



# Byzantine Coins

Collecting Regnally-Dated Byzantine Coins

**By David R. Cervin**



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"Solomon, I have surpassed thee!"

Thus spoke Justinian the Great at the dedication of Santa Sophia in Constantinople the day after Christmas, A.D. 537. Of course he was referring to the legendary temple built by Solomon some 1,500 years prior. Even in Justinian's time Solomon's temple was just a memory - a legend - as numerous wars and invasions had reduced the once superlative edifice to a mass of rubble; and then erosion by weathering had even caused any remnants of the foundations to disappear.

Had Justinian, in fact, surpassed Solomon? Indeed, he had not only outdone Solomon the Wise, but his structure has to be regarded, by two very fair methods of measuring, as the most remarkable structure constructed up to that time. And even if it were reconstructed today - remember, it still stands - it would be regarded as a very creditable accomplishment for the 20th century.

For eons the only method of erecting large structures was called "post and lintel." And that was it: a beam resting on posts at each end. The Egyptians knew only this method, and built huge structures. However, it remained for the Greeks to carry post and lintel construction to its ultimate perfection, as reflected in what is usually referred to as the most beautiful building of the ancient world, namely the Acropolis in Athens.

Were the Greeks conversant with the arch and dome? Indeed they were, but these facets of architecture were almost never used in grandiose public buildings. Rather they were used in burial structures, generally on a small scale and in remote areas. Also, their domes were often of a pseudo-dome nature, i.e., the dome achieved by corbelling brick. This is best exemplified at the tomb of Atreus at Mycenae, ca. 1200 B.C.

Thus it remained for the Romans to develop what is now known as the Roman arch. Even the dome was constructed as early as 78 B.C. in the tabularium at Rome. However, it was not a true dome, it being more properly defined as a square dome. Nevertheless, with the development of many buildings of circular plan during the empire, the dome naturally came into use. An early example is the domical vault at the Garden of Sollust, Rome (ca. A.D. 70-80).

Hadrian, however, was the first to realize the tremendous opportunities of the simple dome form. He applied it on an enormous scale to the circular Pantheon, built between A.D. 110 and 115. This dome, 144 feet in diameter, is constructed at ground level, of brick, and is still one of the marvels to be seen by visitors in Rome.

From the time of Hadrian, the dome became more and more common. It was no problem to place a dome on a circular structure; but most structures are not round, they are square. The problem thus presented of supporting the in-curving parts of the dome, had puzzled the Romans for many years, and all

sorts of attempts, by means of corbelling, and diagonal arches and niches had been made. However, the Romans never solved this problem.

The Byzantines found the solution. It was accomplished by perfecting the "pendentive," a sort of a triangle that has three-dimensional shape. A pendentive is simply the transition structure between a square building having four arches and a superimposed dome. It was probably first successfully used at the end of the fifth century, the same period in which Justinian was born.

Now Justinian had many accomplishments, not the least of which was his massive structures. Deeply devout in the Christian faith, it occurred to Justinian early in his career as emperor of the Byzantine Empire that he should erect a great Christian basilica so large and so remarkable that it might never be surpassed.

Justinian was not one to do things half-way. He therefore hired as his architects Isidorus of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles, both from the east. He told them what he wanted: a tremendous dome on a square base, each of the four walls being an arch.

This objective was gargantuan. Heretofore, structures had been erected empirically: If it succeeded, a larger one could be attempted; if it failed, corrective measures would be applied and another attempt at stability would be tried. But the problems they had to face in constructing Santa Sophia could not be solved empirically; rigorous theory was needed.

Thus a new kind of architect/engineering was needed and the decision to explore this route must have been Justinian's own. Surely a decision as important as this could not be delegated to a subordinate. No doubt Justinian had been exposed to the work of Isidorus and Anthemius in connection with his military works on the eastern frontier, or with his improvements to the water supply of Constantinople; and he learned to respect their intellectual and technical ability.

Started in 532, and utilizing the newly invented pendentive, Santa Sophia, with a dome measuring 102 feet in diameter, was completed in a scant five years, A.D. 537.

With this tremendous structure, Byzantine architecture came to its maturity. Further, it was to influence, for the next dozen centuries, the buildings of Greece, the Balkans, Armenia, Italy and Russia. More important, it was the basis for Romanesque architecture for all of Europe.

When you visit St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, constructed more than 1,000 years after Santa Sophia, and marvel at the 136-foot dome supported by a square arched structure, do you give all credit to Michelangelo, its architect? If you do, you are wrong. Let us give an assist to Justinian, the man most responsible for building Santa Sophia which utilized the then-recent Byzantine invention of the pendentive. And no one in those 1,000 plus years, including Michelangelo, improved on the Byzantine pendentive.

Gosta E. Sandstrom in *Man the Builder* nicely summarizes Santa Sophia: "It is not only an engineering accomplishment of the highest order; it is sublime architecture, religious reverence frozen in stone."

Of course, total credit cannot be given solely to Justinian. Isidorus and Anthemius need a share of the glory. Robert Browning in *Justinian and Theodora* deftly credits both the emperor and the architect thus:

"True, Justinian could not have built Santa Sophia without Isidorus and Anthernius. But equally these two men could not have built it without Justinian, who provided not merely money, but a lively interest in every detail and the encouragement to try something which had never been done before - and which has never been done since on a remotely comparable scale."

How can the size of Santa Sophia best be described? For more than 1,000 years it was the largest church in Christendom. It surpassed in size all of the great -cathedrals built in Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries, and part of the 16th century. And even today it ranks in size among the top dozen churches of ' all time. Justinian did not miss by very much his goal of building a basilica that would never be exceeded in size or grandeur.

So, we have a great basilica, Santa Sophia, dedicated by Justinian in 537. Now how does this possibly tie in with the regnally-dated coinage of the Byzantine Empire? To answer this question we need to further examine Justinian, especially during his earlier years as emperor.

Justinian, the most famous of all the Byzantine emperors, was by birth a barbarian. Born 483, we know nothing of his early life except that at about 17 his father was smart enough to send him to Constantinople where he received an excellent education. Here he was clever enough, or lucky enough, to make the acquaintance of Justin, a rough, crusty soldier of little learning but who seemed destined to succeed Anastasius as emperor. In turn, Justin, some 33 years Justinian's senior, saw in Justinian the polish and knowledge that he lacked which would be so useful to him should he rise to emperor. Accordingly, he adopted Justinian (whose real name was Upranda) as his nephew. Young Upranda promptly renamed himself Justinian in honor of his adopted Uncle Justin.

In 518 Anastasius died, and as expected, Justin succeeded to the throne. True to his plan, his brilliant nephew, Justinian, was the real ruler in nearly every sense of the word. Thus, when Justin died in 527, Justinian not only succeeded him, but he had had 10 years of intense training as a full-fledged emperor.

If Justinian had one single ambition it was to restore Roman power in the western Mediterranean. (Although we speak of Justinian as being of the Byzantine Empire, he regarded himself as a Roman.) During his almost four decades as emperor he recovered North Africa from the Vandals, liberated Italy from the Goths, and gained a footing in Spain. Once more, and for the last time in history, the Mediterranean could justly be called a Roman lake.

But these successes were a hollow victory. For these achievements he taxed the empire beyond the limits of its resources. Shortly after Justinian's death it became quite clear that the Byzantines were not able to bear the burden of the great emperor's achievements, and much of his work of reconquest was quickly undone. And, for nearly nine centuries after Justinian's death, the Byzantine Empire continually

dwindled in size until in 1453, the last vestige of the old Roman Empire fell to the Ottoman Turks. The formerly great Byzantine Empire had completely fallen, never to rise again.

Wrong or right, Justinian was not remembered as the ruler who restored Roman power in the western Mediterranean. Then for what was he best remembered? As the builder of Santa Sophia and as legislator. We have already seen Justinian's prowess as a builder. But what of his legislative ability?

Though not trained in legal matters, Justinian had a keen legal mind. This strength coupled with a powerful administrative ability gave him the opportunity to codify the centuries of Roman law. There were so many thousands of volumes of Roman law that no one person could begin to digest its contents. Worse, there were many inconsistencies of interpretation of law resulting in unfair and irregular decisions. It was necessary to retain -only those laws which were deemed applicable and throw away the tremendous volumes of conflicting and inapplicable laws.

In 528, just one year after being elevated to the office of emperor, Justinian started the codification of Roman law. The immense job was completed six years later and became popularly known as Justinian's Code of Laws. So fair and logical was this work that Justinian's code was the basis of law for centuries thereafter in Europe and Asia Minor, including English common law, the basis of U.S. jurisprudence.

With these two great accomplishments - the construction of Santa Sophia and codification of law - Justinian rightfully felt that all of his accomplishments - not just his greatest - should be dated from his ascension to power. Thus in 537 - the year Santa Sophia was dedicated - he issued a decree declaring that all principal documents and decrees should be dated from the beginning of his emperorship.

The impending completion of Santa Sophia was possibly the catalyst that prompted Justinian to issue his decree requiring dating of important documents. Coins fell under this decree, so the next year, 538 - his regnal year 12 - was placed on the follis, half follis and quarter follis. But for the two larger denominations, it was not sufficient to just include the date. Rather, the facing bust of Justinian was used in lieu of the time honored profile almost exclusively used on all Roman and Byzantine coins. And for the follis, its diameter measured 38mm - sometimes reaching as much as 42mm with a stretched out planchet - a size possibly greater than any coin previously struck, or for that matter, to be struck until double talers made their appearance in the mid 16th century. (By comparison, U.S. silver and copper-nickel dollars - at least until Anthony dollars showed up - measure 38.1 mm.)

Three tremendous changes in one coin - facing bust after nearly a millennium of profiles; regnal dates; and, possibly the largest coin struck to that time - make Justinian's follis singularly unusual. Did Justinian just "happen" to make those three changes? Hardly. Keep in mind the most exhilarating moment in Justinian's life occurred Dec. 26, 537. And only a few months later these fantastically different coins made their appearance. It is reasonable to assume that Justinian needed something to celebrate - better, to commemorate - the completion of Santa Sophia. There is no known record of official directives calling for this action, but there must be a reason for three major changes in coinage taking place at the same

time. Until a better reason is offered, I submit that these three changes are directly related to the completion of Santa Sophia.

The numbering systems that the Byzantines used were strangely complicated, principally due to their geographic location. Though originally under the domination of Rome, their proximity to Greece exposed them heavily to the Greek tongue. Thus, their written language became a mixture of Greek and Latin, with Greek eventually winning out. However, during Justinian's day, and for nearly two centuries thereafter, both Roman and Greek numbers were employed.

Before studying these numbers, we need to understand the three ways in which numbers were employed on coins.

1. Regnal dated, nearly always Roman numerals.
2. Coin denomination, nearly always Greek numerals.
3. Officina (a sub-mint area), nearly always Greek numerals.

Since Roman numerals had been in use for nearly a millennium by the time the Byzantine Empire was reaching its zenith, on the surface it would appear to be quite unnecessary to explain how to read them. But it doesn't work that way. The Byzantines managed to make several changes which, strangely enough, were retrogressive in development.

Low-value Roman numerals are: 1 = I; 5 = V; 10 = X.

To make a larger number, follow with equal or smaller numbers and add. Thus: II = 2; VII = 7; XIII = 13.

To make a smaller number, precede with a smaller number and subtract. Thus: IV = 4; IX = 9.

This method, cumbersome though it appears when compared to our decimal system, was the only method employed by the Romans and medieval Europeans until about the 13th century. However, the Byzantines introduced changes which were illogical and only tended to confuse what had been the gospel for so many centuries.

In the eastern sector they changed V to **ν**, a letter pronounced "mu" taken from their alphabet. This of course makes no difference. But then comes the crusher: they introduced **ϛ** for six, and still retained **ν I** for six. Thus:

$$6 = \nu I = \rho$$

$$9 = \nu III = \rho III$$

However, in the area proximate to Rome the V for 5 was retained. Thus we encounter V at the Carthage, Perugia, and Ravenna Mints, all of which are close to or west of Rome.

Sometime both sixes were used in the same series of coins. Even this was not too bad, but engravers often let the two symbols approach one another in appearance, requiring more than simple care in interpreting.

But the real change came when they abandoned the add-subtract method of, finalizing numbers and employed add only. Thus:

$$IX = XI = 11$$

$$IIX = XII = 12$$

They also stacked letters on letters. Thus:

$$IIX = XII = X/II = II/X = 12$$

Stacking was used frequently due to space limitations. In fact, stacking may be described as the rule and not is the exception.

Still another change adopted, though very infrequently used, is five I's for five. Thus:

$$5 = IIII, \text{ usually shown II/III}$$

When used, however, the normal method is to stack due to space limitations. We can therefore make the following chart:

$$1 = I.$$

$$2 = II$$

$$3 = III \text{ or } I \text{ over } II \text{ or } II \text{ over } I.$$

$$4 = IIII \text{ or } II \text{ over } II.$$

$$5 = \mathcal{u} \text{ or } IIII \text{ or } II \text{ over } III \text{ or } V.$$

$$6 = \mathcal{u}I \text{ or } \mathcal{g} \text{ or } VI \text{ or } I\mathcal{u}.$$

$$7 = \mathcal{u}II \text{ or } \mathcal{g}I \text{ or } VII \text{ or } II\mathcal{u} \text{ or } I\mathcal{g}$$

$$8 = \mathcal{u}III \text{ or } \mathcal{g}II \text{ or } VIII \text{ or } III\mathcal{u} \text{ or } II\mathcal{g}$$

$$9 = \mathcal{u}IIII \text{ or } \mathcal{g}III \text{ or } VIII$$

$$10 = X.$$

$$11 = IX \text{ or } XI.$$

$$12 = IIX \text{ or } XII.$$

$$13 = IIIX \text{ or } XIII.$$

Three numbers preceding a larger number is very rare and is probably the maximum.

When using Greek letters for numbers, the Byzantines adopting the following letters:

No.	Greek letter	Greek name
1	A	Alpha
2	B	Beta
3	Γ	Gamma (symbol here is representative only)
4	Δ	Delta
5	E	Epsilon
6	S	Septa
7	Z	Zeta

8	H	Hepta
9	∅	Theta (symbol here is representative only)
10	I	Iota
11	IA	Iota alpha
12	IB	Iota beta etc.
20	K	Kappa
21	KA	Kappa alpha
30	^	Lambda (symbol here is representative only)
31	^A	Lambda alpha (symbol here is representative only)
40	M	MU

We now have the tools for studying the regnally-dated coinage of the Byzantine Empire. However, at the outset, let us observe that there are two distinct periods for dating coins: first, from Justinian I, 527-565, through Constans II, 641-668; and from Constantine IV, 668-685, through Leo III, 717-741.

For the former, coins may usually be found for every year of the emperor's reign; consequently, most of the coins are relatively commonplace. However, for the second group, there are rarely more than two different years having dates even if the reign was long, such as in the case of Constantine IV, Justinian II and Leo III. Further, the dates were usually for the first year or two only, although sometimes a 20, or even a 30-year date may be found. If the latter, then rarely would an early year be struck. Needless to say all of the dated coins for this period range from scarce to very rare.

There is something nice about having the first of anything. For Christian-dated coins, that would be the penny struck by Niels Stigsen, the Bishop of Roskilde, in 1234; for England, the shilings of Edward VI in 1548; for France, the toulouse of 1549; and for the United States, the 1787 Fugio cent. For the Byzantine Empire, the first of regnal dating which was to be used for nearly 200 years - was 538.

The obverse shows the facing bust of Justinian, a rarity for practically all coins preceding this date. Ancient artists - be they Roman, Greek, Parthian, Egyptian -found the profile to be the easiest way to depict a head. The facing portrait started by Justinian in 538 was to be used by the Byzantines for the remainder of the life of their empire, a period of more than 900 years. Justinian is helmeted and cuirassed (armored), holding a globus cruciger (cross on a globe) in right hand and a shield. To the right is a cross. The legend reads: D.N. IVSTINIANVS PP. AVG. ("Our Lord, Justinian, Father of his Country, Augustus.")

The reverse has a large M (40 nummi or one follis) between A/N/N/O (year) and XII, Justinian's regnal year of striking this coin. Since Justinian began his rule Aug. 1, 527, this coin was struck in either 538 or

539, and is therefore shown as 538/9. Above M is the Christian cross, below is officina (sub-Mint) mark  $\alpha$  (alpha).

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; therefore the coin was struck in the first officina. The M rests on a horizontal line, below which in the exergue is CON, which stands for Constantinople Mint.

Since Constantinople was the largest and only Byzantine Mint in operation for the duration of the Byzantine Empire, since the denomination is a follis (largest of the bronze coins, a millimeter or so larger than our silver dollar), and since the officina is  $\alpha$ , this coin may be regarded as the most basic and desirable of the several other coins having different Mints, denominations and officinae, but also struck in regnal year 12. (The coin is SB 163 in David Sear's book *Byzantine Coins and Their Values*.)

The location of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey) is readily envisioned by most people without recourse to a map: on the west side of the Bosphorus, the narrow (one mile wide) and short (15 miles) body of water that connects the two great seas of the ancient world, the Mediterranean and Black. But the Byzantines struck coins at 27 Mints, 15 of which included regnal dates.

A 40 nummi (follis) struck in regnal year 15, is dated X/  $\mu$  (541/2). Note the use of  $\mu$  (mu) for five instead of the usual V found in Roman numerals. The officina is  $\Delta$  (delta, fourth letter of the Greek alphabet), representing the fourth officina (SB 163).

An example of the first year of dated coinage, XII (538/9), from the Nicomedia Mint, shows NIKM in the exergue. The usual abbreviation for Nicomedia is either NIK or NIKO. The NIKM- shown here is a rarely used form of the abbreviation for Nicomedia. Officina is  $\beta$  (beta, second letter of the Greek alphabet) representing the second officina (SB 201).

A follis of year XIII (539/40), struck in the Theoupolis Mint, is struck on a planchet measuring 42mm. (The Theoupolis Mint was originally the Antioch Mint, but was renamed Theoupolis after the great earthquake in 528.) This coin is possibly larger than any coin previously struck anywhere, or for that matter to be struck until double talers made their appearance in the mid-16th century. The officina is  $\gamma$  (gamma, third letter in the Greek alphabet) from the third officina (SB 218).

As already pointed out, Justinian brought the Byzantine Empire to its greatest size, representing the dominant force around the Mediterranean Sea. But even before Justinian died in 565, the load was becoming too great for his subjects. The decline was slow but sure, ending in 1453 when the Ottoman Turks completely took over what was left of the Byzantine Empire.

An early illustration of decline can be measured in the size of the follis, previously 39-40mm and by 561/2 reduced to 32mm. Overproduction of coins and a scarcity of metal due to heavy demands of war probably caused the reduction in size. These coins never again reached the spectacular size of Justinian's early folli.

An earlier illustration of the deterioration of the Byzantine Empire is shown by coins struck at the Cyzicus Mint, located just south of Constantinople. The abbreviation for this Mint is truly intriguing, KYZ, more suited to the call letters of a radio station in the early 1920s (when only three letters were used) rather than an early medieval Mint.

Another example is a follis from regnal year X/Ϸ I/II/I in itself interesting because four lines are occupied to show the numerical year. The corresponding Christian year is 545/6. The diameter is 35mm, a several millimeter reduction from sizes struck from year 12 through 15 for Constantinople, Nicomedia and Theoupolis Mints, and for some years at the Cyzicus Mint (SB 207).

Another sharp reduction in size is seen in a follis from Cyzicus Mint, year X/X/Ϸ II/I, or 29, 555/6. The diameter measures 32mm, a further 3mm reduction in a -span of just 10 years. Again there are four lines used to express the regnal year of minting, probably not used by any other country. This alone is one of the fascinating reasons for collecting Byzantine coins.

The reader may have already detected the interesting, though seemingly unexplainable, selection of numerals for the two coins struck exactly 10 years apart and from the same Mint. The earlier coin reads X Ϸ III or 19.

The other coin reads XX Ϸ III or 29. Note here the use Ϸ for 6 and the 3 I's, these four symbols adding to 9. A possible reason for the using of Ϸ in lieu of Ϸ I is to conserve space on a coin when a longer number is encountered. However, this seemingly logical reason does not hold up for the following known dates on Cyzicus folli: X Ϸ = 15; X Ϸ = 16; and X Ϸ II = 17.

Here 17 reverses the trend of shortening the regnal date. Until someone can come up with a firm reason for when these two symbols, Ϸ and Ϸ, are used, we must conclude that their use was directed by the whim of the Mintmaster.

Coins from the Constantinople, Nicomedia, Theoupolis and Cyzicus Mints exist in large numbers. Not so for the Carthage Mint in Africa. A half follis (20 nummi) is identified by a large K (Greek for 20) on the reverse. Struck in regnal year XIII (A.D. 539/40), Carthage is identified by CAR in the exergue. In the lower part of the K may be seen S which stands for secundo, or second officina.

The identification for the officina is in Latin rather than Greek. Latin identification for officinae is quite exceptional. In the case of Carthage there is a possible explanation. Carthage was west of Rome, one of the westernmost Mints used by the Byzantines. Carthage's proximity to Rome and great distance from the Grecian influence of Athens might account for the use of Latin instead of Greek for officina. On the other hand, the Greek K for 20 (nummi) is retained rather than the Latin XX for 20 (SB 267).

Scarce though coins are from the Carthage Mint, those from the Ravenna Mint are considerably scarcer. One shows a large I (iota = 10 = decanummium), flanked on left by ϷN/N/O, on the right by XX/XIII (560/1); all within a wreath (SB 326). There is no Mint indication so how do we know that the

Mint is Ravenna rather than Constantinople, Nicomedia, Cyzicus, Theoupolis or Carthage; all of which struck similar decanummium? The answer is that all Mints except Ravenna included the Mint name in the exergue, as shown by a follis of Nicomedia, NIK. A cross is above the I which is included at all Mints, again excepting Ravenna. The date, X/XX/  $\mathcal{N}$  (561/2) must be carefully scrutinized, which is typical of the usual poor striking of Byzantine coins (SB 205).

None of the emperors who followed Justinian evidenced his ability to administer a country that claimed supervision over just about all of the lands bordering the Mediterranean. And Justin II, nephew of Justinian, was no exception to this statement. Selected for the succession before his uncle's death, Justin found himself inheriting the numerous problems resulting from his predecessor's overambitious policies. Within five years of his accession, Italy had been lost to the Lombards, Spain to the Visigoths and an almost unending war was initiated on the eastern frontier when Justin refused to pay Khusru the customary tribute that his uncle had paid. Little wonder that in the dark ages that followed, the reign of Justinian was looked back upon as a Golden Age.

These problems overtaxed Justin's mind, and in 574 he was obliged to appoint Tiberius as caesar.

But there was one shining light during Justin's reign. He found in his Empress Sophia a woman of keen intellect who exercised considerable political influence throughout her husband's reign, including the regency of Tiberius. However, our interest in Sophia is the prominent part that she played in the coinage.

Not only did Sophia worm her way into nearly every regnally-dated coin - her success was much less in gold and silver coins, none of which was regnally-dated, however - but she appeared in a type of portraiture on coins that heretofore had little, if any, precedence.

On the obverse we find Justin on the left and Sophia on the right, seated facing on a double throne, both nimbate (with halo). Justin holds a globus cruciger; Sophia holds a cruciform scepter. The legend reads: D.N. IVSTINVS PP.AVG. The translation is: "Our lord, Justin, father of his country, Augustus." So dedicated was Sophia to the proposition that she must appear on coins, that her facing seated portrait appears on all dated coins issued by the Mints at Constantinople, Nicomedia, Cyzicus and Constantine. And even at the other Mints, Justin appears as the sole portrait on dated coins only for the early years of his reign.

The reverse is very much like the reverse of Justinian, the smaller size (29mm) being the chief difference. The large M (40 nummi) is flanked with  $\mathcal{A}$  /N/N/O on the left and  $\mathcal{N}$  (5) on the right representing regnal year or Christian year 569/70. Above is the Christian cross, below is  $\mathcal{A}$ , or first officina. In the exergue is NICO, Nicomedia Mint (SB 369).

In spite of Sophia's domineering traits, she was unsuccessful in having her name placed on the obverse except at the Carthage Mint. The legend reads: D.N. IVSTINO ET SOPHA AV. This has to be one of the earlier instances of women's lib claiming victory.

But this is not the only facet of prime interest displayed by this coin. The regnal date V/III uses the very occasionally-used Roman V of the western Mints instead of the Byzantine  $\nu$  for 5.

Justin also struck coins without depicting his wife, Sophia. A follis (40 nummi) of Justin's first regnal year (565/6) at the Theoupolis Mint shows Justin helmeted and cuirassed (armored), bust facing, holding a globe surmounted by Victory, and shield; to right, a cross.

The reverse has a large M (40 nummi); above, a cross; to the left A/N/N/O; to the right, I for regnal year one, with star above and below; beneath, officina letter *r* (third); in the exergue, the mark of the Theoupolis Mint. This coin is quite scarce and very desirable.

Theoupolis is the only Mint to strike a follis featuring Justin without Sophia. Half and quarter folli, also only having the portrait of Justin, were struck at both the Theoupolis and Thessalonica Mints. Not to be overlooked is the large size, 32/33mm, and weight, 19.7 grams. All other Justin folli range from 28 to 30mm, and weight from 11 to 15 grams. This follis was struck in Justin's first regnal year. The conservation of metal with the passing of time, as already demonstrated during Justinian's reign, is again emphasized, this time for Justin's reign.

David B. Sear in *Byzantine Coins and Their Values* points out that Byzantine coins were not popularly collected until the early part of the 1970s. Even here, most interest was centered in gold and silver. Thus collectors of regnally-dated coins are probably still on the very low side. Another type of coin probably not extensively collected are those with Chi Rho, the first two letters of Christ in Greek shown as a Christogram, an X superimposed over a P.

For those about to embark in these two fields (regnally-dated and including a Chi Rho), coins involving both on the same coin can be attractive.

One of the real "freaks" of the Byzantine numbering system is the unorthodox (by Roman standards) method of not subtracting smaller numbers that precede larger numbers. For example, two otherwise identical follis coins show regnal year 7 expressed as II  $\nu$  and  $\nu$  II. The first time this reverse is encountered is quite a shock.

Another coin expresses regnal year 5 as II/III. Has any other country done this? It would seem doubtful. It is hard to envision a civilization capable of building a Santa Sophia with its engineering marvel of the pendentive, and then indicating 5 with five vertical sticks.

Sear identifies Theoupolis Mint coins from the first, second, third and fourth officinae, all with II/III for five, but shows no year 5 bearing the usual  $\nu$ .

However, another specimen is singularly unusual in that it is year 5, 11/111 from the Cyzicus Mint, one not listed by Sear. On the other hand he notes year 5 as  $\nu$  with both first and second officinae. This illustrates a fascinating point for those delving into Byzantine numismatics. The field is so new and undeveloped that unpublished specimens are often found by rank amateurs. This fact plus the relatively low cost for buying Byzantine coins are solid reasons for recommending that numismatists searching for

new fields to conquer should not overlook the coins struck by the Byzantine Empire over a period of nearly 1,000 years.

So far all regnal years have been shown by Roman numerals, but with minor changes for V and VI. However, many coins have dates shown by the Greek alphabet,  $\Delta$  (delta),  $\epsilon$  (epsilon) and  $H$  hepta, translating to four, five and eight respectively. But the Mint designers also liked to stay with the standard non-Greek numerals.

With Sear noting both Greek and Roman numerals for most dates in this series we might just call the Mint designers bilingualists. But clearly the use of Greek letters by the Byzantines for showing regnal dates is the exception, not the rule.

One of the truly "backwards" gems of Justin II is a decanummium (10 nummi = quarter follis) from the Carthage Mint. First of all the obverse shows Justin in profile facing right. Since the 12th year of Justinian's reign, 538/9, when he introduced the "Byzantine facing bust," no Mintmaster had retreated to the time-honored Roman profile view. And rarely was it to be used during the coming several centuries.

The reverse is also singularly different from other contemporary coins. First, the Greek symbol for 10, I (iota), is replaced by the Roman X. Since the start of regnally-dating coins only Greek letters had been used to show denominations. Then the A/N/N/O (in the year of), which has always been placed on the left, now appears on the right. Further, the first N is retrograde. The second N is normal.

To the left is a singularly strange way to express the regnal date of mintage: P/R. P stands for primo, first. R translates to regnal, making the coin minted in regnal year 1, or 565/6. However, reading P/R is further complicated by the fact that P is retrograde; and R is almost non-existent due to wear. Above X is the Christian cross, below a six-pointed star, which, on Christian-oriented coins, is sometimes associated with the Star of Bethlehem. In the exergue, CAR is for Carthage Mint.

Why the profile on the obverse and X on reverse, both of which are deeply seated in Roman tradition? Once again the Carthage Mint, south and west of Rome, could be expected to have more Roman influence than the mints in the eastern sector of the Byzantine Empire.

Tiberius had, in effect, two separate reigns of four years each. In 574 he was regent for the mentally ill Justin. Upon the death of Justin in 573 he was raised to the rank of augustus. The downhill trend of the Byzantines, so successfully initiated by Justin, was to continue with Tiberius. Early he lost the important city of Sirmium on the northern frontier. He achieved considerable popularity through his great generosity, but died before his liberality led to financial ruin.

Numismatically speaking, Tiberius achieved two firsts. He reckoned his regnal years from his creation as caesar, December 574. His earliest coins are therefore dated year 4. He usually employed a lower case for the time-honored M, thus m, retaining the capital M only for the Theoupolis Mint.

No mint issuing regnally-dated coins had more than five officinae (sub-mints), normally shown by the first five letters of the Greek alphabet. Thus if five different officinae for the otherwise same coin are collected, the series is automatically complete. However, a group of two, three or four officinae can sometimes be complete. It should here be pointed out that officinae up to 10 may be found in gold coins, but gold was never regnally-dated. For that matter, silver coins were never regnally-dated either.

Note the large number of different coins minted by the Byzantines when compared to American standards. During U.S. numismatic history, as many as four Mints have struck coins in any given year (eight have been in operation) and denomination. Tiberius utilized five Mints and up to five different officinae (sub-mints) for each Mint, year and denomination. With these particular coins more than 1,400 years old, and little done to preserve them for their first 1,350 years, the acquiring of a complete set seems almost like a minor miracle. At a minimum it offers tremendous satisfaction to the collector, and a burning desire to again achieve this in another five officinae field.

Folli of Tiberius shrink after their initial appearance, a graphical illustration of the deterioration of the Byzantine Empire. They couldn't even spare metal to maintain the size of initial striking.

Tiberius reserves for the Theoupolis Mint two of his more interesting coins. As already mentioned, only this Mint was used to escape employing his invention of the lower case m for the follis instead of the time honored M employed since the reign of Anastasius I, 491-518.

But as if to ensure its future financial value he limited this M not only to a single coin but to a single regnal year II/II for which only two officinae, **Ϸ** and **r**, are now extant. Again as already pointed out regnal year 4 is the first year of his minting since he recorded his regnal years from his creation as caesar in 574.

For the second interesting coin, Tiberius chose to pick up the cudgel left off by his predecessor, Justin II, when he chose to use Roman numerals in lieu of the usual Greek for denominations. Tiberius' coin is identified by Sear as SB 452. Or is it? Let us find an answer to this question.

The obverse shows bust facing, wearing a crown with cross, and consular robes; in right hand, mappa; in left, eagle-tipped scepter.

The reverse has a large XX (20 nummi = half follis) with pellet between; above, cross; to left A/N/N/O; to right **ϷII** (regnal year 8, year 581/2); beneath **e** (Theoupolis Mint). Everything agrees with Sear's description except in place of **e** my coin has **r**. Can this be a symbol for Theoupolis? To find out we observe that SB 457 is like my coin but is a pentanummium (10 nummi), and has **r** instead of **e** for the Thessalonica Mint indication. Thus our coin is parallel to SB 457. There must either be a new coin number or SB 452 should identify both **e** and **r** as symbols for Theoupolis Mint.

What do we do with this new information? At an appropriate time we send this and all other data inconsistent with our supplemental to David R. Sear. He will presumably use this, together with similar data from others, in the next edition of *Byzantine Coins and their Values*. Thus we will have, in our own

small way, contributed to the knowledge of future Byzantine numismatists. And just what can be more satisfying than that?

Maurice Tiberius did much to stem the tide of Byzantine land loss so effectively instituted by his successors. Enhanced with a distinguished military career, he stopped the Persians and consolidated what was left of Justinian's re-conquests in the west. He militarized Ravenna and Carthage which subsequently became the outposts of the empire. However, the emperor was unable to stem the tide of the Slav and Avar advance in the Balkans. This led to his deposition as emperor by Phocas in 602. The deposed emperor fled to Asia but was overtaken and murdered together with his sons.

A typical obverse of coins of Maurice has the legend D. N. MAVRIC.TIBER.PP.A. ("Our Lord, Maurice Tiberius, Father of his Country, Augustus"). Maurice appears helmeted and cuirassed, bust facing, holding globus cruciger and shield. The reverse has a large M between A/N/N/O and  $\zeta$  (regnal year 6); above, a cross; beneath officina B; in exergue, NIKO (Nicomedia Mint). Reference to Sear shows that for year 6 only officinae *A* and *B* have been noted. This makes for a complete series, albeit very short. But might not a numismatist sometime come up with a higher lettered officina? Very doubtful. All of the years under SB 512, 5 through 20, are limited to not more than officinae *A* and *B*.

Probably the plum of Maurice's coins presentation is the 10 decanummium (quarter follis), identified by Sear as SB 581. The coin has an I (iota = 10) between A/N/N/O and II/III (regnal year 5, 586/7); in exergue, CAT (Catania Mint). This coin has four attractive features: First, coins from the Catania Mint, located in Sicily, are quite scarce. Second, it has the classic five sticks, II/III to represent 5. Third, no regnal year 5 has been noted by Sear. And fourth, it has a very small diameter, 12mm, but has a disproportionately large thickness, 2.5mm. It would be nice if the coin in better shape, but dealing in were Byzantine bronze coins, poor condition is the rule, not the exception.

What might be the plum of all is a decanummium of regnal year 15 which looks conventional except for the date, which is X/IIIII. The coin is unnoted in Byzantine records, and no coin from any time period employs five I's with X. Thus it is singularly interesting, possibly unique and certainly extremely desirable.

It was Phocas who rebelled against and caused the downfall and death of his predecessor, Maurice Tiberius. But it was like going from the frying pan into the fire. Phocas' rule was a period of complete disaster for the empire as civil war and persecution of the aristocracy raged simultaneously, while the frontiers of the empire were being threatened on all sides. As the empire teetered on the brink of disintegration, Heraclius and his son of the same name reached Constantinople in 610 and put an end to Phocas' reign of terror and had him executed.

If there is one feature that distinguished the coinage of Phocas from his predecessors it is the Roman X for denomination. Of his predecessors, Justinian never used it, and the others very rarely did. These are further limited to half- or quarter-follis, and generally only for a single mint. Phocas has added a full

follis (XXXX) and issues from all the principal Mints: Constantinople, Thessalonica, Nicomedia, Cyzicus, Theoupolis and Carthage.

A typical example is shown by a follis from the Nicomedia Mint. The obverse shows a bust facing, wearing crown and consular robes, and holding mappa and eagle-tipped scepter. The reverse has a large XXXX; above, ANNO; to right, numerals representing regnal year II/II (605/6); in the exergue NIKO followed by  $\text{Α}$ , first officina. Note the location of ANNO at the top of the coin. Heretofore A/N/N/O has always been to the left of the denomination with the single exception of the "backwards" coin of Justin II which is to the right. The use of multiple Roman Xs and original location of ANNO at the top of the coin, ordinarily not encountered in Byzantine coinage, are thoughtful reasons why it is so fascinating to collect these regnally-dated coins.

Leontia, wife of Phocas, borrowed a page from Sophia, wife of Justin II, by appearing with her husband on a coin.

But Phocas' real choev d'oeuvre is his half follis from the Carthage Mint. The obverse legend reads D.N. FOCAS PERP AVG ("Our Lord, Phocas, Perpetual Augustus").

Although he regarded himself as a "perpetual augustus," his reign of only eight years and execution by Heraclius belied the veracity of this statement. Phocas' crowned bust is facing, wearing consular robes, and holding mappa and cross. However, it is the reverse that commands our greatest interest. Here we see XX, with a pellet between, for denomination, but showing his regnal years with the Greek letter  $\text{Ε}$  for five (35b). With this we have a complete turnaround. The normal, by far, is a Greek letter for the denomination and Roman numerals for regnal year. Here we have the opposite! But this is not all. ANNO (year) has been omitted from the coin, this for the first time in Byzantine coinage. In place of ANNO is a six-pointed star. (In medieval times the six-pointed star, now referred to as the Star of David, was considered to be the Star of Bethlehem.) The exergue shows KRTG for Carthage.

Phocas' treatment of "Year" shows great imagination; sometimes on top, sometimes conventionally to the left of the denomination, and once deleted. Even the several ways to abbreviate Carthage on a coin is of interest when compared to what we do. In the United States, we pretty much settle for S to indicate coins minted at San Francisco. But the Byzantines used for Carthage: CAR, KAR, CT, CRTG and KRTG.

One of the greatest of all Byzantine rulers, and the founder of a remarkable dynasty, Heraclius came to power when the Empire seemed close to disintegration. Harassed from all sides, and losing much of their land wealth including Jerusalem with its symbolic Holy Cross, the Empire was on the verge of total collapse.

Heraclius' first move was to reorganize the military, creating land grants to the soldiers on condition of hereditary military service. He began his great counter-offensive in 622, and after six years of bitter fighting' the emperor often leading his troops in person, a miraculous change of fortune had occurred.

Much of the lands lost since the days of Justin II, including Jerusalem with the restoration of the Holy Cross, were recovered. Total defeats were inflicted on the Persians and the Sassanian Empire.

Unfortunately the emperor lived long enough to see the undoing of much of his achievement, for the closing years of his reign witnessed the first dynamic expansion of Islamic power. Heraclius died in 641, a broken man. However, the reign of Heraclius marked a turning point in Byzantine history, and his work laid the foundation for future greatness.

Numismatically speaking, Heraclius showed almost a passion for over striking folli of earlier emperors, from Anastasius to Phocas. Why? Maybe because of his tremendous reorganization and expansion of the military forces, metal was at a premium, and the stored moneys of previous emperors was the best source for his planchets.

This over striking was often very sloppily done. One example of a follis of Heraclius, over struck on Phocas follis, shows a large M with A/N/N/O to the left and only faintly readable; regnal date 11/11 (613/4) to the right; and a Chi Rho above in lieu of the usual cross. However, still heavily outlined is XXXX and CON is in the exergue from the earlier Phocas follis. The equal intensity of both strikes plus the rather rare use of Chi Rho in lieu of the usual cross make this an attractive collector's item.

Another but better over striking is shown by a follis showing on the reverse a large M; to left, A/N/N/O; to right, regnal year 11/11 (613/4); cross, above; **Σ**, second officina, below; and NIKO, Nicomedia Mint in the exergue. The over stamped coin appears to be a follis of Phocas. The NIKO B in the exergue is the only visible part of the over struck coin. The NIKO and NIKO B on the same coin makes for another nice collector's item.

The denomination of 30 nummi (three-quarter follis) was almost never struck before Heraclius' reign; and when struck it was always, XXX Heraclius, conceived of employing the Greek symbol for 30, the letter lambda, which resembles an upside-down V.

Note the five elements of the line drawing of the complete reverse shown: a large lambda; to left, A/N/N/O; to right, X/X; beneath, officina letter A; and in the exergue, CON for Constantinople Mint. Of the six coins that the writer has laboriously collected over the years, only the one shown by SB 811 has all of these elements. Even Sear's illustration of SB 811 is lacking two-thirds of the letters for the mint indication. Further complicating the problems of the coin is that it is obviously an overstrike.

Heraclius was prolific in originating coin styles not previously encountered. One shows Heraclius in the obverse center, son Heraclius Constantine on his right, and the Empress Martina on his left, all standing facing; each wearing crown and chlamys, and holding globus cruciger in the right hand. Previously (Justin and Phocas), wives were pictured with the emperors, but never also a son. Note the sideways elongation of the coin, presumably to accept three persons.

Another scarcity of Heraclius is the decanummium (quarter-follis) from the Catania (Sicily) Mint, The interesting facet of this coin is its size, only 13mm (one of the very smallest of regnally-dated coins), yet

has the proportionally high thickness of 3mm. The reverse shows a large I (iota, Greek 10) between A/N/N/O and regnal year X (619/20); exergue, CAT for Catania Mint (SB 886). Coins from the Catania Mint, as with the Constantia Mint, are scarce.

However, the real gem of Heraclius' coins is shown by SB 845. This is a follis from the Seleucia Mint in Isauria, about 400 miles southwest of Constantinople on the Mediterranean Sea. Operating only from 615-7, few coins were ever struck and today they are almost unobtainable.

Over struck on what appears to be an Antioch follis of an earlier reign, the obverse legend is illegible. Heraclius on the left (practically off the coin) and Heraclius Constantine, smaller, on the right (actually at the obverse center of the coin), standing facing, each wearing chlamys and crown with cross, and holding globus cruciger; between their heads, a cross.

At 10 o'clock on the reverse is a cross that remains from the over struck coin. The Chi Rho above the M is, for this rare coin, the rule and not the exception. Heretofore we have nearly only seen crosses, the Chi Rho being the very occasional exception.

There is no record of an officina past **ε** (five) for regnally-dated coins. Five is the apparent maximum number of different officinae that may be found for an otherwise identical coin.

SB 883 offers us a new angle in Byzantine numismatics. We have already seen illustrations of over stamping of coins, normally coins of a previous emperor. The intention was to wipe out the original coin, but inadequate minting facilities often did not accomplish this.

However, the Byzantines also employed a reverse procedure called countermarking. Here the original coin (but of the same emperor, not one from a previous reign) is countermarked to present a complete new message but so marked as to preserve as much of the original coin as is possible.

SB 883 nicely illustrates this point. The coin here shown is identified by Sear as from the Syracuse Mint in Sicily.

The obverse shows SCLs within a circular punch stamped over the lower part of the standing figures of the original coin. The K at 4 o'clock is the only part of the original coin in the lower half that may be seen.

The reverse shows the facing busts of Heraclius with short beard, and son Heraclius Constantine beardless, each wearing crown and chlamys, cross between their heads; all within an oval punch stamped over the upper part of the M of the original coin. The date of the original coin is year 20 (maybe year 21) making it identical to SB 809. Just barely visible below the oval punch may be seen the lowest inclusion of Heraclius and son Heraclius Constantine as a part of the countermark on the reverse, and the upper part of their bodies still visible on the obverse of the original coin, make this interesting, if not unique. The ruler and son appear on both sides of the same coin. Needless to say coins so countermarked are scarce and desirable.

Constans II, the grandson of Heraclius, started his reign negatively by losing Egypt permanently to the onslaught of the Muslims. However, he more than balanced these losses by overpowering revolts in North Africa and Italy, and by subjugating the Slavs in the Balkans.

Towards the end of his reign, Constans took the unprecedented step of moving his residence to the west. Syracuse was his final destination and this became his imperial capital, though the rest of his family remained in Constantinople. His despotic behavior ultimately led to his assassination in 668.

Constans' coinage reaches almost two ultimates:

1. His bronze strikes are probably the worst coins ever executed for a major country in the history of numismatics.
2. The historical interest of two of his coins has only a handful of peers, again in the history of numismatics.

It is ironic that both of these "ultimates" occur at the same time.

To understand the historical value of the coin we must back up to Constantine I (the Great) 307-337. Constantine, the first Christian emperor, needed to destroy Maxentius, usurper to the Imperial throne in Gaul and claimant to the rest of the western Roman Empire over which Constantine was augustus. On the eve of the Battle of Milvian Bridge, Oct. 27, 312, which was destined to be the first great military victory for Christianity, Constantine prayed to Jesus Christ for help in defeating the infidels. This resulted in the vision of Constantine, sometimes referred to as "The Flaming Cross."

Eusebius and Lactantius are the two contemporary ancient authorities who have recorded accounts of the vision of Constantine, but they are not in agreement as to the actual form it took. Eusebius records that in answer to his prayer Constantine saw above the setting sun the sign of the cross with the words HOC SIGNO VICTOR ERIS ("in this sign may you conquer"). On the other hand, Lactantius suggests the vision to have been seen in a dream and to have taken the form of Chi Rho, a monogram composed of the first two letters of the name of Christ in Greek, XPISTOS. The monogram is also referred to as a Christogram.

We have already seen coins including the Chi Rho above the denomination symbol by both Justin II and Heraclius. But no Byzantine emperor had used HOC SIGNO VICTOR ERIS on a coin. Constans was to use both interpretations of Constantine's vision on the same coin. No Byzantine emperor used either interpretation after the death of Constans II. Further, both coins are regnally-dated providing immediate transfer to the Christian base of reckoning time.

Constans, must have loved the expression "In this sign may you conquer," as he placed it on nearly all of his folli (some have no legend). However, the Chi Rho appears only on the two coins shown, and then usually a long staff replaces it. One has to search long and hard to find coins with both interpretations of Constantine's vision.

Constans, had a knack for developing numerous minor variants which developed a variety of different coins.

One variety shows Constans holding a long cross rather than a long staff headed by a Chi Rho. The few remaining letters of the legend are enough to read the usual: "In this sign may you conquer."

Small variants that differentiate this coin from the other two of Constans: M in lieu of m, officina below M, exergue devoted wholly to the date, and the interesting date of 11 which combines two Greek letters, *I* and *A*.

Note that these three folli of Constans average about 20mm - just under the size of a U.S. copper-nickel 5-cent coin - and are as small as folli ever measured, before or after the time of Constans II. Remember, the earliest folli of Justinian I, struck 538 to about 550, averaged 39-40mm, with a maximum size of 42mm. Thus in the space of about 125 years, folli shrunk from a peak of 42mm, a bit larger than our silver dollar, to a mere 20mm, a little smaller than the U.S. 5-cent piece. All coins are base metal copper with minor additives.

Although it is true that only Constans, of the Byzantine emperors, used the two interpretations of Constantine's vision on a single coin, the same cannot be said of two Roman emperors and a Roman caesar. Constantius II, 337-361, and Vetranio, 350, used the Latin "HOC SIGNO VICTOR ERIS" in conjunction with the Chi Rho on the same coin. So did Constantius Gallus, a cousin of Constantius II, who was governor of the eastern provinces. Although these two are collectors' items, none are dated, as are those of Constans. Thus it remains for Constans to have two of the finer historically attractive coins in the history of numismatics.

Upon his assumption of power in 668 Constantine IV was immediately faced with relentless Arab pressure. This culminated in the great siege of Constantinople which commenced early in 674 and lasted a full four years. The city proved to be an impregnable fortress, and the Arabs were forced to retreat, a defeat which was of great historical significance as it prevented the Muslim tide from sweeping over Europe. Strategically located on the west side of the Bosphorus, Constantinople was truly the key to the defense of the west and the salvation of Christianity, the principal role that the 1,000-year duration of the Byzantine Empire was to play in world history.

In the Balkans, however, Constantine was less successful. His expedition against the powerful Bulgars ended in defeat and loss of Moesia.

The numismatic wanderings of Constantine were of such variety and interest as to convert a life-long specialist of United States dollars into a collector of regnally-dated Byzantine coins. For starters, Constantine IV was so proud of his record as co-emperor starting in 654 that he dated his coins (and other documents) not from his assumption of supreme power in 668 but rather from his co-emperor status of 654. He thus outdid Tiberius II Constantine, who recorded his regnal years from his becoming caesar in 574 rather than as emperor in 578.

Constantine's real contribution to numismatics is novel and may be unique. Knowing what we presently know about regnally-dated Byzantine coins, how would you like to determine the regnal date of a coin that has a large K -obviously 20 nummi, or one-half follis -A/N/N/O to left, CO/N to right, a cross above, and *E* below. The CO/N is clearly Constantinople Mint, *E* is fifth officina, and A/N/N/O translated "in the year of." But "in the year of" what? Without the clue already given - he reckoned his regnal years from 654 - the possible dates can range only from 668, the year he assumed supreme power, to 685, the year he died, a span of 18 years. And just how can we possibly read any but one to 18 years on this reverse? The answer is: we can't.

But falling back on our knowledge that Constantine started his regnal dating in 654, we have a range of up to 31 years for a date. So, why not let K serve both as mark of value and as regnal year? This would then be regnal year 20, and is shown by a half-follis (SB 1180).

The obverse bust is three-quarter facing right, wearing a helmet and, cuirass, holding a spear in right hand and passing below the right ear, back of head and above the left ear; also holding a shield.

The reverse has a large K, which serves both as mark of value (20 nummi = one-half follis), and as regnal year, 20 (A.D. 673/4), between A/N/N/O and CO/N; above, cross; beneath officina letter *E*. Sear lists either C over ON or C to the left of O over N for Constantinople, but has not noted CO over N. There is nothing unusual in finding a new variant. The detailed study of Byzantine numismatics is in its infancy, hardly more than two or three decades old. All variants need to be noted for inclusion in future editions of present books.

Is this coin, utilizing a single symbol - in this case, K - to serve simultaneously both as mark of value and as regnal years (dating), unique? Possibly. Until demonstrated to the contrary, uniqueness may be ascribed.

By now you would suppose that Constantine IV had done his share in designing coins that hold peak interest among numismatists. But no. He still had one more trump card to play. And it was to confuse numismatists almost to this very day.

The coin in question is a pentanummium (quarter follis, or 10 nummi) in the same series as the aforementioned half follis, but of half its value. Obviously the I, representing 10 nummi, cannot stand for regnal year 10, if for no other reason than Constantine was only co-emperor in 664 (10th dated regnal year), and consequently was not empowered to issue coins until his assumption of supreme power four years later.

The reverse consists of a large I between a cross and K; in the exergue CON. Why Constantine substituted a cross for A/N/N/O to the left of the large I is not known, unless his religious fervor got the best of him and he wanted a Christian cross on reverse.

With few collectors of bronze Byzantine coins until several decades ago, and consequently no real study of them until recently, early students in this field concluded that regnally-dated coins had to have

A/N/N/O, not an unreasonable thought. At least this omission of A/N/N/O has influenced one of today's leading authorities on Byzantine coins, David B. Sear, to not designate this coin as regnally-dated. Since the elaborate and thorough presentation of regnally-dated coins is a very important part of Sear's opus, the failure to identify a dated coin is not without significance.

Is this coin rare? Really not. There presently exist in the files of the Roman Coin Project at the American Numismatic Association five of these coins for awarding as Coin No. 6 in the RCP program. (Earned by either completing the INCC, or by obtaining two new American Numismatic Association members after having already earned Coin No. 5 for securing one new ANA member.) In what condition are they? Very poor. But there is enough detail to be assured that attribution is correct.

Upon the death of his father, Justinian II became emperor in 685. A highly advantageous peace treaty concluded with the Arabs left Justinian free to give his attention to the Balkan problem, where he recovered some of the lands that Justinian I (the Great) 527-565 fully controlled.

Strangely, Justinian II's downfall was his attempt to enforce his religious doctrines on the Roman church. His failure in this demonstrated the declining authority of the Byzantine emperors in Italy.

After 10 years of rule Justinian was suddenly overthrown by a revolt led by the Gen. Leontius. The deposed emperor had his nose and tongue slit, and was then exiled to Cherson.

For the half-follis Justinian quartered a large follis from a previous emperor.

While Leontius was leading a successful revolt against Justinian II in 695, the Arabs attacked North Africa capturing Carthage in 698. This led to a rebellion against Leontius' regime, headed by Apsimar. Leontius was overthrown and mutilated in the same manner as his predecessor.

Leontius' short reign produced few regnally-dated coins and are badly struck and/or mutilated. The interesting angle here is that the regnal year is shown by a Greek letter rather than the usual Roman numerals.

Following his successful rebellion against Leontius, Apsimar ascended the throne under the name of Tiberius III. Although a capable ruler, he was unable to check the Arab advance in North Africa.

In the meantime, the exiled Justinian II had been plotting his return to Constantinople. Escaping from Cherson, he put together an army of Slavs and Bulgars in 705, and after gaining entry to the city by crawling through an aqueduct pipe, he overthrew Tiberius and re-ascended the throne of his ancestors.

A distinctive feature of most of Tiberius' coins is his holding a spear diagonally across his body. Upon his resumption of power, Justinian II executed both Leontius and Tiberius. However, they were merely the first victims in what soon developed into a reign of terror. Even though the Arabs benefited from these internal conflicts of the Byzantines, Justinian devoted all his time and efforts to his personal vendettas. Ultimately rebellion broke out in an army which Justinian had dispatched to wreak vengeance on Cherson, the place of his former exile. The army proclaimed Gen. Bardanes emperor. Entering

Constantinople, there was no one left to support the hated Justinian and he and his only son Tiberius were put to death. So ended the illustrious dynasty of Heraclius.

Justinian's two separate reigns made him the Grover Cleveland of the Byzantine Empire, and he did not forget that when he dated his coins. Thus upon his resumption of power in 705, it represented his 20th regnal year. As a result his lowest regnal year during this second reign was 20, or 705/6.

A follis shows facing busts of Justinian on the left and son Tiberius on the right, each wearing crown and chlamys, and holding between them a patriarchal cross on a globe inscribed PAX (peace). The reverse has a large M with A/N/N/O on the left; X/X/I on the right; above, cross; beneath, officina letter B (second sub-Mint); in exergue, CON (Constantinople Mint). The regnal year is 21, 706/7.

Of Armenian origin, Philippicus held unorthodox religious opinions, resulting in rejection by the Pope, thus further weakening the Byzantine Empire in Italy. After a year and a half of power, the unpopular heretical emperor was overthrown by a military revolt.

A half-follis shows a bust facing, wearing crown and loros, and holding globus cruciger in the right hand, and eagle-tipped sceptre in left. The reverse shows a large K between A/N/N/O and 1, representing regnal year one, or 711/712; above, cross; beneath, officina B, though nearly obliterated (SB 1456). For Philippicus this is an excellent specimen. Few of his coins ever surface, and when they do they are often questionably attributable and rarely able to be photographed.

Following the downfall of Philippicus, a civil-servant by the name of Artemius was elevated to the throne. On his coronation he took the name Anastasius II in honor of the earlier emperor (Anastasius I, 491-518) who had risen from the civil service.

While Anastasius was skillfully preparing Constantinople for the forthcoming Arab onslaught, a revolt again broke out among the soldiers. Anastasius was dethroned and permitted to retire to a monastery.

The strange slash, /, is the distinguishing feature of Anastasius II coins. (SB 1469).

A simple tax official, with no inclination or ability for affairs of state, Theodosius III reigned in Constantinople for only two years before he was supplanted by the powerful general Leo. Theodosius issued only two regnally-dated coins, both of which are regarded as extremely rare, and are possibly unique.

Leo III was one of the most powerful of Byzantine rulers. The great Arab attack on the Byzantine capital, which had been threatened for several years, began within six months of Leo's accession. Leo successfully resisted all attacks for 23 years, finally resulting in a great victory for Leo in 740. For this, Leo was very popular with the masses. However, he initiated the Iconoclast Controversy - iconoclasts were violently opposed to the adoration of icons (statues and representations of religious subjects) - a controversy which plagued the Byzantine world for generations to come.

Leo died in 741, his popularity considerably undermined by his ardent support of iconoclasm.

To Leo goes the honor of striking the last regnally-dated coin of the Byzantine Empire. This was in this 20th regnal year, 736/7. As if to celebrate the occasion he conceived a reverse vastly different from any of his predecessors.

The obverse shows a bust facing, wearing crown and chlamys, and holding globus cruciger. The reverse is divided into two parts by an ornate horizontal bar. The upper portion has a facing bust of son Constantine V, wearing crown and chlamys, holding globus cruciger; cross in field to the right. The lower part has a large M between A/N/N/O and X/X; beneath M, officina A. (SB 1514). These coins were struck in two sizes: small, 3 to 5 grams and 16 to 20mm; and large, 8 to 12 grams and 25 to 28mm.

Regnal year 20 is 736/7. Since Justinian I struck the first regnally-dated coin in 538, and Leo struck the final dated coin in 737, there is a total span of 199 years in striking regnally-dated coins. This time period is about only one-fifth of the nearly 1,000-year duration of the Byzantine Empire.

Western numismatics may be divided into four classifications: ancient, to the fall of Rome (A.D. 476); medieval, fall of Rome to A.D. 1500; modern, A.D. 1500 to coins not in daily use; and contemporary, those coins in daily use.

It is an interesting observation that if one could determine the combined number of participants in the United States in the first two categories, they would probably total well under 1 percent of all collectors. A further breakdown of this ancient-medieval combination might find, strictly as a guestimate, an 80-20 percent division with the larger number favoring the ancient group. The smaller group of medieval then has two broad divisions: Byzantine and its offshoots such as the empires of Nicaea and Trebizond and the Latin Orient which developed from the several great crusades emanating from Western Europe in the 11th and 12th centuries; and the numerous feudal states and principalities that were to develop into the countries of Europe much as we presently know them.

By now it is evident that the collecting of Byzantine coins is low on the totem pole of coin collecting. But within this category of Byzantine coinage, once again there are several divisions. Thus one can collect by Mints, some 27 striking Byzantine coins at one time or another; specialize in the standard follis with its vast size variants, a coin which lasted for 600 years; collect by denominations, some of which emanated from one particular Mint only; gather representations of holy persons - Christ, the Virgin, archangels, and saints; find different forms of imperial dress, from the Roman cuirass and paludamentum of the early period to the various forms of loros in later times; collect all types of the anonymous coinage (no secular -legends, names, or representations struck in the 10th and 11th centuries, and probably unique in numismatics); study the curious cup-shaped (scyphate) form of coins very likely used more by the Byzantines than by any other country; locate the difficult-to-find indictionally-dated coins, a 15-year cycle of dating that operated independent of the emperors' reigns; trace the history of the numerous overstrikes and countermarks frequently employed by Byzantine emperors: The possibilities are endless, limited only by the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the collector.

Note that in suggesting methods of collecting Byzantine coins, mention is not made of acquiring regnally-dated coins. These coins, which were struck only from 538 to 737 - a time span of about one-fifth of the life of the Byzantine Empire - obviously represent only a modest portion of Byzantine numismatics and an extremely small segment of all numismatics.

It would be naive to try to guess the number of serious collectors in this field in the United States, but two or three score would probably be on the high side.

What is the reason most often given for not collecting Byzantine coins? Cost. But is this a valid reason? I think not. Let me offer two reasons for collecting.

1. Byzantine coins, especially copper, have almost universally not been collected - yes, almost despised through the centuries. Actually until two or three decades ago bronze coins were normally not sold individually, but rather by lots or even by weight. Today they have considerably more value, partly because of the outstanding study and books by Sear and others preceding him; but they may be purchased well under costs commanded by Roman and Greek coins, and even many modern and contemporary coins.

2. Both junior and adult ANA members can earn up to four Byzantine coins by participating in the Roman Coin Project. For details see any recent issue of *The Numismatist*.

To summarize: the collecting of Byzantine coins offers almost limitless opportunities; the field is about as uncrowded as a field can be; and the cost of Byzantine coins is definitely modest. What more can a budding young or an elderly numismatist ask for than this?

### **Acknowledgement**

The collecting, studying, and analyzing of regnally-dated Byzantine coins would be almost impossible without the continuous referral to Sear's *Byzantine Coins and Their Values*. On the book jacket, Sear modestly states: "The collector will find more information compressed into this work than in any other single volume published previously on Byzantine coinage."

This is truly the understatement of the decade. It is just no longer possible to collect Byzantine coins and not have Sear's opus at one's fingertips.

### **About the author**

David R. Cervin is the originator and administrator of the American Numismatic Association's Roman Coin Project.

The 75-year-old Amarillo, Texas, resident is a 1984 winner of the ANA's Medal of Merit, and is the only living ANA member who has both a Howland Wood Award for exhibiting and a Heath Literary Award.

His main field of collecting interest is in early Christian-dated coins. Cervin has what is believed to be the largest private collection of Christian dated coins before 1500.

He has been collecting in earnest for about 18 years. He designs and builds houses, and is a frequent golfer.

## For further reading

Following is a list of reference and general-reading works concerning Byzantine coinage. Readers interested in delving deeper into the subject may find specialized volumes through numismatic book dealers or through the American Numismatic Association library, Colorado Springs, Colo.

*The Billon Trachea of Michael VIII Palaeologos, 1258-1282*, Simon Bendall & P.J. Donald.

*The Bronze Coinage of the Late Roman Empire*, Hugh Goodacre.

*Byzantine Coins*, George E. Bates.

*Byzantine Coins*, Philip Grierson. Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, England. 1982.

*Byzantine Coins*, Philip D. Whitting. Putnam Books, New York, N.Y. 1973.

*Byzantine Coins and Their Values*, David R. Sear. Seaby Publishing Ltd., London, England. 1974.

*Byzantine Coin Values; A Guide*, Paul F. Rynearson. Malter Westerfield Publi. Co., San Clemente, Calif. 1971.

*Byzantine Numismatic Bibliography, 1950-1965*, Joel L. Malter, Argonaut Inc., Chicago, Ill. 1968.

*Byzantine Numismatics and the Collector*, David R. Sear. International Association of Professional Numismatists Publication No. 8.1986.

*Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, Alfred E. Bellinger & Philip Grierson.

*The Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection of Harvard University*, Handbook of the collection.

*Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire 1081-1261*, Michael F. Hendy. .

*Coinage in South-Eastern Europe 820-1396*, D.M. ' Metcalf. Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication No. 11, London, England. 1979.

*The Coins of Late Antiquity*, Andrew Burnett.

*The Emperors of Rome and Byzantium, Chronological and Genealogical Tables for History Students and Coin Collectors*, David R. Sear.

*A Handbook of the Coinage of the Byzantine Empire*, Hugh Goodacre. Spink & Son Ltd., London, England. 1957.

*History of the Later Roman Empire, from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian*, J.B. Bury. (reprint)

*A Supplement to the History of the Later Roman Empire*, J.V. Bury. (reprint)

*History of the Byzantine State*, George Ostrogorsky.

*Imperial Byzantine Coins in the British Museum*, Warwick Wroth. Argonaut Inc., Chicago, Ill. 1966.  
*Introduction a La Numismatique Byzantine*, Dr. Henry Longuet. Spink & Son Ltd., London, England.  
1961.  
*The Later Palaeologan Coinage: 1281-1453*, Simon Bendall & P.J. Donald.  
*Moneta Imperii Byzantini*. Wolfgang Hahn. Vienna, Austria.  
*Monnaies Byzantines*, Comte Jean Tolstoi. (available in reprint)  
*Monnaies Byzantines et d'autres pays contemporaines a l'Epoque*, Rodolfo Ratto. J. Schulman,  
Amsterdam, Netherlands. 1959.  
*Roman Gold Coins of the Medieval World 383-1453*, Harlan J. Berk.  
*A Selection of Byzantine Coins in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts*, J.P.C. Kent.  
*Western and Provincial Byzantine Coins of the Vandals, Ostrogoths and Lombards and the Empires of  
Thessalonica, Nicaea and Trebizond in the British Museum*, Warwick Wroth. Argonaut Inc., Chicago,  
111. (reprint)

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Note: Transcribed from *Coin World's World Coins Supplement*; May 1987 by James Martin. Photo by James Martin



Justinian I (The Great), A.D. 527 - 565.  
Regnal Date "A/N/N/O X/II" (=17, regnal date for A.D. 544 -545).  
Officina "B"; Nicomedia Mint (see cover for obverse photo)