A HOARD OF HISTAMENA FROM PHASELIS DATING TO THE REIGN OF CONSTANTINE X DOUKAS

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Abstract

This article examines a hoard of seven gold *histamenon* nomismata discovered during excavations at the Domitian Agora in the ancient city of Phaselis. The coins are dated to the reign of Byzantine Emperor Constantine X Doukas (AD 1059–1067). All specimens were minted in Constantinople and belong to Type 1b *histamena* of Constantine X Doukas. This hoard constitutes one of the rare Middle Byzantine gold finds unearthed in Anatolia and is analyzed comprehensively in this study with respect to its archaeological and numismatic contexts. Within the same archaeological context, eighteen bronze coins —predominantly from the Late Roman Period and dated between the 3rd century BC and the 7th century AD— were also recovered.

KEYWORDS: Phaselis, Domitian Agora, Hoard, Coins, Constantine X

Resumen

Se publica tesorillo de siete monedas de oro del tipo *histamenon*, descubierto durante las excavaciones arqueológicas realizadas en el Ágora de Domiciano de la antigua ciudad de Fasélide. Las monedas se fechan en el reinado del emperador bizantino Constantino X Ducas (1059-1067 d.C.). Todos los ejemplares fueron acuñados en Constantinopla y pertenecen al tipo 1b de los *histamena* de Constantino X Ducas. Este conjunto constituye uno de los escasos hallazgos de moneda de oro del periodo bizantino medio documentados en Anatolia y se analiza exhaustivamente en este estudio desde sus respectivos contextos arqueológico y numismático. En el mismo contexto arqueológico se recuperaron también dieciocho monedas de bronce, predominantemente del periodo romano tardío, cuya cronología abarca desde el siglo III a.C. hasta el siglo VII d.C.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fasélide, ágora de Domiciano, tesoro, monedas, Constantino X

1. Introduction

Phaselis, located at the intersection of the regions of Lycia and Pamphylia, emerged as one of the major centers of the Mediterranean trade network in antiquity[1], owing to its strategic position with three natural harbors. Ancient

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[1] The city was first identified by the modern explorer F. Beaufort during his investigations in 1811–1812, and, on the basis of the ethnicon Φασηλίτης attested in inscriptions; he determined that the name of the city was Phaselis (Beaufort, 1818: 56-70). Following this initial discovery, scientific investigations were subsequently carried out at the site by C. R. Cockerell in 1812 (Cockerell 1903: 170), C. Fellows in

sources report that the city was founded around 691/690 BC by Dorian colonists from Lindos on Rhodes (Ath. Deip. VII, 51; Tüner Önen, 2008: 95). The presence of sheltered harbors and a strategic location commanding the east–west maritime routes constituted decisive factors in the selection of the settlement site. Inscriptions written in the Rhodian dialect, together with coins dating to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, indicate that Phaselis preserved its Dorian identity over an extended period.

Herodotos states that Phaselis was among the founders of the Hellenion Temple in Naukratis, Egypt (Hdt. II, 178). This testimony indicates the city's active involvement in Eastern Mediterranean trade from an early date. Cypriot and Egyptian-origin Archaic sculptures and figurines recovered during the 2024 excavations at the site provide additional archaeological support for this interpretation. Throughout the sixth to fourth centuries BC, the city maintained a degree of autonomy under Persian rule; following a brief participation in the Delian League, it came under the control of the Ptolemies and subsequently the Seleucids during the Hellenistic period. In the 130s BC, Phaselis was incorporated into the Lycian League, and in the first century BC, when piracy intensified in the region, it passed into Roman rule.

During the Roman Imperial period, Phaselis developed into one of the more prosperous cities of the province of Lycia–Pamphylia. During Emperor Hadrian's visit to the city in AD 131–132, an extensive program of urban development was initiated, and the monumental Hadrianic Arch overlooking the South Harbor was constructed (Schäfer, 1981: 35–36). After the earthquake of AD 141–142, the city was rebuilt with the assistance of Opramoas of Rhodiapolis (Kokkinia, 2000: 233–245).

From the third century AD onward, pirate raids and shifts in trade routes weakened Phaselis's economic power. Nevertheless, during the Byzantine period, the city continued to exist as a bishopric and served as a significant harbor station between Korydalla and Attaleia (Hellenkemper and Hild, 2004: 799). However, its commercial activity gradually declined between the ninth and eleventh centuries, and following its capture by the Seljuks in 1158, the city was ultimately abandoned.

Today, with its three harbors, planned urban layout, and monumental structures, Phaselis is an important ancient settlement reflecting the cultural continuity of the Mediterranean world. This article presents a hoard consisting of seven gold *histamenon nomismata* dating to the reign of Constantine X Doukas (AD 1059–1067), which constitutes part of the limited evidence for the Byzantine-period history of the city, and discusses the significance of this find within the context of Phaselis's late-phase economic structure.

1838 (Fellows 1975: 211), and T. A. B. Spratt and E. Forbes in 1842 (Spratt and Forbes 1847: 194). In 1881 and 1882, O. Benndorf (Benndorf and Niemann 1884), in 1913 R. Paribeni and P. Romanelli (Paribeni and Romanelli 1914: 183 ff.), and in 1944 Kalinka studied the city's epigraphic evidence (TAM II/3: 138 ff., nos. 1183–1220). After the Second World War, the first scholars to conduct research in the region were F. Stark (Stark 1956: 172) and G. Bean (Bean 1968: 151). Scientific excavations at Phaselis were first initiated in 1980 under the auspices of the Antalya Museum by K. Dörtlük (Dörtlük 1981: 80–82) and continued under the direction of C. Bayburtluoğlu from 1981 to 1985 (Bayburtluoğlu 1984: 301–305; 1986: 373–385). The survey projects initiated in 2012 under the direction of M. Arslan were transformed into excavation works in 2017, marking the beginning of the second phase of excavations at Phaselis (Arslan 2018: 15 ff.; Arslan and Tüner Önen 2014: 78; 2016: 300; 2018: 295; 2019: 43; 2021: 147). These works were taken over by Erdoğan Aslan in 2024, and the third phase of excavations is currently ongoing within the framework of the Heritage for the Future Project.

2. Current Excavations and Research

As also noted by Strabon (Strab. 14.3.9), the city has three harbors: the North, Central, and South Harbors. The Central and South Harbors are interconnected by a main street, and intersect at a square located between the main streets extending to the north and south. The city's principal public buildings[2] are situated to the east and west of these main streets (Fig. 1).

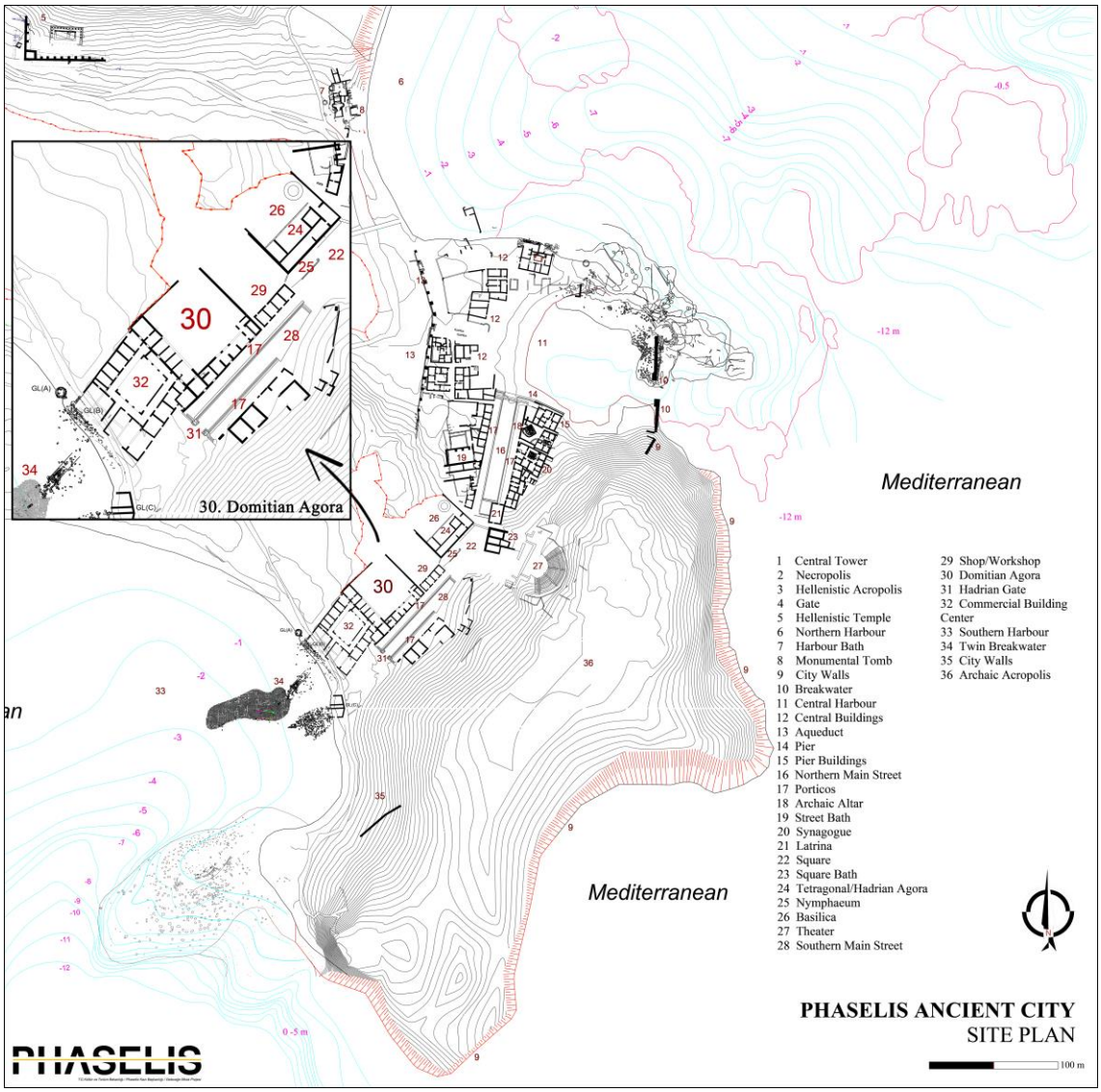


Figure 1. Phaselis City plan.

The city center is accessed from the South Harbor via the South Main Street, at the entrance of which the Hadrianic Arch is located. The first structure on the western side of the South Main Street is the Domitian Agora, while on the eastern side are quadrangular-plan structures whose functions have not yet been determined and which are tentatively interpreted as shops or workshops.

[2] Among these structures are the Great Bath, Small Bath, Latrina, Theatre, Tetragonal Agora, Nymphaeum, Domitian Agora, and a series of shops. In addition to these public buildings, the 2024 and 2025 excavation seasons led to the discovery of a structure interpreted as a possible synagogue and an altar associated with Archaic finds.

In 2024, work was initiated in the eastern and western porticoes of the South Main Street, as well as in the structures located behind these porticoes. While only vegetation clearance was conducted in the eastern portico and associated structures, the western portico and the North Building —a four-room structure located to the northwest of the portico— together with the spaces on the eastern and southern sides of Domitian Agora, underwent vegetation clearance, excavation, minor repair, conservation, and emergency intervention works.



Figure 2. Aerial view of South Main Street and Agora.

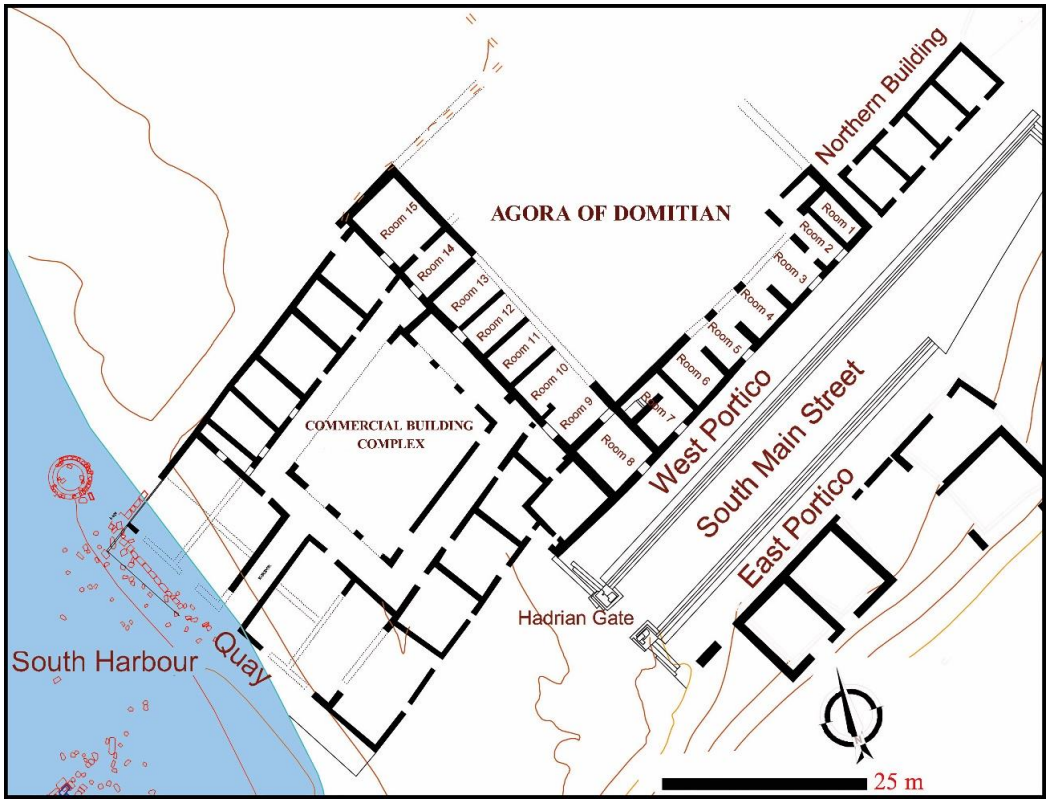


Figure 3. Plan of Domitian Agora.

The Western Portico, where excavation works are ongoing, begins at the square situated between the South Main Street and the North Main Street and extends as far as the Hadrianic Arch located at the southern end of the South Main Street. Oriented along a north–south axis, the Western Portico measures 79 m in length and approximately 3.70 m in width. Its western side is bounded by the rectangular-plan North Building and the western walls of Domitian Agora, while its eastern side is bordered by a portico accessed by steps rising from the street. To the south of the Domitian Agora, located west of the portico and measuring approximately 45 × 48 m, lies the Commercial Building Complex, while a possible street is situated to its north. In its present state, the Domitian Agora has a square plan with a large central courtyard and is surrounded on its southern and eastern sides by quadrangular-plan rooms (Figs. 2–3).

In order to create a level terrace on the sloping terrain descending toward the South Harbor, an east–west-oriented retaining wall supported by quadrangular buttresses was constructed to the south of the agora. At the uppermost part of this wall, remains and traces of large window openings facing the harbor are preserved. The western façade of the structure, in its northern continuation, is bounded by large ashlar blocks that remain buried beneath the soil. Although excavations in the northern sector have not yet been completed, the available evidence suggests that this area also featured an arrangement similar to that of the southern sector.



Figure 4. East Portico and Main Entrance Gate of the East Facade of Domitian Agora.

The eastern façade of the agora is the best preserved compared to the other sides. The walls beneath the door thresholds that provided access to the agora along this façade were constructed of double-faced rubble masonry with lime mortar, while the wall construction technique changes in the upper sections. On the side facing the portico, ashlar blocks of varying sizes were employed, whereas on the interior face of the agora, small- and medium-sized rubble stones bonded with lime mortar were used, as in the lower sections. This type of masonry is observed in many structures across the city. Access to the agora through this wall is provided by four door openings of varying widths. These doorways, leading into the quadrangular rooms, are framed by jamb blocks on both sides, with door thresholds positioned at their bases (Fig. 4).

Among these entrances, the main doorway, located approximately at the center of the eastern wall and larger than the others (3.13 × 2.23 m), has been preserved in situ with its jamb and lintel blocks. On the façade of the lintel block of this doorway is a four-line inscription (Fig. 5), dated to AD 93/94 and dedicated to Emperor Domitian, set within a *tabula ansata* (Fellows, 1975: 211; IGR III: 755; Bérard, 1892: 440, no 89; Petersen and Luschan, 1889: 142, no 175; TAM II/3: 1186; Schäfer, 1981: 143, lev. 70.1; Tüner Önen, 2008: 310, 311).

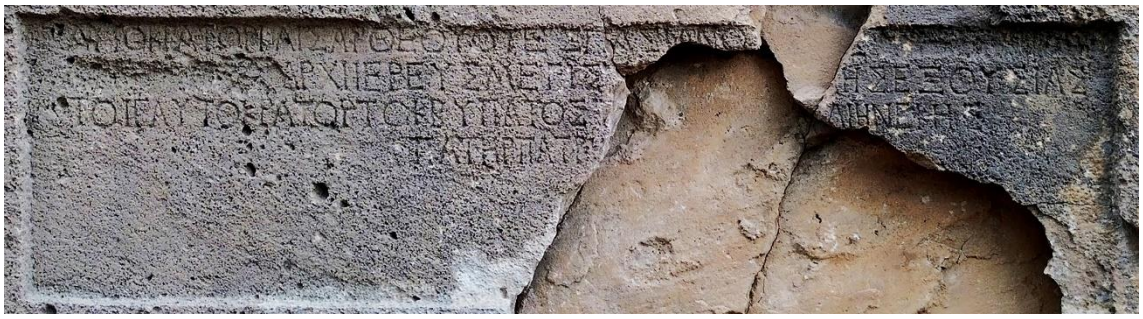


Figure 5. Inscription on the Lintel of the Main Entrance of Domitian Agora.

Αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ, θεοῦ Οὐεσπασιανοῦ υἱός, [Δομετι] ´-
[ανὸς Σεβαστός]´, ἀρχιερεὺς μέγιστος, δημαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας
τὸ ιγ´, αὐτοκράτωρ τὸ κβ´, ὕπατος τὸ ις´, τειμητὴς διηνεκής,
πατὴρ πατρίδος.

"*Emperor Caesar Domitian Augustus, son of the deified Vespasian, pontifex maximus, holding tribunicia potestas for the thirteenth time, acclaimed imperator for the twenty-second time, consul for the sixteenth time, censor perpetuus, and pater patriae*".

3. The New Hoard of Phaselis

A total of 15 rooms were identified along the southern and western edges of the agora, where excavation work is being conducted[3]. Excavations carried out in Room 8 (7 x 10 m), located at the southwestern corner of the agora, were conducted between elevations of +6.35 m and +4.73 m above sea level. Two floor levels belonging to different periods were identified within the room.

The second-phase floor, dated to the most recent period, was detected approximately 0.50 m below the level of the door threshold of the doorway providing access from the portico into the room. This floor, situated at an elevation of +5.80 m above sea level, was constructed within an area measuring 0.90 × 0.90 m using in situ terracotta paving slabs (0.48 x 0.49 m and 0.53 x 0.30 m) set on a lime-mortar bedding. Additionally, in the southeastern corner of the structure, an L-shaped row of stones, probably functioning as a bench, was identified[4].

Approximately 0.80 m below the late-phase floor, at an elevation of +5.00 m, the first-phase floor was identified. In this phase, another doorway was detected in the western wall of the structure; however, this opening had been blocked with stone blocks in the Late Period (Fig. 6). Coins recovered from this layer between +5.80 and 5.00 m are dated to the 3rd–4th centuries AD, while the ceramic finds are dated to the 2nd–4th centuries AD. Furthermore, beneath the first-phase floor, two coins dating to the 3rd–

[3] Excavations in the other parts of the agora have not yet begun; therefore, it is not currently possible to draw definitive conclusions regarding the architecture of the agora.

[4] This arrangement was constructed of three ashlar blocks, two of which are large and bossed, with an interior fill consisting of soil and rubble stones.

2nd centuries BC, together with ceramic vessel fragments attributable to the Hellenistic Period, were recovered.

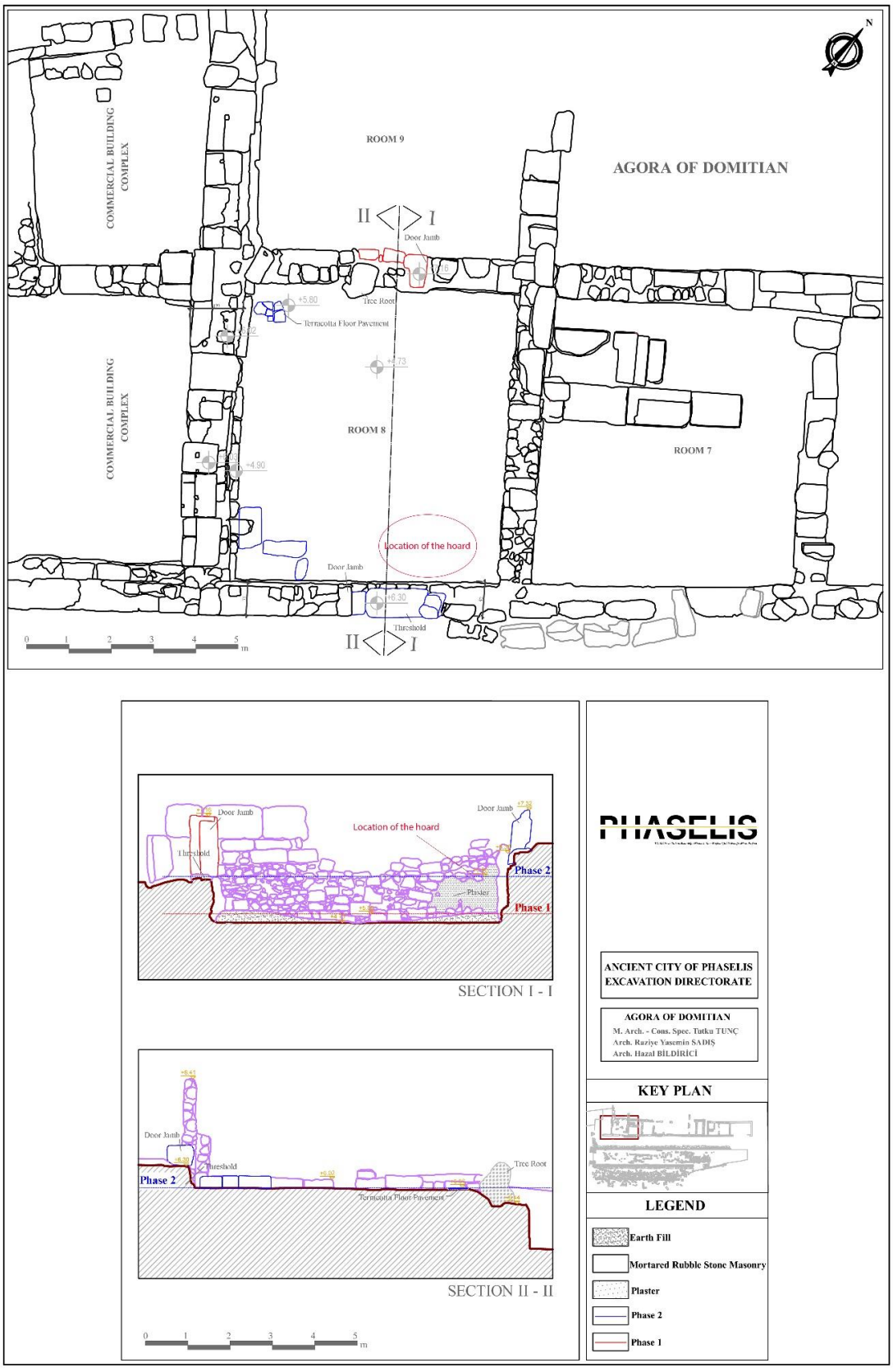


Figure 6. Domitian Agora, Plan and Section Drawings of Room 8.

In excavations carried out in this area, coins and ceramics dated to the 5th–7th centuries AD were recovered from a layer corresponding to the upper levels of the second-phase floor, representing the final occupational phase of the structure, between +6.35 and 5.80 m. Within this layer, at an elevation of +6.20 m, a hoard of seven gold coins (*histamena*), which constitutes the subject of this study, was found clustered together and buried in the soil (Fig. 6-7).

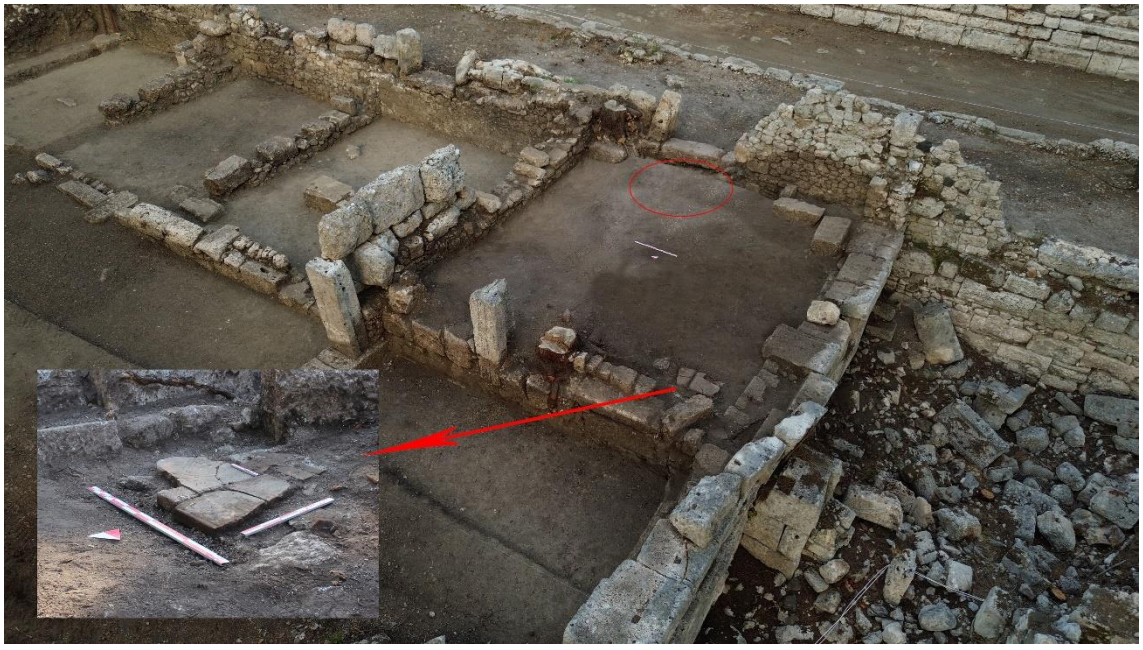


Figure 7. Domitian Agora, Final-Phase Floor of Room 8 and Findspot of the Hoard.

The hoard comprises seven concave (scyphate) gold coins of the *histamenon* denomination issued under Constantine X Doukas (AD 1059–1067), all minted in Constantinople. The earliest concave coins of Byzantium were introduced as *histamena* during the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos (AD 1042–1055). The concave form increased the durability of the coinage and facilitated handling, enabling its use as a reliable medium of exchange in both daily transactions and long-distance trade. By the 1050s, concave coins had become the standard form of Byzantine gold coinage (Demirel Gökalp 2016: 556).

During the reign of Constantine X Doukas (AD 1059–1067), two different types of *histamena* were struck. On Type I coins, the obverse depicts Christ seated on a throne with a backrest, while the reverse shows the emperor standing full-length. In Type II, the obverse depicts Christ seated on a lyre-shaped-backed throne, while the reverse depicts the Virgin Mary crowning the full-length emperor. Type I coins are further divided into Type 1a and Type 1b based on the decoration of the labarum held in the emperor's right hand: specimens with an undecorated labarum are classified as Type 1a, while those with a decorated labarum are classified as Type 1b. All coins from the Phaselis hoard belong to Type 1b.

Metrological analysis shows that, consistent with the *histamena* of Constantine X Doukas, their diameters range from 25.53 to 27.44 mm and their weights from 3.71 to 4.39 g (Cat. Nos. 1–7). In addition to the hoard, a total of 18 bronze coins were recovered from the same context, at various stratigraphic levels associated with both phases of the structure. Most of these belong to the Late Roman Period; the earliest example is a Phaselis coin dated to the 3rd century BC, while the latest belongs to the Byzantine emperor Constans II (AD 641–668).

Although these 18 coins reflect the structure's occupational phases, the *histamena* hoard clearly dates to approximately five centuries after the room was abandoned, suggesting that it was buried in the area for temporary safekeeping long after the building had fallen out of use. Comparative evidence from Anatolia indicates that no *histamenon nomisma* hoard dated to the reign of Constantine X Doukas (AD 1059–1067) has previously been documented in the literature (Demirel Gökalp, 2022: 377; Ünal and Lianta, 2023: 49–60). However, a hoard consisting of five *histamenon nomismata* of Constantine X Doukas was found in Lachin, Azerbaijan (Mosser, 1935: 47), and another one containing 27 *histamenon nomismata* was identified in Yerevan, Armenia (Mosser, 1935: 31), although their archaeological contexts remain insufficiently documented and no secure association with military or political events has been established.

4. Conclusion

The seven *histamena* recovered at Phaselis, dating to the reign of Constantine X Doukas (AD 1059–1067), represent a more significant accumulation than ordinary savings due to their high purchasing power and economic value. Considering the number of coins and their minting dates, this hoard appears to reflect a short-term accumulation. The coins may have been amassed over a period of approximately eight years by an individual or family, or acquired simultaneously through specific economic activities or as payment for military service.

The second scenario is more plausible, suggesting that the hoard reflects a single event or transaction, such as income from a commercial operation or remuneration for military service, rather than long-term savings accumulated incrementally. In either case, the *histamenon nomisma* constituted the primary gold coin of the Byzantine economy during this period and possessed considerable purchasing power (Morrisson, 2002: 923).

Each *histamenon* contained approximately 4–4.4 grams of pure gold; thus, the seven coins together correspond to about 30 grams of gold, representing a substantial accumulation within the economic context of the eleventh century. The *histamena* from Phaselis functioned as a widely accepted instruments of payment in international trade at the time of their circulation, often described as a "Medieval Dollar" (Lopez, 1951: 209-234; Kaplanis, 2003: 768-801). The *nomisma* was used in the Middle Ages and served as a common medium of exchange across the Eastern Mediterranean and in regions engaged in commercial relations with Byzantium. Therefore, in this context, the coins may represent the savings of a local resident of Phaselis, or they may have been brought by a foreign merchant or an individual originating from outside the region.

Considering the findspot of the hoard and the chronological distribution of coins recovered from the same room, it is evident that the hoard from Phaselis, dating to the reign of Constantine X Doukas (AD 1059–1067) and consisting of seven *histamena*, has no direct relationship with the structure in which it was found. The coins were most likely buried in this area after the building had been abandoned, with the intention of retrieving them later. Such hoards, typically buried hastily in random locations, are generally associated with the concealment of wealth accumulated under the pressure of an impending disaster (Curta and Gandila, 2011–2012: 45-47).

This interpretation suggests that the assemblage represents a temporarily hidden deposit in response to an extraordinary situation rather than the outcome of routine economic saving practices. In conclusion, when both the characteristics of the hoard and its archaeological context are evaluated together, it becomes clear that the seven-

histamena hoard recovered from the Domitian Agora, dating to the reign of Constantine X Doukas (AD 1059–1067), does not reflect a functional or structural association with the building. Instead, it appears to represent a concealed accumulation of wealth hidden under exceptional circumstances after the structure had fallen out of use and subsequently left unretrieved.

Although the precise reasons for its concealment remain uncertain, external factors such as political instability, piracy, or broader regional security concerns affecting Phaselis during this period may have contributed to its deposition. Accordingly, the hoard —though numerically small— represents a significant economic value and should be interpreted as a deposit hidden under extraordinary circumstances during the post-abandonment phase of the building, ultimately abandoned and never retrieved by its owner.

5. Catalogue

Constantine X Doukas (Constantinople, 1059–1067)

***Histamenon* (Concave). Type 1b (Plate 1)**

Obv: +IҲSXISRCX RCϚN ΛNTIhϺ
Christ is depicted seated frontally on a square-backed throne. He is bearded, with a cross nimbus, and wears a tunic and himation. His right hand is raised in a blessing gesture, while his left hand holds the Gospel resting on his knee. The cover of the Gospel is decorated with dotted ornamentation.

Rev: +KѠNRΛCΛ OΔOUKΛC
Constantine X Doukas is depicted standing frontally. He is bearded, wearing a loros, a crown decorated with a cross, and pendilia. In his right hand, he holds a labarum with dotted decoration on the staff, while his left hand holds a globus terminating in a cross. The composition is framed by a double dotted border.

Ref: DOC III/II, p. 768, no. 1b; BMC II, p. 514, nos. 1-2.

1. AV, 4.39 g, 26.42 mm, 6 h, Excavation Inv. No. PHA25.GCA.A10.S-6.
2. AV, 4.37 g, 26.13 mm, 6 h, Excavation Inv. No. PHA25.GCA.A10.S-2.
3. AV, 4.32 g, 27.36 mm, 6 h, Excavation Inv. No. PHA25.GCA.A10.S-4.
4. AV, 4.29 g, 26.11 mm, 6 h, Excavation Inv. No. PHA25.GCA.A10.S-1.
5. AV, 4.28 g, 27.44 mm, 6 h, Excavation Inv. No. PHA25.GCA.A10.S-8.
6. AV, 3.93 g, 26.32 mm, 6 h, Excavation Inv. No. PHA25.GCA.A10.S-3.
7. AV, 3.71 g, 25.53 mm, 6 h, Excavation Inv. No. PHA25.GCA.A10.S-5.

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IGR. Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes (Cagnat).

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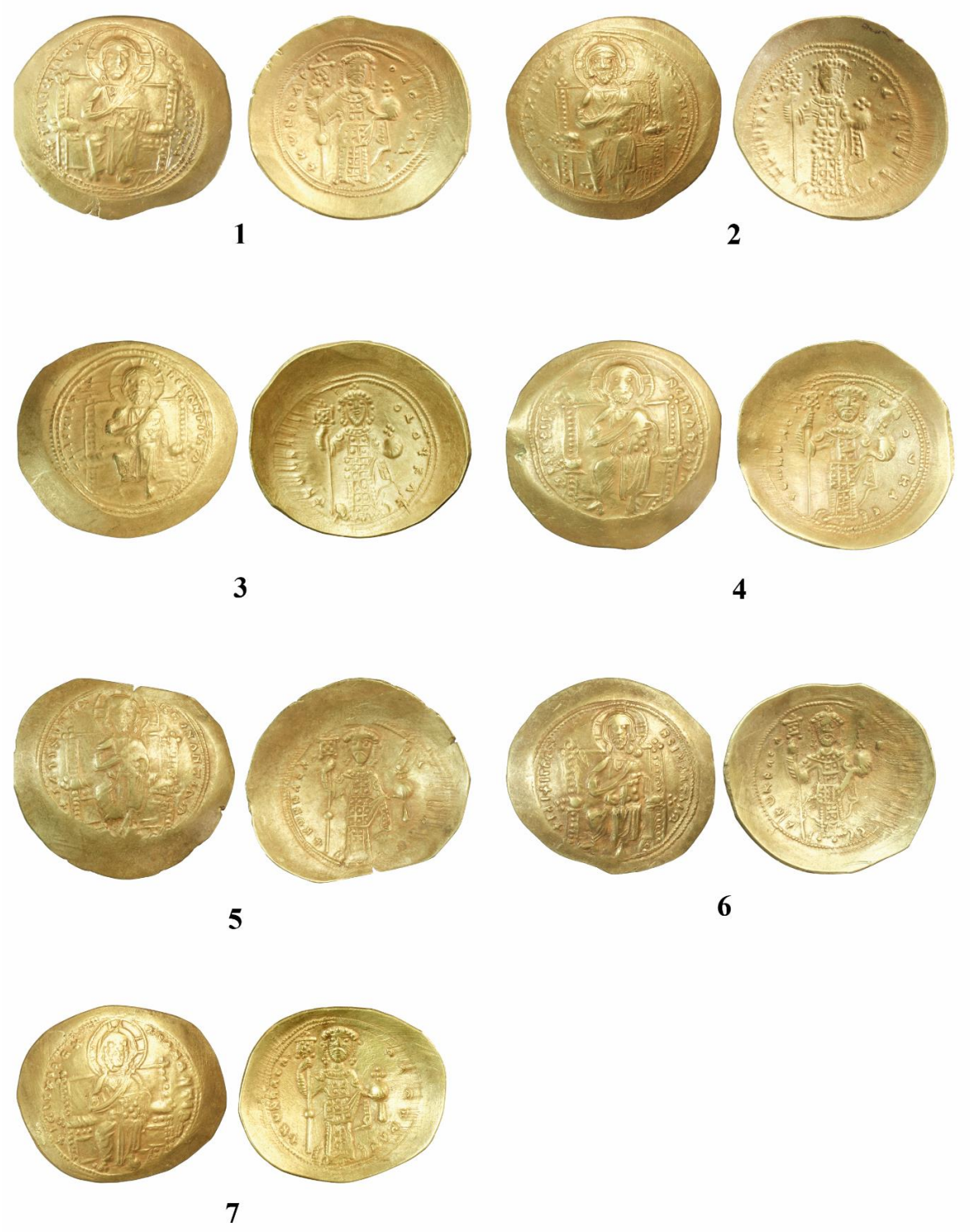


Plate 1. Coins of the New Hoard.