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A LATE-ROMAN SOLIDUS FOUND AT PREŁUKI (THE UPPER SAN RIVER BASIN)¹

Abstract: The aim of the article is to publish and discuss the late Roman solidus of Theodosius II (408-450), found in 2018 in the vicinity of the village of Prełuki, Komańcza commune, Sanok County. The coin was found randomly by treasure hunters, eventually recovered and donated to the Historical Museum of Sanok by Robert Fedyk. It is the second find of a late Roman solidus in the Upper San River basin. Several years ago a solidus of Valentinian III (425-455) had been found in Prusiek, Sanok County. Both coins belong to the early Migration Period finds horizon in this area. This consists of few bronze buckles, a sword, and fragments of a Hunnic cauldron finds. In all likelihood, the solidi found their way into the Upper San River basin as a consequence of the Hunnic-Germanic relations. They should be also treated as a part of the latest wave of Roman coins arriving in the present Lesser Poland area in the 5th century AD.

Keywords: Solidus, Theodosius II, Prełuki, Sanok County, Migration Period

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, one of the authors of the present text published an article (co-authored by E. Pohorska-Kleja) on the discovery of a solidus of the Western Roman emperor Valentinian III (425-455) at Prusiek (Sanok County) (Bodzek, Pohorska-Kleja 2011) (Fig. 1: 1). Quite recently, another Late-Roman gold coin has been found in the San River basin (Fig. 1: 2), namely a solidus of the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II (408-450), unearthed randomly at Prełuki (Komańcza commune, Sanok County) in June 2018.² The coin was found by some unidentified treasure hunters before it eventually reached one of the authors of the present article

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² The find has already been noted in literature (Bulas, Kotowicz 2018, 210, n. 2; Bulas 2019).





Fig. 1. Roman solidi in the Upper San River basin:

- 1 – Prusiek, Sanok County, Valentinian III (425-455), Milan ca. 430-455, plaster cast;
 2 – Prełuki, Sanok County, Theodosius II (408-450), Constantinople, 424-425, gold
 (1 – photo J. Bodzek jun.; 2 – photo D. Szuwalski)

Robert Fedyk (intermediately, along with some rudimentary details on the place and circumstances of the find), who passed it over to the Historical Museum in Sanok. According to the information obtained, the coin was found to the north of the village Prełuki, on the left bank of the Oslawa River, on the steep forested hillside of Sokolisko (Fig. 2: 1), ca. 487 m above sea level, within the area of the surveying plot 15/1 (Fig. 2: 2). No other artefacts accompanied the coin find in question, while the site itself (if this is the actual place) would theoretically rule out the coin's relation to any known settlement site (but see commentary below).

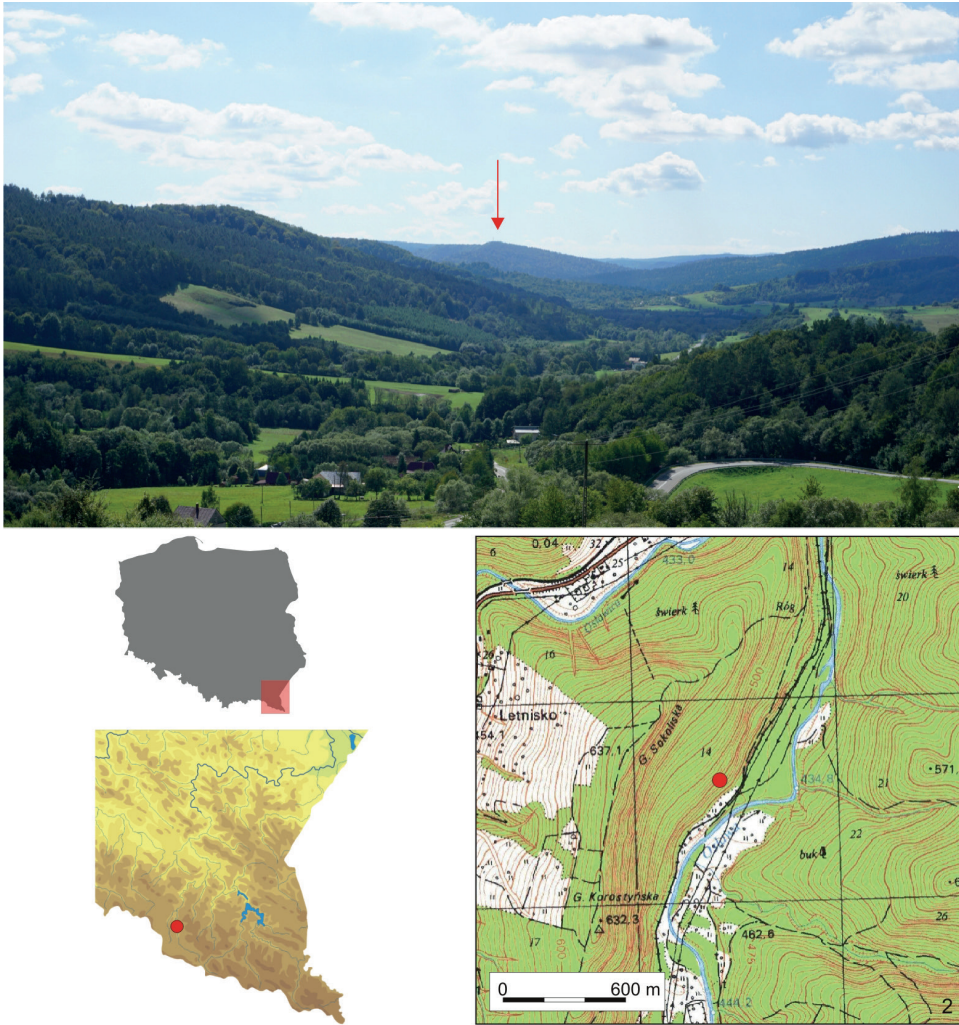


Fig. 2. Preluki, Sanok County, Subcarpathian Voivodeship: 1 – view of the Oslawa valley (from the north) and the hill Sokolisko (in the central part of the further background, indicated with an arrow); the coin was unearthed on the hillside; 2 – approximate location of the coin find site (photo and text by P. N. Kotowicz)

DESCRIPTION

The coin (cf. Cat.1; Fig. 1:2) represents the issue GLOR ORVIS TERRAR (Kent 1994, no. 232), minted in Constantinople and datable to the years 424-425 AD. The piece found at Prełuki was struck by the eight officina. This very short-lived issue of solidi was likely connected with providing the funds for a campaign in Italy aimed at installing Valentinian III on the throne of the Western Roman Empire. Solidi of this type were also minted, in larger amounts, in Thessalonica, but over a slightly longer period, in the years 424-430 AD (Kent 1994, 86). To date, the coin found at Prełuki has been the only specimen of the GLOR ORVIS TERRAR solidus type as recorded for not only southern Poland, but also among the coin finds from the whole of Poland.

Generally speaking, the solidus found at Prełuki is a fairly well preserved coin. It is only slightly worn out, both on the obverse and the reverse. As for the obverse, details of the emperor's hair and face are obliterated. The reverse is worn out even less, perhaps due to a slightly concave surface. The coin is pierced, which would have pointed to its temporary extra-monetary usage as a piece of jewellery or a token of prestige. According to the observations made by M. Biborski, there are no traces of wear and tear inside the coin hole, which might suggest that the period of the solidus' use in its non-monetary function was relatively short-lived. The hole, 2 mm in diameter, has an uneven surface inside. Its situation on the obverse coincides with the axis of the emperor's bust, in its lower part (it could be assumed that even slightly below), whereas on the reverse, it is also at the axis of the image, but above the ruler's head. Such a location of this aperture may suggest that the reverse was considered to have been the principal side of this coin after the piercing. Interestingly, this is the first recorded find of a Late-Roman (5th-century) pierced solidus from the Polish Carpathians or, more broadly, from the south of Poland. Unlike the gold coins dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries as found in southern Poland, 5th-century pierced solidi have never been recorded in this region before. An analysis conducted by the Laboratory for Archaeometallurgy and Historical Artefacts Restoration (Institute of Archaeology, Jagiellonian University) has shown that the hole was most probably made in Antiquity. In any case, modern origin of the perforation has been precluded (cf. Biborski, Biborski in this volume).³

³ The authors of the article would like to thank Dr hab. Marcin Biborski and mgr Mateusz Biborski for the performance of the above analysis.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE COIN'S ARRIVAL

It is not easy to determine how long the coin from Prełuki may have remained in circulation. A comparison to some much better preserved pieces from the hoard of Witów (cf. Bodzek 2009, fig. 4.8-11) seems to point out that it may have been used for a certain period after its mintage, either in monetary or non-monetary use. The lack of an archaeological context for this coin find makes it difficult to resolve this question.

Compared with the other Late-Roman solidi found in the south of Poland, the recent find from Prełuki is different on one important element. A vast majority of the remaining pieces were minted no earlier than ca. 430 AD, with some of them produced certainly after the year 440 AD (cf. Bodzek 2009, 166, Table IV). Thus, they must have reached the territory of the present-day southern Poland after ca. 430 AD at the earliest, but at least some of them even later. The solidus from Prełuki was produced in the years 424-425 AD, i.e., several years earlier than the other Late-Roman gold pieces ever found in southern Poland. The same point would also apply to the coin finds from the Carpathian region. To date, the sole comparable Late-Roman gold coin (in terms of the dates of issue) is a solidus of Valentinian III produced by the mint of Rome in the years 425-426 and deposited as part of the Witów Hoard (Piotrowicz 1936, 88-90; Bodzek 2009, 189, no. 34.4). In the latter case, the coin was deposited at least twenty or so years after being minted, as can be seen from the evidence of the other coins from the same hoard struck in the name of Theodosius II in the years 441-450 AD. The aforementioned piercing (indicative of the non-monetary function of the piece from Prełuki) as well as the slight wear and tear seem to point to the fact that the recently found coin would have been placed in the ground at least a dozen or so (or more) years after being issued. Such a dating for the coin find of Prełuki is validated through the presence of two Constantinopolitan solidi of the GLOR ORVIS TERRAR type in the hoard of Biňa, okres Nové Zámky, in Slovakia (Kolníková 1968, Pl. II nos. 14-15). This deposit can be dated on the basis of the presence of later coins in the names of Theodosius II and Valentinian III to the early years of the second half of the 5th century (Kolníková 1968, 12). It is worth adding that the same hoard included some imitation solidi of the type in question (Kolníková 1968, 12, 43, nos. 107-108).

The finds recorded thus far would tend to point to the wave of Late-Roman gold coins arriving in the present-day southern Poland in the 450s or perhaps later, during the third quarter of the 5th century (cf. Bodzek 2009, 173-175; Bodzek 2016, 84). This particular time horizon encompasses several finds. From the territory of the Polish Carpathians, we have known of the above-mentioned gold solidus in the name of Valentinian III from Prusiek (Godłowski 1995, 162; Madyda-Legutko 1995, 21, no. 587; Bodzek, Pohorska-Kleja 2011) and a solidus

in the name of Marcian (450-457) from Sławęcín, Jasło County (Skowronek 1965 – as Biecz; Skowronek, Ślaski 1966, 203-204; Bodzek 2009, 187, no. 28). From the Upper Vistula River basin area, let us mention the Witów Hoard which comprised the solidi of Valentinian III and Theodosius II (Piotrowicz 1936, 88-90; Kunisz 1985, no. 307; Kaczanowski, Margos 2002, no. 848; Bodzek 2009, 89, no. 34), a tremissis of Valentinian III found at Szczurowa, Brzesko County (Morawiecki 1984, 23-24, fig. 20; Kunisz 1985, no. 343; Kaczanowski, Margos 2002, no. 760; Bodzek 2009, 188, no. 30), and an imitative solidus of Theodosius II unearthed in the environs of Tarnów, Tarnów County (cf. Piotrowicz 1936, 90-91; Bodzek 2009, 188-189, no. 33; Bodzek 2016). In turn, from the area of the so-called Masłomęcz Group, i.e., from the territory farther to the north-east, we have the finds of solidi in the names of Arcadius and Theodosius II, which were found near Metelin, Hrubieszów County, possibly as part of some hoard (Przybysławski 1907, 606; Bodzek 1996, 142-145; Bursche 1996, 90; 1998, 236-238, no. 13; Bodzek 2009, 183-184, no. 16.1-2) and a single solidus in the name of the latter emperor, found at Opaka, Lubaczów County (Bodzek 2009, 184, no. 18; Piotrowski, Dąbrowski 2009). Along with those gold coins, we should also consider the same timeline horizon for the bronze coins of Honorius (395-423) and Valentinian III, found at Biecz, Biecz County (Kunisz 1985, no. 7 III-IV; Madyda-Legutko 1995, nos. 31-32; Bodzek 2009, 179, no. 1.1-2).⁴ For Silesia, we have one attested find of a solidus in the name of Valentinian III from Górzec, Strzelin commune (Konik 1965, 140, no. 1; Ciolek 2008, 317, no. II/3). We could also add that apparently the latest coins (in terms of their mintage dates) among the above-mentioned finds are a solidus of Marcian found at Sławęcín and an imitation solidus in the name of Theodosius II from Tarnów. Considering the state of their preservation or, more precisely, the condition of their actual wear and tear, those coins could not have been deposited in the ground later than several or a dozen or so years after their issue. This would concern both the solidus of Marcian, now in the collection of the Regional Museum of Biecz and thus available for examination, and the lost imitation piece found near Tarnów, whose very good condition of preservation was recorded in a publication by Ludwik Piotrowicz (Piotrowicz 1936, 91; cf. Bodzek, 2016, 82). Among the other coin finds mentioned here, very well preserved pieces are also the solidi which formed part of the hoard of Witów as well as a solidus of Theodosius II from Opaka (cf. Piotrowicz 1936, 89; Piotrowski, Dąbrowski 2009, 207, respectively). This particular dating (the third quarter of the 5th century AD) of the inflow horizon for Late-Roman coins arriving in the territory of the modern-day southern Poland is also confirmed by the absence, in the same territorial range, of any finds of 5th-century coins struck

⁴ The coins originally held in the collection of the Regional Museum of Biecz were stolen on the night of 24/25 June 1975 and have remained missing to this day.

in the Western or Eastern Roman Empire, but later (younger) than Marcian's reign (cf. Bodzek 2009, 173; Bodzek 2016, 84). The following, in terms of their dates of issue, group of coin finds from the area under consideration is separated from the above-named horizon by about 70 years. It is represented by coins in the name of Justinian I (527-565), mostly (but not exclusively) representing bronze issues, which would begin the inflow of Early-Byzantine coinage into the area in question (Salamon 2004; Wołoszyn 2005; 2008; 2009; Wołoszyn, Salamon 2006; Bodzek et al. 2017). This circumstance points to an interruption in the inflow of Late-Roman coinage during the third quarter of the 5th century into the present-day southern Poland, a situation which finds confirmation in the other archaeological material from the same area (cf. Maćzyńska 1999; 2005). Traces of the inflow of a wave of Western and Eastern Roman solidi during the first several or more than ten years after the mid-5th century can also be found in some other regions of Central- and Northern-European Barbaricum in the form of the hoards from Biňa in Slovakia (Kolníková 1968; Kolníková, Pieta 2009), Trąbki Małe I and II in Pomerania (Ciołek 2001, nos. 302-303), and Stora Brunneby on the island of Öland (Fischer et al. 2011). The situation is different, of course, in the lands/regions adjacent to southern Poland. From the territory of central (very few instances) and northern (numerous pieces) Poland as well as from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, we have known of coin finds including some solidi produced in the latter half of the 5th or even during the 6th century (cf. Bursche 1998, 51-61, 254-; 2003; 2008; Mielczarek 2004, 247-250; Ciołek 2002; 2003; Militký 2004, 516, Tab. 5, Map 6; 2009; Bodzek 2009, 174-175; Prohászka 2009). However, with all the relevant coin finds from Lesser Poland taken into account, it could be assumed that the solidus found at Prełuki could have reached the San River basin no later than the third quarter of the 5th century as part of the above-mentioned inflow horizon of Late-Roman gold or possibly also bronze coinage.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF THE COIN FIND

Even though we do not know a closer archaeological context of the coin find from Prełuki, we could venture to formulate several general conclusions on this 5th-century Roman coin found in the Upper San River basin or even in a wider perspective of the Polish section of the Carpathian range and the overall regional culture-related situation in the 5th century. In one of the previous publications concerned with 5th-century coins found in the south of Poland, the authors refer to a certain isolated location of the solidus of Valentinian III from Prusiek (Bodzek, Pohorska-Kleja 2011, 159). The discovery at Prełuki (Theodosius II's

coin) has changed this perspective. These two recorded coin finds come from the area of the left-bank Upper San River basin. The distance between the two sites is around 23 km long (in a straight line). With all the proportions in relation to the aforementioned very few finds of 5th-century coins in southern Poland considered, it could be assumed that there exists a conglomeration of such coin finds in the Upper San River basin. Moreover, such coin finds would attest to a certain significance of this region during the early phase of the Migration Period. This could be corroborated to a certain extent also by some other archaeological material (Fig. 3). From the village Sanoczek, situated not very far from Prusiek, we have got one reported find of a bronze buckle dating to the first half of the 5th century AD (Bodzek, Pohorska-Kleja 2011, 156, Pl. 1.2; Bulas 2019, fig. 3.2). These two locations are about 1 km apart. The buckle can be classified as the type H 25-28, according to the classification of R. Madyda-Legutko (Madyda-Legutko 1986, 67-68). Another buckle, also apparently representing the group H and most probably datable to the phase C3-D has been found at Balnica, Sanok County (Bulas 2019, fig. 3.1). Another, hitherto unpublished, find of a buckle of the type H27 or H28 took place randomly near Międzybrodzie, Sanok County,⁵ and the most recent (2019) scheduled prospecting by metal detectors of the vicinity of the medieval hillfort “Zamczysko” at Sanok-Biała Góra under the direction of P. Kotowicz, have brought the discovery of a sturdy spike from a thickened-frame buckle. Finally, among the artefacts recovered from the settlement Sanok 59/60 are a piece of a bucket-shaped vessel and, of particular importance here, a fragment of a bronze cauldron of Hunnic provenance (dating from phase D) (Bulas 2019, fig. 2.4; 3.4). It is possible that a sword found in the Solina Reservoir (Solina, Lesko County) should be dated to the early phase of the Migration Period as well (Kotowicz, Fedyk 2008 – incorrectly localized as Polańczyk). These non-numismatic artefacts as mentioned here, all found in the region under consideration, would date from a somewhat earlier period than the coin finds. Some of them point directly to the continuation of the settlement activity existing there at the time (in the early phase of the Migration Period). The artefacts from the settlement Sanok 59/60 are of particular significance in this context.

Referring again to the *solidi* in the names of Theodosius II (Prełuki) and Valentinian III (Prusiek), it should be stressed that these constitute the latest evidence of human activity in the Upper San River basin in Late Antiquity (specifically, in this case, during the early phase of the Migration Period). It is not easy to define their character precisely. The absence of any details on the circumstances of their discovery as well as on their strict archaeological context

⁵ Unfortunately, it has not been possible to determine the exact place where the artefact (now in private ownership) was found. The Archive of the Historical Museum in Sanok received only some photographs of this buckle. The authors would like to thank Professor Dr hab. Renata Madyda-Legutko (Institute of Archaeology, Jagiellonian University) for her identification of the item.

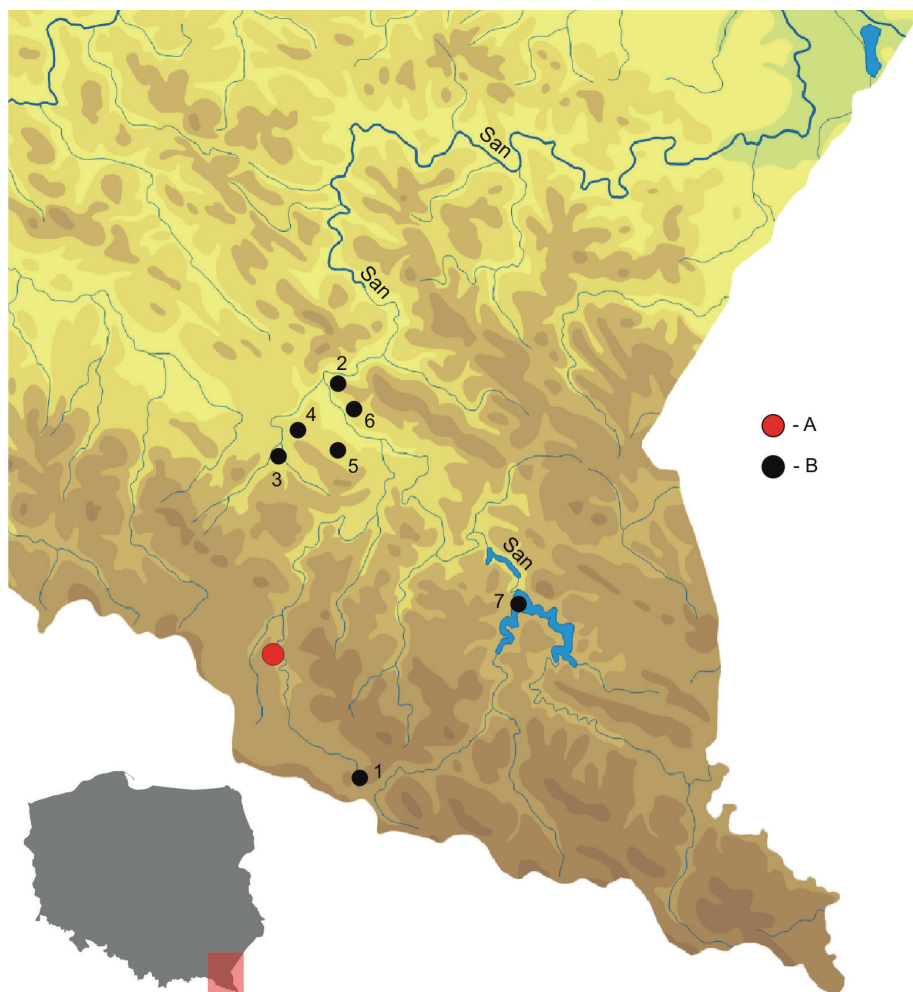


Fig. 3. Location of finds from the Migration Period in the Upper San River basin: A – Preluki; B – other finds (1 – Balnica, Sanok County; 2 – Międzybrodzie, Sanok County; 3 – Prusiek, Sanok County; 4 – Sanoczek, Sanok County; 5 – Sanok, Sanok County, site 59/60; 6 – Sanok-Biała Góra, Sanok County; 7 – Solina, Lesko County) (text by P. N. Kotowicz)

makes it impossible to address the question if these are single finds, elements of hoards, gravesite-related or votive finds, or finds directly related to some settlement activity. In the first place, it is difficult to resolve if the coins themselves are testimony to settlement activity, just like the previously mentioned finds of non-numismatic artefacts from the settlement site Sanok 59/60 or they would

attest to some other type of human activity. Nonetheless, they would constitute, alongside the other above-mentioned artefacts, the evidence of a relatively intense human activity in this area at that time. Such activity is the follow-up to a trend already commenced in the earlier periods, as confirmed in view of abundant material from the settlement- or sepulchral-based contexts as well as of stray finds (including coins) and at least partly related to the southward transmigration of the settlements of the Przeworsk culture (Madyda-Legutko 1995; 1996; 2004; Madyda-Legutko, Tunia 2008; Parczewski et al. 2012, 26-27; Bulas, Kotowicz 2018; Bulas 2019; Bulas et al. 2019). Let us also add that some other unidentified Roman coins were reportedly unearthed at Prełuki before the Second World War (cf. Tarnowych 1937, 260; Parczewski et al. 2012, 26). As some earlier publications point out, it is possible that river valleys (Oślawa and Sanoczek, in this case) may have served as transport routes leading up to the passageways that would allow communication with the territories to the south of the Carpathian range (Gaśowska 1979, 44-49; Mączyńska 1999, 31; Bodzek 2009, 176; Kotowicz 2015). We have noticed a similar situation in the Western Carpathians, where in the Poprad, Dunajec, and Ropa valleys there is ample evidence of settlement activity or multiple coin finds that are loosely associated with the early phase(s) of the Migration Period have been reported (Madyda-Legutko et al. 2005; Madyda-Legutko, Tunia 1993; 2008). In this particular case, we should refer especially to the discovery of a gold solidus of Marcian at Sławęcín and some 5th-century bronze coins found at the nearby town of Biecz (Madyda-Legutko 1995, no 31-32; Kaczanowski, Margos 2002, no 31-32; Bodzek 2009, 179, no. 1). From the latter location, we have also recorded one find of a bronze coin in the name of Justinian I (527-565), which would attest to the fact the Ropa valley continued to be a place of human activity also in the later phase of the Migration Period (Wołoszyn 2009, 497, no. 2). In light of all the evidence now available, yet without sufficiently detailed information, it would be rather difficult to decide with no doubt which types of activity the finds of Late-Roman and Early-Byzantine coins in the Polish Carpathian region could be possibly linked with.

It is nevertheless difficult to determine the culture context of the coin finds we have described. In one of the earlier publications, one of the co-authors of the present text was inclined to associate the find of this solidus in the name of Valentinian III with the Germanic element (Bodzek 2009, 177). What could point to such a possibility is the coin's provenance from the mint of Milan and the resulting similarities to the hoard of Biña, most likely connected with the territories of the Western Roman Empire. Just as the coins from that hoard, the solidus found at Prełuki may have reached the Germanic inhabitants of the Carpathian range through the Hunnic territory. The question of the redistribution of gold pieces which the Huns obtained among their Germanic allies have already been discussed on multiple occasions. In the context of Polish coin finds, the Hunnic

influence was already noticed by L. Piotrowicz in his publication of the hoard from Witów (Piotrowicz 1936, 89-90). As for the problem of a possible Hunnic control over the territories of modern-day Poland, it has been summed up quite recently by P. Kaczanowski and J. Rodzińska-Nowak (Kaczanowski, Rodzińska-Nowak 2013). In this particular context, a significant piece of evidence attesting to the existence of such relations is the above-mentioned fragment of a Hunnic cauldron unearthed at the settlement Sanok 59/60. The coin of Theodosius II found at Prełuki would fit in with this general picture. The similarities (as we have indicated above) in the form of the solidi of the same type as present among the contents of the hoard from Biña seem to validate such an interpretation. In all likelihood, the solidus found its way into the Upper San River basin as a consequence of the Hunnic-Germanic relations/contact.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COIN

Theodosius II (408-450) Constantinople, AD 424-425

AV, solidus

Obv. Pearl-diademed, helmeted and cuirassed three-quarters facing bust, holding spear over shoulder and shield with horseman motif; D N THEODOSIVS P F AVG
Rev. Emperor standing facing, holding standard and cross on globe; star in left field; in exergue CONOB; GLOR ORVIS TERR H; dotted border

W: 4,45 g; dia 22 x 21 mm; axis: VI

RIC X (= Kent 1994), p. 257, no. 232

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