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THE GOLDEN SEAL OF STROIMIR

Abstract: The golden seal of Stroimir, recently acquired by Historical Museum of Serbia, not bearing the official rank of his owner, could belong, either to a prominent and rich person unknown from other sources, or to the well-known member of the ruling family of Serbia from the second half of the 9th century – Stroimir.

Key words: Stroimir, Serbia, Bulgaria, Patriarchal cross, Byzantines seals.

The Historical Museum of Serbia recently acquired a Byzantine-styled golden seal.¹ It is not known where or when this seal was found. The Auction house did not provide this information.

The weight of the seal is 15.46 g, height 194 mm, and diameter 135 mm. It is made of solid gold.² The very small portion on the edge of the stamp-field is missing, but otherwise the degree of preservation is excellent. The shape of the seal is conical, with the small ring at the top. This kind of seal its owner held with him – most probably around neck or wrist –, and it served for the sealing of documents in wax. It is the only one golden Byzantine-styled seal of this kind. This peculiarity is easy to explain. Firstly, the owner of this kind of seal should be a rich and prominent person, what in turn decreases the number of such seals in circulation. Secondly, for the heir (son, brother, cousin) it was not of any use, since it had purpose only for his owner, and a heir could, most probably, use it as a material to melt, and to create a new one, which would bear his name. This could explain the rarity of this kind of seals.

¹ The seal appeared on the Auction, held in München on July 11 2006 (Gorny & Mosch, Maximiliansplatz 20). Prof. Đorđe Janković from Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, warned, on 9 July 2006, the authorities of Serbia about the appearance of this seal on the market, and urged for immediate action. Serbian government acted adequately and bought the seal for the Historical Museum of Serbia.

² According to an unofficial report from the Institute of Nuclear Physics, Vinča.

Description

There is a Patriarchal cross on one step is in the center of the seal. There is also a transversal bar below the top of the Cross. Endings of the bar are thick with wide edges. The step, too, is of the same appearance in shape as the upper transversal bar. The border of dots around the Patriarchal Cross is not closed at the step. Around the Patriarchal cross is a circular inscription:

+ <u>KE</u>	+ Κ(ύρι)ε
BOIΘ.	βοίθ(ει)
CTPOHMIP:	Στροήμιρ.

Border of dots around the inscription. The Greek orthography of the Serbian personal name Stroimir is preserved in *De administrando imperio* (*DAI*) – Στροήμηρος.³

Lettering

The letters H, C, E, resemble letters on the seal of *Epiphanius, imp. Spatharios and strategos of Hellas*, dated in the 9th century.⁴ The letters C, T, H, are very close to those on the seal of *George, imp. Spatharokandidatos and strategos of the Peloponnesos*, dated to the 9th century.⁵ An identical Θ and especially typical K is to be found on the seal of *Constantine imp. Protospatharios and strategos of Sicily* (9th century). The same seal of Constantine has Patriarchal cross very similar to the one on the seal of Stroimir.⁶ Furthermore, the inscription: Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τῷ σο δούλ(ῳ) runs around the Patriarchal cross, similar to the Stroimir's seal. Even the small cross, which marks the beginnings of the circular inscription, is identical with the cross on Stroimir's seal. On the seal of *Demetrios abydikos of Thessalonica* (9th century), almost all letters strikingly resemble to the same letters on Stroimir's seal: K, P, I, T, Θ, C.⁷ Another seal of *strategos* of Thrace, published by

³ *Codex parisinus gr. 2009*, f. 95v and f. 96v. This orthography is at least from 1070s, if it was not transcribed letter by letter from an earlier manuscript of the *DAI*.

⁴ *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, ed. J. Nesbitt – N. Oikonomides, I – V, Washington D. C. 1991 – 1998, II, N° 8.42 (= *DO Seals*).

⁵ *DO Seals II*, 22.25.

⁶ *DO Seals I*, 5.11.

⁷ *DO Seals I*, 18.1.

Zacos-Veglery, also has identical letters: K, O, C, M, P, T.⁸ The same stands for the letters K, I, T, C, on the seal of *Theoktisos imp. Kandidatos and protonotarios of the Thrakesioi* (9th/10th centuries), and especially for the letter *kappa*.⁹ The characteristically open *beta* on Stroimir's seal indicates the date after the 850s.¹⁰ The same stands for *kappa* with shorten arms, being both separated from the vertical bar of the letter *kappa*.

The overall impression of lettering, points that Stroimir's seal belongs to the second half of the 9th century.

Patriarchal cross

There are many specimens of Byzantine seals with the image of Patriarchal cross. They differ from each other in the shape of endings – thick or thin – as well as to the regard of transverse bars – at the peak or below the peak of the Cross, and in the numbers of the steps. Usually, this type of cross has three or four steps. Similar to that on the Stroimir's seal are, for instance, those preserved on the four seals of *Constantine, imp. Protospatharios and strategos of Sicily* (9th/10th century),¹¹ but not to the one inscribed on the seal of *Basil imp. Strator and archon of Thessalonica* (9th/10th centuries) – which, eventually, could exclude the date of Stroimir's seal after the end of the 9th century.¹² The seal of *Marinos patrikios, imp. Protospatharios, and strategos of Thessalonica* (9th/10th centuries) has, not only the identical Patriarchal cross as Stroimir's seal does, but also the identical letters such as: T, P, K, I, C, as well as an identical small cross which marks the beginnings of the reading.¹³ From the 9th century is the seal of *Basil (?) imp. Strator and archon of Christoupolis*, with the same Patriarchal cross as on Stroimir's seal.¹⁴ In the case of Stroimir's seal, there is only one step at the bottom of the Cross, similar to the seal of *Basil imp. Strator and archon of Thessalonica* (dated in the 9th/10th centuries).¹⁵

The analysis of the Patriarchal cross on Stroimir's seal also showed up that this seal is most probably from the second half of the 9th century.

⁸ *Byzantine Lead Seals I–III*, ed. G. Zacos – A. Veglery, Basel 1972, N° 2080. This seal is dated in the first half of the 9th century.

⁹ *DO Seals III*, 2.37.

¹⁰ See commentary on N° 27.1 in *DO Seals II*, p. 82.

¹¹ *DO Seals I*, N° 5.11 – 14.

¹² *DO Seals I*, N° 18.12. See, also, *DO Seals I*, N° 18.47, *Theoktistos kommerkiarios of Thessalonica*, dated in the 10th century.

¹³ *DO Seals I*, N° 18.69.

¹⁴ *DO Seals I*, N° 39.2.

¹⁵ *DO Seals I*, N° 18.12.

Some peculiarities

The usual invocative formula on Byzantine lead seals is: Κύριε βοήθει τῷ σῷ δούλῳ. Most often, it is abbreviated in cruciform monogram ΚΘΗ, with the words τῷ | σῷ in the upper corners, and δού | λῳ in the lower corners. In the cases when this invocative formula is inscribed circularly, the craftsman usually write this formula in abbreviated form: either κε βοήθη,¹⁶ κε βοθ,¹⁷ κε βο¹⁸ or κε βοήθ.¹⁹ There is no firmly established pattern to the regard of this kind of abbreviation. That, what is peculiar in the case of Stroimir's seal, is *iota* instead of *ita* in the word βοήθει. A craftsman wrote κε βοιθ, and marked the end of the word with the dot, which, most probably, has to be regarded as the abbreviation for the missing letters at the end of the word (η or ει). The replacement *ita/iota* in this formula is quite unusual, and could be a signal that this seal was not struck in Byzantium, but in the country where Stroimir lived.²⁰ Exactly the same mistake, *iota* instead of *ita* in the word βοήθει (βοίθει), is made on the seal of *Isaac, imp. protospatharios and strategos of Drougobitia* (10th/11th centuries).²¹ There is another seal of the same person, *Isaac, imp. protospatharios and strategos of Thrace*, with the same mistake.²² One should note that the same mistake occurs in the regions populated by Slavs (Drougobitia, Thrace and Bulgaria). This could be rendered as the typical Slav pronunciation and spelling of the Greek letter *ita* and, consequently, its replacement with *iota*. In other words, it could mean that a craftsman of Stroimir seal was not a Greek.

In addition, there are no abbreviations for τῷ σῷ δούλῳ or at least for τῷ, which usually stands in proper grammatical expression on Byzantine seals. On the other side, a craftsman had limited options to utilize proper grammar, since the size of the seal is too small to inscribe even the abbreviated forms of expected words. Therefore, the replacement of *ita* with *iota*, could also appear as the consequence of sparing the space. Since a craftsman deliberately made grammatical errors, to spare the space and preserve the equal distance from letters and their equal size (what he actually mastered superbly), which could

¹⁶ E. g. *DO Seals II*, Nos 27.1 (9th/10th centuries) 38.2 (10th century).

¹⁷ E. g. *DO Seals II*, No 33.1 (9th/10th centuries).

¹⁸ E. g. *DO Seals II*, No 31.2 (11th century).

¹⁹ E. g. *DO Seals II*, No 40.3 (10th century).

²⁰ The seal of *Nicholas imp. hypodiakonos and skeuophylax of St Thomas*, (10th century), has a similar abbreviation as Stroimir's seal, ΚΕ ΒΟΗΘΙ, where the last letter is *iota* instead of *ita* or *epsilon* and *iota* (ει); cf. *DO Seals V*, No 91.

²¹ I. Iordanov, *Pecātite ot strategiata v Preslav (971 – 1088)*, Sofia 1993, No 220 – 221, fig. 221a, T. 47.

²² *Ibid.* No 234, fig. 234, T. 23.

not be expected if this seal was struck in Byzantium by a Greek craftsman, we can assume that this seal was struck outside Byzantium. It is also probable that a craftsman was not familiar with Greek entirely, and maybe not being Christian himself, since he made peculiar mistake in the invocative formula.

One can have an impression that a craftsman followed the idea to create nice piece of work, neglecting the proper Greek expression on the inscription.

The owner of the seal

This seal, not bearing the official rank of his owner, could belong, either to a prominent and rich person unknown from other sources, or to the well-known member of the ruling family of Serbia from the second half of the 9th century – Stroimir. This Stroimir is known from Constantine Porphyrogenitus' the *DAI*. Porphyrogenitus writes that *archon* of the Serbs, Moutimir, had two brothers – Stroimir and Goinik. Their father, Vlastimir, defended Serbia against Bulgarian attacks during the three years. The ruler of Bulgaria at that time was Presiam (836 – 852). After father's death, the sons inherited the rule in Serbia, but very soon, the heir of Presiam, Boris, attacked Serbia, *wishing to avenge the defeat of his father Presiam*. This sequence of events points out that Moutimir and his brothers began to rule Serbia before 852, i. e., before Boris became the *khan* of Bulgaria. According to Porphyrogenitus' narrative, the previous war was not over by the deaths of Vlastimir and Presiam, respectively. Therefore, we assume that this war appeared to be waged around 853/54. After the peace agreement, settled near the frontier town of Ras (in the vicinity of modern town of Novi Pazar), Moutimir ruled together with his two brothers for a short span of time, when he had decided to be sole ruler and expelled his brothers in Bulgaria. Stroimir had a son Klonimir, to whom Boris gave a Bulgarian wife. Of him was begotten Tzaslav. On the other side, Moutimir kept Peter, the son of Goinik, in Serbia. Later on, after Moutimir's death, Klonimir, with Bulgarian help, tried to take rule in Serbia, but the *archon* of Serbia, Peter, defeated and killed him.²³

The narrative preserved by Constantine Porphyrogenitus is most probably a shortened version of much extensive account. The Emperor did not

²³ *Constantine Porphyrogenitus De administrando imperio*, ed. R.J.H. Jenkins – Gy. Moravcsik, Washington D.C. 1967, 32.38 – 78. There is dispute about the date of this war and opinions varied that it occurred from 854 – 860, 873, or even after 880. See, *Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije II*, prir. B. Ferjančić, Beograd 1959, 51, n. 163; Lj. Maksimović, *O vremenu pohoda bugarskog kneza na Srbiju*, ZFF 14/1 (1979) 75; T. Živković, *Južni Sloveni pod vizantijskom vlašću*, Beograd 2002, 392 – 393; Idem, *Portreti srpskih vladara (IX – XII)*, Beograd 2006, 22 – 23 (Živković, *Portreti*).

allow himself to explain complicated political circumstances, which led Bulgarian or Serbian rulers to theirs politically, or militarily actions. In that case, he would be forced to reveal the relations between Byzantium and Bulgaria, which were, until 866, very unfavorable for Byzantium. He preferred to stay quite on this topic, since he underlined several times in the *DAI* that Bulgarian were always in servitude and submission to the Byzantium.²⁴ It seems that Moutimir accepted Boris as his *senior* and that, in the following years, the Byzantines were looking to reverse political orientation of Serbia, and to be as it was during the rule of Vlastimir, Moutimir's father. Therefore, it is very probable that diplomatic activities of Byzantines provoked Moutimir to expel his brothers – who were, most probably, the objects of Byzantine diplomacy. Since he acknowledged Boris as his senior, it is quite understandable why he sent his brothers in Bulgaria. There they were kept as the hostages. To protect himself, Moutimir held Peter, the son of Goinik, at his court in Serbia.²⁵

Therefore, after 855/56, Stroimir lived in Bulgaria. There his son took a Bulgarian wife. The wife of Klonimir should not be of common stock, since Boris himself made a choice of the bride. It seems that members of the Serbian ruling family were treated well in Bulgaria, with the all respects to their rang and nobility. Stroimir was held, almost certainly, in the capital of Bulgaria, Pliska.²⁶ Only after 893, Simeon transferred capital in Preslav.

The seal of Stroimir, which served as his signature for everyday purposes, and not bearing any rank or title, is to be expected if belonged to Moutimir's brother, Stroimir. After his expulsion, he eventually lost his title of *zupan*, the usual rank of the members of the ruling family in Serbia (in the 12th century). He could not be called *zupan* in Bulgaria. On the other side, the luxurious appearance of the seal points to the conclusion that its owner was a prominent and a rich man. Since we know that his son was married by the will and choice of Bulgarian *khan*, it seems that family was in fact respected and most probably rich enough to distinguish themselves with some luxurious objects. The absence of the rank or title on the seal confirms the idea that the seal belonged to Stroimir, Moutimir's brother. It is to be expected for a person stripped of his ruling rights. Since he died, most probably, before 896, when his son Klonimir tried to take the throne in Serbia, Stroimir's seal should be dated between 855/56 and 896.²⁷

²⁴ *DAI*, 32.29 – 30; 32.35 – 38.

²⁵ The extensive explanation of these political circumstances is given in, Živković, *Portreti*, 21 – 26.

²⁶ However, if Stroimir's seal belongs to Stroimir of Serbia, than one is to expect that it should be from Pliska.

²⁷ The appearance of the Patriarchal cross on the seal, does not necessarily mean that owner of the seal was a Christian. It could be was just a pattern of that time.

Тибор ЖИВКОВИЋ

СТРОЈИМИРОВ ЗЛАТНИ ПЕЧАТ

Резиме

Златни купасти печат са алком на врху, са натписом на грчком: *Боже помози Стројимиру*, откупљен је на аукцији у Минхену од аукцијске куће Gorny & Mosch, Maximiliansplatz 20, 11. августа 2006. године. Печат се данас налази у Историјском Музеју Србије.

Печат је висине 194 мм, пречника 135 мм. Тежина је 15.46 гр. Постоји мало оштећење испод кружног натписа које не утиче на иначе одличну очуваност печата. Овакав печат је служио за свакодневне потребе власника, односно, уместо његовог потписа. Чињеница да се овим печатом могао служити само његов власник, донекле објашњава због чега су овакви печати ретки. С друге стране наследници су могли да искористе материјал за израду свог печата или у друге сврхе.

На основу анализе слова и поређењем са оним која се могу наћи на византијским печатима који су прецизније датирани, може се закључити да печат потиче из друге половине IX века. Истоветан закључак се намеће анализом крста који се налази у средини печатног поља.

Власник овог печата није обављао никакву јавну функцију. Једноставан натпис упућује да је у питању печат за приватну, свакодневну, употребу. Оно што је упадљиво, јесте да је направљен од злата, што, последично, његовог власника ставља међу веома угледне људе свога времена. Будући да је познато према Спису о народима Константина Порфирогенита, да је млађи брат српског архонта Мутимира, Стројимир, живео у Бугарској после изгона из Србије, могло би се најпре помислити да је овај печат припадао управо овом Стројимиру.