

COINS OF CRISIS:

Power and Money in Late Byzantium and Beyond



**Special exhibition on occasion
of the 25th International Congress of Byzantine Studies
25 to 27 August 2026, 11:00 am – 4 pm**

**Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Medieval Research
(Österreichische Postsparkasse), Georg Coch-Platz 2, 1010 Wien, 3rd floor
(barrier-free access via Wiesingerstraße 4, 1010 Wien)**

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**25th INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS OF
BYZANTINE STUDIES**
Vienna, 25-28 August 2026
Byzantium beyond Byzantium

NAC

Numismatica Ars Classica NAC AG

**Samuel Cowell
in cooperation with Johannes Preiser-Kapeller**

Acknowledgments

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Foreword

With an exhibition both tied to a specialist congress while open to the general public, it is a fine line to balance the presentation of field specific research with an accessible, understandable, and intelligible message for those less familiar or perhaps entirely unacquainted with Byzantium. For those researchers or other parties interested in the numismatic discoveries presented herein pertaining to the Late Byzantine world, please skip ahead to the section titled “Forthcoming Publications and Core Research”. For those to whom Byzantium may be a lesser known topic - or for those wishing to again view the colorful brush strokes that so excitingly fill the broad canvas of a millennium of medieval history – this exhibition presents an albeit brief if thorough overview of Byzantine history and culture.

Exhibition Collaborations

Hosted in collaboration with this exhibition is a project by Dr. Nathan Websdale. His excellent and complimentary research can be found in the section titled “Prosopography of a Fragmented Byzantium: 1204 – 1261”.

Featured Student Presentations

To be found at the end of the catalogue are informations on presentations created by students in the course taught by Dr. Preiser-Kapeller, Dr. Mitsou, and Mr. Cowell, 070088 UE Guided Reading Global History Presentations - Money, Merchants and Mongols: Aspects of Economic Exchange in the “Globalization of Marco Polo”, 1200-1400 CE. Representing a swath of global history from the 13th through 15th centuries, these interactive presentations in mediums both digital and physical highlight the interconnected trade networks of the period and the Byzantine roots found in Vienna!

Exhibition in Summation

The hope of this exhibition and its collaborations is to engage, dialogue with, and excite a wider audience of non-specialists about Byzantine history while simultaneously presenting in detail the innovations and recent discoveries in the field of Late Byzantine numismatic research. Such a task is not a simple one, and the author hopes that both general and specialist readerships may find something of use in this exhibition.

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I. “Solomon, I have outdone thee”

What is a Byzantine?

The fall of the Western empire in 476 is taken as a hallmark date, yet less emphasized is the fact that within half a century the Romans would reconquer significant portions of Italy, Africa, and Spain. A medieval Roman living in the city of Rome in the seventh century would have been quite surprised to learn that he or she had now progressed into a medieval period and was living centuries after the fall of their own empire, considering that they still lived in the ancient capital, still begrudgingly paid taxes to a Roman imperial administration, and still were subject to a Roman emperor.

Such an example is not meant to mitigate the traumatic and often catastrophic events of the Late Antique period such as the conquests of the city of Rome in 410 or 455 AD, but the example serves to highlight how traditional dates and seminal events – while serving to concisely convey complicated trends – may not fully reveal all details. The benefit of such shorthanded history is to make intelligible often nebulous and protracted episodes of consequence, but the downside comes at the cost of marginalizing certain aspects of the story. And if there has been a common trend in the historiography of the ‘Byzantine’ Empire from the enlightenment to the Second World War, marginalization of the medieval Romans for the benefit of other peoples and states is front and center.

When the Medieval Romans are denied their Roman patrimony and heritage, the way history is told is altered. The *translatio imperii* of Charlemagne and the Franks looks very different if done in an environment with a thriving and extant medieval Roman state, or an environment where any legitimate claims to Roman identity were already forfeited. The actions of the Crusaders in sacking

Constantinople are viewed differently if done unto the successors of the ancient Caesars, or a foreign and despotic, oriental and treacherous principality. The ways in which the Medieval Romans are viewed has changed drastically in what is a relatively short time, historiographically speaking. Only recently have perceptions of 'Byzantium' shifted, and long it has been to the benefit of many false historical narratives that the medieval, Greek speaking Romans are denied their Romanness.

Any discussion of 'Byzantine' history inevitably is posed with questions of a semantic nature. For even in the very name of 'Byzantium' lies not only a question, but a centuries long battle to define exactly who and what the people ruled by the administration based in Constantinople for over one thousand years were. Juxtaposing the continual usage of a state apparatus dating back to the Roman Republic and Empire with a different religion and (perceived) language from said epochs, the fundamental tension of defining who or what a 'Byzantine' is lies with the progression and development of a state that across millennia of existence absorbed new cultural elements alongside the retention of older ones, and how those gradual adoptions impact their identity.

To many enlightenment scholars, it was an outright impossibility that a medieval, Greek, and Christian state could be Roman. Yet in the diatribes of Gibbon and quips of Voltaire a deeper truth is found, whereby posthumous generations of historians from peoples or states often historically adverse to the 'Byzantines' adjudicate and pronounce an identity upon a foreign people whose own views were not fully nor fairly considered.

The question of who or what a 'Byzantine' is, invariably is best answered by the people who themselves belonged to that group. In a medieval empire that often fluctuated in territories, influence, peoples,

and languages, the question of identity remains rather clear. The ‘Byzantines’ always identified themselves as the *Ῥωμαῖοι* (*Rhomaioi*, the Romans). Likewise, the neighbors around the ‘Byzantine’ empire referred to them as Romans. The term ‘Byzantine’ is not contemporary to the empire it describes and never was used by the ‘Byzantine’ people to refer to themselves (at least not in the sense of Western European historiography).

While in modern culture the Latin language is ubiquitous with the Roman people, a self-identifying Roman who spoke Greek did not have their Roman identity invalidated by that fact. Even under the traditional chronological boundaries of the Roman Empire (27 BC – AD 476), millions of Roman citizens identified as a part of the Roman state while speaking a language other than Latin. Greek speaking Romans were equal to Latin speaking Romans under the law, and many Latin speaking Romans preferred the Greek portions and culture of the empire, perhaps most famously with triumvir Marcus Antonius or emperor Hadrianus.

The heights of Roman culture and the flourishing of literary output came from the imitation of Greek culture and acquiesce that the Latin language fell short of Greek. The first ever work of Latin literature was created in the 3rd century BC at the behest of the Roman senate, who specifically and pointedly invited a Greek to write it. Without the Greek Livius Andronicus (Λίβιος Ἀνδρόνικος), there would be no Horace or Vergil. Cicero would not have flowered without that Greek progenitor of Latin literature. Even the very role model of the most famous Latin orator was a Greek himself, namely Demosthenes (Δημοσθένης).

With a cultural blending of Latin and Greek under an empire with millions of Roman subjects who spoke each of the respective

languages, the antiquated views of the enlightenment and post-enlightenment no longer can stand. With the advent of the empire, Roman identity never again was an exclusively Latin affair. The inception of imperialistic ambitions made it nigh unavoidable that the Roman identity would expand beyond the Latin language and culture to include those of the peoples now members of Roman society.

If Cato the Elder waxed and waned about the corrupting nature of Greek culture on Roman society, within two generations his grandson Cato the Younger dined with Greek intellectuals and devoured their philosophical ideas. That the Roman world was no longer limited to Latin, the Latin speaking Romans admitted as much:

*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit
agresti Latio*

Captive Greece took captive her savage conquerer and
brought the arts to rustic Latium.

Thus the Latin language cannot be the exclusive domain of Roman identity, as not only did the Latin language need inculcation under Greek minds to form its literary traditions, but millions of Greek speaking individuals already lived in the Roman Empire and identified as Roman subjects under a Roman emperor centuries before the traditional ‘fall’ of the Roman empire in AD 476. The ‘Byzantines’ therefore as Greek speaking, Roman identifying subjects did not bring about change in this specific aspect but rather continued a tradition of Greek speaking Roman citizens, dating back in some cases to before the Principate founded by Augustus.

If the world after 476 in the modern age is arbitrarily classified as medieval, the Romans would have been quite surprised indeed to discover that the progressed into a new epoch. Sitting on the Bosphorus at the city founded by and named after emperor Constantine I, the

medieval Romans spoke the same language, read the same literature, and excised authority through the very same institutions of the *Res Publica* (Commonwealth) founded by the ancient Romans, and reformed by emperors Augustus and Diocletian. The medieval Romans could trace their state back to Romulus and were even insulted by the Ottonian court for such. If the world around them had moved on, the medieval Romans stayed very much the same.

The ‘Byzantines’ were in fact the same Romans of the classical period only chronologically later, and their usage of the Greek language did not preclude them from Roman identity but in fact was a part of a centuries’ long tradition of cultural and linguistic fusion under the spacious umbrella of the Roman empire, judiciously administered by the linguistically apathetic tax collector.

In Hoc Signo Vinces

The age of enlightenment (among many others) scorned the medieval Romans and denied them their Romanness for being medieval, Greek speaking, and Christian. As shown above, the roots of Greek Speaking, Roman identifying people dates far back into the history of the Roman empire, with a precedent both centuries long and tens if not hundreds of millions of souls rich. Likewise, the transition into the category of the middle ages is an essentially modern tool to help classify broad periods, with less practicality when applied to the medieval Romans with the traditional date of AD 476. If the medieval Romans cannot be denied their Roman identity because of the medieval period or their linguistic peculiarities, there is only the matter of Christianity to still address.

The change in religion of the Roman state during the third century AD indeed forms one of the most consequential historical development of any age in any place at any time. Here indeed lies a

noteworthy difference between the Principate of Augustus and the empire of medieval Romans, a radical departure from the past with ramifications in every aspect of Roman life.

It is perhaps easier to understand the rise of Christianity by first surveying what came before. Roman paganism as a system was less defined than what replaced it, though the general guidelines of the religious system could be and were enforced with rigor depending on the desires of a particular emperor. Centered around the Pantheon, the

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Ivory Triptych Depicting Apostles, Saints, and the Crucifixion of Christ
– Altes Museum Berlin



Saints Constantine and Helena in Imperial Garb – Altes Museum Berlin

gods and goddesses of the ancient world were not omnipotent beings, but rather an eclectic mix of powerful deities reflecting the various virtues and vices of mankind. Religion necessitated animal sacrifice, and the great bone of contention with Christianity centered around this issue. Sacrifices made on behalf of the pagan gods to the health of the emperor and empire were seen as a matter of imperial security by the pagan authorities, and the refusal to take place in ordained rituals was viewed as tantamount to treason and a threat to the stability of the empire.

The prevailing idea of a beneficent and aloof paganism offering freedom of worship only to be replaced by a strict monotheism is misleading. The pagan religion of Rome allowed only those pagan rites to flourish which matched the approved practice of the state. Those who

did not worship according to the correct rites of paganism as defined by the state, or who worshipped deities abhorrent to the tastes of a particular Roman emperor, were subject to criminalization, up to and including torture and death. The Aegyptians were regularly condemned for their particular pagan rites, with blanket bans decreed on Aegyptian forms of paganism, belittled as cults by the authorities. Aegyptian gods and goddesses were likewise frequently barred from being worshipped altogether, whether in the aforementioned rites or in a manner more appealing to Roman sensibilities. Roman authorities frequently proscribed and carried out executions including crucifixion for those who defied imperial censures of worship. The Druid religion was likewise mercilessly repressed, with the religion facing extinction through the rigid prosecution of all its priests.

Such restrictions on worship as viewed through the lens of ensuring divine favor through the practice of correct worship is not entirely different from the monotheism that replaced paganism in terms of strict adherence. Both before and after the conversion of the Roman state to Christianity, the imperial authorities were concerned with appeasing the divine through correct ritual practice. The extent to which any form of a religion was repressed depended in either age on the zeal and interest of a particular emperor.

What had changed with Christianity was the extensive articulation and argumentation over specific theological issues, especially that of Christology, the study of Christ and his nature(s). The vision of emperor Theodosius I and later rulers centered around this, with a unified religion to strengthen the bonds of empire. One emperor had been ordained by one God to enforce one religion across one empire. The Church never did enjoy this envisioned unity, however, and from its inception at Pentecost issues arose. Church councils were called, dismissed, celebrated, or condemned depending on the sect of

Christianity in question. Particularly worrying for the emperor in Constantinople was the trend for certain sects of the Christian religion to be favored by certain peoples or ethnicities, with the dangerous effect of the differences in religion coalescing into organized resistance along ethnic lines.

While emperor Constantine I was the first to convert to Christianity, and emperor Theodosius I was the first to enforce Christianity as the official and only religion of the empire (in its Nicene form), the inevitability of Christian conquest was less clear in the contemporary period. Not only were rival sects like the Arians dominant, but the pagans had the force of a wealthy and connected aristocracy to advocate for their cause. Only with hindsight was it clear that the apostate Julianus (361-363) would be the last pagan to take the imperial diadem. He met his end in the sands of Persia via a spear hurled by an unknown assailant, alleged by some to have been thrown by a Christian.

The last emperor of the old religion, with Julianus died some part of the Roman past. Inveterate and staunch men of the old guard like Libanius and Ammianus Marcellinus remained ever true to the faith of their fathers and grandfathers, but the position in which they sat was no longer central at court but in the ever distant fringes of high society. Without the financial and institutional support of the imperial personage, salvation for the pagans gasped its last with the premature death of the self-styled philosopher monarch. Bitter recriminations did little to salve the festering wounds of a dying religion, and the sprouting of monks throughout the Italian peninsula bore an ominous omen for those who clung to the old way in the eternal city.

The conversion of the empire to Christianity occurred well before the traditional ‘fall’ in AD 476, and many proud and unabashed

Romans joined the new faith. If conversion in religion removes an individual from their previous identity, should one strip Constantine I and Theodosius I of their emperorship or Romanness? Is the Roman senate meeting in the 5th century under the same practices and precepts of the 3rd century no longer the same body, simply because the religion of its members was changing? The logical answer is of course that these men retained their Roman culture and identity, even through their change in religion. If one would strip the medieval Romans of their Roman identity on the basis of Christian belief, then the entire late antique period and figures like Alexander Severus and Philippus I must be likewise questioned. The opinion of scholarship is uniform in that conversion in religion did not make any Roman bereft of their identity, much like how any person who today changes religion does not lose their cultural background. The medieval Romans remained Roman in their new Christian form, though the gradual process of conversion to the new faith was never uniform or smooth. Disparate pockets of pagan worship survived long into the empire, with ever increasing rarity. For social ingratiation, military service, or other career prospects, adherence to the state approved sect was mandatory, in periods of heretical emperors as with pious ones.

With the turn of the fourth century, abjuration of the pantheon was the new norm, and as men like Symmachus faded out of the limelight and monuments like the altar to victory disappeared, the young minds that the pagan aristocrats once tried to sway were convinced by their rivals and ultimately defined the next millennia of western thought up to the current day. Try as hard as Julianus did, it was not to Libanius or Symmachus but to Saints Ambrosius, Augustine, and their ilk that the eyes of the world turned.

Vicisti, Galilae.

Rise of the Dominate and State of the Empire in Late Antiquity

The beginning of the medieval Roman empire is a story of great recovery and greater loss. The empire that spanned the Mediterranean had since a series of crises in the 3rd century AD faced the concurrent problems of external encroachment and internal instability. New “barbarian” formations from the periphery of the empire poured into the country in ever greater numbers, sacking towns and weakening imperial authority. Provinces, abandoned to their fate by the weakened administration, took to usurpation and fought the invaders. The economic integration of the empire dissolved with rampant hyperinflation, and the economy of the empire in large parts reverted to exchange in kind. Only with Diocletian (284-305) and the tetrarchic rule of four monarchs was stability returned, both defensive and economic. The long decades of exasperation changed the complexity of Roman governance, however, and the military influence of so-called barracks’ emperors tinged the imperial office with despotism. The first among equal, respectful rulership of the Principate had been replaced by the authoritative lord and master of the Dominate.

Such trends are general of course, and the transformation was lengthy and occluded, but by the time of the 5th century AD, the emperors of the Romans no longer behaved as they did in the age of the Antonines. The most significant change was the expectations of the Roman people regarding the emperor. With the conversion of the empire to the new faith came new standards by which an emperor was evaluated. Imperial figures were expected to defend the Church (and by the early medieval period, this was synonymous with Nicene, orthodox Christianity), endow churches and monasteries, care for the destitute, and generally hold themselves to a high moral standard (or at least not publicly flaunt any inevitable liaisons).

Court ritual and etiquette likewise developed to seclude the emperor from general accessibility outside of controlled venues, such as the hearing of petitions, visiting of the circus, triumphal processions, and, of course, church attendance. The attire of the emperor changed too, and the traditional toga was replaced by the *chlamys* and *loros*, developed from the garb of the consuls.

Nor was the empire as it had been in the age of the Antonines. Internal conflicts between the central administration and various “warlords” of Roman and “Barbarian” background ravaged the empire and saw the collapse of the Western portions, with imperial authority falling apart in Italy, Gaul, Spain, Africa, and Britain. The loss of half the empire was both a terrible shock to the viability of the state and the integrity of general morale. Not since the dark days of the Second Punic War had Rome faced such terrible losses with so little prospect for recovery. Yet the Romans of the 5th century AD were as tenacious as those in the 3rd century BC, and hope was not yet forlorn.

The imperial dreams of reconquest were indelibly colored by the old memories of illustrious lands of great grandeur, and more than one emperor attempted the reconquest of the lost Western provinces. Only with emperor Justinian did distant dreams become vivid reality, however. The spectacular reconquests of Justinian were only marred by the equally spectacular collapse of the empire under his successors.

Late Antique Roman Africa, its Loss, and Reconquest

It is perhaps better to paint a picture for one such province that was lost, to best illustrate the impact of the loss of all, and of the tantalizingly intoxicating prospects of reconquest. The blossoming of Roman Africa in Late Antiquity created the most fragrant rose for the crown of empire. From the desolate interior villages today thronged and thrived multitudes in antiquity. Testimony to the veracity of the

flourishing of Roman Africa is Thysdrus. That ancient city boasted of a theatre with a seating capacity of 35,000 strong while the current population of El Djem on the same site is around 21,000. The great difference being the many fold increase in the global population size across those disparate 1,500 years.

Throughout the deserts and craggy landscapes of the north one can hardly believe the poems from antiquity that come down to us describing lush landscapes and vegetation up to hundreds of miles from the coast. The quiet but evidently once prosperous ruins that scatter across the empty seas of sand speak to that truth louder than any literature could. The study of climate and its developments likewise attests to a once vibrant region, today ecologically no longer able to support what once was possible, a reminder perhaps for the current age to be mindful of the past.

More important perhaps than the cities, the Late Antique population of Roman Africa produced the supreme minds of the age. Indisputably among the greatest thinkers of all time and the most significant theologian after the pharisaic convert Saint Paul, the venerable and hallowed Saint Augustine grew up in the interior of Roman Africa over 200 miles from the northern coast, in one of many villages situated in a verdant and lively landscape dominated by forests and small-scale agriculture, from which the saint happily recalls childhood memories of interacting with and hunting local fauna. Among St. Augustine we too can credit Roman Africa for Tertullianus, Lactantius, and Saint Cyprianus. If one moves from the famous to the forgotten, the picture becomes even more compelling. Peter Brown, the eminent historian of Late Antiquity, wonderfully recounts the splendor and spirit of these places and times by recounting the epitaph of a certain individual, 'Here lies Dion, a pious man; he lived 80 years and planted 4000 trees'.

The loss of such a valuable province to the Vandals was a bitter blow, and the absence of Spain, Gaul, and Italy (though perhaps not Britain) likewise contributed to the desolation and woe of the Romans. In the age of Justinian, the early medieval Romans balanced memories of a Mediterranean wide empire with the practicalities of a diminished state, never forgetting the Zenith of their territorial extent and always desiring its return.

Photographs © the Author



Late Antique Ivory Panels of the Respective Personifications of Rome and Constantinople - Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum.

The Age of Justinian

Emperor Justinian is in many ways emblematic of the wider period. Justinian was thoroughly pious, obsessed with religious union, an administrative genius, visionary of the highest order, a man impatient of the limitations set upon him by his times, and - indicative of the gradual linguistic changes of the empire - the last emperor of the Romans to be a native Latin speaker. He is an emperor of such import that his reign frames the entire early empire, thereafter both defined by his brilliant successes and by his abysmal failures.

Photograph © the Author



Justinian's Hagia Sophia in its modern form,
Istanbul, Turkey.

The builder of the Hagia Sophia, the influence of Justinian's architectural program is among the greatest of all time, not only impacting Christian but also Islamic architectural practices. In just five years, Justinian built the greatest church ever seen, dwarfing in size all other buildings on earth for an entire millennium. The vast dome and impressive interior decorations stunned countless generations and the

Rus, in a celebrated story, upon seeing and entering the church, decided that only the true faith could have such beauty, and converted to Christianity. Justinian, upon seeing the finished church, is said to have proclaimed, “Solomon, I have outdone thee” - referring to the famously beautiful First Temple of the Jews. No other building besides the Hagia Sophia in the history of mankind has so affected not only the architectural practices, but the sentiments and beliefs of various nations and peoples across the centuries. For his magnificent church alone, Justinian would rank among the most influential of medieval Roman emperors.

Perhaps an even greater accomplishment than the Hagia Sophia, the legal codex assembled by Justinian has provided the foundation for all Western (and by proxy, global) jurisprudence, far outliving and outstretching the empire in which it was created. Without his compendia, the legal systems of the world today would be radically different and immeasurably poorer. The brilliant consolidation and editing of a vast corpus of Roman law into a thematic and digestible series is perhaps the most brilliant accomplishment in the history of law. If Justinian boasted of besting the building exploits of Solomon, he too could match Moses, Lycurgus, and Solon in arena of law givers.



Justinian and Theodora,
Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna

It is fitting then that the visage of Justinian remains among the most iconic of the medieval world, as does that of his powerful wife Theodora, thanks to contemporary mosaics surviving in Ravenna. The two strove and labored together, and they remain in the Basilica of San Vitale today as they did in their own, magnificent and larger than life.

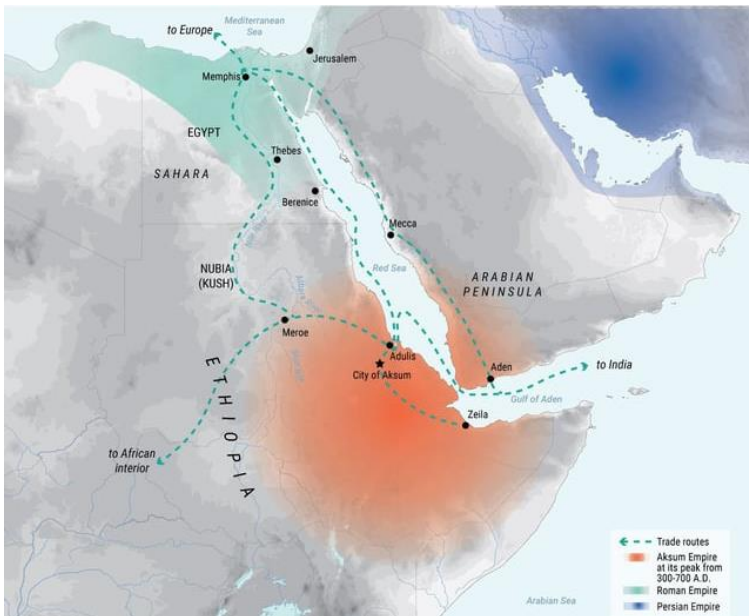
Yet all was not well. The military exploits of Justinian are among the most celebrated in history, and the scale of his activities breathtaking for the logistical constraints of the age, but the emperor pushed his people too hard and stretched his resources too far. The brilliant deeds of Justinian were funded by the taxes drained from his subjects, and they soon revolted *en masse*. The emperor, thanks to his ever-faithful wife, steeled himself and slew tens of thousands of his own people to remain in the imperial office. Such a rapacious and unseemly deed can never be lauded, and the accomplishments of Justinian's reign mask such pockmarks.

The rapid reconquest of North Africa also proved to be misleading, and a rushed attempt to take Italy and Spain led the empire into military quagmires abroad, all exacerbated by the onset of a plague. Overextended in martial bellicosity with a population and tax revenue culled by disease, the great period of Justinian and his reign set the stage for the dramatic collapse to follow. Ominously for the future of the empire, the Arabian Peninsula was less affected by pestilence, and their increasing prominence in political matters and indirect warfare between the Romans and Sasanians foreshadowed the greatest challenge either empire would ever face.

Axum, the Medieval Romans, and a Shifting Arabia

The mighty Axumite empire lasted for a millennium in the horn of Africa. Converted to Christianity by Saint Frumentius in the 4th

century – himself chosen by the Saint Athanasius, great defender of orthodoxy – the fortunes of Axum coincided with the burgeoning Christian religion rapidly overtaking the late antique world. Conversion brought tangible benefits to Axum and a natural alliance with the Romans. The zenith of early medieval Roman power coincided with that of the African empire, and the great emperor Justinian found a natural and willing ally in his Axumite counterpart, Kaleb. Much like Justinian, Kaleb fashioned himself as emperor, the protector of Christians both within and outside of his domains. When king Dounaas in modern day Yemen converted to Judaism and began to persecute Christians, Kaleb invaded and drove the king to suicide. Lesser known than the famous Persian, African, or Italian wars of Justinian, Kaleb nevertheless waged impressive campaigns to form a regional hegemony across the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, from the horn of Africa well into the Arabian Peninsula.



Axum in the Age of Kaleb (© Geopolitical Futures)

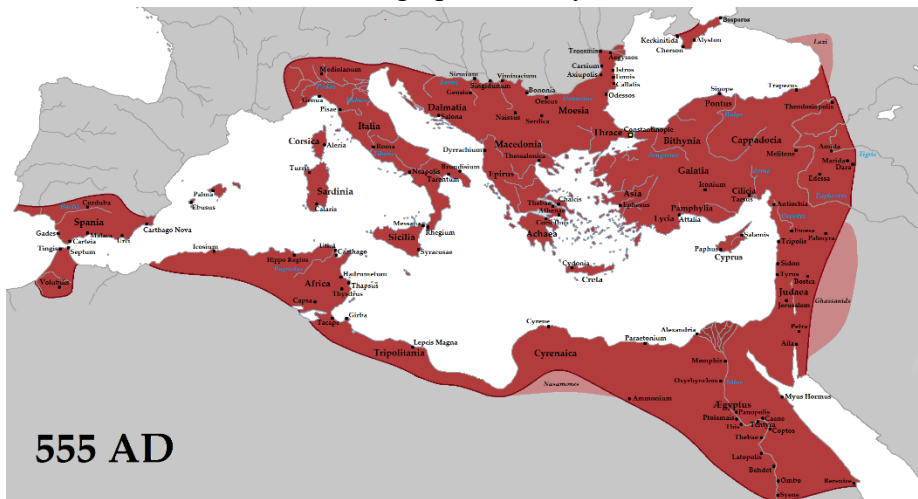
Centuries before the reign of Kaleb, emperor Ousanas was the last pagan to rule Axum. It would be his successor Ezana who received Saint Frumentius with open arms and converted to his religion. The missionary trip of Saint Frumentius was of such importance, that an extant letter from fellow emperor Constantius II addressed to Ezana evidences the worry of the Arian, Roman, imperial court that a Nicene Christian should be proselytizing the Axumites, and the Arian Romans requested that the missionary Saint Frumentius should be turned over to imperial authorities and replaced with an Arian. Fatefully, Ezana and his successors chose to follow the Nicene tradition and thus were in harmony with later medieval Roman rulers – a momentous decision not only for the political alliances and struggles of the late antique epoch, but also for the many millions of Orthodox Christians living in Ethiopia and the horn of Africa today.

For their efforts in the conversion of Axum to Christianity and the defense of Christians throughout Africa and Arabia, apostle to Ethiopians (and later Bishop) Frumentius as well as emperors Ezana and Kaleb have been canonized by West and East alike. Most impactful of all was the spread of monotheism into the Arabian Peninsula, and the dealings of the Romans, Persians, and Axumites with the various tribes of the Arabian Peninsula.

Before Kaleb and the forging of an empire, Axum stood at the crossroads of geopolitical intrigues and shifting alliances. The ‘Great Game’ of the late antique world was the forging of alliances between local Arabian tribes with either the Romans or Sasanians. Indelibly colored by the subsequent rise of Islam, the forging of pan-tribal identities in Arabia and the gradual abandonment of Pagan religion in the region is of great importance for the study of this period and the rise of Islam. Axum played no minor role in this story, forming a key ally of Chalcedonian, orthodox Christians against not only the Sasanian empire

but the various other groups opposed to Nicene Christianity, including the inveterate Arian Christian sect as well.

Photograph © Tataryn



Rome in the Age of Justinian

The Sasanian Wars and Advent of the Arabs

The intermittent warfare between the medieval Romans and the Sassanians involving allies and proxies such as the empire of Axum and the Arab tribes reached its crescendo fifty years after the death of Justinian. With the benefit of hindsight, the catastrophically short-sighted policies of numerous emperors and a series of disastrous usurpations imploded the empire into civil war and weakened central authority when it could be ill afforded. Full-fledged Sasanian campaigns ravaged the Roman east, sacking and conquering towns from Antioch to Alexandria. The loss of Egypt, long the breadbasket of the empire, and the loss of Jerusalem, the oldest See and holiest site in Christianity, struck twin blows at the organizational capabilities and religious sensibilities of the Romans. The Sasanian conquest of Roman

provinces held since before the days of Caesar shocked the consciousness of the Roman people and challenged assumptions about inherent Roman supremacy.

During the loss of the Eastern provinces a usurper, Herakleios, launched a successful *coup d'état* from Carthage and was faced with a Sisyphean task to reconquer the half of the empire lost to the Sasanians. Throughout a two-decade long campaign filled with immense hardships, Herakleios led the Romans to triumph. Recapturing both Jerusalem and the relic of the True Cross, Herakleios strengthened the fortitude of his people and restored to them notions of pride, religious triumphalism, and political balance.

However, after an exhausted Rome beat an exhausted Persia, neither empire had the strength to stand up to a second challenger. Out of the cities of Arabia came a highly motivated and well-organized invasion, at the worst possible time for the Romans and Sasanians. The results of twenty years of campaigning, bloodshed, sacrifice, and loss by emperor Herakleios and the Romans dissolved alongside the fragile peace established with the Sasanians. The Roman victors of that legendary conflict through strength earned a stay of execution from the Arabs at the cost of half their empire. The Sasanian losers were entirely vanquished, and the political balance of the Near East was forever changed.

Whispers floated in the streets of Constantinople that the unprecedented rise of the Arabs was the result of the emperor marrying his own niece. Others speculated it was due to the presence of Jews and heretics in the empire. Still others proposed new formulations of Christology as the solution. Unease and fragmentation diminished influence in the provinces, and the prospects of the empire were on the certain decline. As the decades progressed, not only did reconquest of

the lost provinces seem ever further away, but the possibility of total collapse and conquest at the hands of the Arabs seemed ever more likely for the Romans. The most sacred lands of empire and religion had been taken by an existential foe. No Roman emperor would ever again see the walls of Herod, Tower of David, or Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Deus Adjuta Romanis

This hexagram encapsulates the state of the medieval Romans during the middle of the 7th century. On the obverse of the coin is a depiction of the emperor wearing *chlamys* (a ceremonial cloak fastened with a brooch) as well as *stemma* (a crown). The emperor holds the *globus cruciger*, a symbolic representation of the world. This symbol is the Cross mounted on the globe, marking the lands of the Earth in their entirety as being under Christian dominion. The emperor holds the *globus cruciger* to signify the world being his rightfully to rule - as given to him by God. The legend betrays the influences of the Dominate, with the emperor Constans II (641-668) named as 'lord'. Yet old titles from the Principate remain, and the medieval Roman emperor still carries the proud titles of 'Augustus' and 'Father of the Fatherland', shared with the likes of Augustus and Cicero.

The reverse is boldly Christian, again placing the Cross over the globe. The legend names the identity of the people who issued the coin, the Romans. They invoke the aid of Almighty, asking that 'God, help the Romans'. This cry reflects both the need for divine intercession more generally, as well as the specific cry of the Roman soldiers who charged into battle. Of note are the Latin legends. While the emperor at this point was Greek speaking - as were the majority of his subjects - the inexorable weight of tradition preserved the ancestral language of

the Roman empire on its coinage long after it was no longer spoken by a majority of subjects.

Photograph © the Classical Numismatic Group
Electronic Auction 597, lot 683.



Obverse: δΝ CONSTAN TINΨPPAΨ

DOMINUS NOSTER CONSTANTIVS PATER PATRIAE AVGVSTVS

Our Lord Constantine, Father of the Fatherland, Augustus

Reverse: δΕΥΣ ΑΔΙΥΤΑ ROMANIS

DEVS ADJUTA ROMANIS

God, help the Romans

II. The Apogee

‘Thou Shalt Not Make Unto Thee Any Graven Image, or Any Likeness of Anything in Heaven Above’

After the initial collapse at the hands of the Arabs came introspection, and after introspection a gradual recovery. The disastrous 7th and 8th centuries forced the medieval Romans to reconsider their society, practices, religion, rituals, and customs, to ask why the Divine had forsaken them. In an age where security and prosperity were readily attributed to God, it was only natural to wonder where the Romans had gone astray to receive such unending troubles. The new religion of the conquerors uncomfortably challenged held Roman assumptions, and comparisons in theology between that of the Christians and that of the Muslims were inevitable.

The ruminations of Roman theologians and generals alike landed upon the issue of religious, pictorial representation in the empire. Islam started to ban the depiction of humans or animals in the artistic sphere, and with such a policy the Arabs had conquered the finer portions of the Roman lands. To some quarters in the empire, it was evident that the Romans must follow suit. In succession between father and son, dynasty to dynasty – with but a short reprieve - the strict enforcement of iconoclasm and the persecution of those who venerated icons became standard imperial policy. Those who advocated for strict adherence to the second commandment waged a war of words and occasional violence with the defenders of the icons, who traced their practices back to the earliest period in the Church. The eventual triumph of the self-styled ‘slaves to the icons’ saw the preservation of the tradition of figural depiction in medieval Roman art, though the internecine bouts of persecution saw the destruction of much material culture from the earlier period. Churches such as those found on Naxos

indicate a widespread and sweeping program of iconoclasm, not only affecting the capital city of Constantinople but even the remote provinces. Only in places inaccessible to the emperors of Constantinople like the basilicas of Italy or monasteries of the Sinai, further removed from the clutches of the iconoclasts, did significant amounts of art from the early medieval Roman period survive.

Photograph © The Classical Numismatic Group
Keystone Auction 8 lot 127



Obverse: ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΝΙΚΑ

ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΝΙΚΑ

Jesus Christ Conquers (all)

Reverse: ΛΕΩΝ ΣΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΣ ΕΚ ΘΕΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ .

ΛΕΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ ΕΚ ΘΕΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ

Leon and Constantine, from God emperors

The coinage of the iconoclastic period offers the supreme testament to imperial policies, with the traditional bust of the emperor removed to make way for the Cross. Contemporary seals likewise evidence the removal of saints and the likeness of the emperor from the sigillographic medium, not only from the imperial administration or armies but for those of private citizens too.

Linguistically, the empire was shifting. The hexagram from roughly a century before featured Latin legends in a predominately Greek speaking empire. On the eve of the iconoclastic struggles, Latin legends on coins began to be replaced with Greek. The cultural momentum of so many centuries was difficult to overcome, however, and while the legends from this period onwards are indeed written in Greek, the Greek legends are spelled with the Latin alphabet. The obverse of the coin no longer features the emperor but pays homage to He who favors him. The Cross is presented with the legend declaring that Christ will conquer all. The reverse, indicating a shift from the late antique Dominate, no longer presents the emperor as 'Our Lord' or 'Augustus' but rather as being sourced in legitimacy 'from God'. The culture of the Romans and their empire is perceptibly changing, tangible in the numismatic and sigillographic forms.

Macedonian Machinations

The grand resurgence of the medieval Roman state came under the watchful eye of the Macedonian dynasty. The second longest reigning family in all Roman history (at one hundred and eighty-nine years, from 867 to 1056), the members of Macedonian period and family not only waged warfare to rebuild damaged frontiers but also cultivated and promoted the arts. Beautiful ivory carvings accompany a resurgence in numismatic refinement, and the military campaigns of capable generals returned to the empire lands not seen in centuries. Not

since the early years of emperor Justinian I had the empire such an air of exuberance, a string of brilliant victories showcasing a recovery that the enemies of the empire found impossible to stop. Accomplishment fed momentum, and momentum fed accomplishment.

Photograph © the Author



A fine example of Macedonian period artistry in the form of a carved ivory icon, Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum.



Obverse: +EMMA NOVH IC XC

EMMANOYHΛ IH̄C̄OYC̄ XPICTOC̄

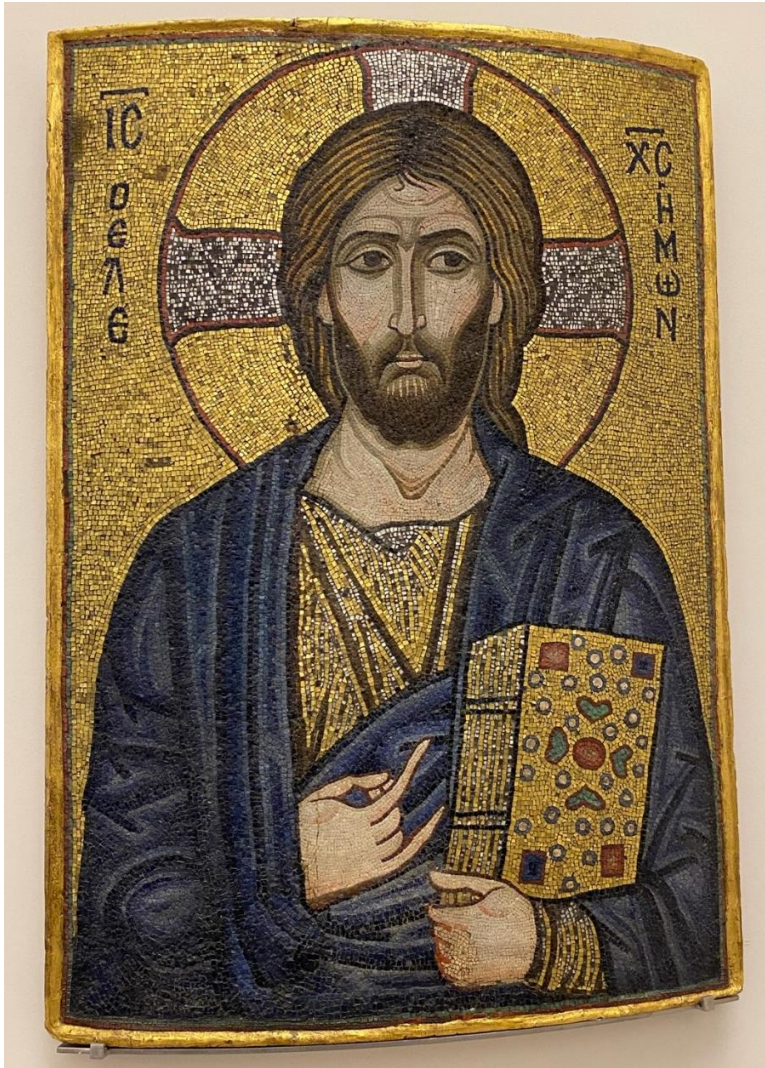
Jesus Christ, Emmanuel

Reverse: Ih̄S̄VS̄ XRISTVS̄ bASILEVS̄ bASILE

IH̄C̄OYC̄ XPICTOC̄ BASILAEYC̄ BASILAEΩN

Jesus Christ, king of kings

The above anonymous follis (copper coin) demonstrates the medieval ideals of kingly virtue, wherein the emperor meekly mints coinage in His name alone, for Him who for the sake of mankind died meekly and alone. The days of iconoclasm are in the distant past, and the Triumph of Orthodoxy has firmly reestablished the usage of Christian iconography in all realms, including the numismatic. Christ is presented as the *Pantokrator*, or omnipotent. Latin letters are still present, but by the next century will entirely disappear from medieval Roman coinage. On this example, two (of the many) titles of Christ are given, both biblical.



An 11th Century Mosaic Icon of Christ the Merciful from the Macedonian Period,
Altes Museum Berlin.

In Revelations 19:16 Christ is described as:

καὶ ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ τὸ ὄνομα
γεγραμμένον βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων.

And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name
written, king of kings, and lord of lords.

And in Matthew 1:23 the angel instructs Joseph:

δοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱὸν καὶ
καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐμμανουὴλ ὃ ἐστὶν
μεθερμηνευσόμενον μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός.

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth
a son, and they shall his name Emmanuel, which being
interpreted is, God is with us.

Thus the biblical kingship of Christ is proclaimed on the follis,
with the implicit connection that the earthly model and Roman emperor
mirror their divine counterpart.

For the Romans of the Macedonian period, with the oversight of
an aged and responsible emperor, the beginning of the 11th century
provided a respite from the many ills faced by the empire in previous
centuries. A string of rather incompetent successors and the rise of
Turkic nomads in Anatolia undid much of this success, and a series of
military defeats and civil wars was only stopped by the extraordinary
founder of the Komnenian dynasty, Alexios I (1081-1118). Capable
strategist and able administrator, Alexios reformed the state, stabilized
currency debasement, and oversaw the first of many crusades who
passed through the lands of the medieval Romans. The increasing
presence of Westerners in the empire - and the especially the

establishment of Western kingdoms and principalities in the Levant – defined the later medieval Roman period.

Komnenian Codifications

The apogee of the later, Medieval Roman empire occurred under Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180). The usage of a surname to identify the emperor betrays a significant development occurring throughout the later Macedonian period and beyond, whereby the aristocratic clans of the medieval Romans codified their nobility and exclusivity via pronounced familial clans and identities. In the early and middle periods of Roman history, leading men and women were simply known by their forename. An emperor like Justinian, while clearly belonging to and remaining aloof with a royal household, nevertheless did not use nor was identified with a cognomen in his imperial role by contemporaries. The growth and eventual acceptance of such practices in the later periods evidences a development in the general practices of Roman society and the creation of an entrenched, permanent, and rather inaccessible noble class that did not exist previously.

While patricians still walked the streets of Constantinople and senators traced their families back to the ancient times of Romulus, the reins of power and office holders of the imperial administration of the early and middle medieval Roman periods were comprised of a surprising diverse background. The poorest members of society, while the vast multitude remain static in social station, nevertheless had no limit to how high their prospects might soar. Illiterate farm hands could dream of imperial aspirations and see them one day fulfilled, as the life of emperor Basil I (867-886) showcases.

However, after the accession of Alexios I Komnenos to the Roman throne, this was no longer to be the case. The imperial office developed into the exclusive purview and domain of those select

families who had the good fortune to ingratiate and promote themselves into the rapidly burgeoning – and soon closing – class of noble Roman families.

The Age of Manuel I Komnenos

Unlikely imperial aspirant, the reign of Manuel I Komnenos marked the peak of later medieval Roman influence and prestige among Westerners and Easterners alike. Triumphal entry into Antioch fulfilled the dream of Manuel's grandfather, and short sighted policy dashed Manuel's dream of a grandson. Emperor of renown, friend of the Latins, and great power of the East, under Manuel came the last twinkle of the Komnenian star before in a few decades the proud Romans would be forced into ignominious exile or under foreign yoke.

The closest comparison in history to Manuel may well be the other bookend of great medieval Roman temporal power, Justinian I. Both men married powerful wives who altered their trajectory as ruler. Both men nurtured the tales of the bygone glory of their empire. Both men inherited copious treasuries, the result of previous fiscal responsibility and the means by which they might enable their visions of grand conquest and restoration. Both men were adept lawmakers and took interest in legal reform. Both men meddled in theological controversy and promoted formulations unpopular by all parties in dispute. Both men sought closer ties to the Papacy and a strengthening of the Eastern and Western churches. Both men sought to reclaim lost Roman lands in the West. Both men launched grand expeditions and military campaigns of a size long not seen. Both men ultimately were met with mixed results. Both men expended and extended fiscal resources to a breaking point, from the perspective of hindsight without consideration for the yet unknown (and ultimately catastrophic) events of the future. Both men in hindsight doomed the empire they tried to

strengthen, the former to an Arab onslaught and the latter to a Western onslaught. And both men remain an enigma, with many passionate debates about the legacy of either.

Photograph © the Digital Vatican Libraries



Manuel I Komnenos with his wife Maria of Antioch,
Vat.gr. 1176, f. 11r.

Whatever the degree of blame that Manuel has in subsequent events, it is undeniable that of the medieval Roman emperors his rule is perhaps most charming of all. A dashing figure, famously swarthy and handsome, ladies both East and West swooned over the emperor born in the purple. Jousting with the prince of Antioch, Raynald of Châtillon, he proved his courage both in personal contest and large-scale military campaigning. Active and energetic, he led campaigns from Sicily to Cilicia. Under his colorful banners he rode, galloping across Levantine plains to reassert the authority of an office long known, and now again respected in the region.

A bold theologian and perceptive ruler, Manuel attempted reunion with the Papacy, his eye towards the future to avert the hostilities that so plagued the final centuries of the medieval Romans. Ever striding forward, Manuel was acknowledged by East and West as the supreme prince of Christendom and the man most valorous in an age full of valorous men. Manuel was a formidable emperor at the apex of a global power, well-endowed with charm, chivalry, looks, intellect, and dignity. Reigning at the height of the medieval period, Manuel embodied contemporary medieval ideals in every way. Truly, *ὁ Μέγας* (the great) indeed.

Latins Induced Lamentations

The prosperity sheltered in the reign of Manuel I Komnenos did not long outlive him. Rising tensions with Westerners led to a series of unfortunate events and distasteful deeds, culminating in perhaps the most famous sack in all of history. The pillaging of Constantinople in 1204 destroyed the strength, integrity, and wealth of the medieval Roman empire, with the internationally respected and feared state now divided into multiple successors whose sum total was less powerful and less influential than that which had come before. In this period of

destabilization, the various successor states which would emerge each promoted a specific, state-centric ideology to legitimize themselves and their claimants as the true successors of the Roman state. Constantinople, the fabled and beautiful capital of the Roman empire, would remain under foreign occupation for over half a century.

The tale of resistance, resilience, and rebuilding that followed the collapse of the Roman empire after the 1204 sack is where the numismatic research to follow begins. The task of painting onto a canvas the broad strokes of medieval Roman history in so short a format is a difficult one, and the author hopes that the above description adequately has described who the medieval Romans were, where they came from, and their story contextualizing the sections to follow.

Photograph © the Author



Byzantine Imperial Sarcophagi (Original Occupants Unknown),
Istanbul Archeological Museum

III. Forthcoming Publications and Core Research

Sam Cowell is a first year doctoral student at the Universität Wien focusing on 13th century Balkan and Anatolian coinage under supervisors Dr. Johannes Preiser-Kapeller and Dr. Nikolaus Schindel, in conjunction with the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (OEAW). He is Managing Editor in Chief of the numismatic journal *Ars Nummorum et Eorum Fontium* (ANF), and also serves as Director of Numismatics at the L5 Ancient Coin Marketplace. Sam has numerous publications across various journals including the ‘Classification of the Aspron AR Trachy Reverse Dies of Manuel I Megas Komnenos’ and ‘The Fourrée Hyperpyra of John V Palaeologus’. He has presented lectures at institutions including the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research (OCBR). Sam obtained his bachelors at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and his master’s at the Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien with the thesis titled ‘Thirteenth Century Byzantine Economic Activity: Analyzing Logistical Networks through Geographic Information Systems’.

Sam’s doctoral dissertation is titled *Staking Legitimacy in Striking Coinage: Numismatic Practice and the Politics of Byzantine Identity ‘in Exile’, 1204-1261*. This project reassesses the field of thirteenth century Byzantine numismatics via a new typological system integrating hitherto unpublished coinage and unstudied variants, the result of which will challenge current theories of contemporary economic practice and enable an updated understanding of the propagandistic intricacies of power and identity in the tumultuous post Fourth Crusade epoch. The scope of the typology is the period of 1204-1261 across the states of Nicaea, Epirus, Trebizond, Bulgaria, Serbia, and the Frankokratia.

Forthcoming publications include a chapter in the *Moving Byzantium* series ‘Epiros: The Other Western Rome’ volume, entitled ‘Reevaluating the Byzantine Mint at Arta: Numismatic Evidence for the Imperial Pretensions of Alexios III in ‘Exile’ and a New Typology for Thirteenth Century Epirote Rulers’

Abstract: Traditional assumptions about Epirote coinage from the mint at Arta are challenged in light of recent discoveries and the holistic study of the thirteenth-century Byzantine numismatic field. The typology of Epirote Arta stands out as among the most important, yet least studied, of any mint in the post 1204 decades. Key to understanding Epirote imperial ideology, study of Epirote coinage generally and Arta specifically highlights how Epirote rulers portrayed themselves as legitimate heirs of Byzantine identity and imperial authority through numismatic production and iconography intended for domestic and international audiences via monetary exchange. Findings include an unpublished coin surfaced in the private trade linking the nascent Epirote court of Michael I, the inception of the Arta mint, and the early thirteenth century peregrinations of Alexios III. Alexios III is shown to have minted coinage in his own name as emperor while in ‘exile’ with the support of Michael I, years after his 1203 flight from Constantinople. Among many reattributions is a trachy thought to be an issue of Michael II but in fact a possible post-Klokotnitsa Bulgarian issue depicting a figurative coronation of Manuel I by Ivan Asen II. Based on the Epirote section in the forthcoming doctoral dissertation of the author, this paper reevaluates Epirote coinage from the mint at Arta. Relevant to both the numismatic field and wider study of medieval Epirote, Nicaean, and Bulgarian identity, this paper updates our understanding of Epirote numismatic production and thus better contextualizes their claims to Byzantine imperial and cultural heritage in a world drastically changed by the Fourth Crusade.

IV. Numismatic Background to the 13th Century

Representing the prerogative of the ruler, minting coinage was a powerful way to state authority and legitimacy via a medium with the potential to circulate beyond one's own domain. Production and quality control at thirteenth century Byzantine mints generally operated at comparatively low standards when juxtaposed with the preceding Komnenian period, with poorly struck or brockage issues rather the norm than the exception. The two most prolific Byzantine 'successor' states are here each given a brief overview, to best contextualize the catalogue that follows. The catalogue presents coins minted in the various crises facing the medieval Romans after the fourth crusade, examining the relationships between power and money.

Epirote Numismatics

The state of Epirus had two mints, Arta and Thessalonica. The rulers of the Epirote state that minted coins are Michael I Komnenos Doukas (1204-1215), Theodoros I Komnenos Doukas (1215-1230), Manuel I Komnenos Doukas (1230-1237), Iohannes I Komnenos Doukas (1237-1244). Potentially, also Demetrios I Komnenos Doukas (1244-1246) and Michael II (1230-1266/68) minted coinage. Michael I only minted at Arta, Theodoros I at both Arta and Thessalonica, Manuel I at both Arta and Thessalonica, and John I only at Thessalonica. Demetrios I potentially minted at Thessalonica, and Michael II potentially at Arta¹. Thessalonica broadly served as the more active mint when used concurrently with Arta by a ruler. The differences in the utilization of these two mints and the frequency at which these rulers

1 Hendy 1999, pgs. 120-1, 129-30, 134-5. For the reattribution of the coinage of Michael II, see the forthcoming publication of the author reevaluating the mint of Arta.

minted coinage varied a great deal, reflecting the dynamic geopolitical changes and turbulence of the period.

The Epirote mint operated on a theoretical trimetallic system with hyperpyra as the money of account, sourced in the economic reforms of Alexios I (1081-1118) over a century before. Unlike their contemporary Nicaean counterparts, the rulers of Epirus never ventured to mint gold coinage. Electrum trachea were issued by Epirus though comparatively rare, only minted in large quantities during the reign of Theodoros I. The billon trachea formed the bulk of coinage minted in Epirus, with billon tetartera forming a seldom seen addition.

While anything approaching absolute populations numbers for produced coinage is difficult to calculate, the general patterns of rarity as described above are represented in the Ashmolean collection at Oxford. As of publication in Lianta's LBC, from both Thessalonica and Arta across the Epirote sections are represented²: 0 AU hyperpyra, 6 EL trachea, 114 AE trachea, and 6 AE tetartera³. It should be noted that these figures represent the comparative rarity of coinage produced by Epiros, though not necessarily a complete picture of coinage used in Epiros. Coinage minted before the Fourth Crusade still circulated in relatively large quantities in Epirote lands, as did other coinage minted contemporarily with the Epirote rulers, including Nicaean issues, Latin issues, and the so called 'Bulgarian imitative trachea' (perhaps better identified as 'faithful copies').⁴ Overall, the economic circulation and practices of the Epirote state were one of continuity in disruption, perpetuating numismatic traditions grounded in the erstwhile unified

2 These figures excluding later Nicaean controlled emissions.

3 LBC 2009, pgs. 147-73, 182-3.

4 Baker 2020, pgs. 76, 251-2; Hendy 1999, pgs. 67-80, 435-6.

empire while adapting to the reduced circumstances of the thirteenth century.

Nicaean Numismatics

The state of Nicaea utilized at least two mints, Nicaea and Magnesia – though a third, unknown location is perhaps evidenced by a distinct deviation in style of certain subgroupings. The rulers of the Nicaean state that minted coins are Theodoros I Laskaris (1205-1221), Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas (1221-1254), and Theodoros II Laskaris Doukas (1254-1258). Theodoros I minted at both Nicaea and Magnesia, with subsequent rulers minting at Magnesia. The conquest of Thessalonica during the reign of Iohannes III expanded the dominions and mints of the empire, with both Iohannes III and Theodoros II minted coinage there. Unlike their contemporary Epirote counterparts, the rulers of Nicaea minted golden coinage – and in immense sums. Electrum trachea were seemingly issued in large numbers through relatively scarce today, with varied typological sorts often only evidenced by a sole surviving example. Billon trachea were minted alongside billon tetartera. Coinage from neighboring states modeled on the Komnenian economic system frequently circulated in Nicaea alongside domestic coins, including Latin, Bulgarian, and Epirote issues.

Examining the Ashmolean collection at Oxford, the following coins of Nicaea and Magnesia are represented: 15 AU hyperpyra, 20 EL trachea, 123 AE trachea, and 28 AE tetartera. For the Nicaean coins minted at Thessalonica after its conquest, the following: 0 AU hyperpyra, 2 EL trachea, 27 AE trachea, and 0 AE tetartera. In studying the Ashmolean collection and comparing with Epirote figures, the contemporary Nicaean state minted proportionally greater amounts of precious coinage. The minting of both gold and electrum issues from

the Nicaeans occurred in both larger outright population figures and higher proportional population percentages than in Epiros. The frequent minting of precious coinage gave Nicaea increased economic influence and an advantage in the ability to fund ambitious projects when compared to their Epirote rivals. In summation, the copious minting of hyperpyra form a most notable exception to the numismatic practices of the Nicaean state that otherwise match rather closely those of Epiros.

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Abbreviations

CLBC = Marchev and Wachter 2011

DOC = Hendy 1999

LBC = Lianta 2009

PCPC = Bendall 1988

Sear = Sear 2021

SECTION V



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

1). Alexios IV Angelos



2.76g, 23mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Tetarteron, Constantinople circa AD 1203 - 1204, AE. **MHP ΘV** Full-length figure of Theotokos, nimbate, in orans, wearing tunic and maphorion, infant Christ at breast; Star in either field. Rev. **AAE|EIOC ΔCΠIOTHC** Full-length figure of emperor, bearded, wearing divitision, simplified loros, sagion, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding labarum and l. globus cruciger; Manus Dei blesses emperor in upper l. field. Sear 2020. DOC IV XXIV 1b.

This tetarteron was minted right before the 1204 sacking of Constantinople by the very man who led the crusaders to the queen of cities. Alexios IV Angelos, son of the deposed and blinded Isaakios II Angelos, fled to the West after escaping imprisonment and dethronement. Promising - as an enticement for Western involvement in a campaign to retake his throne - the payment of sums he could not afford, Alexios IV successfully led the Fourth Crusade to retake his crown and unsuccessfully fulfilled his end of the bargain. Desperate to gather the wealth needed to pay back his exorbitant promises, the unhappy populace soon revolted over oppressive taxes and Alexios IV was strangled. Coins like the above perhaps went as payment to ever

more impatient crusaders. The money sent was not enough. In just three months, their patience would run thin and the city be sacked.



2). Anonymous (Latin Empire of Constantinople)



2.41 g, 19mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Tetarteron, Constantinople circa AD 1204 – 1261, AE. **ΑΓΙΑ
ΕΑΕΝΗ** Full-length figure of empress, nimbate, wearing divitision, loros, maniakion, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand resting on chest and l. holding Patriarchal Cross. Rev. **ΑΓΙΟC**

ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟC Full-length figure of emperor, bearded and nimbate, wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding patriarchal Cross and l. resting holding akakia. Sear 2059. LBC 129. DOC IV LII 28. CLBC 11.27.

‘These barbarians, haters of the beautiful, did not allow the statues standing in the Hippodrome and other marvellous works of art to escape destruction, but all were made into coins.’ – Niketas Choniates

For the philhellene and lover of antiquity, perhaps the most saddening crime committed by the Western forces during the sack of Constantinople in 1204 was the wholesale destruction of ancient statuary to mint coinage. The greatest art, metalwork, and contraptions of antiquity that had been preserved for a millennium or more were summarily cast into the furnace to mint trachea and tetartera for the

Latin empire - an ironic fate for such celebrated statues to be transformed into a coinage today renowned for its crudity.

Coins like the above tetarteron were minted out of the bullion scavenged and looted by the crusading forces, including the countless statues torn down and melted. The very act of plundering and reusing the statues was both practical and political. The crusading armies needed coin to pay their soldiery, and the statues of antiquity appreciated by the medieval Romans were of less interest to the newcomers. Eyewitness to the sack of Constantinople, Niketas Choniates summarizes the situation well:

‘Thus great things were exchanged for small ones, those works fashioned at huge expense were converted into worthless copper coins.’



3). Theodoros I Laskaris



3.14g, 19mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Tetarteron, Megnesia (?) circa AD 1208 – 1221, AE. **Θ**

ΑΓΙΟΘ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟC Half-length figure of St. Theodore, nimbate and bearded, wearing body armor with chiton, r. hand holding sword and l. shield. Rev. **Θ** Half-length figure of emperor, bearded, wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding labarum and l. globus cruciger with patriarchal Cross. Sear –. LBC –. DOC –.

This specimen is the first known tetarteron from the emperor Theodoros I Laskaris of Nicaea. With this discovery comes the completion of the denominational set for Theodoros I. The previous absence of tetartera for Theodoros I was curious, and the extreme rarity of the denomination compared with other contemporary rulers poses questions that are difficult to answer. One potential explanation for the dearth of tetartera under Theodoros I but abundance under successors Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas and Theodoros II Laskaris Doukas could be explained by the Nicaean anonymous tetartera. Perhaps these coins, featuring no emperor to identify them with, were minted in the earliest phase of Nicaean history, only to be replaced by named issues of Theodoros I at a later date. Whatever the role of the anonymous

tetartera, this first known tetarteron of Theodoros I is an exceptional piece and of magnificent style.



4). Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas



4.76g, 27mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Hyperpyron, Magnesia circa AD 1222 – 1254, AU. **IC XC** Full-length figure of Christ, cruciformly nimbate with five pellets in each Cross arm, bearded, seated upon backless throne, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand outstretched in benediction and l. holding Gospels. Rev. **ΙΩ ΔΕΥΠΙΟΤΗ ΤΩ ΠΟΡΘΥΡΟΓΕΝΝΗΤΩ ΜΗΡ ΘΥ** Full-length figures of emperor and Theotokos; Emperor bearded, wearing divitision, loros, maniakion, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding labarum over shoulder and l. akakia; Theotokos nimbate, wearing tunic and maphorion, r. Hand outstretched to crown emperor and l. in benediction. Sear 2073. LBC 202-8. DOC IV XXIX-XXX, 4-19.

Presented in finely engraved attire on this hyperpyron, the emperor boldly stares forward at the viewer. In his right hand lies the labarum. Like Constantine of old, Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas has heard the message to conquer under the Chi Rho. During the reign of Iohannes, enemies on every front were subjugated and the landmass under Nicaea's control greatly increased. The confident emperor even

tells a small lie, imitating predecessors by using the title porphyrogennetos – but Iohannes was not born in the imperial palace.



5). Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas



1.50g, 31mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Magnesia circa AD 1222 – 1254, AR. **IC XC** Full-length figure of Christ, cruciformly nimbate with pellet in each Cross arm, bearded, seated upon backed throne, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand in benediction and l. holding Gospels. Rev. **ΙΩ ΔΕCΠΙΟΤΗC Ο ΑΓΙΟC ΚΩΝCΤΑΝΤΙΝΟC** Full-length figures of emperor and St. Constantine, bearded, holding star-tipped-scepter with triangular decoration; Emperor wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding Cross-tipped-scepter; St. Constantine nimbate, wearing divitision, simplified loros, sagion, and stemma with pendilia, l. hand holding akakia. Sear 2074. LBC –. DOC IV XXXI 20 (incorrectly described obverse).

This rare silver trachy of Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas depicts the emperor holding a scepter with emperor-saint Constantine. The scene on the obverse is one commonly found on coinage of the period. Whether standing or seated in varying designs, Christ always holds one hand out to bless the viewer and the gospel books in the other. As the

Logos, the written texts of the bible represent the living Christ. By featuring this ruler of all on coinage, the emperor reminds the viewer of the natural order of the medieval Roman world.



6). Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas



1.83g, 29mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Magnesia circa AD 1222 -1254, AE. **Ο ΑΓΙΟC**

ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟC Full-length figure of St. George nimbate, wearing body armor with pteryges, chiton, and sagion with agrapha, l. hand holding spear r. resting on shield. Rev. **ΙΩ ΔΕCΠΟΤΗC Ο Δ8ΚΑC** Full-length figure of emperor, bearded, seated upon a backed throne, wearing divitision, loros, sagion, and stemma with pendilia, both hands holding sheathed sword across lap. Sear 2108. LBC 259-60. DOC IV LXXXIV 54.

The unabashed brandishing of a sword from the imperial throne comforts the Roman viewer of this coin. The message is clear: the emperor personally defends his people from any harm or danger. If that bold stance were not enough, saint George stands in military splendor, offering the aid of the Christian faith to the emperor and his people who keep, protect, and uphold true worship. The presence of militaristic

saints is common on the coinage of the period - the use of bellicose paraphernalia by the emperor less so.



7). Theodoros II Laskaris Doukas



3.36g, 29mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Magnesia circa AD 1222 -1254, AE. **IC XC O**

ΕΜΜΑΝΗΛ Half-length figure of Christ Emmanuel, cruciformly nimbed with five pellets per each Cross arm, beardless, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand in benediction and l. holding scroll.

Rev. **ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ ΔΕΣΠΟΤΗΣ ΔΣΚΑΣ Ο ΤΡΥΦΩΝ** Full-length figure of emperor and St. Tryphon, holding lily-tipped-scepter mounted on globe; Emperor, bearded, wearing divitision, simplified loros, sagion, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding labarum; St. Tryphon wearing body armor with pteryges, chiton, and sagion with agrapha, l. hand holding trilobate scepter. Sear 2144 (incorrectly identified, reverse as St. Theodoros). LBC —. DOC IV XXXVI 12.

Saint Tryphon and the coinage of Theodoros II Laskaris Doukas showcase the personal bonds of an emperor with his favorite saint, and the unique expressions of power through networks of devotion. Saint Tryphon, ever popular with the Nicaean state, was the patron saint of Theodoros II and given prominent placement on his coinage. Of less outright significance than the followings of other saints like George, the

religious practices and tastes of an individual emperor are reflected through the prominence of a favorite saint.



8). Michael I Komnenos Doukas



2.23g, 31mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Arta circa AD 1211 – 1215, AE. **AP XM** Half-length figure of St. Michael the Archangel, nimbate, wearing divitision, loros, and maniakion, r. hand holding spear over shoulder and l. globus cruciger. Rev. **MHXAH O Δ8KAC MHP ΘV** Full-length figures of despot and Theotokos; Despot bearded, wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding Cross-tipped-scepter and l. akakia; Theotokos nimbate, wearing tunic and maphorion, r. Hand outstretched to crown emperor and l. in benediction. Sear 2232 (as Michael II). LBC –. DOC IV XLVI 3 (as Michael II). CLBC 15.4.3 (as Michael II).

A popular practice for the rulers of the period is that saints appear alongside their namesakes on coins. A Theodoros might prominently feature saint Theodoros on coins, and a Michael might promote the archangel, Michael. This coin is one such example, where

nominative determinism has influenced the obverse iconographical choice.



9). Theodoros I Komnenos Doukas



2.43g, 29mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Arta circa AD 1215 -1230, AR. **IC XC** Full-length figure of Christ, cruciformly nimbate with five pellets in each Cross arm and diamond inbetween, bearded, seated upon backed throne, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand in benediction and l. holding Gospels. Rev. **ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ Δ8ΚΑC Ο ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΣ** Full-length figures of emperor and St. Demetrios, holding Cross-in-circle-tipped-scepter with triangular decoration; Emperor bearded, wearing divitision, traditional loros, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand resting on Chest; St. Demetrios nimbate, standing on dais, wearing body armor with pteryges, chiton, and sagion with agrapha, l. hand holding sword over shoulder. Sear 2158. LBC 320. DOC IV XXXVIII 1. CLBC 12.1.1.

Emperor Theodoros I Komnenos Doukas presents himself in a beautiful rendition of the traditional loros, finely bejeweled and evocative of the majesty of both the garb and the office it represents.

The emperor holds a military standard together with saint Demetrios, proclaiming divine protection for both Theodoros and his subjects.



10). Theodoros I Komnenos Doukas



0.96g, 19mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Thessalonica circa AD 1215 -1230, AR. **MHP ΘV**
ΗΑΓΙΟCΟΠΙΤΙΚΑ Three-quarters-length figure of Theotokos
Hagiosoritissa, nimbate, in orans, wearing tunic and
maphorion. Rev. **ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ ΔΕΠΙ Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΣ** Full-
length figures of emperor and St. Demetrius; Emperor bearded, wearing
divitision, simplified loros, maniakion, and stemma with pendilia, r.
hand resting on chest and l. hand accepting the outstretched city of
Thessalonica; St. Demetrius nimbate, standing on square dais, wearing
body armor with pteryges, chiton, and sagion with agrapha, both hands
outstretched, offering the city of Thessalonica to the emperor; Manus
Dei blesses emperor in upper field. Sear 2159. LBC 321-2. DOC IV
XXXVIII 2c. CLBC -.

The political aspirations of emperor Theodoros I Komnenos Doukas are made explicit on this trachy. The emperor is presented the city of Thessalonica by its patron saint St. Demetrius, with the hand of God blessing the scene from the aloof heavens. There is no room for doubt that Theodoros is the rightful ruler of Epiros, and his reign in the city of Thessalonica is sanctioned by both its dearest saint and the divine Almighty. Of interest is the extreme clipping found on this specimen. The weight reduction to 1 gram is indicative of a changing

economy in the region, with growing reliance on the denier tournois of the Franks. Silver trachea of Theodoros are often found heavily clipped.



11). Ivan II Asen



2.65g, 31mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Ochrida (?) circa AD 1230, AE. **IC XC** Half-length figure of Christ, cruciformly nimbate with five pellets per Cross arm, beardless, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand in benediction and l. holding Gospels. Rev. **ΙΩ AC + ΒΝΒ ЦСВ АТЫ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΕ** Full-length figures of emperor and St. Demetrius, holding star-tipped-scepter; Emperor bearded, wearing divitision, chlamys, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding Cross-tipped-scepter; St. Demetrius nimbate, standing on dais, wearing body armor with pteryges, chiton, and sagion with agrapha, l. hand holding sword over shoulder. Sear —. LBC 478. DOC IV XLVII 2.

The specter of Bulgarian dominance became manifest with the battle of Klokotnitsa in 1230. Epirote emperor Theodoros I Komnenos Doukas was captured alive in battle and eventually blinded by the ascendant Bulgarian emperor Ivan II Asen. Manuel, brother of the imprisoned Theodoros, was elevated to the purple at the discretion of the victor. Seemingly, celators were either loaned to Ochrida or sent

finished coin there, for emperor Ivan II Asen minted a series of gold and bronze coinage in the style of the Thessalonican mint. His golden hyperpyra were a prerogative not ever assumed by his vanquished Epirote neighbors, and likely a direct challenge to the economic power and authority of the Nicaean state. Presenting himself in the traditional raiment of the Roman emperor, Ivan II Asen stands alongside the patron saint of Thessalonica with a symbol of astrological blessing— an ominous omen for those desiring an independent Epiros. The ascendancy of Bulgaria over her Roman, Epirote neighbors is made clear for all to see on this coin.



12). Manuel I Komnenos Doukas



3.39g, 30mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Thessalonica circa AD 1231 - 1237, AE. **Θ ΑΓΙΟC ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟC** Half-length figure of St. Demetrios, nimbate, beardless, wearing body armor with pteryges, chiton, and sagion with agrapha, r. hand holding spear over shoulder and l. hilt of sword. Rev. **ΜΑΝΟΥΗΛ ΑΥΓΑCΤΟC** Full-length figures of emperor and Christ, bearded; Emperor, wearing divitision, chlamys, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding Cross-tipped-scepter and l. akakia; Christ, nimbate, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand outstretched to crown emperor and l. holding Gospels; star and crescent sigla to left side. Sear 2177. LBC 346-9. DOC IV XLI 3. CLBC 13.3.1.

Emperor Manuel I Komnenos Doukas ascended to the throne under the shadow of a Bulgarian state on the rise. Wearing the chlamys, on this trachy the figure of Manuel is depicted in an identical iconographic fashion as the previous issue of Ivan II Asen. Saint

Demetrios again is present, a popular choice for those rulers associated with the great city of Thessalonica.



13). Iohannes I Komnenos Doukas



1.09g, 20mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Thessalonica circa AD 1237-1242, AE. **MHP ΘV** Full-length figure of Theotokos, nimbate, in orans, wearing tunic and maphorion. Rev. **ΙΘ** Full-length figure of emperor, winged, wearing divitsion, simplified loros, sagion, maniakion, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding labarum and l. akakia.

The coinage of Iohannes I Komnenos Doukas is among the most varied and certainly the most innovative of any ruler in the period. Not least in interest are the trachea where the emperor receives attributes not normally bestowed upon mere mortals. Otherwise wearing the standard clothing for the imperial office, the addition of two prominent wings presents the royal personage as perhaps something more. Whether the angelic appearance is meant to be taken as a symbol of abstract heavenly protection, or should be interpreted as a sign of the emperor's personal piety, is less clear.



14). Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas



4.26g, 31.5mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Hyperpyron, Thessalonica circa AD 1246, AU. **IC XC** Full-length figure of Christ, cruciformly nimbate with pellet in each Cross arm, bearded, seated upon backless throne, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand outstretched in benediction and l. holding Gospels. **Rev. IO ΔΕΧΗΟΤΗ ΤΩ ΠΟΡΘΥΡΟΓΕΝΝΗΤΩ ΜΗΡ ΘΥ** Full-length figures of emperor and Theotokos; Emperor bearded, wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding labarum over shoulder and l. akakia; Theotokos nimbate, wearing tunic and maphorion, r. Hand outstretched to crown emperor and l. in benediction. Sear –. LBC –. DOC IV XXIX 4i (as potentially Thessalonican).

After conquering Thessalonica in 1246, emperor Iohannes III Batatzes Doukas decides to mint a series of hyperpyra in the city. Perhaps intended as a response to the earlier coins minted by Ivan II Asen – potentially in Thessalonica - the economic strength and viability

of Nicaea is demonstrated by the utilization of the highest imperial numismatic dignity in a city where the previous Epirote emperors never assumed the privilege.



15). Michael VIII Palaiologos



2.31g, 25mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Constantinople circa AD 1261-1282. **Ο ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ** Half-length figure of St. George, nimbate, wearing body armour with pteryges, chiton, and sagion, r. hand holding spear resting on shoulder and l. hand resting on shield. Rev. **ΧΜ ΔΕΥ ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΟ Ο ΚΩΝΣΤ** Full-length figures of emperor and St. Constantine, bearded, holding patriarchal Cross; Emperor, wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding labarum; St. Constantine, wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, l. hand holding trilobate sceptre. Sear 2267. LBC 525-26. DOC 71-2. PCPC 28.

This trachy depicts the emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos alongside the emperor-saint Constantine I who lived nigh a millennium before. The man who styles himself as the ‘new Constantine’ frequents that saint on his coinage. Constantine founded the city of Constantinople on the Bosphorus in AD 327, and after the loss of the city in 1204, Michael recaptures it in 1261 and refounds Roman rule. The two events share some similarities, and it never hurts that the most famous and first Christian emperor makes for a flattering comparison to

the current emperor Michael, himself sitting tenuously on an ill-gotten throne.



16). Andronikos II Palaiologos



4.13g, 27mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Hyperpyron, Constantinople circa AD 1282 - 1294, AU. **MHP ΘV**
Half-length figure of Theotokos, nimbate, in orans, wearing tunic and maphorion, within the walls of Constantinople marked by six towers.
Rev. **ΑΝΔΡΟΝΙΚΟΣ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΣ** Full-length figures of emperor and Christ, bearded; Emperor, wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, in proskynesis with both hands raised; Christ, cruciformly nimbate with no pellet in each Cross arm, wearing tunic and kolobion, r. hand outstretched in benediction and l. hand holding Gospels. Sear 2326. LBC 635-36. DOC V 229-34. PCPC 91a.

Perhaps the most iconographically striking of any medieval Roman coin type, on this hyperpyron the emperor humbly supplicates himself before Christ in the form of proskynesis. The bold stature of emperors brandishing swords or the assumed piety of winged, angelic monarchs is far from the scene where the head of Roman society grovels on his knees. Religiosity is a form of power as influencer of public opinion, though there is small reason to be cynical of the

emperor's self-portrayal. Andronikos II has a deserved reputation for piety – though, it must be added, for general incompetence too.



17). Andronikos II Palaiologos



2.50g, 25mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Trachy, Constantinople circa AD 1282-1294, AE. Seraph with six wings; Pellets in the fields. Rev. **ΑΝΔΡΟΝΙΚΟΣ Ο**

ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΣ Full-length figure of emperor, bearded, wearing divitision, loros, maniakion, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding Cross-tipped- sceptre and l. akakia. Sear 2352. LBC 657-9. DOC V 588-9. PCPC 120.

Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

Holy, holy, holy, lord God almighty

According to Isaiah and Revelation, the seraphim cry out this prayer at the foot of the throne room of God. A less frequently seen motif on 13th century coinage in comparison to abundant obverses with Christ, the Theotokos, or various saints, the depiction of a seraph perhaps is intended by the emperor to recall the book of Isaiah, where the prophet – after being cleansed of his sins – communes with God. The emperor Andronikos, ruling in a period of tumult and decline,

perhaps intends to assuage his subjects that their ruler still stands as advocate before Christ.



18). Iohannes V Palaiologos with Iohannes VI Kantakouzenos



0.35g, 14.5mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Tornese, Constantinople (?) circa AD 1341-1376, AR. Quatrefoil Cross with B in each quarter. Rev. ? Full-length figures of emperors, bearded, holding akakia; Each emperor wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, open hand resting on chest. Sear – . LBC –. DOC V –. PCPC –.

Similar to type Sear 2533 (DOC V 1197; LBC 852; PCPC 293), this specimen lacks the stars on the obverse (and seemingly the Cross-tipped-scepters held by emperors on the reverse). A curious, likely unpublished, and damaged example, such a specimen is emblematic of the difficult and poorly understood coinage of the civil wars facing the medieval Roman empire in the time of emperor Iohannes V Palaiologos.



19). Iohannes VIII Palaiologos



0.51g, 14mm (with the above photograph at x2 magnification)

Follaro, Constantinople circa AD 1425-1448, AE. **IC XC** Full-length figure of Christ, cruciformly nimbed with pellets in each Cross arm, bearded, wearing tunic and kolobion, within mandorla, r. hand in benediction and l. hand holding Gospels. Rev. **IOAN** Full-length figure of emperor, bearded, wearing divitision, simplified loros, and stemma with pendilia, r. hand holding Cross-tipped-sceptre. Sear 2568. LBC —. DOC —. PCPC 352.

The reduced straits of the empire in the late 14th and early 15th centuries are reflected in the rather unattractive coinage produce. The fine style stavrata of Iohannes V Palaiologos quickly plummeted in artistic quality, and the bronze coinage of the period fared little better. By the time of Iohannes VIII Palaiologos, the empire was a shell of its former self. The crude figures of Christ and the emperor are barely discernable on the ragged flan, though the present example is of above average quality for the series. The presence of portions from the legend allows for an accurate identification, something not always possible with the crude bronze coins of the final decades of the empire.



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Postword

Besides outlining the basic history of the medieval Romans for an interested general public, this exhibition has presented 19 coins from across the late Byzantine period, featuring unpublished coin types alongside the well-known. Reflecting the needs, desires, and expressions of a variety of rulers from differing states, this snapshot has traced the outlines of the numismatic medium and the usage of concerted messaging by medieval rulers to promote their legitimacy and identity. Tangible connections to consequential battles like Klokotnitsa stand next to patron saints and prostrate emperors. The dynamism of this epoch is well reflected in the types of coins exhibited and the stories behind them. The author hopes that this exhibition and accompanying catalogue has been of interest to the reader.

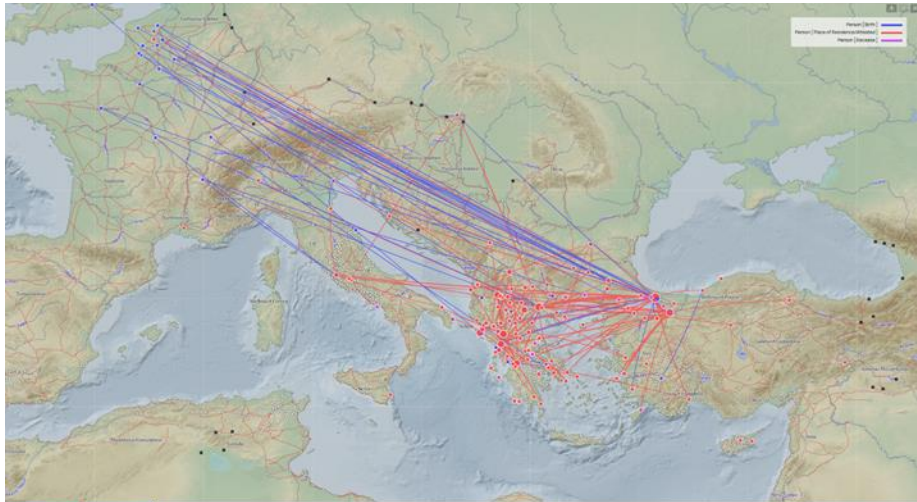
For typological updates and holistic reviewing of the current corpora for Byzantine numismatics of the 13th century, please stay tuned for the forthcoming publication on the mint of Arta and the eventual doctoral dissertation of the author. With any questions, comments, concerns, or ideas, please do reach out at:

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Prosopography of a Fragmented Byzantium: 1204 – 1261

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Epigraphy on Mt Athos (10th-17th Centuries)*



PROSOPOGRAPHY OF A FRAGMENTED BYZANTIUM (1200–1261)

IDENTIFYING THE LOST GENERATIONS OF THE BYZANTINE WORLD
THROUGH THEIR EPISTLES

The *Prosopography of a Fragmented Byzantium: 1204 – 1261* is an early-stage initiative by Nathan D.C. Websdale, Research Associate at the University of Oxford, as a means of addressing one of the more substantial gaps remaining in Byzantine prosopographical studies – the political fragmentation of the Balkan peninsula following the arrival of the Fourth Crusade in 1204. The sack of the capital, and the five-decade period that follows, is the infamous dismantling of a centralised Byzantine state based in Constantinople. Conversely, that period is also

a time of survival and rebuilding of administrative, judicial, familial, and social networks. Within that milieu there is an often-unrecognised flourishing of the epistolary tradition, the art of letter-writing, which connected the peoples of the fragments of Byzantium, and which gained an almost unprecedented importance in the thirteenth century.

Byzantine prosopography is the study of the biographical information of historical persons (*prosōpon* – *face/person*) who are known to have existed at some point and place in the Byzantine World and their entanglements. Prosopography in Byzantine Studies is an active and dynamic field of study. It allows for authoritative biographical information to be gathered for elites and notable figures, while simultaneously allowing for attention to be drawn to sub-elites. While the dates and facts for the emperor and the imperial family are often well-known and easily accessible, prosopography includes persons from the regional governors to local archons and wealthy widows, as well as wandering tax-collectors, village elders, farmers, and the lowly shepherd. Prosopographies include biographical and relational information regarding all these peoples, how and when they presented to our sources, and in their reflection can present a holistic social study often absent from narrative histories.

Within Late Antique and Byzantine Studies there are multiple prosopographies covering different periods. Even an unauthoritative list must include the following:

- 260–641: *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (PLRE)* I-III.
- 641–867: *Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire I, (PBE)* ed. John Martindale.
- 642–1025: *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit (PMZ)*.

- 1025–1180 (and slowly advancing towards 1204): *Prosopography of the Byzantine World (PBW)*, ed. Michael Jeffreys.
- 1261–1453: *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit (PLP)* ed. Erich Trapp.

Despite the magisterial efforts of generations of scholarship, there still exist substantial chronological and regional gaps in our prosopographies which new researchers may now address. New prosopographical evidence from sigillography, epigraphy, manuscript studies, and more besides are presented at the *PROSOPON-International Research Network* as it gathers every two years, (2023, 2025) organised by Zachary Chitwood, Niels Gaul, Olga Karagiorgou, and Ekaterini Mitsiou. The *Prosopography of a Fragmented Byzantium: 1204 – 1261* was presented at the Second PROSOPON Workshop in 2025 as ‘The Epistolary Networks of a Fragmented Byzantium’ reflecting its scope and study of the Byzantine letter.

The source material for the project draws upon a collection of letters written by the leading bishops of the state historiographically known as Epiros. That Epirote state – proclaimed an Empire of the Romans in 1225 and recognised with that title until at least 1242 – was based around either Arta or Thessaloniki. Allied to the Serbs and Albanians, it fought against the Latin Empire of Constantinople and ended the Crusader Kingdom of Thessaloniki in 1224, taking its capital for its own. These bishops were additionally, between 1227 and 1233, in a state of ecclesiastical schism with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and proclaimed their own parallel Orthodox Church of the Balkans. Epiros was also engaged in a long-running political rivalry with the Asanid Bulgarian Empire, first while it was a Catholic power between 1204 and 1235 until amidst an otherwise triumphant expansion Epiros suffered the humiliating capture of its emperor at the Battle of Klokotnitsa in 1230. Following Bulgaria’s

realignment with Orthodoxy in 1235/37, Epiros became a junior partner to an alliance that blended both their ruling and sub-elite families. With the four-decade delayed entry of the Laskarid-Palaiologan Empire of Nikaia into the Balkans, Epiros lost Thessaloniki in 1246 but continued to challenge for the leadership of the peninsular well-beyond the capture of Constantinople in 1261.

Connecting these warring fragments and giving voice to long-mute cities and regions was a network of ‘Western’ (*Dytikoi*) bishops who have left us almost five-hundred epistles of their personal communications, as well as judicial decisions of secular and canonical matters which detail the continued application of imperial law. Through this correspondence and the personages addressed to, mentioned, and sometimes directly quoted, the project has identified six-hundred people (and counting). These include refugees from Constantinople; long-established local families; ecclesiastical ordinations, foundations, and consolidation; recreated fiscal bases; and the reaction to migration from Italy, Flanders, Vlach territories, and more. Many such topics appear in these letters. Many individuals appear as petitioners or as mentioned peoples in those who appealed to the bishops presiding over legal courts at Naupaktos (John Apokaukos), Ohrid (Demetrios Chomatenos), and Kerkyra/Corfu (George Bardanes), as well as several smaller collections. Petitioners had the opportunity to present their cases, and the surviving documentation reflects recent history, living and recently deceased involved persons, and is followed by the episcopal or imperial decision. They are an incredibly detailed and heavily underexplored resource.

The project utilises the Nodegoat software, developed by LAB1100, as a means of structuring data models along spatial and chronological modes. We create entries of all peoples mentioned, together with multiple fields including office, honorific, location, chronological window, family connections, and descriptions. Almost all of the five-hundred personages

mentioned in the letters are entirely undocumented in any Byzantine prosopography. To date, these include fifty-four bishops, ten deacons, fourteen individuals governing cities as a *doux*, four as *protovestiarios*, multiple individuals as *kastophylax* (castellan). In matters of honorifics, we have for example thirteen individuals as *sebastos*, six as *pansebastos*, and three as *panhypersebastos*. Future plans include greater incorporation of the Papal letters referring to Crusaders who settled in the Aegean, as well as further exploration of the Slavic powers who engaged with the Byzantine polities. All aspects of *PFB* are designed for standardisation and compatibility with existing projects so that it directly compliments Ekaterini Mitsiou's research project *PLAS: Prosopography of the Lascarid Period*, which offers coverage of contemporary Anatolia.

In *PFB*, these details are encoded, then mapped using Nodegoat's geographical function, supported by Geonames where possible, resulting in the creation of a populated map of these lost generations of the Byzantine world. Where we are informed of people's movements, their attestations multiply and allow for moments of a moving demonstration of a prosopography of a fragmented Byzantium.

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ἔρωσο – Nathan Websdale

Entangled Charters of Anatolia (1200-1300, ENCHANT)

The 13th century CE was a period of dramatic transformation for the societies of Anatolia and the Eastern Mediterranean, with the conquest of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade (1204), the Mongol conquests of the Seljuk Sultanate (1243) and Baghdad (1258) or the Mamluks coming into power in Egypt (1250) unsettling socio-political structures. While selected aspects have been addressed, a systematic comparison on how the polities of Anatolia tried to reconstruct their power networks within the framework of their perception of world order is missing. The project ENCHANT, funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF (P 36403-G) for the years 2023-2027 at the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and at the University of Vienna, aims to provide such a comparison based on a systematic survey of important artefacts of these efforts, i. e. the documents issued by the state chancelleries of the Byzantine “empires in exile” of Nicaea and Trebizond, Cilician Armenia and the Seljuk Sultanate. The project provides a digital catalogue, a corpus of those documents whose texts have been transmitted at least in significant parts, and a number of publications presenting a comparative analysis of these multifaceted acts of “world (re)ordering” after crisis. Furthermore, ENCHANT cooperates with Ekaterini Mitsiou’s research project PLAS on the Prosopography of the Lascarid Period (1204-1261).

Team: András Barati, Samvel Grigoryan, Ekaterini Mitsiou, Felix Müller, Johannes Preisner-Kapeller (PI), Rustam Shukurov

<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/imafo/research/byzantine-research/byzantium-and-beyond/mobility-and-intercultural-contacts/entangled-charters-of-anatolia-1200-1300-enchanted>

Database: <https://discover-plas.openatlas.eu/>

Student Projects

The preparation of “Coins of Crisis” was accompanied by a course at the University of Vienna in the summer term of 2026, headed by Sam Cowell, Ekaterini Mitsiou and Johannes Preiser-Kapeller on *Money, Merchants and Mongols. Aspects of Economic Exchange in the “Globalization of Marco Polo”, 1200-1400 CE*: <https://ufind.univie.ac.at/en/course.html?lv=070088&semester=2026S>

Students prepared not only presentations on various aspects of this topic, but also developed various formats of communicating these themes to a wider audience in highly creative ways:

- *Between Spain and Anatolia – Mediterranean coinage in coin hoards of late medieval Asia Minor* (Elias Bandion, Simon Lameraner).
- *Between Mali and Tyrol - the extraction and routes of the precious metal in late medieval Afro-Eurasia* (Alexander Saavedra Edelmann, Erik Trauner)
- *Religious Fanaticism and Political Pragmatism - Crusaders minting imitations of Islamic Coinage in the early to middle 13th century* (Benedikt Gruber, Felix Zeller)
- *From the Arabs to Augustus - Sicily at Numismatic Crossroads: The radical transformations of Frederick II 'Stupor Mundi' and the introduction of deliberately anachronistic coinage into the melting pot of Europe* (Lukas Ralf Koch, Naomi Thek)
- *From the clinking of coins to the rustling of banknotes – paper money in Song Dynasty and Mongol-era China* (Martin Dintchev, Severin Beatus Heschl)
- *Valuable fabrics – silk from the Mongol Empire in Vienna and Central Europe* (Michaela Auer, Viola Zotter)
- *The Face of the Stranger? Byzantine Princesses in Medieval Austria and their pictorial representation up to the present day* (Nicolas Cedric Fritz, Lola Skopik)
- *An “Austrian” Marco Polo? The travels of Odorico of Pordenone in the Mongol Empire in the 14th century* (Miriam Lubrich, Simon Heinz Tempel)

Some of the results of these projects are on display in the exhibition, in the form of posters, digital presentation or even board games.

