

WAS EMPEROR PHOCAS BEARDED? NOTES ON AN UNSOLVED PROBLEM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMPERIAL IMAGES IN THE OFFICIAL ART OF BYZANTIUM

Nikolay Markov

National Museum of History – Sofia, 16 Vitoshko lale str., 1404 Boyana, Sofia, Bulgaria; markovn@abv.bg

*“God... made him a living image of His power”
(Eusebius Caesariensis. Life of Constantine. I.5.)*

ABSTRACT

Here the established notion is challenged that the first steps towards the portrayal of individual features (such as beards) in ruler representations in the official art of Byzantium were made in depictions of Emperor Phocas (602 – 610) with a beard on some of the coins issued in his time as well as on his bullae.

Keywords: imperial images, Early Byzantine official art, Emperor Phocas, coins, beard

1. The problem

At first glance, the question of whether or not Emperor Phocas had a beard, which is the subject of this paper, may seem insignificant. Such a perception would be misleading, however, especially since it is now considered proven that Phocas was in fact the first bearded emperor for the entire period since the time of Emperor Constantine I, with the fleeting exceptions of Emperor Julian the Apostate and the usurper influenced by him, Eugenius. This phenomenon has still not found a satisfactory explanation. Elaboration on this topic will certainly contribute to clarifying some ill-resolved questions on the familiar conventionality characteristic of Byzantine art and the Byzantine worldview. The firm conclusions of André Grabar written 90 years ago, for example, are highly illustrative in this respect: “...l’art du portrait appelé à fixer ce masque officiel – signe de grandeur surhumaine – ne fait qu’offrir une formule plastique adéquate à cette vision solennelle et abstraite, en se bornant, pour permettre d’identifier une image impériale, à noter sommairement quelque trait saillant (p. ex. une barbe) d’une physionomie de basileus et à tracer, à côté, le nom du personnage que l’image est censée représenter. L’empereur n’existe guère en tant que thème de l’art portraitique, en dehors de son rang ou de sa fonction sociale mystique à la fois, et la première tâche du “portrait” est précisément de faire sentir qu’un tel est le “vrai” basileus, en montrant qu’il en a les traits nobles et graves obligatoires, allure majestueuse prescrite, le geste

*consacré, les vêtements et les insignes réglementaires...*¹ (Grabar 1936, 10).

Researchers continue to accept Grabar's view unreservedly to this day. Grabar only notes the appearance of beards (defined by Grabar as a salient feature – “*quelque trait saillant*”) in a significant number of Emperor Phocas' depictions known mainly from the bullae and some coin types issued during his reign between 602 and 610.² Grabar attributed this phenomenon solely to the need to determine the identity of the emperor's image (“*d'identifier une image impériale*”). Grabar does not explain what caused this necessity, though, especially considering that “anonymous” imperial portraits had been prevalent for nearly three centuries.

Philip Grierson, one of the notable numismatists of our time, was the first to attempt an explanation. This is what he wrote on the subject, thirty years after Grabar: “*The sudden abandonment of the customary anonymity of official art is something that must surely be ascribed to the orders of Phocas himself and can in part be accounted for by his plebeian background. He was the first emperor for several centuries to have been raised suddenly to supreme power without any previous period of cultural acclimatization. Justin I was no doubt illiterate, but as commander of the palace guard he must at least have become habituated to the standards and notions of artistic propriety current in court circles. A contributory cause may also have been a resemblance between Phocas bearded face and contemporary representations of Christ as we see them on ampullae from the Holy Land; it may have flattered him to be brought before the eyes of his subjects in this fashion. In any case, his restoration of portraiture set its mark on Byzantine coinage for almost the whole of the following century*” (Grierson 1968, 90).

Barry Baldwin has provided another explanation for the appearance of a beard on this emperor's face. He notes that “*Phocas would cultivate hispidity to disguise his disfiguring facial scar*” (Baldwin 1981, 18 – 19). Why do not only Grabar, Grierson, and Baldwin, but also all contemporary scholars of the period continue to insist that Phocas wore a beard? This is despite the fact that a considerable number of his coins issued by all the mints of the empire and from every year of his reign also depict him as clean-shaven?

Asserting that the emperor wore a beard based solely on the fact that some coins from his reign depict him with a beard, however, is hardly an example of rigorous scientific research. I personally do not find well-founded the view that the bearded image of Phocas on some of his coins indicates that a beard was one of his salient features (“*trait saillant*”) and that his beardless depictions are to be taken as conventional representations inherited from the preceding period of late antique coinage. To provide more clarity on the subject, a brief review of the available sources – both material artifacts and written records – is necessary.

2. The sources

2.1. Images from material artifacts

2.1.1. Coin types

By tradition established in the previous century, the largest gold coins, the solidi, depicted imperial images frontally. It is on these coins that Phocas is shown with his characteristic pointed

¹ “...the art of portraiture, which is called upon to fix this official mask – a sign of superhuman grandeur – only offers an adequate plastic formula for this solemn and abstract vision, limiting itself, in order to identify an imperial image, to briefly noting some salient feature (e.g. a beard) of the physiognomy of a basileus and to tracing, next to it, the name of the personage that the image is supposed to represent. The emperor hardly exists as a theme of portraiture, apart from his rank or his mystical social function at the same time, and the first task of the “portrait” is precisely to make one feel that such a person is the “true” basileus, by showing that he has the obligatory noble and serious features, the prescribed majestic bearing, the consecrated gesture, the regulatory clothing and insignia...”

² I must emphasize that Grabar is extremely careful on this issue and does not specifically connect Emperor Phocas with the appearance of the first “bearded” imperial images in his work.



Fig. 1. Depictions of Emperor Phocas on his gold coins: a. Solidus; b. 1/2 solidi; c. Tremisses – beardless; d. Tremisses – bearded (all coins are in private collections). On the frontal bearded representations, Emperor Phocas is depicted with a crown, and on the ones in profile and beardless – with a diadem

Обр. 1. Изображения на император Фока според златните му монети: а. Солид; б. ½ солид; в. Тремис – без брада; г. Тремис – с брада (всички монети са в частни колекции). Върху фронталните си и брадати изображения Фока е представен с корона, а върху онези, в които е представен в профил и без брада – с диадема



Fig. 2. Depictions of Emperor Phocas on his silver coins: a. Miliarensis (in private collection); b. 1/2 miliarensis (in private collection); c. Ceremonial coin – medallion (3 miliarensis?; after Grierson 1968, No. 21); d. Ceremonial coin – 200 nummi (?; after Grierson 1968, No. 112.1). On these nominals Phocas is depicted in the same way as on his gold coins: in the frontal bearded representations he wears a crown, and on the ones in profile and beardless – with a diadem

Обр. 2. Изображения на император Фока според сребърните му монети: а. Милиаренсия (в частна колекция); б. 1/2 милиаренсия (в частна колекция); в. Церемониална монета – медальон (3 милиаренсии?; по Grierson 1968, No. 21); г. Церемониална монета – 200 нумии (?; по Grierson 1968, No. 112.1). Върху тези номинали Фока е представен като върху златните си монети – на фронталните брадати изображения той е с корона, а върху профилните, безбрадите – с диадема

medium-length beard or “goatee” (fig. 1a).³ On smaller denomination coins, the semisses and tremisses, that follow the same tradition, he is depicted in profile and is clean-shaven (fig. 1b, c). Two limited issues of tremisses on which he is depicted in profile with a beard (fig. 1d) pose an exception. On the silver coins, the miliarensis and half miliarensis, Phocas’ bust is again in profile and beardless (fig. 2a); however, on the half miliarensis he is depicted frontally with a beard (fig. 2b). The situation is similar with the copper coins issued during his reign; the folles, ¾ folles, decanummi, and pentanummi all depict the frontal images of Phocas (alone or with Leontia) with a beard, except for a few issues where the emperor is depicted beardless (Grierson 1964, 247 – 250).⁴ The smallest copper coins, the dodecanummi, depict Phocas either frontally with a beard or turned to

³ This type of beard is referred to as a “wet beard” in Russian art history literature.

⁴ The explanation of Grierson, who published them, is that they appeared as a product of engravers’ carelessness (Grierson 1964, 248).

the right and beardless. On several known “nonstandard issues” of silver coins, the medallion (or 300 nummi?), 120 nummi (?), and 200 nummi (?), Phocas is depicted either beardless in profile (the first two) or frontally with a beard (fig. 2c, d).

2.1.2. *The bullae*

The bullae of Phocas known to me invariably depict the emperor facing forward with a beard and medium-length hair covering his ears (fig. 3), i.e., exactly as he is depicted on his solidi (fig. 1a). This connection between the two types of artifacts has been explicitly noted by the compilers of the catalogue of Byzantine seals held in the collection at the Dumbarton Oaks Institute in Washington, D.C., and at Harvard University’s Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge (Nesbitt, Morrisson 2009, 20). This is why they are only mentioned here to register the existence of this type of material source related to the topic.

2.1.3. *Counterweight for a single-arm scale*

In one of the only three known counterweights featuring male (“imperial”) images, some researchers still identify the figure as Emperor Phocas, albeit with uncertainty. It was found in the city of Haifa (present-day Israel) in 1867 (fig. 4) and is today kept in the collections of the British Museum under reg. No. 1867,1005.1. The counterweight is shaped like the bust of



Fig. 3. Lead seal (bulla) with an image of Emperor Phocas (after Соколова 2007, 28, № 23)

Обр. 3. Оловен печат (моливдовул) с изображение на император Фока (по Соколова 2007, 28, № 23)



Fig. 4. Counterweight for scales assumed by many to represent Emperor Phocas (after Dalton 1901, 98, № 485)

Обр. 4. Кантарната противотежест, за която мнозина и досега приемат, че представлява изображение на император Фока (по Dalton 1901, 98, № 485)

a bearded man (an emperor?) with long hair reaching his shoulders. He wears a diadem on his head, and his body is draped in a robe fastened at the right shoulder by a round fibula with three pendants. The tunic covering his right shoulder features a circular ornament with a cross at the center. The counterweight is made from a thin bronze sheet, and its cavity is filled with lead. The hoop formed on the crown, through which the arm of the scale was once fitted, is broken off and missing. In its present state, the counterweight is 19.1 cm tall, has a maximum width of 14.49 cm, and is 5.40 kg in weight without the missing hoop. The archaeologist and British Museum curator Ormond Dalton, the first researcher of this intriguing object, identified the image depicted on it as a bust of Emperor Phocas because “*A comparison with coins of Phocas (602 – 610) suggests that the weight may represent that emperor*” (Dalton 1901, 98, № 485). Anne McClanan, however, has justifiably contested the identification of the figure depicted on the counterweight. As a conclusion to her study of counterweights with “imperial” images, she wrote: “...it seems unlikely that the male figures represent specific historical figures...”, and she holds that the same applies to the female ones (McClanan 2002, 63). It seems that these scale counterweights were likely designed as symbolic imperial images to serve as guarantees of the accuracy of their weights and, by extension, the integrity of the transactions conducted using their single-arm scales.

2.1.4 Images that have not survived to the present day

Two similar images are mentioned in the sources known to us: the portrait of Emperor Phocas and his wife Leontia, sent from Constantinople and received in Rome on April 25, 602, and the statue of Phocas, which was likely erected around 610 near the Magnaura in Constantinople.

2.1.4.1. This is what we know about the first of them, according to a chronicle preserved in the Vatican Archives: “*Venit autem icona suprascriptorum Focae et Leontiae Augustorum Romae septimo Kalendarum Maiarum, et acclamatum est eis in Lateranis in basilica Iulii ab omni clero uel senatu: “Exaudi Christe! Focae Augusto et Leontiae Augustae vita!” Tunc iussit ipsam iconam domnus beatissimus et apostolicus Gregorius papa reponi eam in oratorio sancti Cesarii intra palacio*”⁵ (Norberg 1982, 1101, App. VIII. 10 – 15). Unfortunately, there is no description of this image in the record. In all probability, however, it did not differ significantly from the coin images where Phocas and Leontia are depicted full-length and side by side facing forward (fig. 5) and with Phocas wearing a beard.



Fig. 5. The Augusti Phocas and Leontia, according to a follis issued in 605 at Theopolis (Antioch; in a private collection)

Обр. 5. Августите Фока и Леонтия, според фоллис, емитиран през 605 г. в Теополис (Антиохия; в частна колекция)

A lot has been written about these royal portraits, which were typically sent to cities and provinces throughout the empire during imperial ascensions. It is important to note, however, that during Late Antiquity these portraits held exclusively official political and legal value,⁶ which

⁵ “And the image of the aforementioned Phocas and Leontia Augusti arrived in Rome on the seventh day of the May Kalends and was welcomed in the Lateran at the Basilica of Julius before the entire clergy and senate: “Listen, O Christ! To Phocas Augustus and Leontia Augusta, [long] life!” Then the most blessed and apostolic vicar, Pope Gregory, ordered that the image be placed in the oratory of St. Caesarius [of Terracina] in the palace”.

⁶ Details on the acceptance or non-acceptance of these portraits by their recipients, as well as their legal and political value, can be found in Treitinger 1956, 204 ff.

is why they were not actual portraits of the figures they depicted. Regarding imperial portraits of the time in general, including those of the type we are interested in, Grabar wrote that “...la personne physique du prince s’efface devant le porteur auguste du pouvoir suprême, de même l’image de l’empereur s’attache avant tout à la représentation du souverain, reconnaissable moins à ses traits personnels qu’à ses insignes, à son attitude et à son geste rituels...”⁷ (Grabar 1936, 10).

2.1.4.2. The second known depiction of Phocas was a three-dimensional statue cast in bronze that was erected towards the end of his reign behind the Magnaura building. It is mentioned in two works describing the landmarks of Constantinople – one from the end of the 10th c. (Berger 2013, 72 – 73), and the other from the beginning of the 11th c. Comparing the texts of the two works reveals their undoubted connection. Moreover, regarding the account of the statue of Phocas, it is evident that the authors of both texts used a common source. Both texts refer to the period when the statue was put up to the final days of Phocas’ reign.

The account from the early 11th c. that is preserved in the well-known, possibly “tourist’s guide” work *Παραστάσεις σύντομοι χρονικαί* (Brief Historical Notes), however, is more detailed. This is why I have chosen to present it here: [The rumour that he will suffer a horrible death for butchering so many people] “...came to the ears of the Emperor Phocas while the statue (stele) was being cast, and he made so much haste in the erection of the statue (stele) that, as his contemporaries have told, he caused still more deaths. But he gave much money to the workmen to speed up the work; and eighteen days after the same statue (stele) was put up, he was cast out from the imperial power, getting nothing better than he dispensed, a horrible death...”⁸ (Cameron, Herrin 1984, 156 – 157).

Unfortunately, neither text provides any opportunity to ascertain with certainty whether the emperor was depicted in this image as beardless or with a beard. Despite the silence of the anonymous authors on this issue, I am inclined to believe that Emperor Phocas was depicted as beardless in this statue. Otherwise it would be inexplicable why two inhabitants of Constantinople like Symeon Magister and Logothete (better known to us as Leo Grammaticus)⁹ and George Cedrenus¹⁰ (who will be discussed below), both of whom lived at the time these texts were composed and disseminated, would represent Phocas in their works as beardless if his statue, which was daily before their eyes, depicted him with a beard.

2.2. The written sources

Today, we have two rather detailed textual descriptions of the appearance of this emperor: one in the chronicle of Symeon Magister and Logothete, who likely worked under Emperors Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and Basil II, and the other in the chronicle of George Cedrenus that was created after the mid-11th c. Both seem to be based on a common, now-lost earlier source (or sources) in which Phocas is specifically depicted as beardless. Since these descriptions are very

⁷ “...the physical person of the prince fades before the august bearer of supreme power, likewise the image of the emperor is attached above all to the representation of the sovereign, recognizable less by his personal features than by his insignia, his attitude and his ritual gestures...”

⁸ In Patria, the respective passage states: “And in the seventh year of his reign, toward its end, he strove to set upon on the column that had been built, and eighteen days after it had been set up he was deposed from imperial power” (Berger 2013, 72 – 73).

⁹ There has been considerable controversy regarding the identity of the author of this chronicle, which will be discussed below. According to some scholars, however, its author was most likely a representative of the metropolitan official aristocracy (“ее автор был, скорее всего, представителем служилой столичной аристократии”; Виноградова 2014, 18). In the most recent scholarly edition known to me, the chronicle is almost certainly attributed to the work of Symeon Magister, which is why it is published under the title “Chronicle of Symeon Magister and Logothete” (Wahlrgren 2006); the notes clarifying the identity of its author are on pp. 3* – 8*. The question is reviewed in much greater detail in Treadgold 2013, 197 – 224.

¹⁰ George Cedrenus was not born in Constantinople but moved there in the late 1070s (Treadgold 2013, 340).

similar, I will only present the one from the earlier chronicle of Symeon Magister here: “...hic Phocas fuerat centurio in exercitu, corporis statura mediocri, deformis, vultum habens turgidum, comam rubram, supercilia iuncta et barbam tonsam: in mala cicatricem habebat, quae, quum irascebatur, nigrescebat; erat vinosus, caede gaudens et feminarum amans, saevus et audax in dicendo, sine misericordia et horridis moribus...”¹¹ (Leo Grammaticus, 143).¹² The nature of this description is such that a modern scholar of the text wrote about it that seems to be borrowed from an official document (“qui semble emprunté à un document officiel”; Vailhé 1910, 204).

The discrepancy between the “bearded” images of Phocas on some of his coin types and the bullae and the written sources had long been noticed. Most researchers did not comment on it, but some tried to explain it. This is what the British numismatist, Warwick Wroth, wrote back in 1908: “On his coins Phocas has an unkept, almost ruffianly appearance: he is always represented bearded, so that the description of Cedrenus must, in this particular, be inaccurate. We may rely all the more on the testimony of the coins because, in this case, a bearded Emperor is a deliberate innovation on the beardless type of the previous reigns” (Wroth 1908, XXII – XXIII). And this is what can be read on the same subject in a much more recent work by the French scholar Cecile Morrisson, one of the prominent modern researchers of Byzantine coinage: “Κερόμενος désigne peut-être dans ce cas la forme particulière de cette barbe taillée en pointe”¹³ (Morrisson 1970, 218, n. 1). I do not find Morrisson’s explanation convincing, however, since in Greek the adjective *κερόμενος* is derived from the verb *κείρω* (to shear, shave, cut off), which is why it could not be used to refer to specific beard grooming. The descriptions of Symeon Magister and George Cedrenus were thus lightly dismissed.

The question of Emperor Phocas’ beard probably would be easier to solve if there was not another written source that represents him with a beard. These are fragments from a chronicle that did not survive in its entirety and that is attributed to the 7th c. Byzantine chronicler John of Antioch,¹⁴ whose work is preserved in copies from the 15th and the 16th c. (Excerpta de insidiis – Codex Scorialensis ω 1 and Codex Parisinus gr. 1666). Here is a brief retelling of the episode in Phocas’ life immediately preceding his rebellion, where he first appeared in history according to some scholars. Towards the end of 599 or 600, Phocas was sent as part of an army delegation to Emperor Maurice to demand the removal of his commander Comentiolus. Maurice’s attempt to defend the warlord angered Phocas, a centurion at the time. Phocas, unrestrained, began to speak indecently about the emperor. To quiet him, “εἰς τῶν πατρικίων ἐπιδραμὼν τῷ Φωκῇ ἀπέσπασε τὸν γενεῖον αὐτοῦ” (“one of the patricians [present] pounced on him and pulled his beard”; Roberto 2005, Fr. 316, 546 – 547).

¹¹ “...This Phocas was a centurion in the army, of medium height, ugly, with a lined face, red hair, close-set eyebrows, and a shaven beard (τὸ γενεῖον κερόμενος). He bore a prominent scar that darkened when he was angry; he was a drunkard, delighted in murder, and was a lover of women; cruel and foul-mouthed, he was merciless and of terrible manners...”

¹² Phocas’ description in Cedrenus differs insignificantly (see George Cedrenus, 775 – 776). Of the twenty extant manuscripts of this chronicle, this text appears in the transcripts of the ‘P, H, and K’ (χ) group, according to Alexandra Sotiridou’s study, which was accepted by Stefan Wahrlgren and presented in the textual-critical apparatus on page 154 of his published “Chronicle of Symeon Magister and Logothete” (Wahrlgren 2006). In the Russian translation of the chronicle (Виноградова 2014), the passage is on p. 126 and the notes on the manuscripts known to us are on pp. 10 – 16.

¹³ “In this case *κερόμενος* perhaps refers to the particular shape of this pointed beard”.

¹⁴ There have been, and continue to be, serious disputes over the authorship of all the narratives attributed to John of Antioch that follow the time of Emperor Anastasius. They are summarized in Treadgold 2007, 311 – 329. I consider the arguments presented by Sergey Mariev regarding their obscure authorship and later incorporation into the works attributed to John of Antioch to be quite compelling. This is why Mariev did not include these narratives in the most recent publication of the Chronicle of John of Antioch (Mariiev 2008, 4* – 8*).

This narrative is undoubtedly interesting not only because it introduces us to Phocas for the first time but also because it mentions his beard, which was apparently long enough to be caught and pulled. John of Antioch returned to this episode in his narrative. In Fragment 318, which recounts Phocas' accession, it is mentioned that just before ascending to the throne, the vengeful basileus "*Dunque Foca chiese del patricius che gli aveva afferrato la barba, e disse: "Portate il mio caro amico", e lo fece decapitare*"¹⁵ (Roberto 2005, 548 – 549). In his subsequent narrative, the anonymous author (assumed to be John of Antioch) did not forget Phocas' beard. In Fragment 321, which recounts his deposition and beheading, we read that "*Fozio...entrò nel palazzo con le truppe, catturò Foca e lo trascinò fuori dal palazzo per la barba. Lo spogliarono della veste imperiale, lo gettarono dentro una piccola imbarcazione e lo portarono da Eraclio*"¹⁶ (Roberto 2005, 554 – 555). We see that in the narrative presented by John of Antioch, Phocas' beard plays a special, even pivotal role. It is mentioned when Phocas first appears on the historical scene, again when he ascends to power, and a third time when he is deposed and killed. In fact, the beard is such an important element in the narrative of the so-called John of Antioch that a specific myth seems to have been constructed around it, likely according to the author's intention.

The motives behind the supposed author's creation of this "bearded myth" can only be speculated upon, given that little is known about his life and the exact period in which he lived and worked. It is likely that he worked after 1204 when the Latins, who had captured Constantinople, melted down numerous bronze statues, as noted by Niketas Choniates (Magoulias 1984, 357 – 362),¹⁷ including possibly Phocas.¹⁸ Consequently, no one could compare the possibly beardless image of Phocas with the depiction in the account of the anonymous author supposed to be John of Antioch.

Moreover, it is curious that Theophylact Simocatta, the only Byzantine historian who lived and worked during the time of the events (with his history likely completed no later than 630), presented the events of 602 in such a different way. In his work, for example, Phocas first appears not as a member of a military delegation sent to the emperor but as one of a delegation to their own strategos (*magister militum*) Peter the brother of Emperor Maurice while the army was encamped at Palastolum (?) near the town of Oescus (present-day remains near the village of Gigen, Pleven region). A careful examination of Theophylact Simocatta's narrative in Book Eight, §§ VI. 9 – VII.1 – 7 and XIII.1 suggests that Peter is the basis for the "patrician" character who insulted Phocas by pulling his beard in John of Antioch's account (Феофилакт Симокатта, 81, 189).

It is also worth noting that in Byzantine art, pulling someone's beard was a gesture symbolizing victory over heretics (Grabar 1984, 130), and Phocas was declared a heretic by George Cedrenus (*"καὶ αἰρετικός"*; George Cedrenus, 776); this detail is missing in Symeon Magister. It appears that in Byzantine art, the gesture of "beard pulling" was depicted long after the iconoclastic period, most probably following the schism of 1054. It seems most likely that Phocas was labeled a heretic by George Cedrenus due to his significant rapprochement with the Roman Church, which he even acknowledged as having primacy under Pope Boniface III ca. 19th February 607 (Dölger

¹⁵ "So Phocas asked for the patricius who had grabbed his beard, and said: "Bring my dear friend," and had him beheaded".

¹⁶ "Photius...entered the palace with his troops, captured Phocas and dragged him out of the palace by his beard. They stripped him of his imperial robes, threw him into a small boat and took him to Heraclius".

¹⁷ See Bulgarian translation in Марков 2012, 245 – 252.

¹⁸ In Niketas Choniates' list of the statues destroyed by the Latins in his essay "De Signis" (On the Statues), the statue of Phocas is not mentioned. However, Niketas' aim was not to create an inventory of all the destroyed works of art in the City, "*but in creating a list of symbolic loci of memory*", as noted by Foteini Spingou, who has studied this narrative of his (Spingou 2022, 182).

1924, 17, No. 155); however, it was during Cedrenus' time that the final break between the Constantinopolitan and Roman churches occurred in 1054 and when anti-Roman sentiment in Constantinople was extremely strong then. I should note that in the texts I am familiar with from before the mid-11th c., there are no episodes of beard-pulling or beard-plucking, only instances of cutting and shaving. In contrast, such episodes abound in later Byzantine works.¹⁹

It should also be noted that as a military man, Phocas could not have had a beard long enough to be pulled. This is precisely why, although not formally prohibited, the wearing of long beards by military personnel was not permitted from the time of Alexander the Great onwards (Plutarque, 16 (5.4)). It was also not tolerated in the Byzantine army. This is evidenced, for example, by a source from around the mid-9th c., the "Narrative of the 42 Martyrs of the Amorium" (*Сказания о 42 аморийских мучениках*; Васильевский, Никитин 1905, 24 – 25). It recounts that Callistus the comes of the Scholae Palatinae, whose hair was dirty and whose beard was ugly (*Κάλλιστος παρεστηκώς αὐχμηρά τινι κόμη καὶ ἀφιλοκάλῳ γενειάδι...*) received a severe reprimand from the emperor, who also ordered that the soldier be shaved immediately (*ἄφεῖλεν αὐτοῦ μαχαίρα τὸ βαθὺ τῆς ὑπῆνης*; Haldon 1984, 324, 601, n. 994). Since this episode occurred during the reign of the last iconoclast emperor, Theophilos (829 – 842), some scholars today attribute it to the iconoclasts' general rejection of long beards (Vinson 1998, 510, n. 114).

However, it seems that long beards were generally not accepted in the Byzantine army, regardless of emperors' religious affiliations. This is confirmed by an anonymous Byzantine polemical work dated between the mid-11th and mid-12th c., known to us only in its Latin translation *Opusculum contra Francos*, which reads as follows: "...radunt barbas presbyteri more suorum militum praeter apostolicam institutionem..."²⁰ (Hergenrother 1869, 71). It appears that no reliable written sources mention Phocas having a beard, but at least one (the primary source of Symeon Magister and George Cedrenus which did not survive to our time) supports the view that, contrary to popular belief, Phocas was actually beardless.

3. The possible explanation

The absence of beards among Early Byzantine men should not be taken as absolute. Certainly, almost no man's face was as smooth as a baby's bottom. Even the iconoclast emperors had beards, although they were quite short and evidently well-groomed. Today we do not have a precise record of what Emperor Constantine V ordered in his edict against beards. The existence of such an edict is only known from its mention in *Vita Stephani Iunioris*, which was written at the beginning of the 9th c. by Stephen a deacon of the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople. According to him, the young official George was identified by St. Stephen the Younger as a member of the palace staff by "...il s'était en effet rasé la peau du visage de près selon l'édit de ce tyran..."²¹ (Auzépy 1997, 233). The short beards of the iconoclasts are clearly visible in their surviving images, including on miniatures, coins, and bullae (fig. 6). It was precisely by their beards that men were distinguished from beardless eunuchs, who were the subject of ongoing debates throughout the Byzantine period regarding whether they were to be considered men or belonged to a third sex (Vinson 1998, 485 – 510; Ringrose 1996, 85 – 109; Neil 2013, 1 – 10; Tougher 2013, 153 – 166).

In the sources, the distinction between these two groups is observed with strictness. For example, Emperor Constantine VII's remarkable work *De ceremoniis* explicitly emphasizes the

¹⁹ See, for example, in the chronicle of Ioannes Zonaras, created in the late 11th – first half of the 12th c. (Ioannes Zonaras 277, 549, 658, 745 and elsewhere).

²⁰ "[Their] priests (i.e., the Latins, ed.) shave their beards like [our] soldiers, contrary to the apostolic injunctions".

²¹ "...he had indeed shaved his face closely according to the edict of this tyrant..."



Fig. 6. Solidus of the iconoclast Leo IV and his son Constantine VI, issued after 776. The short, well-groomed beard of the emperor is clearly visible while his co-emperor, still a child, is depicted beardless (in a private collection)

Обр. 6. Салид на иконобореца Лъв IV и сина му Константин VI, емитиран след 776 г. Добре се вижда късата, добре оформена брада на императора, докато съимператорът му, още дете, е представен безбрад (в частна колекция)

difference between eunuchs and men (the bearded) in numerous instances.²² As expected, this distinction needed to be observed in other forms of art such as miniatures, but it is precisely in these that a deviation from the generally accepted rule was found. The discovery was made by British researchers Bente Bjørnholt and Liz James from the University of Sussex. In their examination of the miniatures from the manuscript of the Madrid Skylitzes and the identification of several exceptions to the “rules”. In cases of a depiction of a beardless character (an eunuch) with a beard they conclude that “a beard may be a definition of manliness, rather than a sign of ‘a man’” (Bjørnholt, James 2007, 56). This masculinity (*ἀνδρεία*) was personified, and its image, as the researchers found, appears on a Byzantine lamp or incense burner from the 12th c. that is housed in the treasury of the Church of St. Mark in Venice (fig. 7; Bjørnholt, James 2007, 56).

It remains unclear, however, why the researchers were surprised that the image displayed both feminine features (e.g., lack of beard) and masculine features (e.g., lack of breasts). After all, the noun *ἀνδρεία* is feminine, and moreover, in the Roman pantheon, personifications were represented by female figures only. Additionally, *ἀνδρεία* was one of the four virtues valued in the Greek world and in Byzantium: *φρόνησις* (prudence, prudentia), *δικαιοσύνη* (justice, iustitia), *σοφροσύνη* (moderation, temperantia), and *ἀνδρεία* (manliness or courage, fortitude; see Stewart 2016, 11 – 44), each of which was represented by its own personification in the Roman Empire and traditionally in Byzantium.

It seems that in the Byzantine context, then, the beard was perceived as an easily recognizable symbol of masculinity. For this reason, as seen in several miniatures from the Madrid Skylitzes Codex, characters who appear to have been beardless in reality are depicted with beards. This is why great care must be taken when constructing historically accurate portraits based on the images that have come down to us. Additionally, the depiction of a particular type of beard appears to have conveyed an additional message that was understood by people of the era but is unclear to us today. I will only mention the troubling variations in beard types with which the same ruler was depicted, such as Petar Delyan (1040 – 1041) the self-proclaimed Bulgarian rebel against Byzantine power. He was illustrated multiple times in the same codex by the same miniaturist. On fol. 215r (the scene depicting his proclamation as king), we see Petar Delyan with a long, forked, and unkempt beard. On fol. 215v (the scene with Tihomir, the other claimant to the Bulgarian throne), he is shown with a medium-length pointed beard. Then on fol. 217r (the scene with Alusian arriving), he is depicted with a short, neatly trimmed round beard (fig. 8).

After this brief review of selected examples from various groups of depictions showing significant differences in figures’ beards, it becomes clear that the beard depicted was not necessarily a real

²² See for example Ch. 76, in which it is noted that “*du rang et du lieu de tous les dignitaires qui remplissent une fonction en chaque réception dans les grandes phiales*” (Vogt 1939, 110 – 111).



Fig. 7. Personification of manliness (ἀνδρεία) according to an image on a lamp or incense burner from the end of the 12th c., housed in the treasury of the Church of St. Mark in Venice (Treasure of San Marco 1984, 239, No. 33)

Обр. 7. Персонафикация на мъжеството (ἀνδρεία) според изображение от лампа или ароматизатор от края на XII в., съхраняван в съкровищницата на църквата „Св. Марко“ във Венеция (Treasure of San Marco 1984, 239, No. 33)



Fig. 8. The different types of beard with which Petar Delyan is represented in the illustrated chronicle of Skylitzes, housed in the National Library of Spain in Madrid (Biblioteca Nacional de España. MS Graecus Vitr. 26-2, Fol. 215r, 215v, 217r)

Обр. 8. Различните типове бради, с които е представен Петър Делян в илюстрираната хроника на Скилица, съхранявана в Националната библиотека на Испания в Мадрид (Biblioteca Nacional de España. MS Graecus Vitr. 26-2, Fol. 215r, 215v, 217r)

trait of the person concerned. Its presence or absence in a depiction could signify the emphasis of a particular virtue by the author or in some cases the absence of that virtue. It does not appear coincidental that Byzantine creators of painters' manuals (*hermineia*, *ερμινεία*) placed significant emphasis on the depiction of beards on biblical and other holy personages. Certainly the well-known post-Byzantine *hermineia* from the late 17th to early 18th c. authored by the Athenian iconographer monk Dionysios of Fournas and drawing on older texts provides examples of the following types

of beards: long beards, pointed beards, short beards, small beards, slightly rounded beards, split beards, round beards, sparse beards, broad beards, beards divided into five tufts, barely visible beards, thick beards, long split beards, twisted beards, and of course many beardless figures. Young people, adult figures, and old men had pointed beards that were black, gray, and white, respectively. More interesting in this work is the remark “*Saint Artémius: semblable au Christ*” (Durand 1845, 322). Unfortunately, nowhere in this work do I find even the slightest hint of the symbolic value of the various types of beards, although I have no doubt that such symbolism existed.

If Emperor Phocas was indeed beardless, as seems very likely, why is he depicted with a beard on some of his coin images and bullae? One possible explanation, as suggested by Grierson in the passage I quoted earlier, is the deliberate attempt to resemble Christ’s image (μίμησις Θεοῦ),²³ as seen in some of the well-known Christ depictions of the time like those on ampullae from the Holy Land (fig. 9) and of Christ Almighty as represented in the mosaic of the Triumphal Arch of the Church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna dated to the 6th c. and in the mosaic of the Church of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna from the early 6th c. In these frontal representations, Christ is indeed depicted with a similar pointed, medium-length beard.

It seems that depictions of Phocas with a beard were also intended to reinforce an image of him (no doubt intentionally promoted) not only as a God-fearing ruler but also as a manly and courageous one. The almost complete absence of profile representations of Christ during this period seems to have relieved engravers of the need to depict Phocas with a beard in profile on some of the coin types mentioned above. As a result, on most of these coins, he was shown beardless, which he most likely was in reality. But was the practice of likening images of emperors to those of pagan deities, or later to that of Jesus Christ, something new? Are not the images of Commodus as Heracles, Caracalla as Sol, and others well-known? Do we often not see nimbus around the heads of Christian emperors, creating the impression of a supernatural divine light emanating from them? Did imperial rituals not follow the imaginary model of Christ as the Almighty (Pantocrator), with the emperor being seen “*tanquam praesenti et corporali deo*” (as God bodily present),²⁴ a doctrine in which Phocas, as a military man, undoubtedly believed?



Fig. 9. The image of Jesus Christ on an ampulla from the Holy Land, held in the collections of the Dumbarton Oaks Institute in Washington, D.C., (after Ziadé 2022, 75, No. 64)

Обр. 9. Образът на Исус Христос върху ампула от светите земи, съхранявана в сбирките на Дъмбъртън Оукс във Вашингтон (по Ziadé 2022, 75, No. 64)

²³ The topic of making imperial images resemble those of Christ has long intrigued researchers. I will refer here only to the most recent work I am aware of on this topic, which also provides an extensive bibliography on the issue: Cotsonis 2020, 22 – 24.

²⁴ According to the phrase in Vegetius: “*Nam imperatori, cum Augusti nomen accepit, tanquam praesenti et corporali deo fidelis est praestanda devotio*” II. 5. (Reeve 2004, 39).

4. Conclusion

Everything discussed so far seems to provide sufficient basis for reconsidering the notion that, during the time of Emperor Phocas, individual features began to be prominently represented in imperial images for the first time. This shift marked the end of nearly three centuries of tradition in which imperial images were uniformly symbolic and schematic, with individuals taking a backseat to elements emphasizing their role as emperors. Such a change, which is also linked to a religious and philosophical reevaluation of the ruler's role and status, would be difficult to explain in what is otherwise considered a relatively intellectually barren period like the seven-year tyrannical reign of Phocas. In fact, this change began after Phocas during the reign of Emperor Heraclius, who implemented significant reforms across the Eastern Roman Empire like alterations to imperial images, which started to adopt more individual characteristics.²⁵ To conclude, it may be time to make a concerted effort to more precisely decipher the symbolic language used by the creators of Balkan medieval art.

Primary sources/Исторически извори

- Auzépy 1997:** M.-F. Auzépy. *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre*. Introduction, édition et traduction Marie-France Auzépy. London – New York, 1997.
- Berger 2013:** A. Berger. *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria*. Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Cameron, Herrin 1984:** A. Cameron, J. Herrin. *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*. Leiden, 1984.
- Durand 1845:** Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne grecque et latine avec une introduction et des notes par M. Didron. Traduit du manuscrit byzantin "Le guide de la peinture" par le D^r Paul Durand. Paris, 1845.
- George Cedrenus:** Georgii Cedreni compendium historiarum, I. Parisiis, 1894.
- Hergenrother 1869:** J. Hergenrother. *Monumenta graeca ad Photium ejusque historiam pertinentia*. Regensburg, 1869.
- Ioannes Zonaras:** Ioannis Zonarae epitomae historiarum, III. Bonae, 1848.
- Leo Grammaticus:** Leonis Grammatici chronographia. Bonnae, 1842.
- Magoulias 1984:** H. J. Magoulias (ed.). *O city of Byzantium*. Annals of Niketas Choniates. Detroit, 1984, 357 – 362.
- Mariev 2008:** S. Mariev. *Ioannis Antiocheni fragmenta quae supersunt omnia*. Berlin, 2008.
- Norberg 1982:** D. Norberg (ed.). *S. Gregorii Magni registrum epistularum libri VIII – XIV, Appendix*. Typographi Brepols editores pontificii, 1982.
- Plutarque:** Plutarque. *Vies, T. I. Thésée-Romulus – Lycurgue-Numa*. Paris, 1964.
- Reeve 2004:** E. Reeve (ed.). *Vegetius epitoma rei militaris*. Oxford, 2004.
- Roberto 2005:** U. Roberto (ed.). *Ioannis Antiocheni. Fragmenta ex Historia chronica*. Berlin, 2005.
- Vogt 1939:** A. Vogt (ed.). *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète. Le Livre des ceremonies, T. II. Livre I*. Paris, 1939.
- Wahrlgren 2006:** S. Wahrlgren (ed.). *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae chronicon*. Recensuit Stephanus Wahrlgren. Berolini – Novi Eboraci, 2006.
- Васильевский, Никитин 1905:** В. Васильевский, П. Никитин (ред.). *Сказания о 42 аморийских мучениках и церковная служба им. (Записки Императорской Академии наук по историко-филологическому отделению, VII/2)*. Санкт-Петербург, 1905. [Vasil'yevskiy, Nikitin 1905: V. Vasil'yevskiy, P. Nikitin (red.). *Skazaniya o 42 amoriyskikh muchenikakh i tserkovnaya sluzhba im. (Zapiski Imperatorskoy Akademii nauk po istoriko-filologicheskomu oteleniyu, VII/2)*. Sankt-Peterburg, 1905]
- Виноградова 2014:** Л. Ю. Виноградова (ред.). *Хроника Симеона Магистра и логофета*. Москва, 2014. [Vinogradova 2014: L. Yu. Vinogradova (red.). *Khronika Simeona Magistra i logofeta*. Moskva, 2014]
- Марков 2012:** Н. Марков. *Когато всички пътища водеха към Константинопол*. Велико Търново, 2012, 245 –

²⁵ My assumption here should not be taken as absolute, not least because we have Cedrenus' comment that "*Heraclius [habebat]... barba lata atque proluxa sed Imperator factus, extempo comam totondit, ac mentum rasi, qui est imperatorum habitus*" (Heraclius ... [had] a broad and long beard, but when he became emperor he cut his hair short and shaved his chin, which is an imperial custom; George Cedrenus, 782). See some interesting thoughts on the topic in Baldwin 1981, 19.

252. [Markov 2012: N. Markov. Kogato vsichki patishta vodeha kam Konstantinopol. Veliko Tarnovo, 2012, 245 – 252]

Феофилакт Симокатта: Феофилакт Симокатта. История. Москва, 1957. [Feofilakt Simokatta: Feofilakt Simokatta. Istoriya. Moskva, 1957]

References/Цитирана литература

- Baldwin 1981:** B. Baldwin. Physical descriptions of Byzantine emperors. – *Byzantion*, 51, 1981, 8 – 21.
- Bjørnholt, James 2007:** B. K. Bjørnholt, L. James. The man in the street: Some problems of gender and identity in Byzantine material culture. – In: M. Grünbart, E. Kislinger, A. Muthesius, D. Ch. Stathakopoulos. *Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400 – 1453)*. Proceedings of the International Conference (Cambridge, 8 – 10 September 2001). Wien, 2007, 51 – 56.
- Cotsonis 2020:** J. A. Cotsonis. *The Religious Figural Imagery of Byzantine Lead Seals, Vol. I. Studies on the Image of Christ, the Virgin and Narrative Scenes*. New York, 2020.
- Dalton 1901:** O. M. Dalton. *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography of the British Museum*. London, 1901.
- Dölger 1924:** Fr. Dölger. *Regesten der Kaiser Urkunden des Oströmischen Reiches von 565 – 1453, Teil 1. Regesten von 565 – 1025*. München – Berlin, 1924.
- Grabar 1936:** A. Grabar. *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin. Recherches sur l'art officiel de l'empire d'Orient*. Paris, 1936.
- Grabar 1984:** A. Grabar. *L'iconoclasme byzantine. Le dossier archéologique*. Paris, 1984.
- Grierson 1964:** Ph. Grierson. A Coin of the Emperor Phocas with the Effigy of Maurice – *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 7/4, 1964, 247 – 250.
- Grierson 1968:** Ph. Grierson. *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and Whittemore Collection, Vol. 2. Phocas to Theodosius III (602 – 717). Part 1: Phocas and Heraclius (602 – 641)*. Washington, D.C., 1968.
- Haldon 1984:** J. Haldon. *Byzantine Praetorians*. Bonn, 1984.
- McClanan 2002:** A. McClanan. *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses Image and Empire*. New York, 2002.
- Morrisson 1970:** C. Morisson. *Catalogue des monnaies byzantines de la Bibliothèque nationale, T. 1. D'Anastase I^{er} à Justinien II, 491 – 711*. Paris, 1970.
- Neil 2013:** Br. Neil. An Introduction to *Questions of Gender in Byzantium*. – In: Br. Neil. R. Garland (eds.). *Questions of gender in Byzantine society*. London – New York, 2013, 1 – 10.
- Nesbitt, Morisson 2009:** J. Nesbitt, C. Morisson. *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art, Vol. 6. Emperors, Patriarchs of Constantinople, Addenda*. Washington, D.C., 2009.
- Ringrose 1996:** K. M. Ringrose. Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium. – In: G. Herdt (ed.). *Third Sex, Third Gender Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*. New York, 1996, 85 – 109.
- Spingou 2022:** F. Spingou. Classicizing Visions of Constantinople after 1204: Niketas Choniates' *De signis* Reconsidered. – *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 76, 2022, 181 – 220.
- Stewart 2016:** M. Stewart. The Soldier's Life: Early Byzantine Masculinity and the Manliness of War. – *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 26, 2016, 11 – 44.
- Tougher 2013:** Sh. Tougher. Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course. – In: Br. Neil. R. Garland (eds.). *Questions of gender in Byzantine society*. London – New York, 2013, 153 – 166.
- Treadgold 2007:** W. Treadgold. *The Early Byzantine Historians*. New York, 2007.
- Treadgold 2013:** W. Treadgold. *The Middle Byzantine Historians*. New York, 2013.
- Treasure of San Marco 1984:** *The Treasure of San Marco, Venice*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Milano, 1984.
- Treitinger 1956:** O. Treitinger. *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee*. Darmstadt, 1956.
- Vailhé 1910:** S. Vailhé. Exécution de l'empereur Maurice à Calamich en 602. – *Échos d'Orient*, XIII, 1910, 201 – 208.
- Vinson 1998:** M. P. Vinson. Gender and Politics in the Post-Iconoclastic Period: The Lives of Antony the Younger, the Empress Theodora, and the Patriarch Ignatios. – *Byzantion*, LXVIII/2, 1998, 469 – 515.
- Wroth 1908:** W. Wroth. *Catalogue of the Imperial Byzantine Coins in the British Museum, Vol. I*. London, 1908.
- Ziadé 2022:** R. Ziadé. *L'art des chrétiens en Orient. De l'Euphrate au Nil*. Paris, 2022.
- Соколова 2007:** И. В. Соколова. Печати византийских императоров: каталог коллекции. Санкт-Петербург, 2007. [Sokolova 2007: I. V. Sokolova. *Pechati vizantiyskikh imperatorov: katalog kollektsii*. Sankt-Peterburg, 2007]

БИЛ ЛИ Е БРАДАТ ИМПЕРАТОР ФОКА? БЕЛЕЖКИ ВЪРХУ ЕДИН НЕДОБРЕ РЕШЕН ПРОБЛЕМ ОТ РАЗВИТИЕТО НА ИМПЕРАТОРСКИТЕ ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЯ В ОФИЦИАЛНОТО ИЗКУСТВО НА ВИЗАНТИЯ

Николай Марков

Национален исторически музей, ул. „Витошко лале“ № 16, Бояна 1404, София; markovn@abv.bg

РЕЗЮМЕ

В статията е оспорена представата, че първите стъпки към представяне на индивидуални черти (каквито били брадите) във владетелските изображения в официалното изкуство на Византия били направени с изобразяването на император Фока (602 – 610) с брада върху част от емитираните по негово време монети, както и върху моливдовулите му. За целта са представени и анализирани всички познати ни днес изображения на този император – от монетните му типове, от моливдовулите, от една запазена кантарна противотежест, за която и досега се приема, макар и с известна несигурност, че представя Фока, сведенията за двете недостигнали до нас негови изображения – „портретът“ на августите Фока и жена му Леонтия, изпратен от Константинопол и получен в Рим на 25 април 602 г. и статуята на Фока, издигната вероятно през 610 г. при сградата на Магнаура в Константинопол; както и две писмени описания на императора и едно споменаване за брадатостта му – хрониката на Симеон Магистър, тази на Георги Кедрин, както и разказа на анонимен хронист, приет от мнозина и до днес за съвременния на Фока хроникьор Йоан Антиохийски.

В заключение от извършените анализи е направен изводът, че е необходимо да се извърши преосмисляне на представата, съобразно която по времето на император Фока за пръв път започнали да се представят ясно видими индивидуални черти в официалните императорски изображения, белег за разчупването на почти тривековната традиция за изграждане на унифицирани, символични, схематично представяни императорски образи, в които индивидите били оставяни на заден план за сметка на елементите, представящи ги като носители на длъжността.

Ключови думи: императорски образи, ранновизантийско официално изкуство, император Фока, монети, брада