

About the Origin of a Late Mediaeval Bronze Die Found in the Shumen Fortress

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The paper aims at studying a bronze die which was found during archaeological excavations at the Shumen fortress and entered by the author in the finds book of Shumen Museum of History.

The die is a round bronze plate, yellow-brownish in colour, its diameter is 25 mm and the thickness of the core is 2.5 mm. On the obverse there are two circles made of convex dots and an inscription + Sn BERNAT. S II GUARDIA situated between them. On the inner field there is a shield (*escutcheon*), in the centre of which there is a beehive (*travna* type) and a stylized lily (*fleur-de-lis*) on it. The shield and the beehive are slightly concave and this highlights them when stamped - a fact that was especially important when establishing its bearer's identity (Fig. 1 a.). There is an eye on the reverse made during the cast which makes it possible to wear the stamp on a string around the neck (Fig. 1 b.).

For the time being it is the only find of this type in Bulgaria. It displays a combination of many symbols and inscription and only their correct interpretation provides information about the origin of the die and its probable owner or bearer.

There is a cross at the beginning of the inscription, followed by the abbreviation Sn (Saint) and the name BERNAT. A full stop separates the first part from the second one - S II GUARDIA, and the letter after the full stop could be interpreted in two ways. It could be interpreted as *Sigillum* (stamp seal) or *Sankta* (sacred) 2nd Guard, an elite unit in the army. The translation of the inscription says "Saint Bernat. Stamp seal of (sacred) 2nd Guard" and its meaning reveals the relation between St. Bernat and the Guard mentioned. The letters are uncial and their palaeographic features are similar to the ones in inscriptions on West European coin-like objects dated to the late 14th - mid 15th century, inscriptions on

weapons, etc. The name Bernat is a phonetic transcription of Bernard and is found in the hagiographic literature. It is usually related to the name of Bernard of Clairvaux. He was a remarkable figure of the Roman Catholic church in the late 11th - early 12th century and was canonized in 1174.

His ideas about unification of all believers in the name of Jesus Christ became very popular in Western Europe in the 12th - 14th century. For that reason St. Bernard is identified with the church community and a figure of a beehive being a symbol of the organized community and attribute of the allegoric figure of hope is related to the name of the saint. The stylized lily on the die found in the Shumen fortress is interpreted mainly as a symbol of the royal institution but it is also the flower of the saints, symbolizing light and life. Therefore the effigy of a beehive and a lily in a shield-like frame is in direct relation with the inscription and supports the opinion that the symbol is a key to the text and is its mental reality.

The stylistic features of the whole figure as well as its palaeographic typical features give reason to date the die to the mid 15th century. The logical relation between the inscription and the effigy on the die are the main proof for its origin, related to the superior church authorities.

The die proves the activity of the clergymen of the highest rank during the military campaign, when it was used to seal various documents, related to the activity of the God's servants. The die provides new data on the structure of the Crusaders army, which also included an elite military unit - 2nd Guard. We can only guess whether it was a small number of personal guards or a bigger unit. The find from the Shumen fortress published in the paper, which is unique for Bulgaria, provides also new information about the repertoire of the 15th century stamp seals in Europe.