

VLASTIMIL NOVÁK

with an excursus by

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The Kelč Hoard Revised: Fragments of Islamic Silver Coins,

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The early-medieval silver hoard from Kelč in Moravia is one of the most significant numismatic finds dating from the early 11th century in Central Europe. As based on the information provided by V. Katz, the hoard, found in 1938, was deposited in an earthen vessel, wrapped in a piece of cloth. Unfortunately, the vessel and the cloth have survived only in fragments. One lot of the hoard contained 246 complete silver coins of European origin and as many as 367 fragments of such coins, 1 complete dirham, 876 fragments of Islamic coins, and 246 fragments of silver jewellery. According to oral evidence, this lot was approximately a half of the entire hoard. Another, and greater, lot of the hoard, i.e., 465 coins of European origin (either complete or preserved only in part), 875 dirham fragments, and 237 fragments of silver jewellery is housed in the Olomouc County Museum; another lot of 13 European coins, 34 fragments of European coins, 52 unidentified fragments, 8 fragments of jewellery and a piece of cloth is at the Municipal Museum in Hranice; still another lot of a single fragment of a dirham is at the Municipal Museum in Valašské Meziříčí, while several fragments can be found as part of the collection of the Moravian Lands Museum in Brno, with the remaining fragments in private collections. The hoard of Kelč has been discussed in a number of publications.¹

Between 1989 and 1998, a private metal detectorist performed explorations at the site of the original find (p. 9), resulting in the discovery of 260 early-medieval coins of European origin (complete as well as fragmentary), 345 dirham fragments, 6 fragments of unidentified coins, and 61 fragments of silver jewellery (p. 7). The individual handed over all the items to the Numismatic Department of the National Museum in Prague in 1996 and 1998.

¹ V. KATZ, “Nález mincí a sekaného stříbra ze začátku 11. století u Kelče na Moravě,” *Numismatický Časopis Československý* 15, pp. 10–22; J. ŠTĚPKOVÁ, “Islámské stříbro z nálezů v Kelči na Moravě,” *Numismatický Sborník* 4, 1957, pp. 73–95; J. SKUTIL, “Význam kelčského hromadného nálezů mincí,” *Záhorská kronika (Hranice)* 24, 1946–1947, pp. 13–15, 34–38; R. TUREK, “Česke hradištní nález, dato van mincemi,” *Slavia antiqua* 1, pp. 485–535; T. KUČEROVSKÁ, “Nález zlomkového stříbra z Kelče” in: J. SEJBAL (ed.), *Denárová měna na Moravě. Sborník prací z III. numismatického symposia 1979. Ekonomicko-peněžní situace na Moravě v období vzniku a rozvoje feudalizmu (8.–12. století)*, *Numismatica Moravica* VI, Brno 1986, pp. 235–248; EADEM, “Ke struktuře raně středověkého oběživa v kelčském nález,” *Folia numismatica 1. Supplementum ad Acta Musei Moraviae, Scientiae sociales* 71, 1986, pp. 9–12; EADEM, “Kelčský nález,” *Folia numismatica 8–9. Supplementum ad Acta Musei Moraviae, Scientiae sociales* 78–79 (1993–1994), 1996, pp. 63–187.

At present, the known contents of the hoard includes 798 pennies (complete as well as fragmentary), 58 unidentified fragments, 1 complete dirham, 1,222 fragments of silver coins of Arab origin, and 306 fragments of silver jewellery. Examinations have shown that the oldest specimen of the hoard would be a fragment of a denarius of the emperor Trajan (98–117). The other coins of European origin are represented by Byzantine (969–976), Czech (929–1002), various West-European (Lorraine, Rhineland, Friesland, Saxony, Frankland, Swabia, Bavaria, Provence, Lombardy, England, from 901–1016), and Hungarian issues (997–1038), as well as some 10th-century pennies of the Otto-Adelheid and cross types. The Oriental part of the hoard dates back to the years 717–997. The date of burial, namely the early 11th century, is determined on the basis of the latest coins in the hoard: the pennies of Ethelred II (979–1016) and one coin of king Stephen I of Hungary (997–1038).

The volume in question constitutes a complete study on the Oriental part of the Kelč hoard. In 2005, more than 50 years after the publication by J. Štěpková, and thanks to the project entitled “Finds of the Oldest Přemyslid Coins of the 10th Century in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia,” under the direction of L. Polanský from the National Museum in Prague, it has become possible to re-examine the Oriental part of the hoard described in the relevant numismatic literature as well as the items, both in museum and private collections, that have not been published to date. Dr Vlastimil Novák has undertaken to address this question in the present volume, which is a revised and complete study focused on the Islamic part of the hoard. It is also supplemented with the results of an analysis of the pieces of the cloth in which the hoard was wrapped, authored by Dr Milena Bravermanová (pp. 105–111).

The Oriental part of the Kelč hoard is a typical Hacksilber hoard with an overwhelming proportion of fragments weighing under 1 g, very difficult to verify due to the rudimentary character of the preserved evidence. An attempt to describe the dirham fragments from the Kelč hoard was first made in 1939 by B. Augst, who had only managed to identify no more than eight items, out of the total number of 496 that were available to him at the time. In 1957, J. Štěpková of the Náprstek Museum identified 93 dirham fragments, out of the overall number of 876. The author V. Novák has determined the dynastic identity of 448 items, out of 876, and the precise chronological data (issuer, mint, date of issue, caliph's name) for as many as 193 fragments. The results of V. Novák have confirmed the findings of B. Augst in five cases, while the results of J. Štěpková have proved to be accurate only for 51 items out of the total number of 93 identified in 1957. It should be noted that the erroneous identifications of the previous authors (B. Augst and J. Štěpková) had been caused by the absence of any proper comparative material. In 2008, V. Novák complemented the already known Oriental part of the hoard

with 346 dirham fragments from the National Museum in Prague, with as many as 281 identified in terms of dynastic data, including the determination of precise information for 105 items (emir's name, mint, date of issue and/or caliph's name).

The description of the structure of the Oriental part of the hoard and its analysis performed by V. Novák have been based on the total amount of the numismatic material known to the author, i.e., 1,223 fragments of Islamic silver coins. This particular number includes fragments of dirhams from the Umayyad (1 specimen), 'Abbāsīd (14 fragments + 1 complete dirham + 10 broken pcs), Sāmānīd (146 broken pcs + 198 broken pcs – 226 specimens as per table), 'Abbāsīd/Sāmānīd (7 + 45 broken pcs – 8 specimens as per table), Buyīd (17 + 19 broken pcs – 26 specimens as per table), Ḥamdānīd (1 specimen), and the Ghaznavīd dynasties (2 specimens), as well as a certain number of imitations (12 specimens). The identified coins also comprise a single fragment of a Sassanid or Arabo-Sassanid coin. The author presents a tabular list of the verified and more accurately identified coin fragments (300 specimens), arranged according to ordinal number, with the specific information referring to the author of each identification and the current status of each attribution. Unfortunately, the arrangement is not very clear, which makes it somewhat difficult to find the specific data. The fragments belonging to the individual dynasties are dispersed in various places of the list, making it necessary to look through the entire table in order to find the items pertinent to the specific caliphs, emirs, or the fragments with the preserved information on the place and the year of issue. If the material in question has been detailed as it is, it could have been arranged chronologically, with the ordinal numbers inserted in the last column of the table. Also, we do not know which fragments not featured in the table have been attributed to the individual dynasties. In this case, the quantity list of the fragments attributed to the particular dynasties, rulers, and mints, which can be found in Table 4, is very helpful to the reader. A great value of the present study is the volume's complete photographic documentation: the fragments of the more precisely identified coins are presented in photographs at a scale of 3:1 (pp. 31–49), while all the dirham pieces from the Kelč hoard are featured in 24 plates in photographs at a scale of 2:1, which makes it possible to make a full verification of the descriptions present in the book. Unfortunately, some obverse and reverse pictures are confused (i.e., first reverse, then obverse photo).

With such a widely dispersed and poorly preserved body of material, it has been impossible to avoid making some errors in the identification of certain coins. For example, in the case of the following items:

- nos. 491, 668, 819 – al-Mustakfī billāh, not al-Muttaqī lillāh
- no. 608 – ar-Rāḍī billāh, not al-Muttaqī lillāh
- no. 631 – [ʿAbd al-]Malik ibn Nūḥ (343–350), not Nūḥ ibn Maṣṣūr (366–387)
- no. 757 – over the kalimah on the obverse: “adl”; in the inner marginal legend, an incomplete date: 3xx

- no. 780 – [Nū]ḥ, not “baḥ”
- no. 785 – Sāmānids [Ma]ṣūr [ibn Nūḥ], not Buyids
- no. 853 – the last verse of the kalimah on the obverse; the first two verses of the kalimah on the reverse, therefore why is the name reconstructed as [Nūḥ ibn Naṣr]?
- no. 958 – ending of date 3xx
- no. 1004 – ending of date 3xx, not the mint name Samarqand
- nos. 1099, 1207 – over the kalimah on the obverse “ḥ”, not “baḥ”
- nos. 1131, 1153 – caliph ar-Rāḍī billāh, not al-Muqtadir
- no. 1185 – [ʿA]bd al-Ma[lik] ibn Nūḥ, instead of [Maṣūr] ibn Nūḥ
- no. 1193 – mint [Wā]siṭ

All the coin fragments have been re-weighed, with only two cases (nos. 798, 855) of weight modification in the material prepared by J. Štěpková. According to Štěpková, the overwhelming number of the fragments falls within the weight 0.025–0.600 g. The author provides the weights of all 1,223 items (pp. 13–16), with an analysis of the weights of the broken pieces from the new part of the hoard (nos. 878–1223). His analysis shows that the extent of the fragmentation of the dirhams from the new part of the hoard would not depart from the conclusions presented by Štěpková and confirms the hypothesis that the fragmentation of the coin material would be the evidence for the monetary usage of silver. He confirms those conclusions in the part of the study that deals with the methods of coin fragmentation and the secondary damage to the broken pieces from the Kelč hoard (pp. 61–66). On the basis of several selected items, the author describes coin fragments with rim cuts and traces of cuts within the coin surfaces, broken pieces deformed by bending and with their edges ragged, coin fragments with apertures made before and after the coin was broken (no. 821), and a remnant of a pendant (no. 1209), which would prove that this particular coin was used as an item of jewellery (p. 66). The author notes that dirham fragments began to appear in the Middle Eastern hoards in the second half of the 9th century, at the time when the mints in the territories of the Caliphate would not ensure the fixed coin weights, only the proper quality of the coinage material.

A very interesting section of the study is a description of some rare specimens in the Kelč hoard. The author describes their typologies and reconstructs the legends and titles on the basis of the relevant sources.

Further on, V. Novák describes 12 imitations of Arabic coins, providing the details on the time and the place of their production, as well as the extent of their circulation. These particular items comprise, among other things, imitations of Sāmānid dirhams (e.g., nos. 635, 1218) struck by the Volga Bulghārs.

The author presents the results of metallographic examinations performed with the use of the non-destructive XRFA method for as many as 180 broken pieces of dirhams from the group of those precisely defined. It has proved difficult to interpret the selected material because of the incomplete chronological data. The analy-

sis has indicated that the prevailing amount of the items in the hoard are coins that contain more than 90% of silver, such as dirhams from the Umayyad, 'Abbāsīd, and early Sāmānīd dynasties. In the case of the Sāmānīds, a decrease in the content of silver in the alloy began to appear for the first time in the AH 330s, reaching its lowest level in the latter half of the 10th century under Maṣṣūr ibn Nūḥ and Nūḥ ibn Maṣṣūr (e.g., nos. 770, 720, 852), which would have been linked with the broader crisis of silver coinage in the Middle East. For the Buyid coins, the decrease in the content of silver would begin in the AH 340s, reaching down to various values in a range of 94–65%. Due to the dating of the coins based on the reigns of the Buyid emirs, not the actual years of issue, it may be assumed that the fragments with the lower content of silver would have been struck in the latter half of the 10th century. One of the fragments of the Buyid coins, as mentioned in the analysis, is a fragment of a dirham of the Sāmānīd emir Maṣṣūr ibn Nūḥ (no. 785), with a 79.46% content of silver. On the other hand, the same analysis has demonstrated that the content of silver in the imitations would generally fall within a range of 84–96% (p. 70), although it should be noted that one specimen (no. 603; pp. 68, 70) reached a content value as low as 76.93%. Unfortunately, the fragments under examination have not been arranged in chronological order. Likewise, the volume provides no diagrams showing the contents of silver for all the relevant periods.

V. Novák attempts to deal with the question of how the dirhams of the Kelč hoard had reached Moravia by referring to the research findings of the authors such as T.S. Noonan, R.K. Kovalev and V. Katz. The Arabic silver coinage reached the territories of Northern and Eastern Europe from Transoxiana through Russian, Scandinavian, Slavic, and Khazar merchants, who would only accept payment in dirhams for the goods sold at the markets of Khorasm and Volga Bulgaria. According to R. Turek, the structure of the Kelč hoard (fragments of Islamic coins, ornaments) confirms the view that it had left the Volga basin and reached the territories of Lesser Poland and Silesia via the Ladoga, Novgorod, Kiev, and Volodymyr-Volynsky.

The author also describes the position of the Kelč hoard among some other finds of this particular type from the territory of the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, there are only two finds that could be classified as representing this group: the hoard of Litoměřice, found in 1892,² which reportedly contained fragments of Islamic coins and Oriental ornaments, and the hoard unearthed in Prague (Kanálské zahrady) in 1894 that included Czech and West-European pennies, some jewellery fragments, and only one fragment of a Sāmānīd dirham.³ V. Novák compares the

² E. NOHEJLOVÁ-PRÁTOVÁ (ed.), *Nálezy mincí v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, vol. 2, Praha 1956, no. 1437.

³ ŠTĚPKOVÁ, "Islámské stříbro...", p. 79; EADEM "The Structure of the Finds of the Islamic Silver Coins in the Territory of Czechoslovakia," *Annals of the Náprstek Museum* 3, 1964, p. 115.

Kelč hoard with the hoards found in the territories of Lesser Poland (Małopolska) and Silesia dated to the years 975–1075 (Tab. 6, p. 72) that comprised jewellery as well as Islamic, German, Czech, and Moravian coins.

In conclusion, the present volume has a certain shortcoming in how the author presents the precisely identified coin fragments. The absence of a dynasty-based chronological order in the material makes searches much more strenuous and time-consuming.

However, despite some minor flaws, this study is an important and praiseworthy work. A re-evaluation of such an extensive and dispersed body of numismatic material has certainly been a challenging effort. This monograph is definitely a valuable source in the study of the circulation of Islamic coinage in the territories of Central Europe in the early-medieval period.

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