

# Reading the consular solidi of the revolt of the Heraclii, 608-10

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DAVID WOODS

READING THE CONSULAR SOLIDI  
OF THE REVOLT OF THE HERACLII, 608–10

PLATE 11

In their standard catalogue of the Byzantine coinage of the period 565–610, Hahn and Metlich list four main types of solidi issued by the exarch of Africa Heraclius and his son Heraclius during their revolt against the emperor Phocas in 608–10, two of which they attribute to a mint at Carthage (MIBEC 1–2) and two to an eastern military mint which they locate on Cyprus at the time (MIBEC 3–4)<sup>1</sup>. These four types all depict the same basic obverse, two front facing consular busts of equal size, and the same basic reverse, a large cross on steps, although there are some minor differences in detail between the products of the two mints. Most noticeably, the solidi from Carthage depict only three steps beneath the cross on the reverse, while those attributed to the eastern military mint depict four steps beneath this cross. Furthermore, the solidi from Carthage differentiate between the two consular busts on the obverse, depicting that to the right as bearded and that to the left without a beard, while the solidi attributed to the eastern military mint depict both consular busts as bearded.

In the case of the solidi attributed to Carthage, these two types can be distinguished from one another by their flan, where one (MIBEC 1) was struck on a smaller thicker flan (c. 16 mm in diameter) that had become the norm for solidi at Carthage (*Pl. 11, 1*), while the other (MIBEC 2) was struck on a wider thinner flan (c. 21 mm in diameter) that was the norm for solidi in all other mints (*Pl. 11, 2*). In the case of the type with the smaller thicker flan, the obverse legend reads DNHERACAICONSVAI followed by the Greek numeral for the indiction year (IA, IB, or IF), and the reverse legend reads VICTORIA CONSVAI followed by the same numeral as occurs after the obverse legend.

<sup>1</sup> See W. HAHN – M. METLICH, *Money of the Incipient Byzantine Empire Continued (Justin II – Revolt of the Heraclii, 565–610)*. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte der Universität Wien 13 (Vienna 2009), pp. 69–71 (commentary) 203–206 (catalogue) [MIBEC henceforth]. For a review of the earlier interpretations of these coins, see P. GRIERSON, *The Consular Coinage of Heraclius and the Revolt against Phocas of 608–610*, NC 10, 1950, pp. 71–93. This also serves as the basis for his arrangement of these coins in his *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection 2, Part 1* (Washington 1968), pp. 207–215. For ease of reference, note that MIBEC, p. 203, no. 1 = DOC, p. 210, nos. 1–3; MIBEC, p. 203, no. 2 = DOC, pp. 213–214, nos. 12–14; MIBEC, p. 203, no. 3 = DOC, p. 213, no. 11; MIBEC, p. 203, no. 4 = DOC, p. 213, no. 10.

In the case of the type with the wider thinner flan, the obverse legend reads DMNHERACAIIOCONSVAI followed by the numeral for the indiction year once more (IA, IB, or IΓ), and the reverse legend reads VICTORIA CONSAB followed by the same numeral as occurs after the obverse legend<sup>2</sup>. It is the last legend that is of interest here, specifically the fact that it replaces the final I of the reverse legend in the first case with a letter B instead. A similar letter B also occurs towards the ends of the legends on the two solidi attributed to an eastern military mint, where it also occurs in combination with the letter A. In the case of one type (MIBEC 3) (*Pl. II, 3*), the obverse legend reads DNĒRACLIOCONSVLIBA, and the reverse legend reads VICTORIA CONSAB followed by the Greek numeral for the indiction year (IA only), while in the case of the second type (MIBEC 4), the obverse legend reads DNĒRACLIOCONSVLIBA, and the reverse legend reads VICTORI AAVCC followed by a numeral (Γ only) (*Pl. II, 4*). Hence this letter B is much more prominent on the solidi of this eastern military mint than it is on that of Carthage. It is the purpose of this note to explore the significance of the use of this extra letter B, and the combination BA, in association with the title of consul upon these solidi in the hope that this may contribute in some small way to a better understanding of the significance of the use of this title by the Heraclii.

One may begin by setting the production of these coins and their use of the title of consul in greater historical and numismatic context. The great peculiarity of the revolt of the Heraclii during the period 608–10 was the fact that they both claimed the title of consul rather than that of emperor, that is, Augustus. Heraclius the younger did not in fact accept the title of emperor until after his capture of Constantinople and the execution of the previous emperor Phocas in October 610, while his father disappears from history at about this time<sup>3</sup>. No private individuals had been appointed as consul after 541, so that any claim upon the title of consul may have seemed to contain an implicit claim upon the throne also, but the fact remains that it was implicit rather than explicit, and no usurpers had been so reticent about their aims previously, or would be again subsequently<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, the surviving literary sources preserve relatively little information about the initial revolt of the Heraclii during the period 608–10, and none note that the Heraclii had claimed to be acting as consuls during this period rather than as emperors<sup>5</sup>. As a result, it is not clear why they preferred the use of the title of consul, who it was that was supposed to have granted this title to them, or what exactly they understood their roles as consuls to be. Given the depiction

<sup>2</sup> The entry for MIBEC 2 seems to contain a typographical error, describing the reverse legend as CONSVAB rather than CONSAB, but the plate coin and other examples prove the latter reading correct.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of their use of this title, see W. E. KAEGI, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge 2003), pp. 40–42.

<sup>4</sup> In general, see R. S. BAGNALL – A. CAMERON – S. R. SCHWARTZ – K. A. WÖRZ, *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire* (Atlanta 1987).

<sup>5</sup> The main surviving sources include the *Chronicon Paschale* (c. 630), the *Breviarium* attributed to Nicephorus (c. 780), and the chronicle by Theophanes Confessor (c. 814). In general, see J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Histories and Historians of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford 2010).

of two consular busts of equal size on the solidi from both Carthage and the eastern military mint, as well as on the copper coinage from the eastern military mint alone, it seems clear that they considered themselves to be joint and equal consuls in the best classical fashion, and the inscription on a unique lead seal from Carthage confirms this impression<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, the fact that they took this title while spear-heading a revolt against the current emperor suggests that they saw themselves as active political and military leaders in the manner of the consuls of the Roman republic rather than powerless figureheads in the manner of the consuls under the empire<sup>7</sup>. Yet all is mystery beyond this. Consequently, since the coins, together with the lead seal, preserve the only evidence that this was how the Heraclii saw their role, as consuls rather than emperors, they deserve full and careful attention in any attempt better to understand this problem.

When the Heraclii chose the reverse design for their new solidi they deliberately rejected that used by the current emperor Phocas upon his solidi. The reverse of his solidi depicted an angel standing face forward with a staurogram shaped staff in one hand and a *globus cruciger* in the other<sup>8</sup>. The legend VICTORI AAVCC, followed by either the workshop number at Constantinople or the indiction year at Carthage, surrounded this design until 607, when it was modified slightly to read VICTORI AVGϸ at Constantinople and VICTORI AAVC at Carthage. In contrast, the Heraclii returned to the reverse design introduced, and last used, by Tiberius II Constantine (578–82). This had depicted a large cross on four steps surrounded by a legend that normally read VICTORI AAVCC, followed by either the workshop number in Constantinople or the indiction year at Carthage<sup>9</sup>.

Another important point to note is that there is a strange inconsistency between legend and design on the obverses of all four of the solidi types above, whether issued at Carthage or the eastern military mint, as well as on the obverses of most of the copper types struck by this military mint, whether operating at Alexandria in Egypt or Cyprus. This inconsistency lies in the fact the obverse legend only ever records the name of one consul, despite the fact that the design depicts two consular busts, that is, that the name of the consul is always recorded as ERACLIO, or similar, in the dative singular, where one would more naturally expect the dative plural ERACLIIS in association with the busts of two men bearing the same name, Heraclius.

Next, one should acknowledge the existence of gold fractions which have also been attributed to the eastern military mint operating during the revolt of the Heraclii. Of the six types of fraction attributed by Hahn and Metlich to this mint,

<sup>6</sup> On this seal, see C. MORRISSON, *Du consul à l'empereur: Les sceaux d'Héraclius*, in: C. SOLDE – S. TAKÁCS (ed.), *Novum Millenium: Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck* (Aldershot 2001), pp. 257–266. The legend on it reads DMER[AC]AIICCSS to be expanded as *Domini Heraclii consules*, «The Lords Heraclii as consuls».

<sup>7</sup> On the role of the consul during the Roman republic, see H. BECK – A. DUPLÁ – M. JEHNE – F. PINA POLO (eds), *Consuls and Res Publica: Holding High Office in the Roman Republic* (Cambridge 2011).

<sup>8</sup> MIBEC, pp. 174–185.

<sup>9</sup> MIBEC, pp. 114–118.

a single semissis (MIBEC 5) and five tremisses (MIBEC V6–9), none actually bear the name Heraclius. Instead, they all bear the name Tiberius on the obverse, with one exception (MIBEC V6) that bears the name Anastasius instead. One tremissis (MIBEC 7) bears the reverse legend VICTORI CONSVAB followed by the date IA, and so has clearly been modelled upon the reverse of a consular solidus (MIBEC 2 or 3) struck during the 11<sup>th</sup> indiction (607/08), but this only preserves a *terminus post quem* for the group as a whole. It does not provide a firm reason to date their production to the revolt of the Heraclii, and so attribute them to the eastern military mint as it progressed first to Egypt, then to Cyprus. In fact, given the qualitative difference in the treatment of the coin legends, particularly the shocking combination of blundered legends from two different reigns on most of these fractions, it is very doubtful that the same military mint that produced the solidi described above could also have produced them. Indeed, they seem better attributed to some mint operating during the Persian occupation of a large part of eastern Roman territory c. 613–29<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, it is important to draw attention also to the fact that none of the associated silver or copper issues in the name of the Heraclii from Carthage, Cyprus, or Alexandria include the letter B, or the combination BA, in association with the title of consul. Their obverse legends are remarkably similar to those on the solidi otherwise in that they also refer to a Heraclius in the singular, normally use this name in the dative case, and always describe him as consul, if there is any obverse legend at all, but they never include the letter B, or the combination BA, in association with this title<sup>11</sup>. It is not clear why this should be the case.

So what is the significance of this letter B, or the combination BA, in association with the title of consul on the solidi? Before one can begin to answer this question, one has to ask what, if any, is the relationship between the letter B and the letter A immediately following it in the obverse legend ending CONSVLIBA on the two solidi from the eastern military mint. There seem to be two possibilities. On the one hand, one could argue that there is no connection between these letters, that they represent completely different phenomena performing completely different functions, and the fact that the reverse legend reading CONSAB fails to include a letter A before the numeral for the indiction year could be interpreted in support of this argument. On the other hand, one could argue that they are directly connected, that the use of the letter B by itself simply abbreviates whatever is intended by their combination BA, so that obverse legend reading CONSVLIBA represents a fuller expression of whatever is intended by the reverse legend reading CONSAB. One should also consider the possibility that neither B nor A are of any

<sup>10</sup> Imitation Byzantine copper coinage was produced in at least two mints in Syria under Persian rule. See H. POTTIER, *Le monnayage de la Syrie sous l'occupation perse (610–30)* (Paris 2004); *id.*, *Le monnayage de la Syrie sous l'occupation perse (610–30): Complément*, RN 166, 2010, pp. 447–476; *id.*, 7<sup>th</sup>-Century «Barbarous» Folles: A Secondary Mint in the Eastern part of the Byzantine Empire under Persian Rule, in: A. ODDY – I. SCHULZE – W. SCHULZE (eds), *Coinage and History in the Seventh Century Near East 4* (London 2015), pp. 17–25.

<sup>11</sup> One type of 20 nummi coin from Carthage (MIBEC 12A) is exceptional in that its obverse legend refers to Heraclius in the nominative case: DNCRACAIVS CONSVA.

particular significance, that one or both represent an engraver's error, whether the meaningless continuation of some element from an earlier model or some other form of error<sup>12</sup>. However, one must caution against any lazy temptation to dismiss the unique or unusual as an error without truly considering all the other possibilities. Furthermore, the same level of proof ought to be required in the case of the claim of some form of epigraphic blunder as would be required in the case of any other interpretation. Finally, one should note that the solidi issued by other emperors as consuls are of no assistance here in that none of them include a similar letter B, or combination BA, among the titles of the emperor. Indeed, none of the late sixth- or early-seventh century emperors even used the title consul on their consular coinages. The only reason that their consular coins are distinguishable as such is because their portraits on these coins include consular regalia, the consular robe (*trabea picta* or *loros*) with or without the signal-cloth (*mappa*) or consular sceptre (*scipio*)<sup>13</sup>.

Hahn and Metlich adopt the first approach outlined above in that they seem to assume that there is no connection between the letters B and A. As far as the letter B is concerned, they suggest that it abbreviates the Latin dative plural ending *-ibus*, so that the term *consul* must be understood to be in the dative plural whenever it is followed by this letter<sup>14</sup>. While this is possible in the case of the reverse legend reading VICTORIA CONSAB on one type each from Carthage and the military mint, that is, that one could expand it to read VICTORIA CONS(u) A(i)B(us) «Victory to the consuls!», it is impossible in the case of the obverse legend DN ERACLIO CONSVLIBA appearing on the two types from the eastern military mint, unless one wishes to assume a serious grammatical error within this legend. The key point here is that the name ERACLIO is in the dative singular, so all terms complementing this must be in the dative singular also. Hence one requires the term *consuli* rather than *consulibus*, however abbreviated. It is hardly a coincidence, therefore, that this is exactly what one finds if one separates the letter B from what precedes it, that the letters CONSVLI form the dative singular of the noun *consul*. Hence it is clear that the main part of the obverse legend ought to be read DN ERACLIO CONSVLI, «To the Lord Heraclius as consul!» with the final letters BA remaining to be explained. It is understandable why Hahn and Metlich should have wanted the letter B to abbreviate the dative plural ending, because that would then have acknowledged the fact that there were in reality two equal consuls, and have solved the inconsistency between an obverse legend apparently acknowledging only one consul accompanying the depiction of both. However, one cannot do this at the expense of basic grammar. Hence one must search for an alternative explanation of the use of the letter B here.

<sup>12</sup> Contemporary errors are not uncommon. For example, the reverse legend on the earliest solidi under Phocas retained the plural legend AVCC, as if there were two Augusti, even though Phocas never recognised a fellow Augustus. The obverse legend on the same coins also began ON rather than dN, suggesting that the letters O and D had been confused.

<sup>13</sup> For the use of consular costume upon the coinage of this period, see GRIERSON, *DOC* (*supra* n. 1), pp. 78–80. More generally, see C. OLOVSDOTTER, *The Consular Image: An Iconological Study of the Consular Diptychs* (Oxford 2005).

<sup>14</sup> MIBEC, p. 70.

In light of the fact that all four types of the solidi depict two consular busts on the obverse, but that the associated legends do not otherwise seem to acknowledge this fact, one is immediately encouraged to look to the letter B to resolve this inconsistency, as did Hahn and Metlich. One notes, therefore, that that this B can also represent the Greek numeral two. However, this would be inconsistent with the use of Latin otherwise in these legends, even if this Latin does sometimes include the occasional Greek letter-form<sup>15</sup>. Ideally, if this letter does somehow acknowledge the fact that there were two equal consuls, it should do so in Latin. One possibility, therefore, is that this B could be expanded to read the adverb *bis* «twice». In that case, the reverse legend VICTORIA CONSAB would expand to read VICTORIA CONS(u)A(i) B(is), «Victory to the consul! – Twice», that is, the B instructs the reader to understand this legend twice in reference once each to both of the consuls. Similarly, the obverse legend DNCRACLIIOCONSVLIBA would expand to read D(omi)N(o) CRACLIIO CONSVLI B(is), «To the Lord Heraclius as consul! – Twice», that is, the B instructs the reader to understand the legend twice in reference once each to both of the consuls who happened to share the same name, Heraclius. Since Roman or Byzantine crowds were accustomed to chanting the same acclamation multiple times, and the numbers of such acclamations were duly noted for the record, the casual reader of these legends would not necessarily have been surprised to find some indication in this manner as to the number of times these legends were to be understood or read<sup>16</sup>.

However, there are two main objections to the possible expansion of the B as B(is) in the manner just outlined. The first is that this would have been a unique occurrence of such a numeral on the coinage. The second is that it fails to explain the association of this B with the letter A also. Yet perhaps there is no connection between these letters, so that they represent completely different phenomena. If that is the case, then one needs to prove it, to explain what exactly the A represents if it truly has no connection with the B. One possibility is that this final A represents some form of blunder. This is what Grierson assumed when he suggested that the obverse legend on the solidi from the eastern military mint (which he actually identified as Alexandria rather than Cyprus) was a corrupt copy of the obverse legend on a model Carthaginian solidus dated IA, that is, that the final CONSVLIBA was the corrupt copy of an original final CONSVIIIA (MIBEC 1)<sup>17</sup>. Hence he interpreted the final A of this obverse legend as part of a blundered date. In this way, he distinguished the B of this legend from the final

<sup>15</sup> The suggestion by C. OLBRICH, *The Solidi of the Byzantine Interregnum*, *The Celator* 17.9.2003, pp. 20–24 that the letters B and A abbreviate the Hebrew *bar* (son) and *abba* (father) is far less likely again.

<sup>16</sup> In general, see C. ROUECHÉ, *Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire: New Evidence from Aphrodisias*, *JRS* 74, 1984, pp. 181–199. The record of the meeting of the Roman Senate at which the Theodosian Code was promulgated on 25 December 438 is particularly interesting in that it preserves a careful list of the numerous acclamations, with a note after each telling how often it was repeated (e.g. *Dictum XX*). See J. F. MATTHEWS, *Laying Down the Law: A Study of the Theodosian Code* (New Haven 2000), pp. 35–49.

<sup>17</sup> GRIERSON, *The Consular Coinage* (*supra* n. 1), p. 75.

B of the reverse legend VICTORIA CONSAB which he also tentatively explained as an abbreviation of the dative plural ending *-ibus*<sup>18</sup>. However, this interpretation requires a strange coincidence that the same letter B should have been repeated after the same title consul for two very different reasons within the one short series of coins, whereas the simpler explanation is that it has the same or similar origin and meaning in each case. Furthermore, one should not easily assume any explanation requiring the existence of a blunder in a legend which reveals no clear evidence otherwise of such blundering. It is important to note, therefore, that there is another possibility also in this case, that the A may represent the Greek numeral one in reference to the date of the coin, where one can easily test the plausibility of this interpretation by checking the consistency of this potential date with the date on the reverse of the coin.

The reverse legend of the first type from the eastern military mint (MIBEC 3) only occurs with the final letters IA, that is, it seems to date the type to the 11<sup>th</sup> indiction (607/08). This suggests that the final A of the obverse legend may represent a Greek numeral also, and so refer to the 1<sup>st</sup> year of some other system of dating, which, in this case, must be the 1<sup>st</sup> year of consular rule by the Heraclii, since their revolt did indeed start during the 11<sup>th</sup> indiction. Hence there is a real possibility that the apparent dates on the two sides of the coin are consistent with one another, but simply use different systems of dating. Hahn and Metlich reject the possibility that even the IA date on the reverse could be real, but the apparent consistency of the alleged dates between obverse and reverse could suggest otherwise<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, their reason for rejecting the reality of the IA date is tenuous at best. They assume that there can only have been one mint in operation within the African territories controlled by the Heraclii before their invasion of Egypt in 609, and since the style of the coins in question is so different to that of the solidi attributed to Carthage, that means that these cannot have been produced before 609, well into the 12<sup>th</sup> indiction. Yet there is no real reason why the Heraclii cannot have operated two mints right from the start of their rebellion and before they had begun their invasion of Egypt.

If one applies the same test for consistency to the apparent dates on the two sides of the second type attributed to the eastern military mint (MIBEC 4), one obtains a similar result. In this case, the reverse legend only occurs with the final letter Γ referring to a 3<sup>rd</sup> year. This can only refer to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of consular rule by the Heraclii since their original revolt in the 11<sup>th</sup> indiction (607/08) and, taking into account that the legend also acknowledges Heraclius as Augustus, means that this type must date to the 14<sup>th</sup> indiction (610/11), sometime after the accession of Heraclius on 5 October 610. However, this was also the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the rule of Heraclius as emperor. Hence it is arguable that the final A of the obverse legend may refer to the 1<sup>st</sup> year by the new regnal system of dating, while the final Γ of the reverse legend refers to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year by the old consular system of dating, but that it is the same year in each case, that is, that the apparent dates are consistent. One should note here that the mint at Carthage had a unique tradition of repeating

<sup>18</sup> GRIERSON, *The Consular Coinage* (*supra* n. 1), p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> MIBEC, p. 70.



the date of the *solidi* at the end of the obverse legend as well as at the end of the reverse legend, but had always done so using the same system of dating in each case. Hence the occurrence of a double date on the coins under discussion is not a problem in itself. The novelty here is that the engravers should have used different systems of dating on the two sides of the same coin.

In this manner, one could argue that the letter A may represent the Greek numeral one in reference to a system of dating, but this results in what could be characterized as an unnecessarily complex and potentially confusing arrangement by which the two different types of *solidi* are each dated according to two systems of dating, but not the same two systems of dating, so that three different systems of dating were actually used over this brief period. While one cannot totally exclude such an arrangement, it is not particularly convincing and other potential interpretations need to be explored first before assuming such an implausible arrangement. One may turn, therefore, to a consideration of the second basic approach as outlined above, that the letters B and A are directly connected, so that the use of the letter B by itself may simply abbreviate whatever is intended by their combination BA. So what might it mean to describe a consul as BA? Again, two basic approaches seem possible. On the one hand, one could interpret these letters as the abbreviation of a single word. On the other hand, one could also interpret them as more severe abbreviations of two separate words, the first beginning B, the second beginning A. In either case, one may expect the abbreviated word or words to be complimentary, or to express something about the nature or purpose of the appointment as consul.

In the first case, there is no word beginning BA- which one would normally associate with a consul. If one seeks for some complimentary term, perhaps the best that one can come up with is the adjective *basilicus* «royal, princely, magnificent»<sup>20</sup>. However, the use of such a term would undermine what seems to have been a determined effort otherwise to avoid the use of the imperial title Augustus. In the second case, the possibilities are much larger. One could, of course, suggest that these letters should expand to read B(*asilico*)A(*ugusto*), so that the ending CONSVLIBA expands to read CONSVLI B(*asilico*)A(*ugusto*) meaning «royal consul and Augustus», or something similar, but this would again contradict what seems to have been a determined effort otherwise to avoid regal or imperial pretensions. It would also be without precedent. Alternatively, if one assumes that this phrase was intended to express something about the nature or purpose of the appointment, then the second letter may abbreviate the perfect participle passive of some verb denoting summons or appointment, whether *advocare* «to call upon to participate in, summon to», *ascribere* «to assign, allot appoint», or something else<sup>21</sup>. In this situation, the first letter would probably explain the purpose of appointment. As soon as the Heraclii began to issue coins, usurping the imperial monopoly in this respect, war had been inevitable, and the suspicion must be that one or both had been expected to lead the war against Phocas right from the start. Hence it seems plausible to expand the letters B as B(*ello*), the dative singular of

<sup>20</sup> See P. G. W. GLARE, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford 2012), p. 248.

<sup>21</sup> GLARE (*supra* n.20), pp. 66. 198.

the noun *bellum* «war», and BA as B(*ello*) A(*dvocato*) or A(*scripto*), where A(*dvocato*) is the dative of the perfect participle passive *advocatus* «summoned» in agreement with the name ERACLIO and A(*scripto*) the dative of the perfect participle passive *ascriptus* «assigned». If one accepts this interpretation, then the obverse legend DNERACLIOCONSVLIBA should be expanded to read D(*omi*)N(o) ERACLIO CONSVLI B(*ello*) A(*dvocato*) or A(*scripto*), meaning either «To the Lord Heraclius, summoned to war as consul!», or «To the Lord Heraclius, the consul assigned to the war!», while the reverse legend reading VICTORIA CONSAB could be expanded to read VICTORIA CONS(*u*)Λ(*i*) B(*ello*) meaning either «Victory to the consul (summoned) to war!» or «Victory to the consul (assigned) to the war!» instead. Or perhaps the B in this last case abbreviates a word closely related to that abbreviated by the B in the phrase abbreviated BA, but not the exact same term. Perhaps it abbreviates one of the many adjectives meaning «warlike» – *bellatorius*, *bellicosus*, *bellicus*, *belliger*, *bellipotens* – rather than *bellum* itself, so that the reverse legend means «Victory to the warrior consul!», or something similar<sup>22</sup>.

Yet this by no means exhausts the possibilities, even if one were to accept that the B probably does abbreviate some case of *bellum* in the case of the combination BA, or some closely related adjective when used alone, which was not necessarily the case at all. For example, the A may abbreviate the adjective *aptus* «efficient or good at doing something, fitted for, able to», so that BA means B(*ello*) A(*pto*) «fit for war»<sup>23</sup>. Or it may abbreviate *avidus* «ardently desirous of, eager for», so that BA means B(*elli*) A(*vido*) «eager for war»<sup>24</sup>. Alternatively, the letters BA may mean B(*onis*) A(*rtibus*) «with good qualities» in reference of that which rendered Heraclius worthy of the consulship<sup>25</sup>. The point here is not that any of the above interpretations is necessarily the correct one, but that the treatment of the letters B and A in this manner opens a range of plausible possibilities that do not seem to have been taken seriously heretofore. The letter B, or the combination BA, presumably abbreviate some short phrase or related epithet where these would have been much more familiar to Heraclius' contemporaries, because of their frequent use in contemporary speeches, acclamations, and other media, than they are to the modern reader. Yet little now survives from that period except these very coins, so a definitive explanation as to what these letters mean must remain elusive for the present.

In conclusion, there is no easy and obvious solution to the question posed by the occurrence of the letter B, or the combination BA, in association with the title of consul on three of the four types of solidi struck during the revolt of the Heraclii in 608–10. However, the solution offered by Hahn and Metlich cannot be allowed to stand because it contradicts basic Latin grammar. The final suggestion offered here, that B and A abbreviate two separate words in praise of Heraclius'

<sup>22</sup> GLARE (*supra* n. 20), pp. 249–250.

<sup>23</sup> GLARE (*supra* n. 20), pp. 170–171. Cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.58: *per latrocinia et raptus apta bello manus* (describing a band of Moors).

<sup>24</sup> GLARE (*supra* n. 20), p. 235. Cf. Ovid, *Heroides* 7.153: *si tibi mens avida est belli* (Dido to Aeneas).

<sup>25</sup> GLARE (*supra* n. 20), p. 192. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.22: *cunctisque civium, si bonis artibus fiderent, licitum petere magistratus*.

appointment or character, where the use of B alone abbreviates the same phrase even further, or a closely related epithet, has several advantages in that it respects basic Latin grammar, avoids the assumption of some epigraphic blunder for which there is no evidence otherwise, and is relatively simple in itself. It remains speculative for the moment, of course, but no more so than is necessary given the state of the evidence. The hope must be that some new inscription, coin, or seal may yet emerge to resolve this matter finally one way or the other.

*Abstract*

During their revolt against the emperor Phocas in 608–10, the two Heraclii took the title of consul. Three of the four types of solidi struck in their names at Carthage and by a military mint elsewhere include the letter B, or the combination BA, in association with the title of consul. This paper reviews the different possible interpretations of these letters before concluding that B and A probably abbreviate two separate words in praise of Heraclius' appointment or character, where the use of B alone abbreviates the same phrase even further, or a closely related epithet.

*Zusammenfassung*

Die beiden Herakleioi nahmen in ihrem Aufstand gegen den Kaiser Phokas den Titel des Konsuls an. Drei der vier Solidustypen, welche in ihrem Namen in Karthago und von einer militärischen Münzstätte anderswo geprägt wurden, tragen den Buchstaben B oder die Kombination BA zusammen mit dem Konsulartitel. Dieser Beitrag überprüft die verschiedenen Interpretationsmöglichkeiten der Buchstaben und kommt zum Schluss, dass B und A wahrscheinlich Abkürzungen zweier Worte zum Lob auf die Ernennung oder die Charaktereigenschaften des Herakleios darstellen, während B alleine für denselben Spruch oder ein nahe verwandtes Epithet steht.

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*Key to Plate 11*

- 1 Solidus of the Revolt of the Heraclii (608–10), Carthage, MIBEC 1: Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 100, lot 287 (7 October 2015). © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.
- 2 Solidus of the Revolt of the Heraclii (608–10), Carthage, MIBEC 2: Jean Elsen, Auction 125, lot 567 (13 June 2015). © Jean Elsen & ses Fils s.a.
- 3 Solidus of the Revolt of the Heraclii (608–10), Eastern military mint, MIBEC 3: Roma Numismatics, Auction XII, lot 1122 (29 September 2016). © Roma Numismatics Ltd.
- 4 Solidus of the Revolt of the Heraclii (608–10), Eastern military mint, MIBEC 4: Stack's, The Golden Horn Collection, lot 3130 (12 January 2009). © Stack's Bowers Galleries





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2



3



4

David Woods  
Reading the consular solidi of the Revolt of the Heraclii, 608–10 (scale 2:1)

