Constantinople, which was joined by Thessalonica and Philadelphia.

In the present work, it has therefore been decided to divide the entire production into two phases, and to describe the work of every individual mint in each period.

First phase: Empire of Nicaea

Magnesia

This mint began issuing coins in the name of Michael VIII as soon as his power was consolidated (presumably around 1259), and would cease its activity after the reconquest of Constantinople. Several historians propose the 15th of August as the date, following the Sovereign's accession, but there is no definite proof. Nor is there any information on what happened to the reserves of precious metals stored in Astytzium, the financial epicentre of the Nicaean Empire.

To date, the only nominal that can be assigned with absolute certainty is the hyperpyron nomisma (no. ***1***), which shows Christ enthroned on the obverse and, on the reverse, the scene of the coronation of the Sovereign by the Virgin, with the workshop symbols ❯ and + on either side of the Redeemer, taken from the tradition of John III.



Hyperpyron nomisma of John III

The situation of the aspron trachea nomismata in electrum (although it would now be better to define them as silver coins) is more complicated, as there is no certainty either about the nominals issued in Magnesia or about the exact year. However, in the writers' opinion, a decisive element in the attribution to this phase is the presence of the initials B and Γ to indicate the Years of Reign, a system that was already in use under the predecessors

Typology with Gospels

No.	Obv.	Rev.
49		∴
50	Ⲙ Δ	Ⲙ
51	C Ⲙ	Ⲕ
52	+ +	
53	Θ Ⲣ	
54	N X	
55	A Ⲙ	
57	Ⲣ Ⲙ	
58	Ⲕ Ⲗ	
59	Ⲙ A	

No.	Obv.	Rev.
60	Ⲣ ϥ	
61	Ⲣ Ⲣ	
62	C A	
63	C A	
64	Θ Θ	
65	Є Ⲫ	
66	Ⲫ Ⲫ	
67	A Ⲕ	
68	A Ⲗ	
69	Ⲕ A	

No.	Obv.	Rev.
70	Ⲕ Ⲙ	
71	Ⲙ Ⲙ	
72	X Ⲙ	
73	X Π	
74	(Ⲫ) Π	
75	Π Ⲫ	
76	Π Ⲫ	
77	B Ⲗ Π Ⲫ	
78	Ⲕ B Π Ⲫ	
79	Ⲣ Θ	

No.	Obv.	Rev.
80	Π Є	Π Π Є
81	Є Π	Π Π Є
82	Π Є ?	Π Π Є
83	Π Є	⁘ Π
84	Є Π	⁘ Π
85		
86	⁘ Є	⁘ Π
87	Π ⁘	⁘ Π
V1	Ⲣ Ⲙ	
V2	Ⲣ Ⲙ	

No.	Obv.	Rev.
V3	Ⲙ Ⲙ	
V4	Ⲫ Π	Θ
V5	Δ Ⲗ	
V6	Ⲫ ϥ	
V7	Ⲕ Ⲙ	
V8	Δ Ⲕ	
V9	Ⲙ ϥ	
V10	Ⲕ	
V11	N Δ	
V12	Ⲙ Ⲣ	

To conclude the gold issues of Constantinople, it is worth specifying that in the past Simon Bendall had assigned some variants of the hyperpyra nomismata to the mints of Thessalonica (BENDALL 1987) and Philadelphia (BENDALL 1984), but subsequent studies by Grierson (*DOC* Va) discarded these hypotheses. The scholar in fact assigned types 1 to 4 to the former centre and types 80 to 87 to the latter.

Directly below the hyperpyra nomismata we have the aspra trachea nomismata in silver (as already seen for the mint of Magnesia, they can no longer be considered to be in electrum). Their production isparticularly abundant, counting no less than eleven variants, which can be schematised as follows:

- no. ***23***: Obv.\ Virgin enthroned, Rev.\ Saint Michael the Archangel, Michael VIII and Christ; this type is very particular, as it reproduces the design of the gold coins of both the Magnesia mint and the Constantinople mint (in the latter they vary only in the design on the sides of the Madonna's throne). In the writers' opinion, its attribution could be disputed with the Nicene centre. The period of issue is fixed at 1261, just after the reconquest of the capital
- no. ***24***: Obv.\ Saint Tryphon, Rev.\ Michael VIII and warrior saint; unfortunately, in none of the few known pieces has it been possible to read the name of the warrior saint on the reverse, which thus remains shrouded in mystery. *DOC* Va speculates that this type may have been made in Magnesia after the conquest of Constantinople, concluding, however, that there is no conclusive evidence, but



9

9 Copper aspron trachy nomisma (scyphate)

1259-1260 (Regnal Year II – noted as B).

Obv.\ Bust facing of seraph with three pairs of wings, above B and B.

Rev.\ Half-length facing figure of Michael VIII with short beard, wearing stemma, divitision, chlamys and crown, holding in r. hand a sword and in l. hand a patriarchal cross, on the left B; on the sides X/M/ΔЄC/ΠO/T/C and O/ΠA/ΛЄ/O/Λ/O (*Michael Palaeologus Despot*).

Cu - 1,92-2,61 gr. - Ø 24-26 mm - R4

No reference.



10

10 Copper aspron trachy nomisma (scyphate)

1260-1261 (Regnal Year III – noted as Γ).

Obv.\ Bust facing of seraph with three pairs of wings, above Γ and Γ.

Rev.\ Half-length facing figure of Michael VIII with short beard, wearing stemma, divitision, chlamys and crown, holding in r. hand a labarum-sceptre and in l. hand the globus cruciger (with patriarchal cross); on the sides X/M/ΔЄC/ΠO/T/C and O/ΠA/ΛЄ/O/Λ/O (*Michael Palaeologus Despot*).

Cu - 1,90-3,30 gr. - Ø 20-24 mm - R3

No reference.



11

11 Tetarteron noummion

The year is not reported, but the coin is ranked between 1259 and 1261.

Obv.\ Facing figure of Christ on footstool, with cross nimbus, wears tunic and kolobion, r. hand raised in blessing and l. hand holds Gospels; on the sides IC and XC (*Jesus Christ*). All into single border of dots.

Rev.\ Facing figure of Michael VIII with short beard, wearing stemma, divitision, collar-piece, chlamys, sagion and crown, holding in r. hand a labarum-sceptre and in l. hand the akakia. Above on the right *Manus Dei*, on the sides X/M/ΔЄ/C/ΠO/TH and O/Π/ΛЄ/OΛ/Γ (*Michael Palaeologus Despot*). All into single border of dots.

Æ - 1,52-1,79 gr. - Ø 19 mm - R4

DOC IVa nos. 6.1-6.2 (Empire of Nicaea, Magnesia); *DOC* Vb nos. 194-195 (Empire of Nicaea, Magnesia); SEAR 2003 no. 2240 (Magnesia).

2nd Phase

Magnesia



12a



12b



12c



12d

12 Hyperpyron nomisma (scyphate)

The year is not reported, but the coin is ranked at 1261.

Obv.\ Virgin seated facing on square-backed throne (side panels each decorated with a saltire and four pellets), holding a medallion with nimbate head of infant Jesus; on the sides MP and ΘV (*Mother of God*).

Rev.\ Facing figure of Saint Michael presenting Michael VIII to Christ, who is seated on low throne and is holding a scroll; above sometimes M (*Michael*), on the left X/M/ΔЄ/ΠO/T (*Michael Despot*) and on the right IC/XC (*Jesus Christ*) and OΠ/AΛ/OΛ/OΓ (*Palaeologus*), sometimes IC is between Saint Michael and Christ. All within border of dots.

AV - 4,16-4,28 gr. - Ø 24-26 mm - R4

DOC vb no. 1 (Byzantine Empire, Magnesia, type IIa); SEAR 2003 no. 2241 (Constantinople).



13

13 Silver aspron trachy nomisma (scyphate)

The year is not reported, but the coin is ranked at 1261 (or between 1261 and 1262).

Obv.\ Facing figure of Archangel Michael beardless and nimbate, wearing short military tunic, breastplate and sagion, holding in r. hand a sword resting over shoulder and in l. hand the globus cruciger; on the sides M and X (*Michael*).

Rev.\ Facing figure of Michael VIII with short beard, wearing stemma, divitision, loros (?) and crown, holding in r. hand a cruciform sceptre and in l. hand the akakia; on the sides MI/XA/HΛ/ΔЄC/Π and O/ΠAΛ/Є/O/Λ/O/Γ (*Michael Palaeologus Despot*).

Ag - 2,67-3,05 gr. - Ø 23-24 mm - R4

No reference.



57

57 Copper aspron trachy nomisma (scyphate)

The year is not reported, but the coin is ranked between 1261 and 1282.

Obv.\ Bust facing of the Virgin orans with nimbus, tunic and maphorion; on the sides MP and ΘV (*Mother of God*, MP ligatured).

Rev.\ Michael VIII seated facing on square-backed throne, wearing stemma, divitision, panelled chlamys and crown, holding in r. hand a sword resting over knees; on the sides X/M/Δ/Є/C/Π and O/ΠA/ΛЄ/O/Γ/S (*Michael Palaeologus Despot*).

Cu - 1,27-3,46 gr. - Ø 23-27 mm - C

DOC vb nos. 91-95 (type 19); SEAR 2003 no. 2275; LIANTA 2009 nos. 540-541.



58

58 Copper aspron trachy nomisma (scyphate)

The year is not reported, but the coin is ranked between 1261 and 1282.

Obv.\ Bust facing of cherub holding in each hand a spear, on the sides two ✣.

Rev.\ Michael VIII seated facing on square-backed throne, wearing stemma, divitision, loros and crown, holding in r. hand a labarum-sceptre and in l. hand the akakia; on the sides traces of legend.

Cu - 1,05-3,18 gr. - Ø 20-24 mm - R3

DOC vb nos. 96-99 (type 20); SEAR 2003 no. 2276; LIANTA 2009 nos. 543-545.



59

59 Copper aspron trachy nomisma (scyphate)

The year is not reported, but the coin is ranked between 1261 and 1282.

Obv.\ Facing figure of Christ on footstool, with nimbus, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand raised in blessing and l. hand holds Gospels; on the sides IC and XC (*Jesus Christ*).

Rev.\ Michael VIII seated facing on square-backed throne, wearing stemma, divitision, loros and crown, holding in r. hand a labarum-sceptre and in l. hand a globe; on the sides traces of legend.

Cu - 1,38-3,05 gr. - Ø 23-27 mm - R3

DOC vb nos. 100-102 (type 21); SEAR 2003 no. 2290; LIANTA 2009 nos. 546-547.