

## **Additionally reworked gold hyperpyra of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos (1258-1282) (Abstract)**

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The article discusses two gold hyperpyra of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos, belonging to his Third Gold Coinage, First Chronological Phase, issued in Constantinople between the autumn of 1261 and 1272. Both specimens were additionally reworked, but in two different manners. On the first coin, the body and face and the kneeling emperor was erased by means of a broad engraver's chisel, and the heads of Archangel Michael and Christ were overstruck with small new dies. Thus, Christ has a larger head with hair and beard rendered with large beads. The head of the Archangel is also replaced by a larger head with curly hair of large beads, beard and long mustache, similar to the canonical depictions of St. Theodore Stratelates (weight 4.00 g). On the second specimen, part of the body and the face of the emperor are again erased by means of broad engraver's chisel, but the faces of Christ and Archangel Michael were additionally outlined with very fine cutter, and their eyes were widened with a needle or blunted awl (weight 4.05 g). Until now, similar additionally reworked Byzantine gold coins were known from the Second Gold Coinage of the Nicæan Emperor John III Ducas Vatatzes, struck in the mint of Magnesia in Asia Minor. On their obverse, only the heads of the Holy Virgin and the emperor were overstruck by means of small dies, so that the Virgin received a bearded and mustached male head with stemma with pendilia, but wearing the same garments (maphorion and tunic). The Emperor also received new, bearded face. A total of 14 overstruck hyperpyra of John III Ducas Vatatzes are known. Five of them were found in Bulgaria, and nine in Dobruzha, present-day Romania (in the area of Tulcea on the Danube). Some

authors attribute this overstriking of the gold hyperpyra of John III Ducas Vatatzes to the financial authorities of Michael VIII Palaeologos, when he entered in Constantinople as liberator and restorer of the Byzantine Empire on August 15, 1261. Apparently, as there was no time to prepare dies for the new hyperpyra, part of the old coins of John III Ducas Vatatzes were overstruck, The Virgin Mary was "transformed" into St. Constantine, seeking a symbolic relation between the Emperor Saint and Michael VIII Palaiologos, "the new Constantine". In fact, according to the Orthodox theological and liturgical dogmas this act should be regarded as desecrating the holiness of the Virgin Mary, and such an explanation seems improbable.

Regarding the two hyperpyra of Michael VIII, the author's opinion is that they were overstruck as a symbolic vengeance against the ambitious and insidious Byzantine Emperor, several times excommunicated and anathematized by the Orthodox Patriarch. Large part of the Byzantine common people and part of the aristocracy and the clergy also expressed, by means of rebellions, anathemas, etc., their constant opposition against the odious Emperor who blinded the juvenile Emperor and heir to the crown John IV Laskaris. This discontent grew stronger after 1274, when Michael VIII Palaiologos, aiming to deter the military threat of Charles I of Naples against South Greece, signed a church union in Lyon, recognizing the supremacy of the Pope. One of the main reasons for overstriking, although in different manners, of the two hyperpyra of Michael VIII Palaiologos, was probably an act of revenge by the coins' owner against the Emperor, desecrator of Orthodoxy, who blinded the underage legitimate Byzantine Basileus.