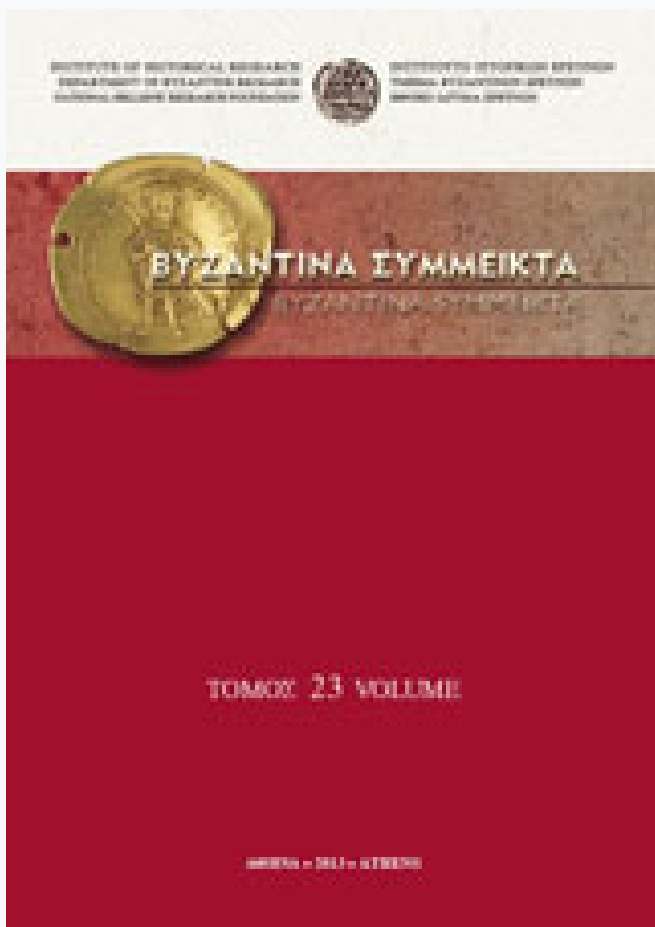


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Book Review: C. STAVRAKOS, Die Byzantinischen Bleisiegel der Sammlung Savvas Kophopoulos. Eine Siegelsammlung auf der Insel Lesbos. I (BYZANTIOS. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization; 1), Turnhout 2010

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C. STAVRAKOS, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel der Sammlung Savvas Kophopoulos. Eine Siegelsammlung auf der Insel Lesbos. I* (BYZANTIOS. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 1). – Brepols, Turnhout 2010. ISBN 978-2-503-53443-5

This book is a catalogue of 112 seals from the private collection of Savvas Kophopoulos. The vast majority of the seals are presented here for the first time, and have no parallel in other published collections. The book includes a three-page introduction in German and then in English on this important collection started by Savvas Kophopoulos, a Lesbos resident, some years ago. The book includes the catalogue itself: for each seal the author provides a picture, a date, a reading and a commentary. Special attention is given to the diameter and the weight of the seals. Conclusions form the last section of the book: fifteen pages written in German and translated into English. The conclusions include an analysis of seals of special interest and a comparison with some 6844 already published seals of the Dumbarton Oaks collection (DO seals I-IV).

On the collection entrusted to him for publication, Ch. Stavrakos notes that he lacked information about the origin of the seals. Only three seals were discovered on the island of Lesbos. Thanks to auction catalogues, it is sometimes possible to follow the seals as they were sold and went from ancient collections to this new collection. Still, this does not provide the original location of the discovery. This absence of information concerning the location of the find creates problems of interpretation of some of the seals.

Ch. Stavrakos also notes that while building his collection, Kophopoulos did not look for particular seals and sometimes purchased groups of seals. So, in this publication, one should not expect to find a focus on a particular region, type of administrative function, or specific saints. There is a diversity of seals in this collection. Some of the seals are in good condition while others are broken, their letters erased and difficult to read.

This book shows that the publication of new seals contributes to a detailed understanding of Byzantine administration and society. In the brief analysis on the collection, Ch. Stavrakos offers an evaluation of those seals that are more interesting. Some of the seals bring new names to light thus contributing to our knowledge of the prosopography of the Byzantine administration. For example, seal 4.1.5 of a certain John Peratikos (early 11th c.), allows us to identify a member of a family which was only known during the Palaeologan period under the name Peratikopoulos. Regarding seal 2.1.I.3 of a *γενικὸς κομμερκιάριος* (dated to the first half of the 9th c.) the first line is not fully visible. Ch. Stavrakos suggests to read Daniel but perhaps Michael should be better. Seal 2.2.5 of a certain Pardos, *πρωτοσπαθάριος* and *στρατηγὸς* is perhaps the seal of the Pardos sent by Constantine IX to replace George Maniakes in 1042.

The collection contributes to our knowledge of an important group of civil servants: the *κομμερκιάριοι*. A new seal of a *κομμερκιάριος* of Hellas is published here for the first time. Seal 2.1.II.1 of Demetrios, *κομμερκιάριος* of Hellas is dated to the end of the 11th c. or even in the early 12th c. That would make him one of the last known *κομμερκιάριοι* of Hellas. The author links the seal to the presence of silk workshops in the region and, more generally to economic prosperity. A doctoral dissertation by F. Montinaro (defended in Paris in 2013 and soon to be published) collects all the information on the *κομμερκιάριοι* available to this day.

Some of the seals help complete lists of civil servants. Seal 2.1.II.5 of Michael, imperial (proto?) *σπαθάριος*, *ἀσηκηῆτις* and judge of Seleukeia (dated to the first half of the 11th c.), is otherwise unknown amongst the judges of the theme of Seleukeia.

This publication also contributes to our knowledge of titles. For example, seal 3.3, belongs to a Theodoros, *χαρτουλάριος* and servant of Hagia Sophia (*δοῦλος τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας*). This is an unusual formulation but the author provides another example for a priest also called *δοῦλος τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας* and examples of servants of a saint.

Finally, Ch. Stavrakos comments on the contribution of the collection to our knowledge of Byzantine iconography. He concurs with other authors that the increasing number of saints depicted on seals from the 10th c. onwards is linked to the compilation of the Synaxarion of Constantinople and the rewriting of saints lives by Symeon Metaphrastes. Twenty four saints are depicted in this collection, and at least six different types of the Theotokos. The author also notes the increasing importance of the Archangel Michael in the seals of the 11th and 12th c. He prefers

to see the presence of the archangel on the seals of patriarch Michael Keroullarios as a sign of his «catholicity»: «Just as the archangel Michael leads the heavenly hosts, in the same manner does the patriarch have precedence over the other churches» (p. 168). I cannot agree with this interpretation. It seems to me that choosing Michael for his seals was simply a sign of his personal ambition or self-assertion. No other patriarch of Constantinople, as far as I know, chose a personal saint for his seals.

An original iconography was chosen for seal 2.1.II.1 belonging to Demetrios, *κομμερχιάρης* of Hellas: Saint Nicholas on one side and the Annunciation on the other. Saint Nicholas is a favorite saint among civil servants, but the other scene is quite rare on seals. The middle of the seal is broken and it is difficult to know if the archangel raises his hand or gives a lily to the Virgin. The author thinks there may be a well depicted behind the Virgin. The story of the Annunciation taking place at the well comes from the apocryphal literature. Annunciations are not frequent on seals but this particular scene of the Virgin at the well, if it is indeed depicted, is exceptional. The only examples of this scene provided by the author are mosaics.

The conclusions end with a statistical evaluation of ecclesiastical seals compared with seals belonging to civil servants and officers. The calculation is done on the 6844 seals of Dumbarton Oaks plus this new collection of 112 seals. The author notes that the proportion of ecclesiastical seals increases under the Comnenian dynasty and argues that the decrease in civil servant seals is due to the transformation of the court during this period and the restriction in the number of civil servants. But another explanation could be offered: many bishops from Asia Minor took refuge in Constantinople. The evaluation is done with the seals of the Zacos collection, mostly constituted of seals coming from the capital.

The book has very comprehensive indices, which include a useful list of parallel seals. The collection of Savvas Kophopoulos has increased since the publication of this book and it is hoped that more seals will be published in the near future.

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