



SIGNET RING WITH AN IMAGE OF A LILY FOUND AT THE SHUMEN VICINITY

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ABSTRACT: *The subject of the presented work is a signet ring with an image of a heraldic lily. Only the main sealing part, filled with glass paste, in which the image is engraved, has been preserved from the object. The thin ring soldered to the tile is not preserved. The traces from the solder of the ring to the solder on the reverse side of the board are clearly visible. The latter has an elliptical shape with a scalloped outline and bud-like ornamentation above it. The central part of the object is occupied by a deep socket filled with greenish glass paste, in which the image of the heraldic lily is carved. Rings with images of lilies from the late Middle Ages are a whole group, and therefore this type of decoration can be considered one of the favorites of this period. Most of the ornaments are made entirely of metal, the more famous ones being silver and gold. The symbolic meaning of the lily is a reason for it to appear on various art monuments, such as the portraits of the founders from the church "St. Nicholas" in Stanichane (XIV century), the late medieval belts with appliqués in the shape of lilies from the territory of Bulgaria and many others. In this context, we can also place the current ring with an engraved image of a heraldic lily from the era of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, found in the vicinity of Shumen and the Shumen Fortress, whose most active life was precisely during this period.*

KEY WORDS: *signet ring, heraldic lily, Mediaeval Bulgaria, metalwork, glass paste*

The subject of the presented work is a signet ring with an image of a heraldic lily (fig. 1). Only the main sealing part, filled with glass paste, in which the image is engraved, has been preserved from the object. The thin ring soldered to the tile is not preserved. The traces from the solder of the ring to the solder on the reverse side of the board are clearly visible (fig. 2). The latter has an elliptical shape with a scalloped outline and bud-like ornamentation above it. The central part of the object is occupied by a deep socket filled with greenish glass paste, in which the image of the heraldic lily is carved (fig. 3). The size of the tile is: length - 1.7 cm, width - 1.5 cm, thickness - 0.3 cm; of the socket in

which the insert is placed - 1.2/1 cm, depth - 0.2 cm. The lily is formed by three large attached leaves growing from a bud-cluster in the middle. The central leaf is located along the longitudinal axis, and the lateral ones are arched towards the base.

Rings with images of lilies from the late Middle Ages are a whole group, and therefore this type of decoration can be considered one of the favorites of this period. Most of the ornaments are made entirely of metal, the more famous ones being silver and gold. In this order, we can mention Seno's golden ring from the necropolis of the church "St. 40 martyrs" in Veliko Tarnovo, the rings of Slav, Dobroslav, Dimitar and two nameless rings [1]. Several nameless rings also have images of the lily [2]. Examples from Byzantine art of signet rings with various images, inscriptions and monograms, made of noble alloys and those based on copper, confirm the popularity of this type of monuments among different layers of society in the Middle Ages [3].



Fig. 1. Plate of the signet ring with an image of a heraldic lily found at the Shumen vicinity

A significant number of late medieval rings (with or without inscriptions, with plant or zoomorphic images) executed in various techniques are known from neighboring Serbia [4]. The variety of metalwork of this period is due to the well-developed metallurgical and jewelry production, evidenced by the numerous written testimonies, wall paintings and a rich repertoire of works of art [5]. Lily rings have been found in necropolises on the territory of Banat, Romania [6]. Rings with only a lily or with a lily and inscriptions have also been found in necropolises at Drobeta, Olteni, Sub Cetațuite, Guruieni, Tîrșor, etc. [7]. Also of interest are the two bronze dies with heraldic representations of lilies, as well as the clay mold for casting similar decorations from Coconi [8].

Unlike the mentioned examples, the present monument combines two materials - metal and glass. Similar rings are known from Novgorod and are distributed within the chronological limits of the 12th to the 14th centuries [9]. Quite a few originate from Kiev in layers from the 12th-13th centuries [10]. Rings with glass paste inserts have also been found in Banat. Three of them are very similar in form to those considered in the present work [11].

The lily became a heraldic sign spread throughout Western Europe and was depicted not only by kings and wealthy families, but also entered the coats of arms of many small and medium-sized nobles [12]. The image of the lily flower was particularly popular on Byzantine coinage, especially after the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204), when it first appeared on the coins of the Nicaean emperor Theodore I Lascaris (1204-1222) and became a heraldic sign of the dynasty. The coins of his successor John I Duka Vatsi (1222-1254) and his son Theodore II Lascaris (1254-1258) continued the tradition of using the lily flower to decorate their coins.

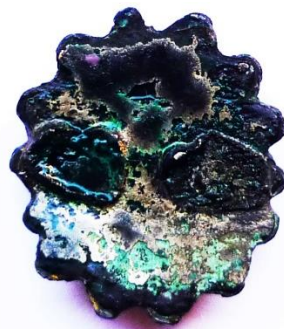


Fig. 2. Reverse side of the signet ring

The tradition continued in the Paleolog dynasty from Michael VIII Palaiologus (1259-1282) onwards, when the lily became the political symbol of the new dynasty and the emblem of the victory over the Crusaders. On the gold and copper coins of Michael VIII, the lily is trefoil, adorns the emperor's scepter, or is represented alone on the reverse [13]. The lily continues to be depicted on the coins of the other representatives of the Palaeologus dynasty - John V Palaeologus (1365-1391), Andronicus IV Palaeologus (1376-1379) and Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425), where it is already located on both sides of the emperor and bust of Christ [14].



Fig. 3. Wax impression from the glass plate on the signet ring

As a result of the Bulgarian-Byzantine dynastic ties in the second half of the 13th century and the traditions of Western European coinage in the 12th-13th centuries, the lily was also brought to Bulgaria. It is from the Western world that the heraldic lily with central straight and lateral curved leaves emerging from a common base - a wrist - enters. The most widespread is the image of a heraldic lily on the silver coinage of Ioan Sratsimir (1356-1396). The continuous use of the lily on the coins of the Bulgarian rulers as a decorative motif on the throne of Christ and the ruler or as an independent element is due both to the established Byzantine traditions and to the increased Western influence at that time.

The symbolic meaning of the lily is a reason for it to appear on various art monuments, such as the portraits of the founders from the church "St. Nicholas" in Stanichane (XIV century), the late medieval belts with appliqués in the shape of lilies from the territory of Bulgaria and many others [15]. In this context, we can also place the current ring with an engraved image of a heraldic lily from the era of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, found in the vicinity of Shumen and the Shumen Fortress, whose most active life was precisely during this period.

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