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**THE SUBSTANTIVE VARIETIES OF
ANONYMOUS FOLLES OF CLASS B**

Orestes H. Zervos

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**ΟΙ ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΕΣ ΤΩΝ ΑΝΩΝΥΜΩΝ
ΦΟΛΛΕΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΤΑΞΕΩΣ Β**

Ορέστη Ε. Ζερβού

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The Substantive Varieties of Anonymous Folles of Class B*

Orestes H. Zervos

In 969 A.D. or shortly after, Byzantine emperor John I Tsimiskēs reformed the copper follis and inaugurated a new series, which endured for some 120 years (ca. 969-1092). The innovation consisted of the abandonment of the traditional imperial effigy and inscriptions connected with it, and their replacement by the likeness of Christ (usually in bust form), or (more rarely) the likeness of Christ, on the front of the coin, and that of the Virgin on the back, with suitable inscriptions. These new so-called "anonymous folles" were struck in eleven consecutive groups designated alphabetically as, Classes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, and K¹ and distinguished from each other by the form of the sacred portrait, or portraits, the length and content of the reverse inscription, etc. The series came to an end in 1092 A.D. when, as a result of the sweeping coin reform of Alexios I Komnenos, the minting of copper folles as such was abruptly abandoned².

The first two Classes A and B, are nearly identical. On the obverse they show the bust of Christ Pantocrator with a circular inscription, + EMMANOVHA, and on the reverse a four-line inscription reading, +IHSYS / XRISTYS / BASILEY / BASILE, in Class A, and a shortened version of the above, in three lines, IS - XS / BAS - ILE / BAS - ILE placed in the corners of a stepped cross, in Class B. A peculiarity of the Class A folles, aside from their unusually long duration (969-1030/35), is the use of large numbers of secret marks (or privy marks), such as, *dots, letters, stars, diamonds*, etc., invariably appearing on the obverse of the follis in specific places (in the cross-limbs, on the Bible, etc.), as well as on the reverse (in the field above and below the four-line inscription). By the most recent count, these secret marks appear in some 83 distinct combinations on the coins³! This means that the folles of Class A can be broken down into distinct 83 substantive varieties to be arranged in respect to one another in some way or other.

It has commonly been thought that the practice of subdividing the anonymous folles by means of secret marks lapsed when Class A came to an end ca.1030/35 and that all subsequent follis issues, Classes B - K, were

* The coins illustrated in the Plate are all in the Archaeological Museum at Corinth. I wish to thank Dr. G. D. R. Sanders, Director of Corinth Excavations, of the American School of Classical Studies, for permission to use this material, and J. A. Herbst, Excavation Architect, for the digital processing of the graphics (Table) and the processing of some of the photographs (Plate).

1. A new follis type, presumably from the same series, has recently been reported from Turkey; see C. S. Lightfoot, "A new Anonymous Follis from Amorium," *Numismatic Circular*, CIII/1995, 376.
2. For a survey on the anonymous folles, see P.

Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, London, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1982 (hereafter, Grierson BC), 204-209.

3. V. Ivanišević, "Interpretation and dating of the folles of Basil II and Constantine VIII, the Class A2", *Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines*, XVII-XVIII (1989), 19-42, esp. 36.

produced each using a single, fixed, secret-mark version⁴. This, however, is not so. While most anonymous folles in the later classes do lack secret marks, there are two important exceptions: Classes B and D. The folles of Class D break down in fact into *three* secret-mark varieties, as shown by K. M. Edwards in her masterly publication of the Corinth Excavation coins⁵ two generations ago. This book was, and probably still is, inaccessible to most numismatists, and as a result Edwards' elucidation of follis Class D has remained largely unknown.

The folles of Class B (ca.1030/35-1042) have suffered a similar fate. Though Class B divides into at least six distinct secret-mark varieties, as will presently be seen, five of them are so rare that the sporadic notices about some of them in the literature have failed to become general knowledge. Thus Grierson's dictum that folles of Classes B-K *no longer have privy marks* has remained the prevalent view on the question.

In this brief article, I will list such substantive varieties of Class B folles as have come to my attention – with a few comments on each – in an effort to provide a more complete outline of this early and important group of anonymous folles than has so far been done. With the exception of one substantive variety known only from a follis in the collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris⁶, all others come from the Corinth ex-

cavation collection, which it has been my privilege to curate over the past 23 years. The Corinth collection, numbering some 90,000 coins, contains well over 800 anonymous folles of Class B, many of them, unfortunately, in a poor state of preservation. Of this mixed lot, I have set aside 253 pieces (32% of the total), taken mostly from the early excavations, to serve as the working basis of this investigation⁷.

In the following Table, in the first column, are given the six substantive varieties of Class B, listed as B-1 to B-6. In the next three columns are indicated the ornaments (or secret-marks) that go with each variety. First are listed the ornaments appearing in the limbs of the nimbus cross of Christ (*square*, *pellet*, *quincunx-and-square*, etc.); next, the ornaments in the upper quarters of the nimbus (with one exception, invariably a *pellet*); and, lastly, the ornament on the Bible (generally a plain *quincunx*). In the fifth column is indicated the size of the letters of the reverse inscription, as a general stylistic index for ordering the six varieties; and in the penultimate column are entered the numbers of specimens for each variety, to give an idea of coin distribution in the Corinth sample.

The standard variety of Class B – the one for which this class had so far been known –

4. Grierson *BC*, 207.

5. K. M. Edwards, *Coins: 1896-1929 (Corinth VI)*, Cambridge, Mass. 1933, 140, No. 108. For further discussion on the varieties of the Class D folles, see O. H. Zervos (with C. K. Williams II), "Frankish Corinth 1997: Appendix, The Coins" *Hesperia* 67/1998, 265-81, esp. 279-80, Nos. 45-46.

6. C. Morisson, *Catalogue des monnaies byzantines de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris 1970 (hereafter, Morisson), 599, No. 81.

7. The Corinth sample breaks down as follows: 147 pieces, excav. of 1914-1929; 23 pieces, excav. of 1930-1931 (N. of Temple, Lechaion Rd., Asklepieion); 19 pieces, excav. of 1936 (Agora SC, spring); 43 pieces, excav. of 1937 (Agora SC, fall); 6 pieces, excav. of 1986, 1987, 1994, 1999; 13 pieces from hoards found in excavations of 1936-1938; 2 pieces from a gift of locally found coins (GRE gift, 1965). Of these coins, 253 in number, 175 are fully identifiable as to substantive variety and form the total of the coins given in the Table. The remainder (78 coins) are too corroded to be of any use.

is Variety B-4, fourth in order in the Table (**Pl. Nos. 6, 7**), and has ornaments, a *square* (in nimbus cross), a *pellet* (in upper quarters of cross), and a *quincunx* (on the Bible) on the obverse. It is the most commonly occurring variety and the one in which the bulk of Class B was apparently struck (93% of the identifiable coins in our sample). As Grierson notes, all three ornaments of this variety had already been used in Class A2, in precisely the same places on the obverse, though not all of them on the same coin⁸. Variety B-4 can be further subdivided into two stylistic subgroups, a very small group in which the letters of the reverse inscription are small and solid (8 pieces in sample; **Pl., No. 6**)⁹, and a larger group with rough, large letters on the reverse (145 pieces in sample; **Pl. No. 7**). These two groups are designated as B-4 (a) and B-4 (b), respectively. The form of the letters is probably of little importance except, as already noted, in that it helps relate this variety to the other varieties of Class B¹⁰.

8. *Catalogue in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, P. Grierson (ed.), Vol. III, Washington, D.C. 1973 (hereafter *DOC III*), 676, note B.1-44.

9. Additional examples of sub variety B-4(a), neat lettering, are illustrated in *DOC III*, Pl. LV: B.18, and in the recent publication, *Νομισματικό Μουσείο. Συλλογή Ηλία Καντά: Βυζαντινά Νομίσματα*, Athens 2000 (hereafter, *Συλλογή Καντά*), Plate on 149: 25.41.

10. There exist folles in Variety B-4, on which the *square* ornament in the limbs of the cross has 'dots' at or near each corner, thus: $\square$ or $\square$. There are a dozen such pieces in the Corinth sample and several others in Paris and in the Bates Collections (Morrisson, 599, No. 80; and G. E. Bates, *A Byzantine Coin Collection*, Boston, Mass. 1981 [privately printed; hereafter, Bates], 131, Nos. 3078, 3086, etc. respectively). I do not consider these constitute separate secret-mark varieties and have not therefore included them in the Table.

The remaining substantive varieties in the Table are all essentially new, in the sense that they are absent from *DOC III*, though some of them have been known for some time from reports in the literature. These varieties are all very scarce. With two exceptions, their secret marks are recycled from Class A folles. I will go through them rapidly in the order in which they appear in the Table.

Variety B-1 (small letters on the reverse) is similar to B-4 (a), except for the *pellets* in the upper angles of the cross, which are omitted here (**Pl. Nos. 1, 2**)¹¹.

Variety B-2 (small letters) uses a *pellet* in the limbs of the cross instead of the usual *square* (**Pl. Nos. 3, 4**).

Variety B-3 (small-medium letters) and Variety B-5 (large letters) both have brand new ornaments in the cross arms, *quincunx-and-square* (**Pl. No. 5**), and *leaf-and-dots* (**Pl. No. 8**), respectively, neither ornament, as far as I know, having ever been used in Class A2. The other secret marks, in the nimbus quarters and on the Bible, are in both instances recycled. The first variety, B-3, is extremely rare in Corinth (1 specimen in sample) but is known from other examples in published collections¹². The second variety, B-5, with the fancy ornament on the Bible (*star-and-quincunx*), seems to be known only from Corinth (3 pieces in sample)¹³.

Variety B-6 (letter-size uncertain) has a 4-rayed *star* ornament (recycled) in the nim-

11. Another example of B-1 is illustrated, without comment, in *Συλλογή Καντά*, Pl. on 149: 25.43.

12. There are two such examples published, once again, without comment: one in Bates, 131, No. 3096; the other in Morrisson, 599, No. 79.

13. A possible duplicate of Variety B-5 is a partially legible coin in Morrisson, 599, No. 78, with nimbus-cross ornament *effaced* and a "star" decoration discernible on the Bible. The "star" is probably all that is left from the *star-and-quincunx* on the worn coin surface.

bus cross, and is known to me only from Morrisson. The variety needs to be confirmed¹⁴.

This is then the roster of the folles of Class B – a large substantive variety (B-4) with five small satellites in attendance¹⁵. I will end this discussion with a few remarks on the imitative Variety Bb listed at the bottom of the Table.

14. Morrisson, 599, No. 81. The ornament in the nimbus cross on this coin is unlikely to be as Morrisson gives it, i.e., an X with a circlet in the center. More probably it is identical with the *star* in the elaborate ornament on the Bible (*star-and-quincunx*) of Variety B-5, just discussed, where the *star* itself is composed of four lozenges with a dot in the center. The same *star* also appears in the nimbus cross in one of varieties of the Class A2 folles (DOC III, 645, Table 24, No. 43). I think the motif is the same in all three instances. Having not seen the coin in Paris, I have rendered the ornament exactly as Morrisson does.

15. This is the picture from Corinth. The only other published assemblage of coins, well enough documented to inform us about the internal statistics of the Class B folles, is the material from Antioch. There, out of the 125 folles of Class B recovered, only a *single* piece belongs to a substantive variety other than the predominant one (B-4), i.e. Variety B-1 (no *pellets* in cross corners). There seem to be no other variants. See *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, IV.2: *Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Crusader Coins*, D. B. Waage ed. Princeton 1952, 166, No. 2264.

Bates (131, No. 3095) reports what may constitute yet another substantive variety of the Class B folles – to be added to the six listed here – one in which the Bible ornament consists of a *square* with corners punctuated by ‘dots’. Because this ornament is most unusual as decoration for the Bible (it is not seen in the Class A series), it is better to withhold judgement until verification of Bates’ description of the ornament.

Variety Bb (11 pieces in sample; **Pl. Nos. 9, 10**) is a stylistically compact group of imitations of Class B folles which, as Grierson has shown on the evidence of over-striking, were minted ca.1090, i.e., five decades after their prototypes. I will forego enumerating the iconographic and other peculiarities of the imitations, as Grierson has done so in detail himself; except for one point left unsettled at the time, having to do with the origin of the *quincunx* ornament in the nimbus cross on these imitations¹⁶. This secret mark is not encountered in that position on any of the known regular folles of Class B – so, where did it come from? There are three possibilities: (a) the ornament was borrowed directly from folles of Class A (of ornaments 34-40 in Class A)¹⁷, which is possible but improbable; (b) the ornament represents a “mis-reading” – an unwitting simplification – of the *quincunx-and-square* of the Class B follis Variety B-3, discussed above, which cannot be excluded; and (c) the ornament comes from an as yet undiscovered regular variety of the folles of Class B (as Grierson has in fact postulated¹⁸). In view of the spate of new varieties of Class B published here, the last possibility seems to me the most likely one¹⁹.

16. To Grierson’s description of the imitations, I will add two points, based on the Corinth sample, which probably have general validity: (a) the imitations were struck on very *thin* flans (all 11 pieces in sample), unlike the regular folles whose flans are of normal thickness; (b) most of the imitations survive in *cut-down* form (9 pieces in sample). These two facts are responsible for the overall low weights of the imitations (also cf. DOC III, 680-81: Bb.1-5). I give the weights of the 11 Corinth pieces as an illustration: gms. 5.26 (flan intact; Plate No. 9), 3.78 (damaged), 3.75, 3.55 (Plate No.10), 3.18, 2.96, 2.82, 2.09, 1.96, 1.92, 1.63.

17. DOC III, 645, Table 24.

18. DOC III, 680, note Bb.1-5.

19. Photographs supplied by the Author.

Table. Substantive Varieties of Class B Folles. Διάγραμμα των ποικιλιών της κλάσεως B.

Variety Ποικιλία	Nimbus Cross Βραχίονες Σταυρού Φωτοστεφάνου	Nimbus Quarter Τεταρτημόρια Φωτοστεφάνου	Bible Βίβλος	Letters on Rev. (size) Μέγεθος γραμμάτων	No. of Coins Αριθμός νομισμάτων	Notes Παρατηρήσεις
B-1		(none)		Small	5	
B-2			—	Small	2	
B-3				Small- medium	1	
B-4(a)				Small- medium	8	Standard variety
B-4(b)				Large	145	
B-5				Large	3	
B-6		—	—	—	—	Needs confirmation
Bb (imit.)				Large	11	Thin fabric

Coins Illustrated on Plate

1. Corinth. Theater, 7.iv.1928 (Inv. 28-25).
2. " Theater, 12.iii.1929 (Inv. 29-903).
3. " Agora SC, 7.xii.1937 (611-630).
4. " Odeion, 21.v.1927 (906).
5. " Uncertain locus, 30.vi.1919 (313).
6. " Lechaion Road, 18.vii.1928 (637).
7. " GRE gift (Inv. 65-1236).
8. " Panaghia Field, 9.vi.1999 (Inv. 99-162).
9. " Temple E SE, 25.iv.1994 (Inv. 94-136)
10. " Theater, 27.iv.1925 (Inv. 25-211).

Omitted for NoumKhron by oversight!

