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Table of Contents

Articles

Monika Ożóg

*The Medallion of Theoderic the Great as a Tool of Political
Propagandap. 6*

Jarosław Szczepański

Demeny Voting in Poland: Introduction to a Research Concept.....p. 25

Marcin Olechowski

The mechanism and instruments of psychological warfare p. 38

Monika Ożóg

University of Wrocław

The Medallion of Theoderic the Great as a Tool of Political Propaganda¹

Abstract

At the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries, the civitas forming in Italy was ruled by one of the powerful figures of Late Antiquity (or the Early Middle Ages): Theoderic the Great, King of the Ostrogoths, later also King of Italy. Raised in Constantinople,² he was aware of the power conveyed by imagery and of the significant role of monetary policy. The present article is focused on the preserved medallion of Theoderic and aims to discuss the question of how the image of this ruler affected his position and whether it could have been a political propaganda tool.

Key words: *Theoderic the Great, medallion of Senigalla, multiplum, Ostrogoths*

¹ I would hereby like to thank Deutsch-Polnische Wissenschaftsstiftung as well as Julius – Maximilians-Universität Würzburg for the research grant which made it possible for me to further study the topic and to collect the necessary literature for the preparation this article.

² Cf. A. Garzya, *Teodorico a Bisanzio*, “Sileno” 20 (1994), 241-251.

The imperial portrait served as a symbol identified with the source of authority. As Paul Zanker puts it: "The power of images was realized in their reciprocal influence. The rulers would also succumb to the suggestion of the symbol they used."³ Representations have served the various functions relating to information policy, education, and propaganda, being the peculiar visual language, the language of communication. It must be said, nonetheless, that coinage is a one-way source, conveying the message imposed by the issuer, who remains the sole authority responsible for the entire content of the monetary propaganda.

At the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries, the *civilitas* forming in Italy was ruled by one of the powerful figures of Late Antiquity (or the Early Middle Ages): Theoderic the Great, King of the Ostrogoths, later also King of Italy. Raised in Constantinople,⁴ he was aware of the power conveyed by imagery and of the significant role of monetary policy. The present article is focused on the preserved medallion of Theoderic and aims to discuss the question of how the image of this ruler affected his position and whether it could have been a political propaganda tool.

As far as the so-called barbarian rulers are concerned, the only known examples of images in gold, apart from Theoderic's medallion, are those of Hilderic (a signet) and Alaric II (a ring). These pieces are unique specimens (not reproduced in any other attested copy), possibly owned by the portrayed

³ P. Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*, München 1997, 12.

⁴ Cf. A. Garzya, *Teodorico a Bisanzio*, "Sileno" 20 (1994), 241-251.

rulers themselves.⁵ When in the mid-6th century, Theodebert I of Austrasia (534-548) decided to strike the gold coin depicting his image, a move intended to express his opposition to the East, the authorities of the Byzantine Empire did not conceal their indignation. It was commonly perceived as an act of abuse. Even Procopius, in his *De bello gothico*, stated with revulsion:

It would be impossible for a barbarian king to have his portrait struck on a coin of gold, even if he should have plenty of gold, for he would not obtain approval to use it even among the barbarians...⁶

The triple solidus medallion bearing an image of Theoderic the Great, the Ostrogothic King of Italy in the years 493-526, was found in the tomb complex at Senigalla (known as Sena Gallica in Antiquity, in the present-day province of Ancona)⁷ in December 1894. The piece is now in the collection of Museo Nazionale Romano. The term “Roman gold medallion” is used to refer to the issues whose weights would exceed the weight of the basic denomination in circulation (relative to the Roman pound). Never used in general circulation, they were objects of special purpose, often presented

⁵ Cf. A. Bursche, *Złote medaliony rzymskie w Barbaricum. Symbolika prestiżu i władzy społeczeństw barbarzyńskich u schyłku starożytności*, Warszawa: UW 1998, 220.

⁶ Prokopios Kaisareus, *De bello Gothico* III, 33, Procopii Caesariensis *Opera Omnia*, recognovit Jacobus Haury, vol. I, *De bellis libri I-IV*, editio stereotypa correctior addenda et corrigenda adiecit Gerhard Wirth, Lipsiae 1963, 442-443.

⁷ Cf. F. Gnechi, *Medaglione d'oro di Teoderico*, “Rivista Italiana di Numismatica” 8 (1895), 149-165; A. von Sallet, *Münzen und Medaillen* (Handbücher der Königl. Museen zu Berlin), Berlin 1898, 101; P. Grierson, *Una moneta d'argento inedita di Teodorico il Grande*, “Numismatica” 1 (1960), 113-115; P. Grierson, *The Date of the Gold Medallion of Theoderic the Great*, “Hikun” 11 (1984), 19-26.

as emperor's gift. Specimens of greater weight were fitted with attached gold rings or clasps.⁸

The *multiplum*⁹ under consideration is a gold medallion, 33 mm in diameter and 15.32 g in weight (i.e., about three solidi). It was struck in Italy, at Rome or Ravenna, although judging from the reverse inscription COMOB, the mint of Rome is a more likely option.¹⁰ There are attested cases where provincial mints would have used the same mint mark as Rome. Also, abbreviated forms of the legend referring to the mint location do not have to be identical (e.g., for the Rome mint: R, ROM, ROMA). In the case of coins struck in precious metal, the abbreviation COMOB was used, meaning: COM(ES) OB(RYZIACI) or OB(RYZAE). This official was responsible for the purity of gold in the solidus (*comes sacrarum largitionum*). Frequently, the title of the comes (*obryza*) was featured alongside the location of the issue. In the 4th-5th centuries, the solidi bearing the inscription COM were minted at Mediolanum (Milan), while the tremisses from Thessalonica would have COMOB.¹¹ As a rule, the lower part of the solidus' reverse (so-called *exargium*)

⁸ Cf. P. Bastien, *Les multiples d'or, de l'avènement de Dioclétien à la mort de Constantin. Essai de classement métrologique*, "Revue Numismatique" 6 (1972) no. 14, 49-82; C. L. Clay, *Roman imperial medallions: the date and purpose of their issue*, [in:] *Actes du VIII^e Congrès international de numismatique*, ed. H. A. Cahn, G. L. Rider, Paris 1976, 253-265.

⁹ The term *multiplum* refers to the multiple reproduction (also partial) of the units minted.

¹⁰ Cf. W. W. Wroth, *Catalogue of the coins of the Vandals, Ostrogoths and Lombards: and of the empires of Thessalonica, Nicaea and Trebizond in the British Museum*, London 1911, 54; E. Bernareggi, *Il medaglione d'oro di Teoderico*, "Rivista Italiana di Numismatica" 71 (1969), 96. However, as the above note points out, the minting mark cannot be taken as an indication of the coin's provenance.

¹¹ Cf. G. Depeyrot, *Le trésore de Dortmund et les solidi milanais (COM et M/D/COMOB: l'apport de la mesure)*, "Histoire & Mesure," 1 (1986) 3/4, 229-238.

features an abbreviation of the mint name (e.g., MD – Mediolanum) along with the abbreviated form OB.

Of particular significance is the commonly noted fact that this medallion is the only gold coin piece that depicts the portrait of Theoderic the Great. It should also be stressed that the right to issue gold coinage belonged to no other authority than the emperor. Hence, a handful of questions may be asked here: when and by whom was this medallion minted? If this was done on Theoderic's orders, it is worth considering the king's actual position and how he could have afforded undertaking such an act of disloyalty or independence. Was this particular medal a kind of a convenient tool of political propaganda? The obverse of the medallion represents King Theoderic's bust, shown in a full frontal position. The garments that can be seen include a shining scale armour (cuirass), covered with a paludamentum fastened with a fibula on his right shoulder. His hairstyle is rich and elegant, face round with clearly delineated eyes, with a slightly "puffed up" look, clean shaven, with eyebrows touching. His nose is long, mouth full, no headgear, neck clearly delineated. The king's right hand is raised, a globe resting on his left hand; on the globe: a small statue of *Victoria* (crowned),¹² holding a laurel wreath in her right hand and a palm leaf in her left. The inscription in the surround reads: REXTHEODERICV SPIVSPRINCIS.¹³

¹² For the evolution of the Victoria image in coinage, see A. R. Bellinger, M. A. Berlincourt, *Victory as a coin type*, New York: American Numismatic Society 1962.

¹³ Magdalena Mączyńska gives a completely different reading of the legend, implausible and incongruous in view of the fact that the interpretation of the obverse and reverse inscriptions was determined a long time ago, namely REX THEODERICH; cf. M. Mączyńska, *Wędrówki Ludów. Historia niespokojnej epoki IV i V wieku*, PWN Warszawa-Kraków 1996, p. 219. Unfortunately, in the latest edition of her book, entitled *Światło z popiołu. Wędrówki ludów w Europie w IV i V wieku* (TRIO 2013), the author does not rectify this misunderstanding. There are many hypotheses on how to interpret this inscription. The first three segments of the inscription are undisputed: REX

The reverse depicts a figure of *Victoria*, in profile, shown at the centre of the composition and resting her right foot on the globe. Her right hand, holding a laurel wreath, is raised, while the left one holds a palm leaf resting against her arm. This representation of *Victoria* on the reverse bears resemblance to the images of the same goddess on the silver and bronze coins of Theoderic, which would be one of the possible reasons for attributing this medallion to the mint of Rome.¹⁴ The surround reads as follows: REXTHEODERICVSVICTORGENTIVM COMOB, which is rendered as REX THEODERICVS VICTOR GENTIVM. The inscription COMOB can be seen in the exergue. On the reverse side, in the middle, a fastening hasp is attached (soldered) horizontally.¹⁵ The execution technique and the epigraphic details would point to the fact that the both sides of the medallion are the work of one minter. Some scholars argue that IVS GENTIVM should be linked with the triumphal character of Theoderic's arrival at Rome in the year 500,¹⁶ but there is no evidence to support this hypothesis.

THEODERICVS PIVS, but there is a problem with the final word, which E. A. Stückelberg interprets not only as PRINCIS, but as an abbreviation of princeps, and then the letters I and S should be rendered as: juvenutius senatus, juvante salvatore, inclyta stirpe, imperator salutatus. Cf. E. A. Stückelberg, *Les titres de Théodoric*, "Rivista Italiana di Numismatica" 11 (1898), 63-66. In addition, T. Allara considers PRINC as an abbreviation of princis, and renders the letter I as iustus, ilustrissimus, indulgentissimus, invictus, invictissimus, while the S as santissimus, serenissimus, sempiternus. I would opt for rendering the inscription as pius princeps imperator salutatus. Cf. T. Allara, *Ancora sui titoli di Teoderico*, "Rivista Italiana di Numismatica" 11 (1898), 67-74.

¹⁴ Cf. W. W. Wroth, *Catalogue of the coins*, 54.

¹⁵ Cf. J. M. Fagerlie, *Late Roman and Byzantine solidi found in Sweden and Denmark*, New York 1967, 4; E. Konik, *Roman suspension-coins found in Silesia*, "Eos" 54 (1964), 307-309.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Serra, *Una riflessione sul Medaglione di Teoderico*, [in:] *Rex Theodericus. Il Medaglione d'oro di Morro d'Alba*, ed. C. Barsanti, A. Paribeni, S. Pedone, Roma 2008, 21-25.

Unfortunately, as long as we have no reliable sources for this medallion, all we are left with are just a set of more or less likely hypotheses. The first question that needs to be asked should concern the purpose for which it was made. Most scholars are of the opinion¹⁷ that it was intended to be given to the senators, which was to have taken place in the year 500 on the occasion of Theoderic's triumphal *adventus* in Rome.¹⁸ As a matter of fact, the ruler is indeed portrayed on the coin as a young person, which may be of course just an idealized image. It is not very likely that the king could have given one medallion to all the senators, assuming of course that only one piece was struck, which we do not know. If Theoderic should have ordered the striking of a gold medallion with his own image, he must have already enjoyed a position of influence. Perhaps, this act was designed to assert his role in the East-West politics. Or is it possible that it may have been the other way round, with the medallion being a gift of the Senate presented to Theoderic as a token of gratitude? In any case, it is possible to connect the presentation of the medallion, the year 500 (regardless of to whom it was presented, as Theoderic spent around half a year in Rome at that time), and the double representation of *Victoria*.

Another interesting thing about this object is the inscription divided by the top of Theoderic's head in the legend of the obverse (REXTHEODERICVSPIVSPRINCIS). As Maciej Salamon observes: "Unlike the continuous inscription, the divided legend above the figure's head was, in the 4th century, a sign of higher regard, and therefore of a higher stature, even though there

¹⁷ Cf. P. Grierson, *The Date of the Gold Medallion of Theoderic the Great*, 19-26.

¹⁸ Cf. M. Ozóg, *Inter duas potestates. The Religious Policy of Theoderic the Great*, trans. M. Fijak, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2016, 92-93.

were exceptions to this rule (...) when the emperors would bear the equal titles, the differentiation between the legends provided a clue on the relation between the respective co-rulers.”¹⁹ In this case, however, in the late 5th century, we have a barbarian ruler, and the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, but perhaps it may have been one of the circumstances indicative of Theoderic’s political position at the time.

The tradition of presenting a statuette of *Victoria* by the Roman Senate dates back to the year 238. There was no rule to how this symbol was used in practice: *Victoria* was represented alongside the emperor dressed, variously, in military or civil attire. Constantine appeared with the statue in public during his two visits to Rome, in the years 312 and 315. His sons would follow in his footsteps. On the medal of Constantius II, the Constantinopolitan deity Tyche is shown holding a small statue of *Victoria* in her hand. Since the late 4th century, the *victoriola* had been used as the symbol of the Roman Senate.²⁰

It may be assumed that the Senate presented Theoderic with the statuette, as a sign of loyalty and obedience to him as King of Italy, just as they would have done towards the emperor. In this manner, the Senate did not act against the emperor as Theoderic used the title REX. This term was used exclusively with reference to barbarian rulers,²¹ which some scholars take as

¹⁹ M. Salamon, *Numizmatyka*, [in:] *Vademecum historyka starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu*, ed. E. Wipszycka, vol. 3, Warszawa 1999, 568.

²⁰ Cf. M. R. Alföldi, *Il Medaglione d’oro di Teodorico*, “*Rivista Italiana di Numismatica*”, 80 (1978), 136-139.

²¹ Cf. A. Alföldi, *Materialien zur Klassifizierung der gleichzeitigen Nachahmungen von römischen Münzen aus Ungarn und den Nachbarländern, III, Nachahmungen römischen Goldmedaillons als germanischer Halsschmuck*, “*Numizmatikai Közlemények*,” 28-29 (1929-1930), 15-17; M. R. Alföldi, *Il Medaglione d’oro*, 138-140; M. Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville*,

proof of the view that the legend of the medallion must have been the commissioned work performed by a Germanic engraver, reflecting the *interpretatio barbarica* of the emperor's scope of authority.²² In my opinion, an attempt to draw a link between the term REX and the reputed non-Roman origin of the medallion should be approached with caution. There is no reason to deny that the engraver may have been a Roman who received a commission to perform the work according to the specific image requirements from Theoderic's milieu, the Senate, or someone else, as we do not know it for certain. The question remains if the Senate presented Theoderic with the statuette of *Victoria*, they may have possibly performed a similar act with a commemorative gold coin, struck as one special piece to make it unique. It is known that the coinage of solidi was reserved for the emperor (they were minted in the emperor's name only).

Another element connecting the medallion, the figure of Theoderic, and the events of the year 500 is the palm (a palm image is represented on the *multiplum* twice). The author of *Excerpta Valesiana* reports on Theoderic's arrival and the events of 500 as follows:

Then coming to Rome and entering it, he appeared in the senate, and addressed the people at The Palm, promising that with God's help he would keep inviolate whatever the former Roman emperors had decreed.²³

"Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes de Rome" 243 (1981), 22-46; A. Bursche, *Złote medaliony rzymskie*, 219.

²² Cf. A. Bursche, *Złote medaliony rzymskie*, 221.

²³ *Excerpta Valesiana* 12,65, trans. J. C. Rolfe,

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Excerpta_Valesiana/2*.html

The location *ad Palmam* was situated at the *Forum Romanum*, near the seat of the Senate. At that time, Fulgentius of Ruspe was present in Rome, when *fuit in Urbe maximum gaudium*, as his hagiographer notes, and had the opportunity to listen to Theoderic's speech, addressed to the people of Rome, with all the ceremony and in the presence of the entire Curia, at the place called "Golden Palm."²⁴ The name "golden palm" comes most likely from the statue of *Victoria*, with a golden palm leaf in her hand, standing there.²⁵ The hagiographer confirms the anonymous author's mention of a rather amicable, electoral (to use the modern phrase) speech, full of promises which no one would really take in earnest later on (the author calls them *favores*). Perhaps it was then and there that the king of the Ostrogoths proclaimed the *Edictum Theoderici* – if we assume that he is the author of the edict. Anonimus Valesianus mentions his pledge to preserve the imperial laws,²⁶ as evident in the sentence cited above, which may be also understood as alluding to a written confirmation by the ruler. On the other hand, of course, this may have been just a coincidence. The *Domus ad Palmam*, located near the *Porticus Curva* at the Forum Traiani, was the place where imperial edicts, such as the Theodosian Code, were announced in public. In fact, however, citizens of Rome would speak of the Forum Traiani in the sense of the Forum Romanum.²⁷

Another idea behind the minting of the medal in the year 500 was the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the ruler's reign or the recent "victory

²⁴ Cf. *Acta Sanctorum*, Januarius, vol. 1, 37 (in 1 Januarii, cap. XIII), PL 65, 130-131.

²⁵ Cf. M. Vitiello, *Teoderico a Roma. Politica, amministrazione e propaganda nell' "adventus" dell'anno 500. Considerazioni sull' "Anonimo Valesiano II"*, "Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte" 1 (2004) vol. 53, 76.

²⁶ *Excerpta Valesiana* 12,66.

²⁷ Cf. S. Ball Platner, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, London 1929, 187.

over the unnamed barbarians.”²⁸ As can be seen, the medallion bears no inscription referring to any celebration or ceremony in connection with the 30th anniversary of the reign, which is something that we can only hypothetically assume, or any other “round” anniversary that would have called for such celebrations. If the *multiplum* had been struck on the occasion of the 30th anniversary, the inscription VOT XXX or ANNO XXX would have very likely been there. Suggestions that the makers of the coin die did not know how or were unable to make such an inscription are simply untenable. According to M. R. Alföldi’s apparently unlikely hypothesis, the medallion might have belonged to a high-ranking Gothic commander from Theoderic’s inner circle, who served in the units charged with the protection of the coast and was buried in the area of one of the main harbours of the military flotilla, as supposedly attested by the finding of the artefact inside the sepulchral complex.²⁹ It was intended to be presented as a gift. Unfortunately, this hypothetical argumentation is not based on any evidence. As a matter of fact, medallions did perform a special role in the foreign policy of the Empire and were presented as gifts by various emperors, also as tributary payments (*largitiones*) in the territories of the Barbaricum.³⁰ As Gregory of Tours recounts, Chilperic received a gold medallion, equivalent to the weight of a Roman pound (327 g), from the emperor Tiberius II Constantine in 581, which would have been perceived as an act reportedly equal to the orders

²⁸ H. Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten*, München 1979, 350.

²⁹ Cf. M. R. Alföldi, *Das Goldmultiplum Theoderichs des Grossen neue Überlegungen*, “Rivista Italiana di Numismatica” 90 (1988), 371. It is repeated, in a similar manner, in R. Pardi, *Le monete dei Goti*, [in:] *Rex Theodericus. Il Medaglione d’oro di Morro d’Alba*, ed. C. Barsanti, A. Paribeni, S. Pedone, Roma 2008, 14-15.

³⁰ Cf. M. R.-Alföldi, *Il Medaglione d’oro di Teodorico*, 213-214.

awarded to some barbarian commanders for their services to the emperor.³¹ However, mentions referring to the emperor awarding a medallion to a foreign ruler can be found only in Gregory of Tours' *Chronicle*.³² Could King Theoderic have done the same? The hypothesis of a gift awarded to the Gothic general must also remain a hypothesis only, despite the fact that we know of many instances of medallions awarded or given as gifts.³³

Assuming that it was Theoderic who commissioned the making of this particular medal, some other dates may be taken into consideration as well, e.g., the years 505-515, when the relations with the Byzantine Empire were definitely not the best. The relations between the emperor and Theoderic aggravated when in 504 the king sent his troops to Illyria in order to repel an incursion by the Gepids, who invaded deep into the Empire's territory, as far as Sirmium in Pannonia. During that campaign, his general fought a battle with Sabinus, the commander of the imperial army, and won. In this instance, the years 508-509, the period of the victories over the Burgundians and Franks, could be assumed as a good moment to commission a gold coin in his own name and with the inscription VICTORGENTIUM. Some scholars argue that the most likely date of the *multiplum* should have been right before

³¹ Cf. Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiarum libri X*, B. Kursch, W. Arndt (ed.), MGH SRMer. I, 52-55, Hannover 1884.

³² In 1968, E. Konik commented that Tacitus had referred to the Roman practice of awarding medallions to foreign commanders and other tribal leaders. Cf. E. Konik, *Kryzys Imperium a barbarzyńcy na północ od Dunaju*, Pamiętnik X Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Lublinie 17-21 września 1968 r., Referaty I, Sekcje I-VI, 54. J. Wielowiejski holds a very different view and argues that such a mention cannot be found in any of Tacitus' works. Cf. J. Wielowiejski, *Uwagi o rozmieszczeniu znalezisk i funkcji rzymskich medalionów oraz monet adaptowanych do zawieszania*, "Wiadomości Numizmatyczne," 14 (1979) 3, 137. Cf. also J. Iluk, *Aspects économiques et politiques de la circulation de l'or au bas-empire*, Moneta Wetteren 2007.

³³ Cf. J. Wielowiejski, *Uwagi o rozmieszczeniu znalezisk*, 137-140.

Theoderic's death, i.e., the year 526. It would be difficult to say anything for certain about this proposition, as there may be some doubt here as well, indirectly connected with the tremissis of Burgundian king Gundobald (473-516), dated to the years 510-516. Notably, there is a supposition that Gundobald ordered the copying of the image design of Theoderic's medallion onto his own coin,³⁴ which must have taken place before Gundobald's death in 516. For this reason, the hypothetical dating of the *multiplum* to the year 526 would be unfounded.

As noted before, the medallion depicts Theoderic with *Victoria* in his hand. The image of the statuette standing on the globe may be identified as a symbol of authority. It is known that Theoderic took a long time soliciting for the recovery of the insignia which had been sent to Constantinople by Odoacer, and the statue of *Victoria* may be perceived here as a symbolic representation of the sceptre and a confirmation of his royal title by the emperor Anastasius, along with the insignia of power, which the author of the *Excerpta Valesiana* refers to, somewhat enigmatically, as the *ornamenta palatii*.³⁵ Among those, there may have been the purple cloak, an important *insignium* of authority. Based on what Jordanes reports in his account on this matter, Theoderic stopped living as a private person in the third year following his invasion of Italy and changed his clothes of a Gothic commander-in-chief for royal attire as the ruler of the Goths and Romans.³⁶

³⁴ Cf. P. Grierson, M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage: With a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum*, Cambridge. The Early Middle Ages (5th-10th centuries), Cambridge 1986, 34-35.

³⁵ Cf. *Excerpta Valesiana* 12. 64.

³⁶ Cf. Jordanes, *Getica*: MGH AA, V, pars prior, *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, T. Mommsen (ed.), Berolini 1882, 295.

On the medallion considered in the present text, Theoderic has a bracelet on his right wrist, raising his hand in a gesture of address. This imagery may be seen as imitative of representations of the Roman emperors as *pacator orbis*.³⁷ In turn, Germanic bracteates often feature the motif of ring/bracelet, which is also evocative of insignia.³⁸ Hilderic would also wear a gold bracelet on his right wrist, symbolic of his adherence to the royal family in accordance with Germanic tradition. Likewise, the Germanic custom of wearing long hair signified an attribute of authority of native descent.³⁹ Another element linked to the insignia of power, as shown on the *multiplum*, is a fibula with pendilia, which fastens together Theoderic's paludamentum as the *sacra insignia*. In this particular case, it can be seen that this artefact is a circular disc plate fibula, which was an attribute used solely by emperors (and by empresses, in the Byzantine era). Like the above-mentioned *sacra insignia*, it was reserved exclusively for the emperor,⁴⁰ signifying his authority. On the sardonyx gemma with a depiction of the conferring of the *nobilissimus* rank on the young (*caesar*) Valentinian III, Constantius is shown attaching a fibula on Valentinian's right shoulder, with Honorius holding a palm leaf over the child. Gold crossbow fibulae worn by other rulers, e.g., on the Stylicho diptych, can be seen as part of the imperial imagery only in very few cases.

The image depicted on a medallion was identified with the charisma and the majesty of the ruler it represented. Some of the imperial insignia

³⁷ Cf. P. Bastien, *Le buste monétaire des empereurs romains*, t. 2, Wetteren 1993, 559-572.

³⁸ Cf. H. Vierck, *Religion, Rang und Herrschaft im Spiegel der Tracht*, [in:] *Sachsen und Angelsachsen. Ausstellung des Helms-Museums*, ed. C. Ahrens, Hamburg 1978, 276-278.

³⁹ Cf. A. Bursche, *Złote medaliony rzymskie*, 206-207.

⁴⁰ Cf. Themistius, *Orationes* XI, ed. H. Schenkel. corr. G. Downey, A. F. Norman, t. 1, Bibl. Teub., Lipsiae 1965, 216.

or garments were treated as signs of prestige among Germanic peoples in Late Antiquity.⁴¹ The Ostrogoth rulers assumed a number of attributes connected with imperial authority, which would often become enshrined as images represented on coins. This would not mean that usurping the imperial insignia was Theoderic's objective, as attested, e.g., by his consistent use of the title REX.⁴² Therefore, it can be concluded that the medallions served as *sacra insignia* and *regalia insignia*, and were at the same time tools of political propaganda, which were used as "protoregalia."



Obverse of the medallion, Museo Nazionale Romano, fot. M. Oźóg

⁴¹ Cf. N. Fettich, *Der zweite Schatz von Szilágysomlyó*, "Archaeologia Hungarica" 8 (1932), 21-23.

⁴² Cf. Prokopios Kaisareus, *De bello gotico* I, 29.



Reverse of the medallion, Museo Nazionale Romano, fot. M. Özóg

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