

3. Byzantine Coins

Byzantine coinage is a direct continuation from the coins of the Late Roman Empire, particularly the Eastern Roman Empire. Historians generally consider the Eastern Roman Empire became the Byzantine Empire after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476, although some historians mark the division at Constantine’s founding of Constantinople in AD 330 and others see the abolition of the consulship in Justinian’s Reign as the end of the Roman Empire and the start of the Byzantine. Numismatically, Byzantine coinage starts from the middle of the reign of Anastasius, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, when he introduced a new bronze coin, the follis, with a mark of the coin’s worth in AD 498. The Late Roman gold denominations, the solidus and smaller tremissis, continued to be issued. A few years later, in the reign of Justinian, the portraits also changed, the head of the emperor now turned face-on and remained so for the rest of Byzantine coinage.

As would be expected, the coinage also generally reflects the fortunes of the empire. During Justinian’s reign (AD 527-565), Italy, Africa and parts of Spain were reconquered from the barbarian tribes that had overwhelmed the Western Roman Empire. Under his successors, this territory was progressively lost. Most of Italy fell to the Lombards not long after Justinian’s death. A costly war between Persia during the reigns of Maurice Tiberius and Phocas destabilized the Sassanian dynasty, paving the way for the rise of the Arabs. During the reign of Heraclius, The Eastern Roman Empire lost Egypt and Syria to these newcomers. Constantinople itself was besieged by Arab forces twice and the Exarchy of Africa fell in AD 698. The Byzantine Empire was reduced to its European provinces south of the Danube, which were threatened by Avars and Bulgars, and only Anatolia (modern Turkey) in Asia. Attempts by Heraclius to reintroduce a silver denomination, the hexagram, failed, but Leo III introduced a thinner and lighter silver coin, the *milaresion*, which lasted for centuries.

Basil II (AD 976-1025) defeated the Bulgars (for which he was nicknamed “Boulgaroktonos”, the Bulgar-Slayer) and extended the Empire’s control over the Danubian lands. During his long reign, the gold solidus was modified to a thinner, flatter, gold coin, known as a *nomisma* or *histamenon*. The Empire appeared to be recovering, and was scoring victories in the East as well as in Italy. The battle of Manzikert, however, in AD 1071 was a disaster and the Byzantine forces were routed by the Turks of Alp Arslan. Byzantium progressively lost parts of Anatolia to the encroaching invaders. Under Alexius Comnenus, Byzantium effected a recovery by appealing to the West for aid. The Pope answered by calling for the First Crusade. While the Crusaders did retake much of the newly conquered land, they proved to be unreliable allies and in some ways were more of a menace to Constantinople than the Arab and Turkish states. Also during Alexius’ reign, the coinage was reformed into a series of “scyphate” (cup-like) coins – the gold *hyperyon* an electrum *aspron trachy* and a billon *aspron trachy*.

Marks of Value

Early Byzantine bronze coins depict a large letter on the reverse that advertises their value in terms of *nummi*, a late Roman bronze coin of small value.

M	Follis	40 nummi
K	Half Follis	20 nummi
I	Decanummium	10 nummi
€	Pentanummium	5 nummi



Follis with large M



Half Follis with large K



Decanummium with large I



Pentanummium with large €

During the Fourth Crusade, the crusaders, led by Venice actually attacked and conquered Constantinople, splintering the Empire. Although Constantinople was eventually retaken, the Empire never recovered and slowly shrank to the area surrounding the capital. The coins of the latter members of the Palaeologi (the last dynasty to rule the Empire) are rare. Finally, in AD 1453 the Ottoman Turks, led by Sultan Mehmed II, took Constantinople. The last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine XI, died during the fighting.

Justin	<input type="checkbox"/> Anastasius I (491-518)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Justin I (518-527)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Justinian I the Great (527-565)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Justin II (565-578)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Tiberius Constantinus (578-582)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Maurice (582-602)
Phocas	<input type="checkbox"/> Phocas (602-610)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Heraclius I (610-641)
Heraclid	<input type="checkbox"/> Constans II Pogonatus (641-668)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine IV (668-685)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Justinian II Rhinotmetus (685-695, 705-711)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Leontius (695-698)
Isaurian	<input type="checkbox"/> Tiberius III Apsimar (698-705)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Philippicus Bardanes (711-713)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Anastasius II (713-715)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Theodosius III (715-717)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Leo III the Isaurian (717-741)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine V Copronymus (741-775)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Artabasdos (741-743)
Phocid	<input type="checkbox"/> Leo IV the Khazar (775-780)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine VI (780-797)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Irene (797-802)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Nicephorus I (802-811)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Stauracius (811)
Phrygian	<input type="checkbox"/> Michael I Rhangabé (811-813)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Leo V the Armenian (813-820)
Macedonian	<input type="checkbox"/> Michael II the Amorian (820-829)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Theophilus I (829-842)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Theodora (842-855)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Michael III the drunkard (842-867)
Macedonian	<input type="checkbox"/> Basil I the Macedonian (867-886)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Leo VI the Wise (886-912)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Alexander III (912-913)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus (913-959)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Romanus I Lecapenus (920-944)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Romanus II (959-963)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Nicephorus II Phocas (963-969)
	<input type="checkbox"/> John I Tzimisces (969-976)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Basil II Bulgar-Slayer (976-1025)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine VIII (1025-1028)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Romanus III Argyropoulos (1028-1034)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Zoe I (1028-1050)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Michael IV the Paphlagonian (1034-1041)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Michael V Calaphates (1041-1042)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Theodora (1042)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine IX Monomachus (1042-1055)
<input type="checkbox"/> Theodora (1055-1056)	

Ducas	<input type="checkbox"/> Michael VI Stratioticus (1056-1057)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Isaac I Comnenus (1057-1059)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine X Ducas (1059-1067)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Michael VII Parapinakes (1067-1078)
Comnenid	<input type="checkbox"/> Romanus IV Diogenes (1068-1071)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Nicephorus Melissenus (1078-1081)
Angelid	<input type="checkbox"/> Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118)
	<input type="checkbox"/> John II Comnenus (1118-1143)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuel I Comnenus (1143-1180)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Alexius II Comnenus (1180-1183)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Andronicus I Comnenus (1183-1185)
Lascarid	<input type="checkbox"/> Isaac II Angelus (1185-1195, 1203-1204)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Alexius III Angelus (1195-1204)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Alexius IV Angelus (1203-1204)
Palaeologid	<input type="checkbox"/> Alexius V Ducas Murtzuphlus (1204)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Theodore I Lascaris (1205-1222)
	<input type="checkbox"/> John III Ducas Vatatzes (1222-1254)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Theodore II Lascaris (1254-1258)
Palaeologid	<input type="checkbox"/> John IV Lascaris (1258-1261)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Michael VIII Palaeologus (1259-1282)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282-1328)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Andronicus III Palaeologus (1328-1341)
	<input type="checkbox"/> John V Palaeologus (1341-1391)
	<input type="checkbox"/> John VI Cantacuzenus (1347-1354)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Andronicus IV Palaeologus (1376-1379)
	<input type="checkbox"/> John VII Palaeologus (1390, 1399-1402)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425)
	<input type="checkbox"/> John VIII Palaeologus (1425-1448)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantine XI Palaeologus (1448-1453)



Gold *histamenon* of Michael IV



Silver *milaresion* of Constantine VII



Billon *aspron trachy* of Manuel I