

## A PURSE OF LATE ROMAN COINS IN TECDE, MALATYA

Duygu Özlem YALÇIN\*

**Keywords:** *Solidus • Tremissis • Late Roman • Coin • Hoard • Melitene*

**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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 SİKKESİ

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Solidus • Tremissis • Geç Roma • Sikke • Define • Melitene*

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

Roma'nın doğu sınırında askeri bir yerleşim olan Melitene, Euphrates üzerinde Armenia içlerine ilerleyen bir geçiş noktası yakınında bulunmasından 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 yayılmıştır. Ancak Tecde Definesi'nin bulunduğu alanda herhangi bir arkeolojik veri ele geçmemiş ve çalışma yapılmamıştır.

İmparatorluk genelinde özellikle MS 5. yüzyıla tarihlenen *solidus* definelere oldukça yaygın olmakla beraber maalesef Türkiye'den söz konusu döneme 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.

\* Duygu Özlem Yalçın (MA), Ankara University, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Archaeology Department, Sub-department of Classical Archaeology, Research Assistant, TR-06100 / ANKARA, e-mail: doyalcin@ankara.edu.tr.

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<sup>1</sup>.

This small collection of seven gold coins was dated to the first three quarters of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. These were all minted in Constantinopolis 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<sup>2</sup>. In consequence, especially in modern Europe, researches on roman hoards and related *corpora* of site finds have

been increasing steadily<sup>3</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>.

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.

<sup>1</sup> 04.05.1985, Find of the Zirai Araştırma İstasyonu Müdürlüğü (Directorate of the Agricultural Research Station) pool construction dig in Tecde District, Malatya. (Museum Inv. nos.: 3131-3137); Research in the museum conducted in between 20-27.03.2013 and 03-14.06 2013 within my PhD dissertation project supervised by Prof. Dr. Z. Çizmeli-Öğün, named "Monetary Circulation Amongst the Roman Eastern Frontier in Light of Numismatic Data", by courtesy of the Governorship of Malatya, Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism with the permission dated to 26.12.2012 and numbered 4286; I would like to sincerely thank to Museum Director Tevhid Kekeç for his permission to publish the material and I am also very grateful both for the helps of Archaeologist Ziya Kılınç and Art Historian Kenan Özdaş.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac 1992; Kennedy 1996; Whittaker 1994; Butcher 2004; Whittaker 2004; Edwell 2008; Hekster - Kaizer 2011; Katsari 2011; Collins et al. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See also: Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire Project ([http://oxrep.classics.ox.ac.uk/coin\\_hoards\\_of\\_the\\_roman\\_empire\\_project/](http://oxrep.classics.ox.ac.uk/coin_hoards_of_the_roman_empire_project/)); Bland 1997, 30 n. 9.

<sup>4</sup> 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"; 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/ IMP.XXXXI'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"; 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/ IMP.XXXXI'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 MVL T 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, 21,30mm, 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 E

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 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE onwards, the advantageous key position of Melitene, on the invasion route from Caucasia 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<sup>5</sup>. This military character did not change much when Rome arrived on the banks of Euphrates in 92 BCE<sup>6</sup>. 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<sup>7</sup>. 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 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>. Further study has shown that a fortified settlement -eight kilometres east of modern Malatya, named Karamıldan, might be an early garrison with its late Hellenistic and Roman surface finds<sup>9</sup>.

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 1<sup>st</sup> century onwards<sup>10</sup>. 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<sup>11</sup> where only the medieval remains of the southwest corner of the *castrum* can be seen now<sup>12</sup>.

The finding spot of Tecde hoard, which is now within the boundaries of the present “Meyvecilik Araştırma Enstitüsü<sup>13</sup> 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<sup>14</sup>). It is known today that through the 5<sup>th</sup> century, populations of these agricultural based settlements increased along with economic activities<sup>15</sup>. 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 3<sup>rd</sup> century when the previous Roman monetary system collapsed, a new monetary system was introduced<sup>16</sup>. 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-

<sup>5</sup> Garstang 1942, 451; Sinclair 1989, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell 2001, 118.

<sup>7</sup> Mitford 1980, 1186.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory 1996, 51; Mitford 1980, 1186.

<sup>9</sup> Sevin – Derin 1989, 437-440

<sup>10</sup> Procop., *Aed.* III.4. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Procop., *Aed.* III.1.16; Mitford 1980, 1186.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory 1996, s. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Research Institute of Fruit Growing.

<sup>14</sup> Satellite image obtained from Google Earth, information of coordinates mostly derived from Malatya Kültür Envanteri 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Perkins-Ward 2008, 321, 328; Ceylan 2009, 46-47.

<sup>16</sup> Michell 1947, 1-9.

formed by Valentinianus I and Valens in 367<sup>17</sup>. Through the end of the century until the mid 5<sup>th</sup>, Barbarian attacks made the *solidi* a crucial medium of war<sup>18</sup>.

The increasing number of gold *solidi* in the 5<sup>th</sup> century also resulted from a series of events following the defeat of Emperor Valens by Goths in 378 after the Battle of Hadrianopolis. Theodosius I tried to reorganize the army by recruiting barbarians who accepted payment in gold only. Soon after, between the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup>, the migrations of Visigoths affected imperial revenues and currency<sup>19</sup>. 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 themselves<sup>20</sup>.

R. Bland investigated more than 300 precious metal coin hoards from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries and arrived at significant conclusions<sup>21</sup>. When he compared the hoarding patterns of the periods in question with the previous century's data<sup>22</sup>, 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 3<sup>rd</sup> century, where gold coins were merely a prestige object rather than a medium of payment<sup>23</sup>.

Although it is known that there was a debasement of *solidus* in the mid 4<sup>th</sup> 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' coinage<sup>24</sup>.

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 gold<sup>25</sup>.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> century unearthed throughout the empire consisting only from gold species<sup>26</sup>. Within this context, there are only 14 hoards save one sample from Turkey<sup>27</sup>, which were deposited between the death of Honorius in 423 and

<sup>17</sup> Harl 1996, 158-159; Bland 1997, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Harl 1996, 175.

<sup>19</sup> Harl 1996, 175.

<sup>20</sup> Harl 1996, 176-177; e.g. Kaiseraugst, Sevso, Vinkovci, Water Newton, Mildenhall Treasures and Hoxne Hoard.

<sup>21</sup> Bland 1997, 29-42.

<sup>22</sup> Bland 1997, 36 Table 2.

<sup>23</sup> Bland 1997, 35.

<sup>24</sup> Morrison et al. 1985, 92-95; Bland 1997, 35-36.

<sup>25</sup> Depeyrot 1983, 86-87; Bland 1997, 37.

<sup>26</sup> RIC X, lxxxix ff.,

<sup>27</sup> Ebcioğlu 1967, 166-177.

the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 Valentianus III's (425-455)<sup>28</sup> coins. Also, due to the short lifetime of the gold coinage from the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards<sup>29</sup> and the fine state of our small collection, 480 CE could comfortably be suggested as the date of burial of the Tecde Hoard.

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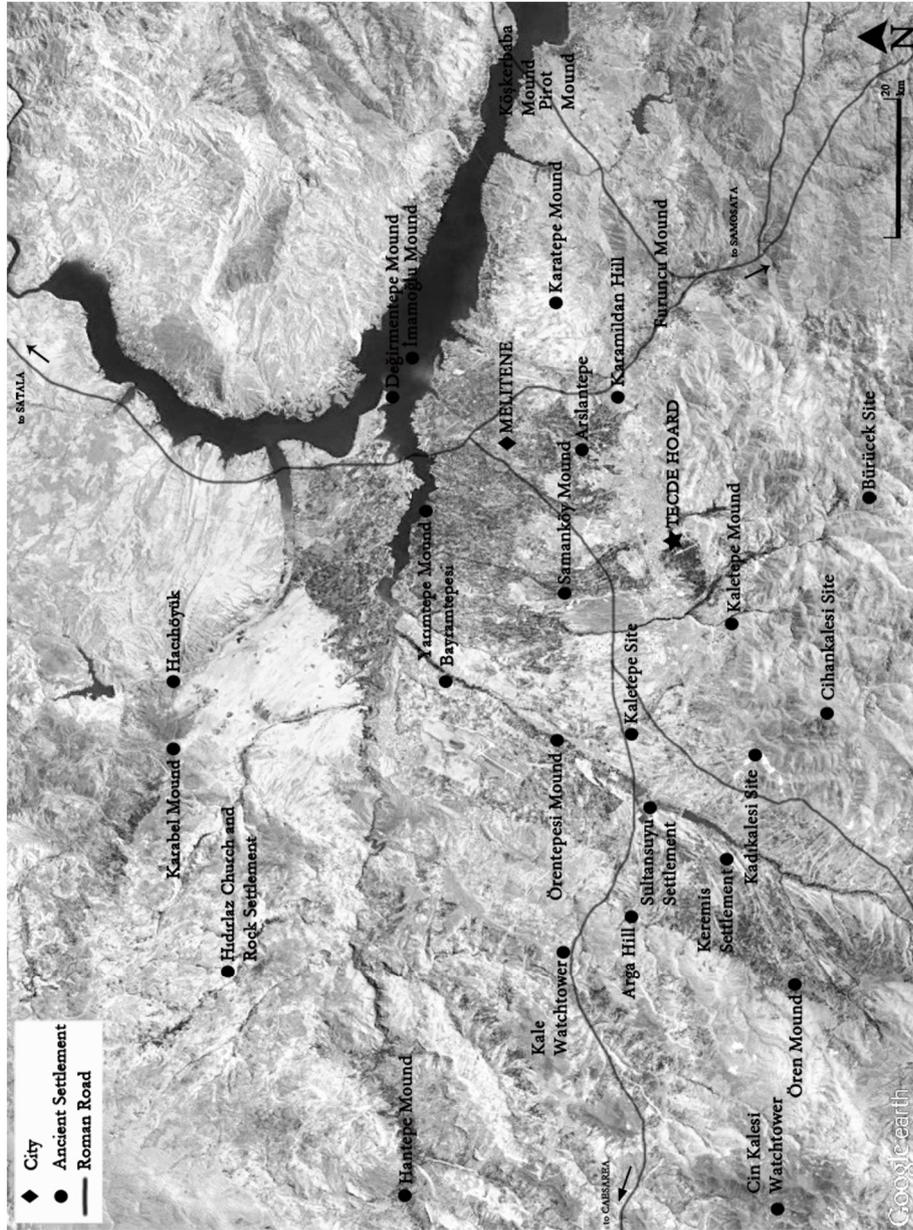
<sup>28</sup> RIC X, lxxxiv.

<sup>29</sup> Bland 1997, 38.

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Map 1 - Late Roman and Byzantine sites in Malatya environs and the find spot of the hoard.

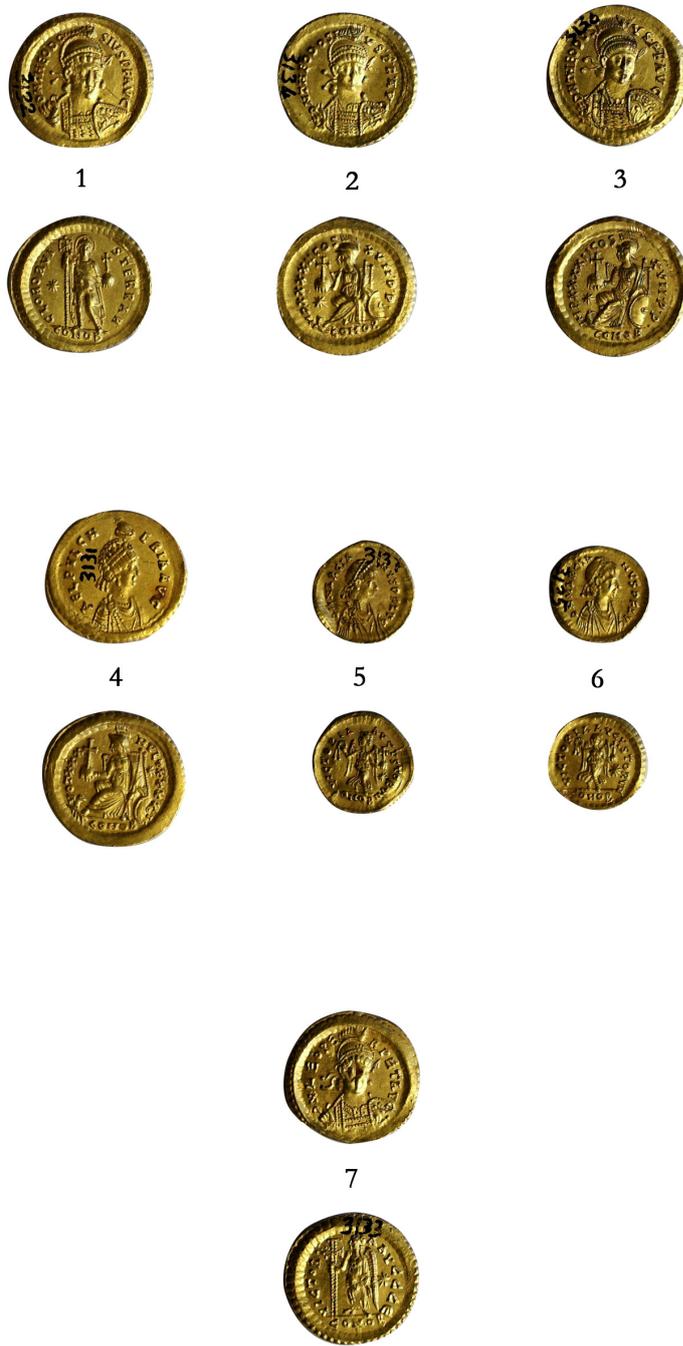


Figure 1