

MAREA

75. Coinage weight

Marea

6th-7th century

Dia. 3.3 cm, bronze

Alexandria, Mustapha Pasha storerooms, Inv. No. M128/04

Originated from Constantinople

Round weight with raised border, four concentric circles grooved around the central hole. In the upper part, a standing cross with slightly elongated *statibulum* (vertical beam). All arms terminating in three dots. Below, an upside-down triangle filled with rows of small dots. To the left of the cross, the letter N (*nomisma = solidus*) with two omicrons as decoration (?), on the left, the letter Θ (nine). The triangle and the letters have small shields at the vertices. On the obverse, the shape is similar but without decoration except for five concentric circles around the central hole. The significance of the triangle below the cross is unclear; it may be an altar or a vessel of some kind.

Few coinage weights have ever been found. They were made of bronze, glass and lead, and they were usually round or rectangular. In the Byzantine period, high-ranking state officials were responsible for managing weights and measures. The Edict of Justinian designated an official called *comes sacrorum largitorum*, specifically charged with responsibility for coinage weights made of gold, silver and bronze. The discovery of a weight of this type in a chamber next to the basilica in Marea permits the assumption that pilgrims headed for the nearby pilgrimage center of St Menas in Abu Mena were given the opportunity to exchange whatever currency they had arrived with.

H.S.

