

## A HOARD OF 12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BYZANTINE COINS

Cristiana Tătaru\*

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*Cuvinte cheie: teaurizare, circulație monetară, Banat, Imperiul Bizantin, Evul Mediu, dinastia Comnenă.*

### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a hoard, which is most likely a fragment of a more extensive treasure and which was recovered by the Romanian judicial authorities in 2014. The finding place of the hoard remains unknown, most of the recovered information indicating that it was found in Banat, somewhere in the area of Timiș and Caraș-Severin Counties. The first part of this paper is dedicated to the presentation of the hoard which consists of 17 billion coins struck by John II Komnenos and 15 billion coins struck by Manuel I Komnenos, the latest coin of the hoard being dated between the years 1160 and 1164. In the second part of the paper an analysis of the similar findings from the Banat area is proposed, alongside with the sketching of a historical context for the hiding of this batch of coins and an analysis of the impact had by the byzantine coin in the local monetary circulation.

### Introduction

In 2014 the Romanian judicial authorities managed to seize numerous archaeological and numismatic artifacts, bringing to the National History Museum of Romania over 3000 medieval coins for expertise. The material brought to the museum was distributed in separate packages according to the name of the person from whom they were collected. The hoard fragment to which this study is dedicated to was preserved in a batch consisting of almost 230 medieval and modern coins. Most of the coins were minted for the kings of the Hungarian Kingdom or in the name of Austro-Hungarian Empire rulers, being common coins that circulated in the Transylvanian area. Considering this structure of the batch, the concave-convex bronze coins stood out immediately. Of all the coins only 62 were preserved in a binder with transparent plastic sheets, while the rest of the pieces were preserved in five bags. The coins were not distributed according to the identification of the pieces, of their state of conservation or even of their date, a fact that might suggest that the owner was not quite interested in the actual collecting activity. Despite the fact that the byzantine coins were scattered in all the six packs, the reasons for which I considered that these specific byzantine pieces might be in fact a hoard or a fragment of a more extensive hoard are, on one hand, related

to the state of preservation of the coins and, on the other hand, with the chronologically homogeneous structure of the batch. With obvious traces of mechanical abrasion determined by their intense circulation and use in the past, the coins are characterized by a uniform color of the surface, indicating that the coins were preserved for a long time in the same environment. It is sure that they were not chemically or mechanically cleaned, because their surface was still preserving significant soil traces.

With regards to the structure of the hoard a number of 32 pieces of stamena denomination byzantine coins were identified, struck for the emperors John II Komnenos (17 pieces) and Manuel I Komnenos (15 pieces).

### Catalog of the coins

1. Byzantine Empire, John II Komnenos, Stamena, Constantinopolis, 1122 – cca. 1137

Obverse. Bust of Christ, bearded and nimbate, with Gospel in his left hand. One pellet in each limb of nimbus cross.

Reverse: Bust of John II Komnenos, bearded, wearing stemma, divitision, collar and paneled loros, with scepter cruciger in his right hand and globus cruciger in his left hand.

1. Bill., 2.93 g, 27.3 × 28.1 mm, ob./rv. 6

Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. A.

2. Bill., 2.89 g, 28.8 × 29.1 mm, ob./rv. 6

Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. A.

3. Bill., 2.80 g, 29.3 × 28.6 mm, ob./rv. 6

\* National History Museum of Romania, Calea Victoriei 12, Bucharest, e-mail: cristiana.tataru@mnir.ro.

Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. A  
 4. Bill., 2.78 g, 27.7 × 28.2 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. A

II. Byzantine Empire, John II Komnenos, Stamena, Constantinopolis, cca. 1137 – 1143

Obverse: Bust of Christ, bearded and nimbate, with Gospel in his left hand. One pellet in each limb of nimbus cross.

Reverse: Bust of John II Komnenos, bearded, wearing stemma, divitision, collar and paneled loros, with scepter cruciger in his right hand and globus cruciger in his left hand. Perpendicular line on the shaft of the scepter, under the cross.

5. Bill., 3.83 g, 27.9 × 31.5 mm, ob./rv. -  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 6. Bill., 3.60 g, 28.1 × 29.5 mm, ob./rv. -  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 7. Bill., 3.60 g, 29.6 × 27.4 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 8. Bill., 3.59 g, 30.3 × 28.6 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 9. Bill., 3.32 g, 28.7 × 32.3 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 10. Bill., 2.99 g, 28.4 × 31.2 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 11. Bill., 2.91 g, 28.4 × 31.2 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 12. Bill., 2.73 g, 27.6 × 26.2 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 13. Bill., 2.51 g, 28.7 × 27.0 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B  
 14. Bill., 2.55 g, 29.1 × 28.9 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. B

III. Byzantine Empire, John II Komnenos, Stamena, Constantinopolis, cca. 1122 – 1143

Obverse: Bust of Christ, bearded and nimbate, with Gospel in his left hand. One pellet in each limb of nimbus cross.

Reverse: Bust of John II Komnenos, bearded, wearing stemma, divitision, collar and paneled loros, with scepter cruciger in his right hand and globus cruciger in his left hand. Perpendicular line on the shaft of the scepter, under the cross.

15. Bill., 2.18 g, 26.8 × 22.8 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10  
 16. Bill., 2.10 g, 27.6 × 26.7 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10  
 17. Bill., 1.93 g, 21.1 × 27.8 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10

IV. Byzantine Empire, Manuel I Komnenos, Stamena, Constantinopolis, 1143 – cca. 1152

Obverse: Bust of Christ Emanuel, wearing kolobion and tunic, with scroll in his left hand. One or two pellets in each limb of nimbus cross.

Reverse: Bust of Manuel I Komnenos, imberb, wearing stemma, divitision and chlamys, with labarum in his right hand and globus cruciger in his left hand.

18. Bill., 4.06 g, 30.9 × 29.7 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. a  
 19. Bill., 3.44 g, 26.1 × 29.2 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. a  
 20. Bill., 3.25 g, 28.1 × 28.3 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. a  
 21. Bill., 3.21 g, 29.2 × 27.2 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. a  
 22. Bill., 3.16 g, 29.1 × 29.3 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. a  
 23. Bill., 2.97 g, 30.4 × 28.1 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. a  
 24. Bill., 2.47 g, 26.8 × 29.7 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. a  
 25. Bill., 2.29 g, 27.9 × 31.1 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. a  
 26. Bill., 3.61 g, 28.2 × 27.1 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. b  
 27. Bill., 3.54 g, 27.8 × 28.7 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. b  
 28. Bill., 3.20 g, 28.1 × 28.2 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 10 var. b

V. Byzantine Empire, Manuel I Komnenos, Stamena, Constantinopolis, 1152 – cca. 1160

Obverse: Christ Pantocrator, sitting on a throne, with Gospels in his right hand. Pellet in each limb of nimbus cross.

Reverse: Full-length figure of Manuel I Komnenos, bearded, wearing stemma, divitision, loros and sagion, with scepter in his right hand and globus cruciger in his left hand.

29. Bill., 2.63 g, 30.9 × 28.6 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 11 var. b  
 30. Bill., 2.58 g, 26.7 × 28.7 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 11 var. b  
 31. Bill., 1.64 g, 26.6 × 24.8 mm, ob./rv. 6  
 Reference: DOC 4.1 – 11

VI. Byzantine Empire, Manuel I Komnenos, Stamena, Constantinopolis, 1160 – cca. 1164

Obverse: Virgin Mary, sitting on a throne.

Reverse: Full-length figure of Manuel I Komnenos, bearded, wearing stemma, divitision and chlamys, with labarum in his right hand and globus cruciger in his left hand.

32. Bill., 3.95 g, 28.1 × 29.5 mm, ob./rv. 6

All the coins are constituted as a homogenous group of Constantinopolitan stamena denomination pieces. With the exception of the last four pieces described in the catalog, the coins were identified following the details of the clothes worn by the emperors represented on the reverse of the coins, as the obverses are extremely worn out. The pieces can be classified in two main groups, the first one comprising the monetary issues of John II Komnenos belonging to the both variants of the so-called secondary coinage, according to the classification of Hendy<sup>1</sup>. The second group consists of monetary issues of Manuel I Komnenos. Most of them belong to the first coinage, variant A, being followed by three stamena of variant B, three stamena of the second coinage and one stamenon of the third coinage minted during the long reign

John II Komnenos	Third Coinage	1122 – cca. 1137	Var. A	4
		cca. 1137 – 1143	Var. B	10
		1122–1143	Var. A/B	3
Manuel I Komnenos	First Coinage	1143 – cca. 1152	Var. A	8
			Var. B	3
	Second Coinage	1152 – cca. 1160	Var. B	2
			Var. A/B	1
	Third Coinage	1160 – cca. 1164		1

Table 1. Distribution of the coins according to the minting periods

of Manuel I Komnenos. As it can more easily be seen in the table no. 1, the core of the hoard is constituted of the coins issued in the last part of the reign of John II Komnenos and the first decade of the reign of Manuel I Komnenos.

The billon coinage of Manuel I Komnenos seems to have started to suffer a constant devaluation around the year 1160<sup>2</sup>, a fact which might be also illustrated by the hoarding of more coins from the reign of John II Komnenos and from the first half of Manuel's reign, than the coins belonging to the later issues.

It is important to mention that most probably the hoard wasn't entirely recovered. However, in the absence of a larger group of hoards, it is hard to tell for the Romanian Banat region if it can be taken into discussion the existence of a hoarding horizon that would allow the hypothetical reconstruction of the partially recovered hoards.

### Discussion

The first question to which this article should try to answer is why do I indicate the region of Banat as the place of discovery for this batch of byzantine coins. For one thing, the information provided by the judicial authorities specified that the items were recovered from a person living in Timiș County. From the same person, who used to own the coins, were also seized a series of archaeological artifacts. According to the evaluation of the archaeologists, similar items were found during the archaeological research that took place in some medieval necropolises of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century located in Caraș-Severin County. However, probably the most important reasons for locating the place of discovery in this area is represented by the similar findings concentrated in the Banat region.

From the point of view of the historical context of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it is important to mention that in the early period of the Komnenos dynasty many previous territorial losses were restored and the stabilization of the Danube line was one of the most important achievements of the first emperor of Komnenos dynasty, Alexios I. Starting with the sixth decade of the 12<sup>th</sup> century one of the main concerns of the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos was to maintain a stable

climate in the Balkans area, especially in regard to Serbia and Hungary, where the local rulers proved to be hostile to the byzantine authority<sup>3</sup>. In this context, several military events must be pointed out. Firstly, the military campaign lead against the Serbian leaders in 1162, 1168 and 1172, which were successful for Manuel I Komnenos and, secondly, the diplomatic and military conflicts which followed the death of the Hungarian king Geza II in 1162, for almost five years. From the chronological point of view, the last coin of the hoard assigned to the third coinage of Manuel I, indicates that the hoard couldn't be hidden before the year 1164. This observation could be used as evidence to support the hypothesis that the hoard was buried with the occasion of the byzantine presence in the area, as they attacked several times between 1166 and 1167 the Hungarian Kingdom in order to recover Dalmatia and Sirmium<sup>4</sup>, military interventions being made also in the South-Eastern area of Hungary, including the Banat.

<sup>1</sup> DOC 4.1, 265–266.

<sup>2</sup> Metcalf 1979, 110–111.

<sup>3</sup> Magdalino 2002, 79, Stephenson 2000, 229–234.

<sup>4</sup> Magdalino 2002, 79–81.

The hoard is all the more interesting as it is a batch of coins which captures the monetary circulation in a period and area in which the Hungarian coinage become dominant in the monetary mass. Therefore, in this context another important question that concerns the presence of the byzantine coins in Banat area during the 12<sup>th</sup> century is if the byzantine coins were a constant presence in the local monetary mass or their presence is only occasioned by the byzantine military activity in the area.

Even if this topic has not been approached with predilection in the literature, the presence of byzantine coins in Banat is not surprising at all. The most recent classification of the byzantine findings in Transylvania, including the Banat region as well, was made by Ana-Maria Velter. By resorting to this synthesis of the monetary circulation in the Transylvanian space, I classified the coins issued by John II Komnenos and by his son Manuel I Komnenos found in Banat in three main groups comprising: the coins found in necropolises, the coins found in the local settlements and the hoards.

Concerning the coins found in funerary context, there were identified five stamena in the following sites: one billon coin identified as a concave-convex coin struck during the Komnenos Dynasty period and which I only supposed that was issued by one of the two mentioned emperors, was found in the grave number 132, from the medieval necropolis in Sfogea (*Cuptoare* – Cornea, Caraș-Severin County), during the archaeological research lead in the year 1981<sup>5</sup>, one billon coin issued by Manuel I Komnenos was found in the year 1989 in the tomb number 60 of the necropolis from Căunița de Sus (Gornea, Șichevița, Caraș-Severin County)<sup>6</sup>, one billon coin struck in the name of Manuel I Komnenos was found in the necropolis from Șopotu Vechi (Dalboșeț, Caraș-Severin County), in the tomb number 37<sup>7</sup>, while two billon coins issued by the same emperor were found during the archaeological excavations organized between the years 1975 and 1977 in the necropolis from Ilidia (Ciclovă Română, Caraș-Severin County)<sup>8</sup>. The findings that come from the settlements are a little more numerous. Therefore, three coins issued during the 12<sup>th</sup> century were found in 1948 in the settlement from Frumușeni (Arad County)<sup>9</sup>, one stamena from Manuel I Komnenos was found in Liubcova (Berasca,

Caraș-Severin County)<sup>10</sup>, in the medieval settlement from Moldova Veche (Caraș-Severin County) comes one stamena from Manuel I Komnenos<sup>11</sup>, but it is important to mention that the historian István Berkeszi speaks in 1907 about several 12<sup>th</sup> century byzantine coins found in this settlement<sup>12</sup>. Another stamena struck by John II Komnenos was found in Pecica (Arad County)<sup>13</sup> and one isolated stamena from Manuel I Komnenos was found in Șvinița-*Tricule* (Mehedinți County) in the year 1970<sup>14</sup>. István Berkeszi mentions in his paper another stamena piece found in the year 1869 in Timișoara<sup>15</sup>.

Unfortunately, up to this moment, based on what I managed to document, only one hoard consisting of coins struck in the names of John II Komnenos and Manuel I Komnenos is mentioned in the literature as found in the Romanian Banat area<sup>16</sup>. The mission to identify similarities in structure and chronology with the hoard presented in this paper is quite difficult, due to the lack of information about the identification of the coins. The hoard found in Teremia Mare (Timiș County), at some point before 1900, is briefly published, from the hoard formed of 130 coins, being identified by the Hungarian numismatist Ödön Gohl only 66 coins, as it follows: 37 pieces from John II Komnenos, 14 pieces from Manuel II Komnenos and 15 pieces extremely worn out, but attributable to the Komnenos dynasty coinage<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Velter 2002, 293, cat. LII/78.

<sup>11</sup> Velter 2002, 294, cat. LIX/89.

<sup>12</sup> Berkeszi 1907, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Velter 2002, 297, cat. LXXVI/138.

<sup>14</sup> Velter 2002, 300, cat. XCVI/167.

<sup>15</sup> Berkeszi 1907, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Another three hoards were found in Transylvania, but I consider that is difficult to connect these treasures with the hoarding phenomenon or byzantine coins presence in Banat. One hoard was found in Făgăraș and was consisting initially of 60 coins, from which only 17 were recovered. They were struck by: John II Komnenos (one piece), Manuel I Komnenos (three pieces), Isaac II Angelos (five pieces), Alexios III Angelos (five pieces) and two Bulgarian imitations – see Oberländer-Târnoaveanu 1981, 287–289. The second seems to have been found around the year 1970, there are no information that it was entirely recovered, 22 billon coins being purchased by the collector Octavian Luchian. The hoard comprises one stamena from Manuel I Komnenos, two stamena from Isaac II Angelos, to stamena from Alexios III Angelos, 12 Bulgarian imitations and five monetary issues of the Latin Empire of Constantinople – see Oberländer-Târnoaveanu 1990, 80–81. The third hoard was found in 1892, in Sibiu Streza-Cârțișoara, Sibiu County, and consists of five coins struck by John II Komnenos and several silver jewelries – See Sabău 1958, 295, cat. 46.

<sup>17</sup> Velter 2002 301, cat. CIV/177; Sabău 1958, 296, cat.

<sup>5</sup> Velter 2002, 290, cat. XXXI/35.

<sup>6</sup> Velter 2002, 292, cat. XLIV/60.

<sup>7</sup> Velter 2002, 300, cat. CI/173.

<sup>8</sup> Velter 2002, 293, cat. LI/74–75.

<sup>9</sup> Velter 2002, 291, cat. XLI/50–51.



As it was mentioned before, the arpadian coinage was already present in the monetary mass from the Banat area. Therefore, for some of the places mentioned before as finding contexts for the billon byzantine coins, were identified eleven arpadian coins and one hoard. Therefore, in the Căunița de Sus necropolis from Gornea (Sichevița, Caraș-Severin County) were found four 12th century arpadian coins in four different tombs<sup>18</sup>, in two different points of Ilidia settlement (Ciclova, Caraș-Severin County) were found two arpadian silver denars, also struck during the 12th century<sup>19</sup>. In Moldova Veche (Caraș-Severin County) was found one bronze coin from Bella III (1172–1196)<sup>20</sup>. Another arpadian denar was found in the medieval necropolis from Pecica (Arad County)<sup>21</sup>, while three 12th century silver Hungarian coins and one of bronze come from the medieval necropolis from Șopotu Vechi (Dalboșeț, Caraș-Severin County)<sup>22</sup>. For Timișoara were identified according to the literature only two coins bearing the name of the king Bella III (1172–1196)<sup>23</sup>. The settlement from Teremia Mare is again individualized by the presence of another hoard, constituted of 1291 arpadian coins struck between the second half of the 12th century and the first half of the 13th century<sup>24</sup>. From a quantitative perspective, the Hungarian coinage dominates the monetary mass from Banat, coins struck in the 12th century by the kings of the Arpad dynasty, being found in a larger quantity and in much more points than the byzantine coins. The hoard recovered by the judicial authorities and brought to the National History Museum of Romania does not bring any changes in the understanding of the coin circulation in Banat area and comes in the continuation and completion of the demonstration made by Ana-Maria Velter for the penetration of the byzantine coin in Banat in the second half of the 12th century, who suggests that the presence of the byzantine billon coins struck by John II Komnenos and Manuel I Komnenos is connected with the military actions of Manuel I in this area<sup>25</sup>.

Unfortunately, due to the fact that it is impossible to establish if the hoard had in its structure

coins issued at a later date, it is difficult to place it in a clearer historical context and to establish if it is part of a more complex hoarding horizon, as it can be observed for the 12th century byzantine coins hoards in the Lower Danube area. Four hoarding horizons from this area draw the attention<sup>26</sup>. The first one is constituted of hoards consisting of coins struck by John II Komnenos and Manuel I Komnenos and buried around the year 1140, while the second one gathers hoards with coins from the same emperors but whose last coins can be dated around 1170–1180. The third horizon comprises hoards which alongside the coins of the two Komnenos emperors are present also coins from the Isaac II Angelos, indicating that they were hidden at some point between 1185 and 1195. In the end, the fourth hoarding horizon unites those hoards that ends with coins struck by Alexios III Angelos, a fact which suggests that they were buried due to a series of events happening between the years 1195 and 1203. I consider that it was important to shortly mention this hoarding phenomenon, due to the fact that it might be partially illustrative for Banat space, as similar coin treasures in structure with the hoards from Teremia Mare and the hoard described in this paper might be anytime discovered.

As a conclusion, most of the known evidence about the hoard recovered in 2014 indicates that it was found somewhere in the Banat area. The hoard is quite important for the analysis of the local monetary circulation, revealing penetration of the byzantine origin cultural goods north of Danube, in a troubling period for the Byzantine Empire diplomatic relations with Serbia and Hungarian Kingdom. It is clear that in the Banat area the Hungarian coinage started to play a prevailing role in the local economy during the 11th–12th centuries, but even if the emergence in the future of similar byzantine hoards would not change the information we have at this moment about the monetary landscape in Banat, they would help at the establishing of a clearer image of the historical events that determined the presence of this quite homogenous hoards constituted exclusively of byzantine coins.

## ABREVIERI

CN – Cercetări Numismatice  
RESEE – Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européennes  
SCN – Studii și Cercetări de Numismatică  
SCB – Studii și Comunicări – Muzeul Brukenthal

51.

<sup>18</sup> Velter 2002, 346, cat. XXIX/160–163.

<sup>19</sup> Velter 2002, 346, cat. XXXIII/177–178.

<sup>20</sup> Velter 2002, 347, cat. XXXIX/196.

<sup>21</sup> Velter 2002, 348, cat. XLVII/232.

<sup>22</sup> Velter 2002, 351, cat. LXVI/269–271.

<sup>23</sup> Velter 2002, 352, cat. LXVIII/273–274.

<sup>24</sup> Velter 2002, 351–352, cat. LXVII/272

<sup>25</sup> Velter 2002, 93–95.

<sup>26</sup> Oberländer-Tárnoveanu 1992, 41–60.

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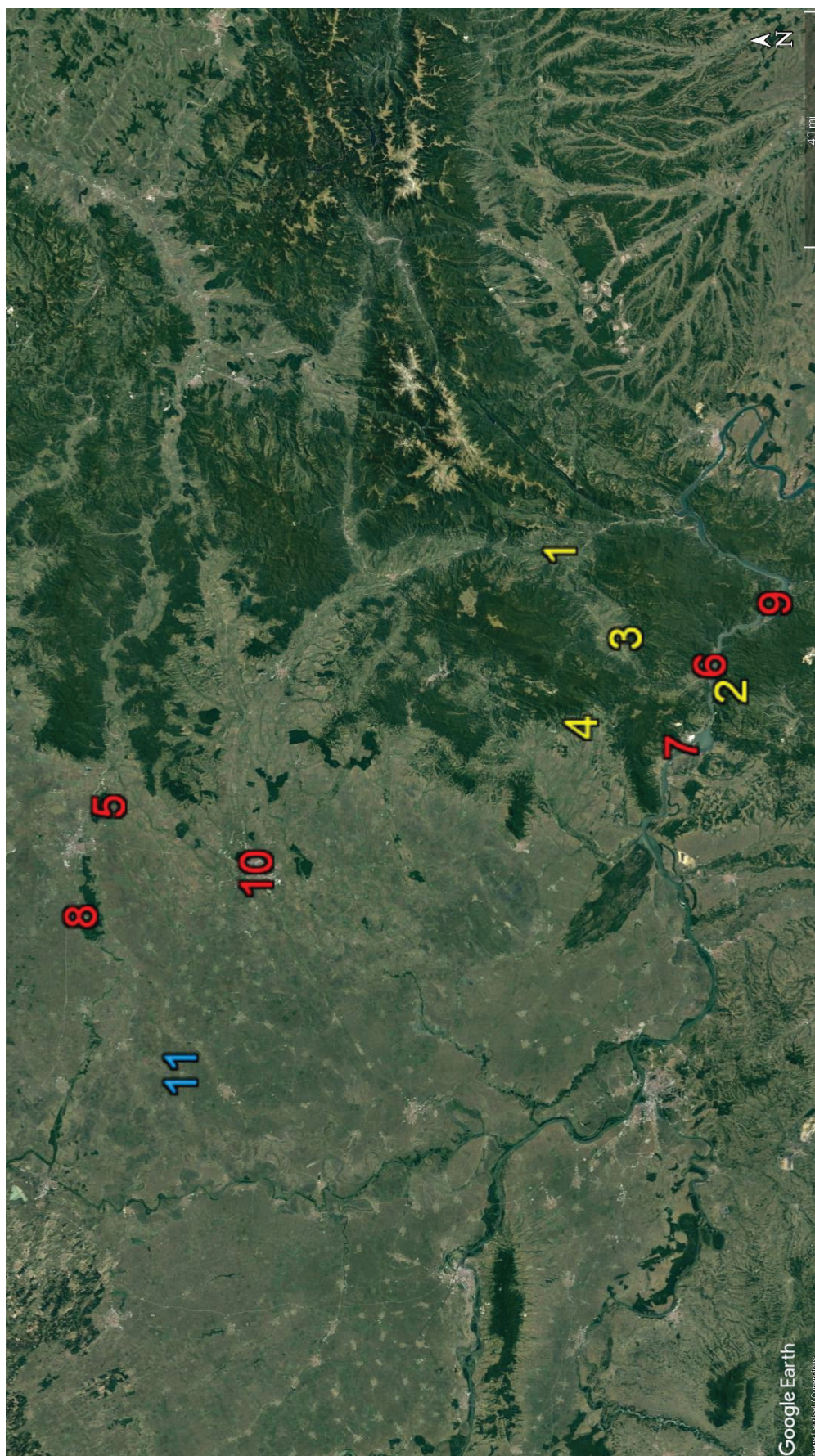


Plate 1 – Map illustrating the findings of 11th and 12th century Byzantine coins in the Romanian Banat Region (nos. 1-4 coins found in necropolises; nos. 5-10 coins found in settlements; no. 11 hoard) – 1. Sfogea (Cuptoare – Cornea Commune, Caraș-Severin County); 2. Căunița de Sus (Gornea, Sichevița Commune, Caraș-Severin County); 3. Șopotu Vechi (Dalboșeț Commune, Caraș-Severin County); 4. Ilidia (Ciclova Română, Caraș-Severin County); 5. Frumușeni (Arad County); 6. Liubcova (Berzasca Commune, Caraș-Severin County); 7. Moldova Veche (Caraș-Severin County); 8. Pecica (Arad County); 9. Șvinița-Tricule (Mehedinți County); 10. Timișoara; 11. Teremia Mare (Timiș County).



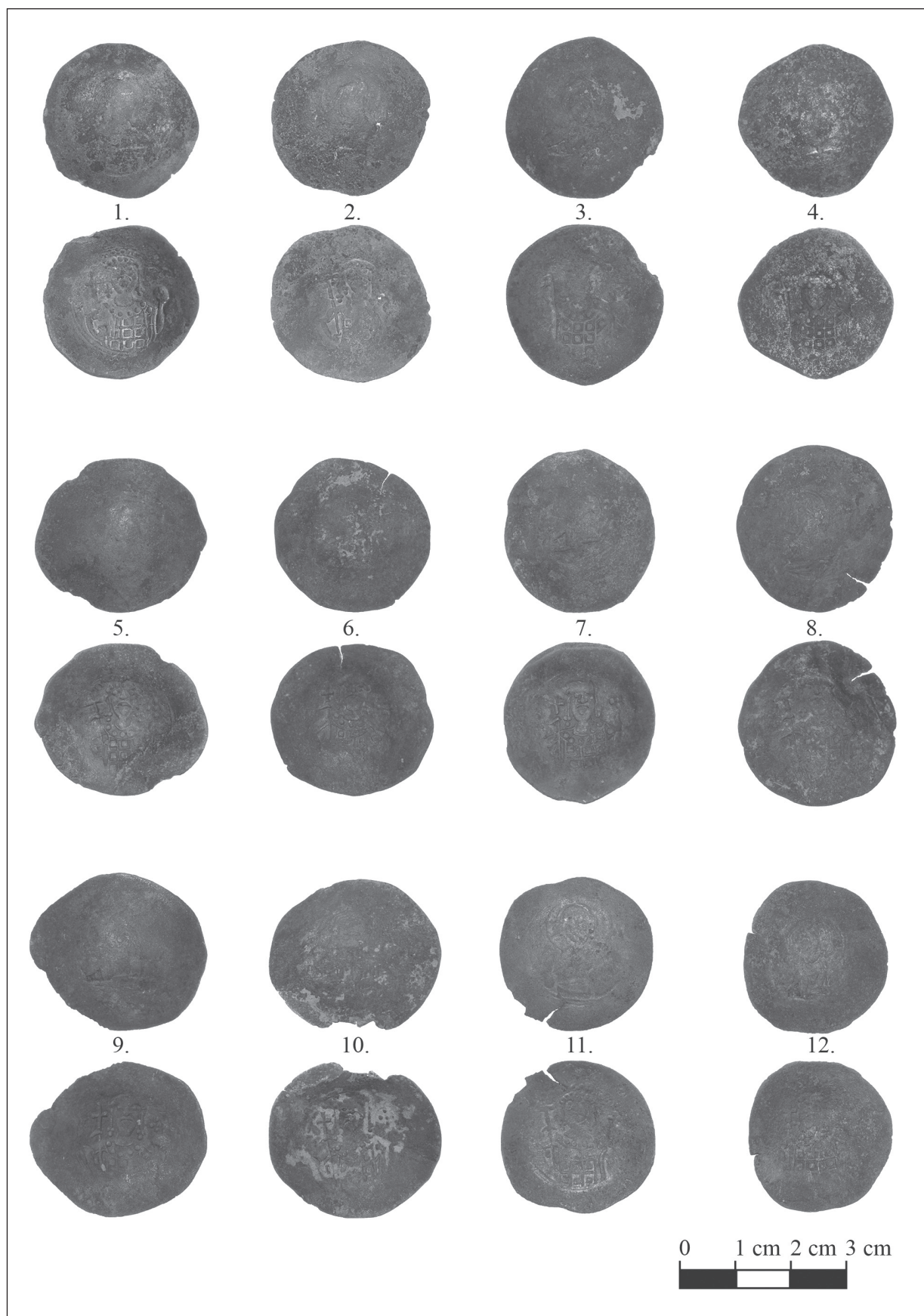


Plate 2 – John II Komnenos, Byzantine stamena coins (fig. 1-12).



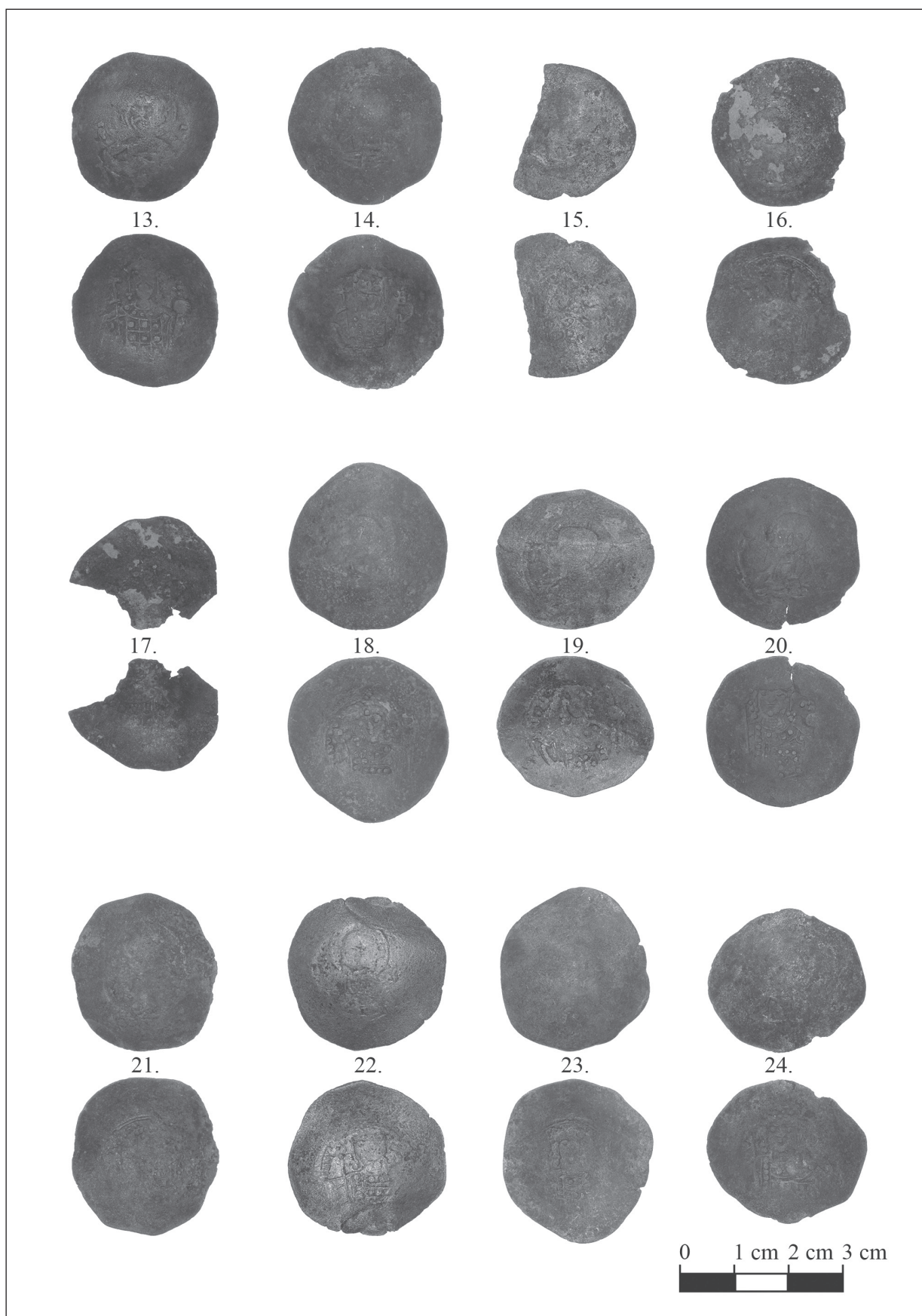


Plate 3 – John II Komnenos, Byzantine stamena coins (fig. 13-17); Manuel I Komnenos, Byzantine stamena coins (fig. 18-24.)

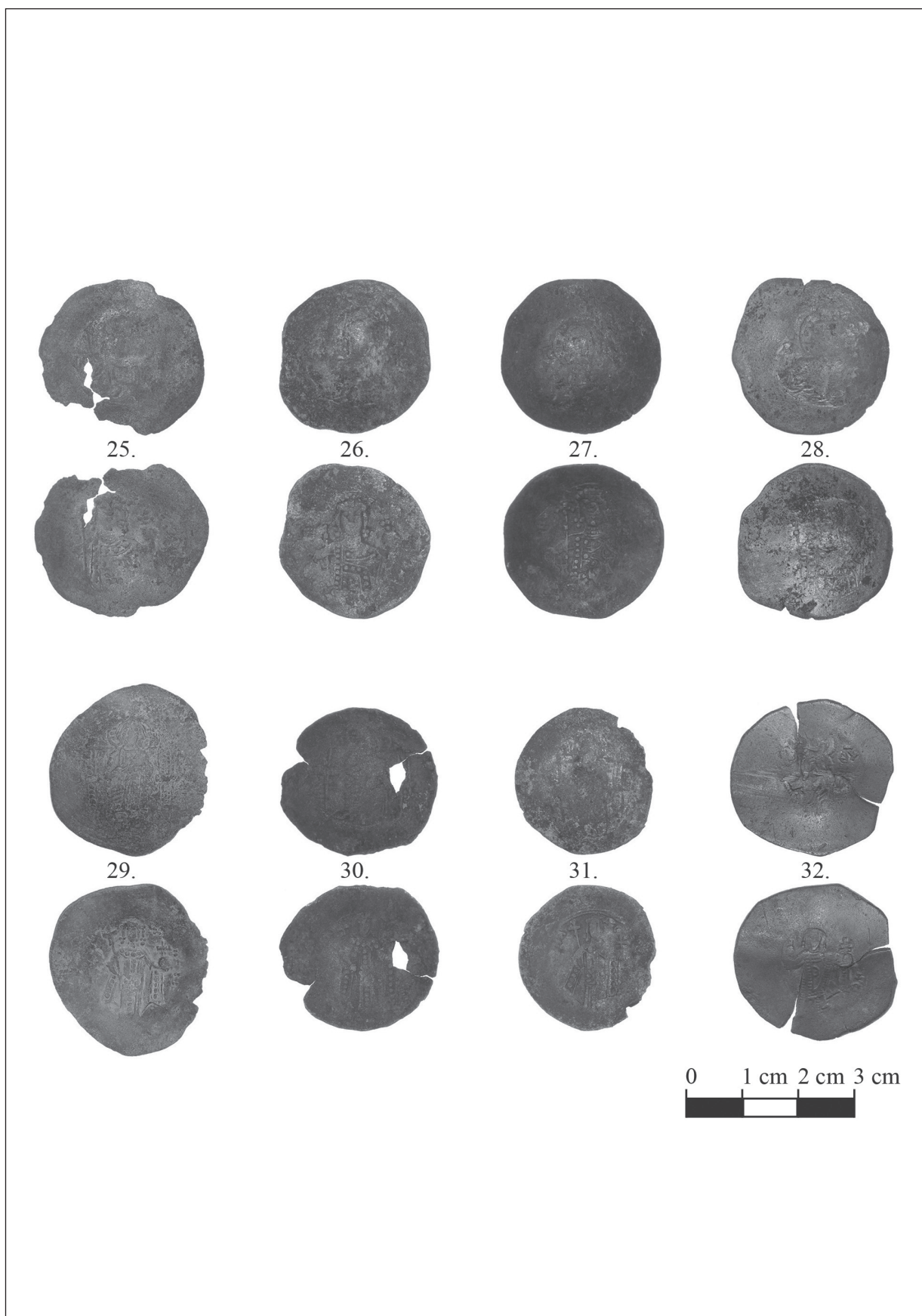


Plate 4 – Manuel I Komnenos, Byzantine stamena coins (fig. 25-32).