

Rzymskie i wczesnobizantyjskie złoto w barbarzyńskich skarbcach i sakiewkach (IV–VI wiek n.e.)

Roman and Earlybizantine gold in barbarian treasuries and bags (4th to 6th centuries)

Summary

In every epoch the political and economic problem was the flow of gold out the country. In Late Roman Empire sums paid as *annonae foederaticae*, tribute and *donativa* are traceable in the source material. On the other hand, there is much evidence of tribute paid to barbarian tribes. This information has often persuaded historians that these payments were the main reason for the collapse of the Roman economy. We have tried to demonstrate that such a view is too extreme. Above all, one has to remember that Imperial diplomacy did not allow the number of recipients of gold to increase and, more important still, it was able to maintain these payments at an almost constant level for two centuries. We might add that from the mid-5th century onwards, there was a noticeable increase in the gold stocks in the Eastern Empire's treasury.

The purposes of the tributes varied depending on time and political circumstances. An analysis of the sources shows that payments of imperial gold usually involved:

- the purchase of a military alliance with some barbarian leader
- the protection of the state from barbarian invasions
- the support of pro-Roman pretenders to barbarian thrones
- the buying off of prisoners of war

Tributes were usually paid out at the imperial court where representatives of barbarian leaders had come to collect them. The entire operation was directed by the *comes sacrarum largitionum*. These payments are described in the sources as *stipendium*, which were remitted annually to the emperor's *foederati*. The provenance of the recipients of Roman gold shows clearly from which direction Rome expected the greatest threats.

In the 5th century, it were the Huns who were paid the largest sums of imperial gold. Numerous tributes were paid to the Gothic tribes, also in the second half of the 5th century. During the 5th century lavish pay-outs in gold were other tribes. Above all we should keep in mind the massive contributions paid to the Visigoths in the first years of this century. From the mid-5th century onwards, tributes were paid from the treasury of the Eastern Empire. In Zeno's time, large quantities of gold were put aside as *donativa* for the Isaurians. In the 6th century, almost all the outgoing gold found its way to Persian.

In the 560s, new "receivers" of Byzantine gold appear on the scene, in areas bordering on the Black Sea and later in the Danube valley. In the history of the Byzantine Empire the chapter of struggles with the Avars now opens. These instances of the imperial wealth at the close of the 5th and beginning of the 6th centuries demonstrate that the tributes paid out to the barbarians did not directly threaten the financial state of the Empire. Silent witnesses of these contributions and the same time lingering traces of the stormy period of tribal migrations in the 5th and 6th centuries are the hoards of *solidi* still found occasionally in Central and Northern Europe. The finds of gold coins in areas to the north of the Danube and east of the Elbe quite clear that these *solidi* were almost all issued in the 5th century and the first half of the 6th – the last issues of Justinian's rule. The majority of finds have been

made in Scandinavia and the southern Baltic coast, indeed 50 of the 70 hoards were discovered in this area. The spread of gold coins from the Danube to Scandinavia came about in stages. The first one was the transport of the gold from the imperial treasury to the seats of the Hun or Gothic rulers. From there, in the second stage, many gold coins became scattered about the entire *Barbaricum* area as result of trading or tribal connections. It must be stressed here that only part of the *solidi* received from the Romans were accepted in inter-tribal dealings. Most of the coins were melted down, and the gold later used in the production of jewellery.