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A quantitative approach to the ›Christianisation‹ of late Roman and early Byzantine coinage (306–711 AD)

Jehan Hillen

Abstract: This article quantitatively analyses the ›Christianisation‹ of the imperial numismatic iconography from the first Christian symbols on the coins of Constantine I until the introduction of Christ on the gold obverses of Justinian II. Although coins were a prime medium for the communication of imperial messages, the ›Christianisation‹ of these messages on late Roman and early Byzantine coins has never been considered from a quantitative perspective A quantitative analysis of the emergence of Christian symbols on coins indicates when the coinage of the late Roman and early Byzantine emperors ›Christianised‹ and simultaneously signifies the usefulness of a quantitative approach to this monetary medium.

Keywords: Quantification, ›Christianisation‹, imperial representation, Byzantine coinage, Late Roman coinage

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel analysiert quantitativ die ›Christianisierung‹ der kaiserlichen numismatischen Ikonographie von den ersten christlichen Symbolen auf den Münzen von Konstantin I. bis zur Einführung des Bildes Christi auf den Goldvorderseiten von Justinian II. Obwohl Münzen ein Hauptmedium für die Übermittlung kaiserlicher Botschaften waren, wurde die ›Christianisierung‹ dieser Botschaften auf spätrömischen und frühbyzantinischen Münzen noch nicht aus einer quantitativen Perspektive betrachtet. Eine quantitative Analyse der Entstehung christlicher Symbole auf Münzen zeigt, wann die Münzprägung der spätrömischen und frühbyzantinischen Kaiser ›christianisiert‹ wurde, und verdeutlicht gleichzeitig die Nützlichkeit einer quantitativen Betrachtungsweise dieses Geldmediums.

Keywords: Quantifizierung, ›Christianisierung‹, Kaiserliche Darstellung, Byzantinische Münzen, Spätrömische Münzen

Introduction*

Although the emergence of Christian art is a well-trodden subject in art history, there is one medium of visual culture that has been mostly neglected in the study of early Christian art, the images that circulated on coins[1]. The historiography of Christian symbols on imperial coinage consists of a few studies mostly concerned with the fourth and occasionally fifth century[2]. Most of these studies lack a quantitative approach leaving it uncertain what kind of agency could be attached to the Christian types. This article aims to provide a more extensive overview of the ›Christianisation‹ of imperial numismatic iconography and, more importantly, to approach this numismatic transformation from a quantitative perspective. This article will combine a typological and museum quantification to indicate the ›Christianisation‹ of the imperial coinage in this period from a quantitative perspective. Before

* This article was originally written as a research paper for the 2021 master seminar »Coins and History: How to unravel the past trough financial and economic media« taught by Prof. Dr. Panagiotis Iossif at Radboud University. This article would not have been here without the support and encouragement of Prof. Iossif to turn my paper into an article. I also thank Dr. Alan Stahl for his comments and for introducing me to Princeton's FLAME project. Finally, I thank Dr. Liesbeth Claes for reviewing the final manuscript. Needless to say, all remaining errors are my own.

1 For the absence of numismatic evidence in studies of early Christian and Byzantine art see: Treadgold 2015, 55 f.; Gandila 2018, 108 f. 132.

2 There is one study that considers the transformation between 306–711. This article, however, only discusses Constantine I and his ›conversion‹ and subsequently leaps to the introduction of the Christ Pantocrator type on the

discussing the emergence of Christian symbols on the coinage of Constantine I a reflection will be given on the two different quantitative methodologies in this article.

The ›Christianisation‹ of the imperial coinage was a process of gradually altering existing iconographic types by replacing pagan types with Christian symbols. In the first phase, this article will primarily refer to ›Christian symbols‹ meaning any symbol that has a Christian connotation and could be found somewhere on the coin, this includes small additions such as a Chi-Rho on a helmet or a Greek cross on an altar. In later periods ›Christian types‹ began to appear which this article defines as an image that could also be found in contemporary churches, chapels, or palaces. Both definitions refer to what we would define as ›Christian‹ in our modern understanding. However, this does not always reflect the connotation of ancient times, something that will be problematised throughout the article. It is, for example, not always evident that what has been referred to as a Christian symbol in previous scholarship should also have been understood in that way in the fourth or fifth centuries. The same thing will be argued for the ›Christian type‹ of the angel introduced in the sixth century but which might be better understood as simply a variation of the ancient victory type. In both cases, the types might be seen as Christian nowadays but it is doubtful whether they were originally understood in that manner.

Christian symbols gradually conquered the obverse and reverse of late Roman and early Byzantine coins. A quantitative analysis of the emergence of Christian symbols on coins could indicate when the coinage of the late Roman and early Byzantine emperors was ›Christianised‹ and simultaneously indicate the possibilities and limitations of a quantitative approach to this monetary medium.

Representativeness

An important issue of using coins as a historical source is the representativeness of the chosen corpus. How does one establish that the specific coins in their current quantities are representative of the coins once produced in the Roman or Byzantine Empire? There are multiple approaches to this problem, none without their methodological problems. Die studies count the number of dies per type and multiply these numbers by the estimated average amount of coins struck per die[3]. Besides the controversies about these types of speculative calculations, most coinages, including the late Roman and early Byzantine coinage, lack extensive die studies[4]. Another method concerns extrapolating from hoard finds and although several studies demonstrated the successfulness of this methodology it is not without flaws either. For example, precious metal coins and finds from Western Europe are overrepresented in (online) hoard databases[5]. Several studies of Roman coinage have therefore instead quantified on the basis of coin types as they are recorded in the *Roman Imperial Coinage Catalogue* (*RIC*). There are two issues concerning this methodology. The first concerns the terminological inconsistency throughout the various *RIC* volumes, primarily the inconsistency of the notion of what constitutes a ›coin type‹. More importantly, a typological catalogue, like *RIC*, usually reflects the collections upon which the catalogue is based rather than the actual production or circulation of coins in a specific period.

Ideally, the *RIC* catalogue would be combined with a full-scale analysis of hoard and single coin finds combined with, as far as they

coins of Justinian II, see: Pfitzner 2016, 40 f. For the study of the fourth, and sometimes fifth, century coinage and their Christian symbols see: footnote 21.

3 Buttrey 1993; Buttrey 1994; de Callataÿ 2011, 12 f.; de Callataÿ 1995, 289–291.

4 There are two complete die studies of Byzantine coinage of the period after Justinian II, see: Füeg 2007; Füeg 2014. These two die studies have, however, been substantially criticized, see: Jarrett 2017.

5 Kemmers 2019, 24 f.; for quantitative studies based upon hoards see: Iossif 2015, 237–240; Iossif 2016, 264, 296; Noreña 2001, 147–151; Rowan 2012, 110–163.

are available, die studies. This would, however, result in a task significantly larger than the scope of a single article or even a dissertation. Moreover, previous studies have indicated that the use of *RIC* for quantification could result in similar results compared to hoard and single-find studies as long as the emphasis is on long-term changes and patterns. Fleur Kemmers' comparison of two studies concerning third-century coinage reveals that different quantitative methodologies, hoard analysis and typological quantification, could lead to different conclusions but do recognise the same patterns. Both studies recognise a similar increase, around 65%, in divine association and a decrease in military themes on the reverse of Caracalla after the death of Septimius Severus. The different conclusions are more a result of distinct interpretations of change and continuity than a reflection of the divergent quantitative methodologies[6]. A correlation between the quantification of coin types and coin specimens found in hoards of the second century was, moreover, indicated by Liesbeth Claes[7]. Finally, the study of Erika Manders shows the correlation between coin types and specimens in the third century by testing the percentages of coin types with ›divine association‹ on the coins of several emperors in the *RIC* catalogue and various third-century silver hoards as studied by Carlos Noreña[8]. Previous studies indicate that the results of quantification based on the RIC catalogue can be comparable to studies based on hoards or single finds as long as the focus is on general trends, continuities and changes in the long term.

Although studies based on hoards, and die studies, are more statistically accurate than the quantification of types there is no quantitative numismatic study concerning several centuries of Roman coinage that has adopted this methodology. The long-term studies of Roman coinage over several centuries are all based on the quantification of *RIC* often citing the sheer amount of surviving Roman coins as one of the reasons for the infeasibility of quantifying based on hoard finds[9]. Reviewers have been critical of this method yet there does not seem to be a feasible alternative. Moreover, reviewers simultaneously value the results of the quantitative studies based on the *RIC* catalogue[10]. These two reasons support using the *RIC* catalogue for a quantitative study of a long-term transformation over several centuries of coinage, such as the ›Christianisation‹ of imperial coins. It might not be the ideal manner of quantifying Roman coins, but it is a feasible method that offers sufficient results for the specific aim of this article.

Another issue of using the *RIC* catalogue concerns the inconsistency of the notion of what constitutes a ›coin type‹. For example, in later volumes of the *RIC* catalogue small changes to a minor part of the reverse type already constitute a new type which in previous volumes might have constituted a ›subtype‹. In addition, it is impossible to say who is responsible for changes to a type or subtype, is a small addition of a Chi-Rho to a helmet a choice of the imperial authority, the officina or the individual engraver? These different options do not carry the same historical significance as this article is mainly interested in changes initiated by the imperial centre. That being said as soon as a symbol appears in several mints a decision by the mint itself could be excluded, which after

6 Kemmers 2019, 26 f. For the two concerned studies see: Manders 2012, 225–252; Rowan 2012, 110–163.

7 Claes 2013, 30 (footnote 17), 110–112. 197–210.

8 Manders 2012, 53–61; Betjes 2022, 47.

9 For example, L. Claes states: »In sum, an analysis of coin specimens as single finds, but also within published coin hoards combined with the findings of die studies would be more accurate in measuring the frequency of imperial kinship messages. …. For the diachronic approach of this study, running for more than 300 years, such combined single find, hoard and die study analysis would require more time to perform than a human lifetime«, in: Claes 2013, 30; More recently, S. Betjes analysed over five centuries of Roman coinage and therefore made a similar argument: »Indeed, given the enormous number of coins that have survived in hoards and the equally impressive number of dies used to strike these, it would turn this study into more than a lifelong enterprise«, in: Betjes 2022, 47.

10 Langford 2014; Horster, 2013.

the death of Constantine becomes the norm for Christian symbols. Coin types in this article are equated to the types as they are recorded in the *RIC* catalogue leading to some inconsistencies regarding what counts as a type and what does not. These inconsistencies do, however, make little difference in the quantitative analysis of this article as the analysis is focused on long-term iconographic changes[11]. More importantly, including all types as recorded in the *RIC* catalogue is relevant for the goal of this article because some of these ›small changes‹, especially in the fourth century, could concern Christian symbols which were often no more than small additions to existing reverse types. Instead of classifying these small additions as subtypes, the later volumes of *RIC* regard this as ›a type‹ resulting in the fact that they are considered in this quantitative analysis. This rigid definition of a ›coin type‹ used in the later volumes of the *RIC* catalogue ultimately fits rather well with the aim of the article to quantify the emergence of Christian symbols.

For Byzantine coinage there is no typological catalogue that has been proven to be representative of the coin production nor is there an online database equivalent to *Online Coins of the Roman Empire*[12]. Therefore this article will use a fourth approach to quantifying numismatic data for the early Byzantine coins, namely quantification of coin specimens from (large) museum collections. Collections are often not seen as representative because the curator's and collector's preferences could ›colour‹ the selected coins and therefore not represent the ancient coin circulation. A previous study has, however, demonstrated that major collections of Byzantine bronze coins could be seen as representative of the original size of the bronze coinage themselves. The five largest collections of Byzantine bronze coins have a striking resemblance in terms of structure and statistical results. More importantly, the archaeological evidence of bronze hoard finds confirms the general patterns of these five large collections[13]. The same methodology has, however, not been applied to Byzantine gold coins. Therefore in this article, the distribution of gold coin specimens from two large museum collections will be compared with three large seventh-century hoard finds to indicate whether or not the general typology of gold coins found in museum collections is representative of the Byzantine gold coin production.

This representativeness test will be performed between two of the largest museum collections of Byzantine coins, the Dumbarton Oaks and Whittemore Collection (*DOC*) and the collection of the British Museum (*BM*)[14]. These two collections will be compared with the compiled dataset of three seventh-century gold hoards. Comparing the coin specimens of three specific seventh-century emperors in two museum collections and the compiled hoard data set will reveal whether there is a resemblance between the distribution of iconographic types between the three datasets. Silver coins played a secondary role in the early Byzantine monetary system. They had no real denominational system and are therefore in numismatic literature often classified as ›ceremonial issues‹[15]. These coins will nonetheless be considered but their representativeness cannot be proven because of a lack of Byzantine silver hoards, moreover indicating that these coins rarely circulated.

The three largest Byzantine gold coin hoards in the *Framing the Late Antique and Early*

11 For a similar reasoning see: Betjes 2019, 45. The study of Claes, on the other hand, uses a more specific type definition, see: Claes 2013, 30–33.

12 Although there is no online typological Byzantine database as of yet, there is a collaboration between Princeton, Dumbarton Oaks, Oxford and the ANS whom are currently working on a Byzantine equivalent to OCRE, see: hellenic.princeton.edu/events/2024/conference-solidus-stavraton-coinage-and-money-byzantine-world

13 Gandila 2009, 153–156, 158–161, 191 f.

14 For more information on how the DOC collection was accumulated, see: Philip Grierson (Interview) — Dumbarton Oaks (doaks.org) (visited on 27-08-2024).

15 Hendy 1985, 449 f. 494 f.; Bland 1997, 39–42; Grierson 1999, 12 f.

Hoard name	Location	Closing date	Georeference	Quantity
Samos Hoard	Samos (Greece)	623	37.727388, 26.846397	300
Rougga Hoard	Bararus (Tunisia)	647	35.230427, 10.781884	268
Le Trésor byzantin de Nikertai	Pella/Apamea (Syria)	685	35°25'20.1"N 36°24'09.0"E	534

Table 1: The three largest Byzantine gold coin hoards in *FLAME*

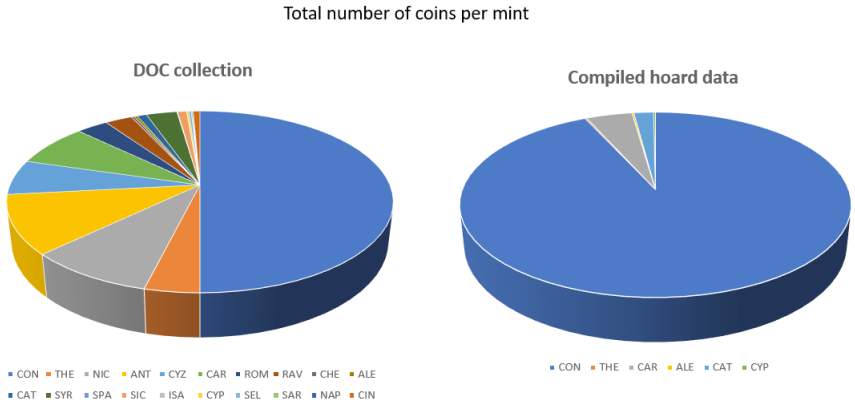
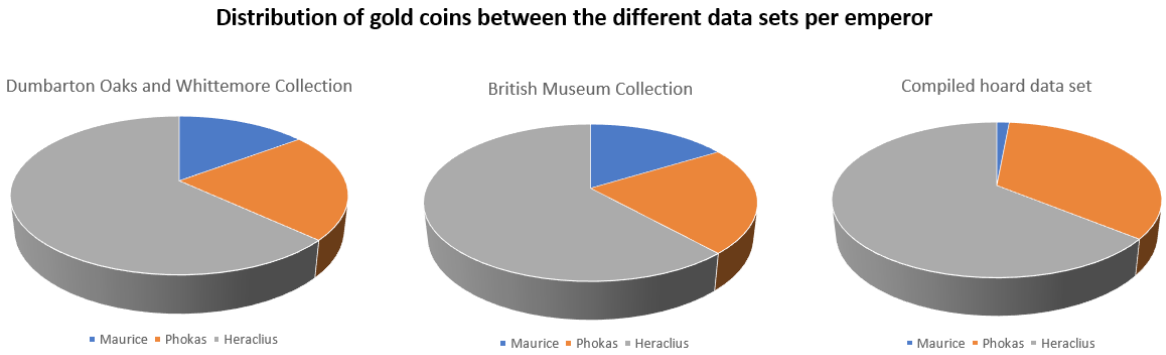


Figure 1: Total number of coins per mint in the *DOC* collection and the compiled hoard database

Medieval Economy (*FLAME*) database will be compared with the two museum collections focusing on three specific emperors: Maurice, Phocas, and Heraclius. The three hoards come from widely different geographical locations, are relatively large, and contain coins mostly dating to the late sixth and early seventh century (**table 1**)[16]. These hoards should therefore represent a reliable sample of the Byzantine gold coin production in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.

This test will only consider coins struck in Constantinople which seems a limitation but this mint accounted for at least half of the total coins of any emperor in the three datasets (**figure 1**). The gold coin specimens of Maurice, Phocas, and Heraclius will be compared to estimate whether the same types could be found in relatively the same percentages. A comparison between the distribution of coins in the three different datasets per emperor indicates that the number of coins in the dataset per emperor is mostly equal, except for the hoard data of Maurice (**figure 2**). The low number of coins from the reign of Maurice results from the fact that the closing dates of the three considered hoards are between 21 and 83 years after Maurice's death, therefore most of his coins had already been replaced in circulation (**table 1**). A regression analysis has been performed between the three different datasets resulting in various R2 numbers. The R2 numbers indicate how similar the total numbers of the different datasets are for the three chosen emperors. The regression analysis of the total number of coins in the three datasets indicates that the distribution of coins for these three emperors between the *BM* and *DOC* collections is almost completely identical. The hoard data is less identical to the museum

[16] For the publications of these three hoards see: Morrisson 1972; Mando & Phane 1989; Guéry, Morrisson & Slim 1982.



Emperor	Number of coins
Maurice – British Museum	25
Maurice – Dumbarton Oaks	58
Maurice – Hoard data	12
Phokas – British Museum	34
Phokas – Dumbarton Oaks	87
Phokas – Hoard data	284
Heraclius – British Museum	95
Heraclius – Dumbarton Oaks	248
Heraclius – Hoard data	529

Figure 2: Distribution of gold coins per emperor in the three datasets

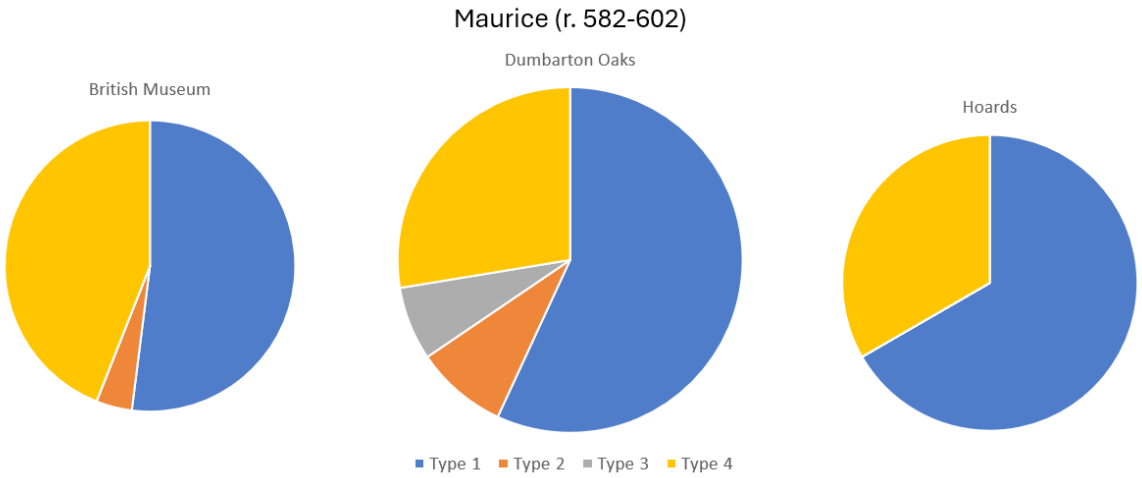
collections, but still, a rather impressive similarity can be found (**table 2**). These R2 numbers indicate that the independent datasets have a strong relation between the variables, between 85% and 98%. In other words, it indicates that the relation between the number of coin specimens of the three chosen emperors in the three datasets is relatively similar, as explained earlier the hoard data deviates slightly from the collections because of a lower number of coin specimens dating to the reign of Maurice (**figure 2** & **table 2**).

Comparing the types on the gold coin specimens of the compiled hoard data of Maurice and Phocas with the types on the specimens from the museum collections reveals the datasets contain mostly the same types in the same relative quantities (**figure 3**). The notion that museum collections contain more rare and uncirculated (gold) coin types would be confirmed by the analysis of the coin specimens of Maurice in the three datasets (**figure 3**).

Data sets	R2
DOC-BM	0.987
BM-Hoard data	0.923
DOC-Hoard data	0.853

Table 2: Results of the regression analysis between the collection of the British Museum, Dumbarton Oaks and data from three large seventh-century hoards

However, the coin specimens of Phocas, which are far more numerous in the hoard data, indicate the opposite. In this case, the hoard data contains a gold consular type whilst one of the museum collections does not contain this particular consular gold type (**figures 2** & **3**). Overall, the most dominant types match and the distribution between the different obverse types is relatively the same for the emperors Maurice and Phocas in the three considered datasets (**figure 3**). Considering the reverse type the similarities are even stronger as these

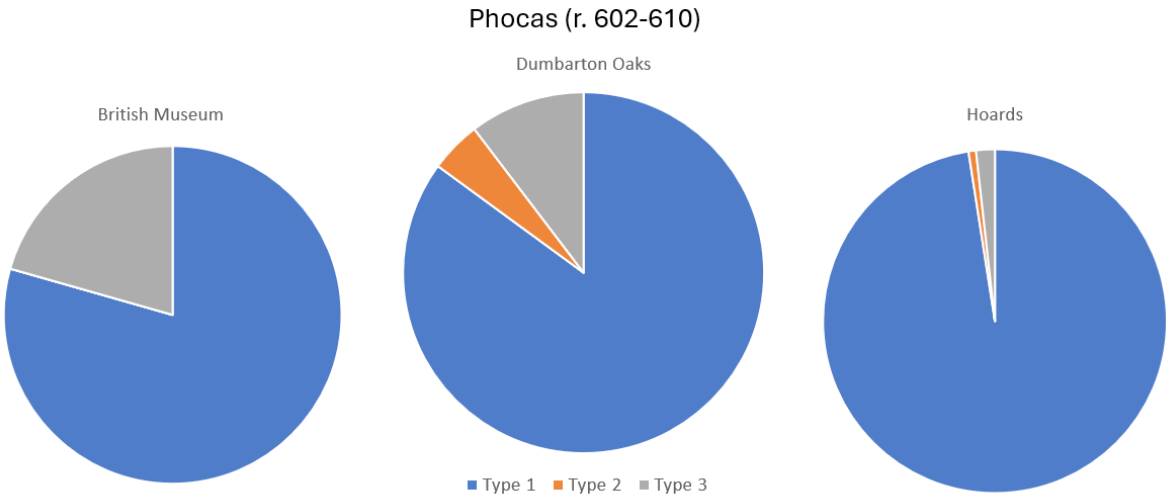


Type no.	Obverse	Reverse	Denomination
Type 1	Bust facing in cuirass and helmet with plume, circlet in front and pendilia. In r. hand holds Gl. Cr. Over l. shoulder, fold of paludamentum	Angel facing, holding in right hand long staff with labarum at the top, in l. Gl. Cr.	Solidus
Type 2	Emperor, enthroned, wearing consular robes and crown with trefoil ornament. In r. hand holds mappa, in l., cross	Angel facing, holding in right hand long staff with labarum at the top, in l. Gl. Cr.	Solidus
Type 3	Bust facing, in cuirass wearing crown with cross and pendilia. In r. hand holds Gl. Cr.. On l. shoulder, angular shield with horseman device	Angel facing, holding in right hand long staff with labarum at the top, in l. Gl. Cr.	Solidus
Type 4	Bust r. with diadem, cuirass and paludamentum	Victory looking r. – holding in r. hand wreath and in l. Gl. Cr.	Semissis/tremissis

Type no.	Samos (hoard)	Rougga (hoard)	Pella (hoard)	British Museum	Dumbarton Oaks
Type 1	4	1	3	13	33
Type 2	0	0	0	1	5
Type 3	0	0	0	0	4
Type 4	4	0	0	11	16
	8	1	3	25	58

Figure 3a: Distribution of obverse types on the coinages of Maurice

types are less subject to change in the Byzantine period. The only difference in reverse type can be found between solidus and semissis/tremissis types. In both collections and the hoard data the distribution between solidi and semissis/tremissis is relatively equal, meaning that the distribution of reverse types is even more similar than on the obverse (**figure 3**).



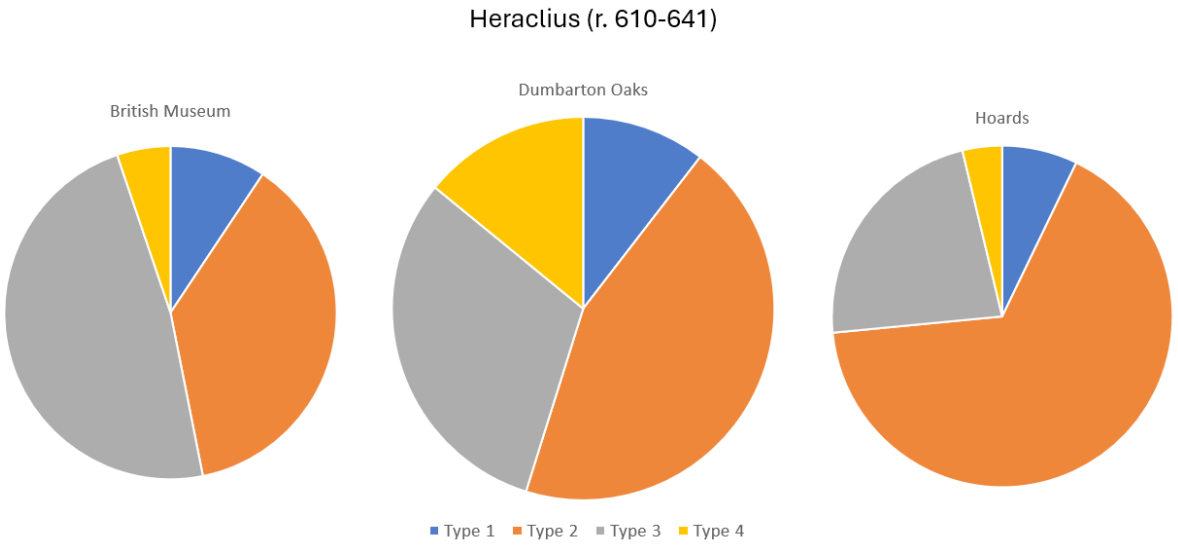
Type no.	Obverse	Reverse	Denomination
Type 1	Bust facing, bearded, wearing cuirass, paludamentum and crown with pendilia and cross on circlet. In r. hand Gl. Cr.	Angel facing, holding in right hand long staff with labarum at the top, in l. Gl. Cr.	Solidus
Type 2	Bust facing, bearded, wearing consular robes and crown with pendilia and cross on circlet. In r. hand, mappa; l., cross	Angel facing, holding in right hand long staff with labarum at the top, in l. Gl. Cr.	Solidus
Type 3	Bust r. with diadem, cuirass and paludamentum	Cross potent on base	Tremissis

Type no.	Samos (hoard)	Rougga (hoard)	Pella (hoard)	British Museum	Dumbarton Oaks
Type 1	139	82	56	27	74
Type 2	0	1	1	0	4
Type 3	5	0	0	7	9

Figure 3b: Distribution of obverse types on the coinages of Phocas

The obverses of the coinage of Heraclius are more complicated because of the introduction of his heirs on the coins[17]. However, if we consider the distribution of Heraclius' gold coin specimens and compare this distribution between the collections and the hoard data, a resemblance can be found (**figure 4**). There are some more differences compared to the datasets of Phocas and Maurice, mainly that the collection of the British Museum contains more of the three emperor types than the other two datasets. More importantly, the distribution between the hoards and the *DOC* collection shows a remarkable similarity and all of the four obverse types of Heraclius are present in each of the three datasets (**figure 4**). There are no differences in reverse types, besides the cross potent standing on a globus

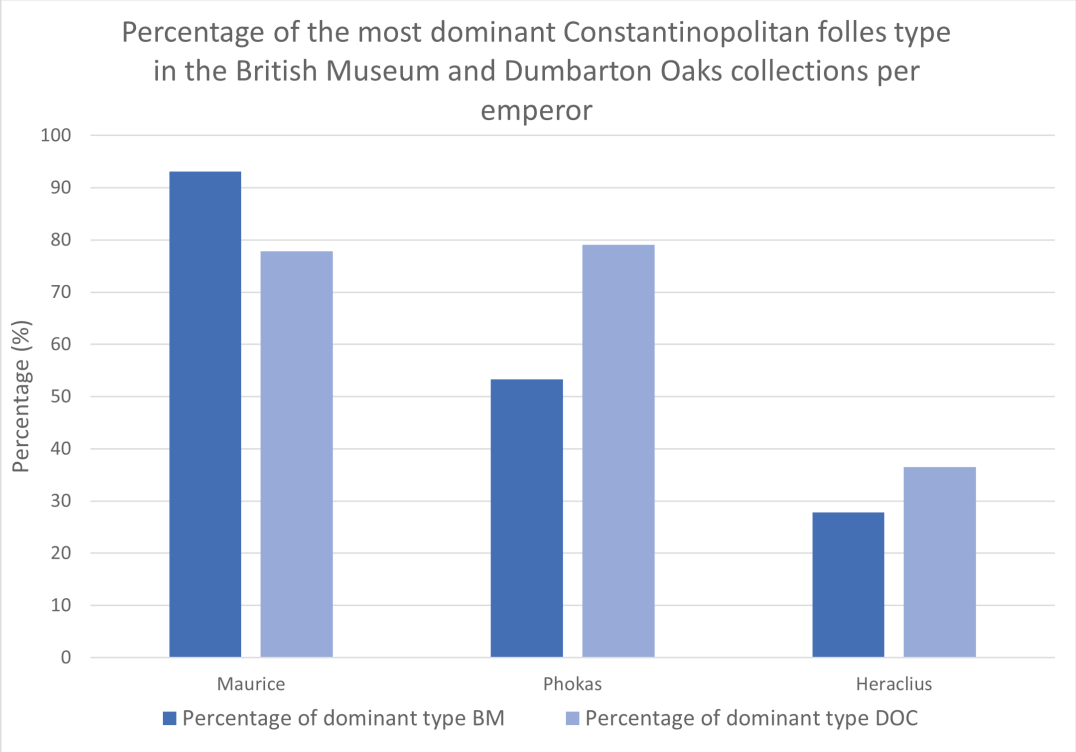
17 For the Heraclian numismatic iconography, see: Humphreys 2019.



Type no.	Obverse	Reverse	Denomination
Type 1	Bust facing, with short beard, wearing cuirass, paludamentum, and crown with pendilia and cross. In r. hand cross	Cross potent on base and two steps	Solidus
Type 2	Bust of Heraclius on l. with short beard, and smaller bust of youthful Heraclius Constantine on r. facing. Diadem on which cross on circlet	Cross potent on three steps	Solidus
Type 3	Three standing figures - In center, Heraclius with moustache and long beard; on r., Heraclius Constantine beardless; on l., Heraclonas, much smaller. Each wears chlamys and holds Gl. Cr. In r. hand. Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine wear crowns with crosses, Heraclonas without	Cross potent on three steps	Solidus
Type 4	Bust r., beardless, wearing diadem, cuirass, and paludamentum	Cross potent on globus/base	Semissis/tremissis

Type no.	British Museum	Dumbarton Oaks	Samos (hoard)	Rougga (hoard)	Pella (hoard)
Type 1	9	26	36	1	3
Type 2	36	110	100	121	149
Type 3	46	77	0	0	127
Type 4	5	35	12	0	9

Figure 4: Distribution of obverse types on Heraclius' coinage



Emperor	Obverse	Reverse	Dumbarton Oaks	British Museum
Maurice	Bust facing in cuirass and helmet with plume, holding Gl. Cr. and shield	M – Above, cross. To l. ANNO. In ex. CON	91 (77,8%)	41 (93,1%)
Phokcas	Bust facing, wearing consular robes and crown with cross. In r. hand, mappa. In l. cross	XXXX. Above ANNO	34 (79,1%)	8 (53,3%)
Heraclius	To l. Heraclius and to r., Heraclius Constantine, both standing. Each wears chlamys and crown with cross, and holds gl. Cr. in r. hand. Between heads, cross.	M, Above, Chi-Rho. To l. ANNO. In ex., CON.	70 (36,5%)	29 (27,8%)

Figure 5: Percentage of the most dominant Follis type in the BM and DOC collections for Maurice, Phocas, and Heraclius. (Only coins struck in Constantinople are considered)

instead of a base on the semissis and tremissis (**figure 4**). In conclusion, all three different datasets show a resemblance in the distribution of the various gold coin specimens per emperor. The hoard data indicates that the gold coin types in the museum collections could be seen as representative of the general Byzantine gold coin typology produced in this period.

Bronze coins were not included in the former representativeness test because they are found less in Byzantine hoards. However, in this case, the collections themselves might be enough to indicate the representativeness of the data[18]. Comparing the bronze coins of

[18] Gandila 2009, 153–156. 158–161. 191 f.

the three emperors in the *DOC* and *BM* collections indicates that Andrei Gandila's argument for the representativeness of bronze coins in collections also applies to these two large collections. Comparing the most common bronze type in the two collections during the reign of Maurice, Phocas, and Heraclius once more indicates the resemblance between these collections (**figure 5**). Most importantly, the obverse type which is the most common is always the same type for each emperor in both collections. The percentages of these types compared to the total number of coins of the considered emperor are relatively close in most cases, except for Phocas due to the limited number of his bronze coins in the British Museum collection (**figure 5**). The reverse of Byzantine bronzes consist of denominational, mint and officina symbols and therefore do not differ between the two datasets (**figure 5**). This representativeness test indicates that, at least for reconstructing general typology, both collections could be used individually producing the same results proving therefore that these samples are representative. The hoard data indicates that for gold coins the collections are representative for reconstructing the general iconography. These are important arguments in favour of the representativeness of this specific sample of coins and therefore legitimise a quantitative approach based on one of these museum collections. Since the *DOC* collection is the largest and most commonly referred to by scholars, this collection will be used for the quantification of early Byzantine coins in this article. In conclusion, this article combines a typological quantification of the late Roman period with a quantification of museum specimens for the early Byzantine period.

The first Christian emperor

On October the 28th 312, Constantine the Great prepared himself with his army for the battle against his ›rebellious‹ co-emperor Maxentius, a battle that would take place at the Milvian Bridge. According to Eusebius of Caesarea, when Constantine looked up at the sun on the day before the battle he saw a heavenly sign with the words »By this conquer«[19]. That night, Christ appeared in Constantine's dreams telling him to use the sign against his enemies in battle. Only one year later, Constantine issued the edict of Milan tolerating the practice of Christianity within the empire. The Christian ›conversion‹ of Constantine has been a hotly debated subject by historians for decades. Perhaps logically, the impact of Constantine's supposed conversion on his numismatic representation has also been discussed in a tremendous amount of publications[20]. These publications have primarily dealt with the introduction of Christian symbols on the coins of Constantine. However, when studied quantitatively the coinage of Constantine conveys an image of continuity rather than change[21].

Christian symbols rarely appear on coins issued immediately after the battle of the Milvian Bridge[22]. Although Andreas Alföldi stated, in 1948, that coinage provided historians with »absolute proof that the emperor embraced the Christian cause with a suddenness that surprised all but his most intimate colleagues«, this »absolute proof« has been severely questioned in recent decades[23]. There are a handful of coin types issued during the reign of Constantine that could be interpreted as

19 For the description of the dream and vision of Constantine by Eusebius see: Eus., Vita Constantini Book I – 28, trans. Cameron – Hall 1999, 81; Nicholson 2000, 309–311.

20 For a summary of the scholarship on Constantine's Christian types, or lack thereof, see: Kemmers 2019, 31 f. For the publications discussing the various Constantinian ›Christian‹ types and the gradual disappearance of pagan types, in chronological order, see: Madden, 1877; Alföldi 1932; Alföldi 1948; Bruck 1955; Bruun 1958; Bruun 1962; Alföldi 1964; Odahl 1975; Odahl 1977; Odahl 1982/1983; Leeb 1992; Christodoulou & Hetaireia 1998; Alföldi 1999; Odahl 2009; Wienand 2011; Ehling 2011; Bardill 2012; Wienand 2012; Manders 2014; Wigg-Wolf 2014; Pfitzner 2019.

21 For the continuity of pagan typology on the coinage of Constantine see: Christodoulou & Hetaireia 1998; Manders 2014.

22 Pfitzner 2019, 42.

23 Alföldi 1948, 1 f.

potentially containing a ›Christian‹ message. These Christian messages consist either out of small ›Christian‹ symbols in the margins or a rather ambiguous reference to the Christian God (**table 3** & **image I**).

The eight coin types with Christian symbols have one thing in common: they are all rare issues and their ›Christian‹ symbolism is ambiguous (**table 3**)[24]. The silver medallion from Ticinum, as well as the rare Siscian bronzes, depict a Chi-Rho on the helmet of Constantine (**image I**). The silver medallion is a festival issue which are naturally rare issues that deviate from numismatic iconographic standards[25]. The Siscian bronze coins seem more relevant since they are not ceremonial issues, but their agency should not be exaggerated either. The high-crested helmet on which the Christogram appears is known from six other western mints but the Christogram itself is only known from some bronze issues struck in Siscia. There are a total of 116 types recorded in RIC struck in Siscia between 319–320, ten of these types depict Constantine with the high-crested helmet but not one depicts the Christogram[26]. This incredibly rare variant was only struck in *officina* B of the Siscian mint. The great variety of helmet engravings found on these coins indicates that these marks were decorations that were designed, engraved, and stamped within the individual *officinae* of the regional mints. *Officina* B of Siscia apparently being controlled by one or more Christian engravers who since the toleration edict of 313 might have had the freedom to engrave their religious symbols upon the coinage[27].

Another extremely rare coin type from Ticinum struck on solidi could potentially contain a Christian symbol but has often been overlooked because the type is not featured in the *RIC* catalogue being only recently discovered at an auction[28]. This type depicts Constantine as a standing-facing emperor on the reverse with a *vexillum* and an oval shield decorated with a *tropaeum* while holding his foot on a captive (**table 3** & **image I**). The ›Christian‹ aspect of this type concerns the top of the *vexillum* which could be interpreted as depicting a small Greek cross. The cross on top of the *vexillum* is a military field symbol and it is questionable whether any Christian meaning was intended here, let alone understood by the audience of this rare solidus type[29]. Moreover, some scholars doubt whether this ›Greek cross‹ was even recognized as a Christian symbol at all at this point in time[30]. The frontality of this reverse type has been connected to the frontal images in early Christian art and the later Byzantine frontal images of the emperor. Although this reverse type is indeed an early testament to the move towards a frontal image of the emperor, this can on its own not be considered a Christian symbol even though the frontal aspect was influenced by early Christian art[31].

[24] A potential ninth type is discussed in an article by David Woods, who considers the two interlaced wreaths on a few of Constantine's gold reverse types to be a representation of the symbol for one thousand, which could be a reference to the ›thousand year-rule‹ of Christ described in Revelation (Rev. 20:1–4). Woods does, however, also admit that the meaning was rather ›hidden‹ and therefore the type was not problematic for pagans because it was not overtly Christian. The type will not be considered here because the relation to Christian thought is speculative, even more so than the types already discussed. For this type and its ›hidden Christian message‹, see: Woods 2018, 375–388.

[25] There is some discussion about the date of this rare silver medallion. In the past, the medallion has often been dated to 315 on the occasion of the decennalia of Constantine, but recently Noel Lenski suggested the medallion could be struck as late as 321, see: Lenski 2018, 251–295.

[26] The Christogram type is extremely rare, for an example see: Coincommunity, www.coincommunity.com/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=343750 (visited on 7-5-2021). The type is a variant of: RIC VII Siscia 81; Alföldi argues that the Christian helmet type was made by the choice of the central minting authority and that all the variations on this type were just ›degenerated Christograms‹, see: Alföldi 1932, 10 f.

[27] Bruun 1962, 9–16; Odahl 2009, 124–130; Odahl 1977, 56–58; Bardill 2012, 221.

[28] For this exceptional solidus type see: Haymann 2019. For the most recent auction this gold type was sold see: Numisbids, www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=lot&sid=2807&lot=424 (last visited 20-8-2024).

[29] For the Christian interpretation of this type see: Haymann 2019, 258–265.

[30] For this argument see: Alföldi 1989, 318–325.

[31] For the frontality aspect of this type see: Haymann 2019, 265–272.

Image I: The ›Christian‹ types of Constantine I (r. 306–336)

Christian type (obverse or reverse)	**Mint**	**Metal**	**Denomination**	**Date**	**Reference**
(O) Bust of Constantine I, wearing high-crested helmet inscribed with ☧, cuirassed, three-quarters facing, holding horse by bridle with right hand and reversed spear on left arm	Ticinum	Silver	Medallion	315	RIC VII Ticinum 36
(R) Emperor standing facing, with vexillum and oval shield with a tropaeum, foot on captive right	Ticinum	Gold	Solidus	315–316	–
(R) Two Victories, winged, draped, facing each other, holding a shield inscribed VOT/PR supported by an altar inscribed with a cross	Ticinum	Bronze	AE2/AE3	318–319	RIC VII Ticinum 86
(O) Bust of Constantine I, helmet inscribed with PX, cuirassed, right	Siscia	Bronze	AE2/AE3	319	RIC VII Siscia 81 (variant)
(R) Legend across field; labarum with three medallions on drapery, crowned by ☧, piercing serpent	Constantinople	Bronze	AE2/AE3	327	RIC VII Constantinople 19
(R) Constantine I, Constantine II, and Constantius II, draped, cuirassed, standing front, leaning on sceptres; Constantine I crowned by heavenly hand, son to left crowned by soldier, son to right crowned by Victory	Constantinople	Gold	36 Solidi (medallion)	330	RIC VII Constantinople 42
(O) Bust of Constantine I, rosette-diademed, right, looking upward	Thessalonica	Gold	Solidus	335	RIC VII Treveri 498
(R) Two soldiers, helmeted, draped, cuirassed, standing facing each other, each holding spear in outer hand and resting inner hand on shield; between them, two standards with a ☧	Arles	Bronze	AE2/AE3	333–337	RIC VII Arelate 381–383

Table 3: The ›Christian‹ types of Constantine I (r. 306–336)

Since this type is not recorded in the *RIC* catalogue the rarity of this solidus type seems self-evident, meaning that besides the ambiguous Christian content of the type, its audience will also have been very select.

The last type with a ›Christian‹ symbol struck in Ticinum concerns bronze issues on which a Greek cross appears on an altar, on other issues from this mint a star is depicted instead of the cross[32]. Of the 85 types recorded in *RIC* struck in Ticinum between 312–318, six types depict the altar with two victories as a reverse type but only one of these types depicts the Greek cross[33]. Besides the rarity of this type, it is once more uncertain whether a Greek cross would even have been considered a ›Christian‹ symbol at this point. The Constantinopolitan type with a ›Christian‹ symbol is referred to as the SPES PVBLIC type and depicts a Chi-Rho that is displayed on a vexillum which is planted in a serpent whose head is turned downward (**image I**)[34]. This type has been interpreted in various ways: a pro-Christian interpretation stresses that the serpent could be a reference to the snake in the Garden of Eden or more generally a symbolisation of paganism or Satan[35]. The Christian interpretation connects this type to Eusebius' account of Constantine putting up an icon before his palace in Constantinople portraying himself and his sons piercing a dragon and a wriggling serpent with their Christian labarum in the shape of a cross topped by a Chi-Rho. According to this interpretation, the SPES PVBLIC type is a reference to this specific painting and its apocalyptic theme[36]. Political interpretations either identify the serpent with Licinius or the barbaric hordes whom Constantine had both recently defeated or argue in the same line that the Chi-Rho should merely be seen as Constantine's personal victory sign[37]. Overtly Christian message or not, the fact is that these coins are rare. Of the 34 types that are recorded in *RIC* that were struck in Constantinople between 327–328, only two types concern the SPES PVBLIC type[38].

Another type with a potential Christian meaning can be found on a gold medallion struck as a multiple of 36 solidi in Constantinople in 330, the year of the capital's inauguration. The reverse of this type depicts Constantine with his sons Constantine II and Constantius II. His sons are crowned by a Victoria and a soldier respectively whilst their father, Constantine I, is crowned by the ›heavenly hand‹[39]. This type could be interpreted as Constantine being crowned by the hand of God, although this is not made explicit anywhere on the medallion. It seems more likely that this type portrays yet another ambiguous imperial motif where Constantine is crowned by a ›heavenly hand‹ that could be interpreted as both Christian and pagan. The hand could refer to the Christian God but might as well be seen as the hand of one of the Roman gods, perhaps exactly the ambiguity Constantine desired to keep the support of both his pagan and Christian subjects. Besides the ambiguity of the ›heavenly hand‹ this type only appears on a highly valuable one-of-a-kind gold medallion that did not circulate meaning that only a few select people in Constantinople would have been able to see this particular (Christian) symbol.

The only type with a potential Christian meaning that can be found on regularly struck solidi portrays Constantine looking upwards into the sky (image I). Contrary to all the previously mentioned types, this type was produced so-

32 Bruun 1962, 5–7; Odahl 2009, 124 f.

33 See: RIC VII Ticinum 86.

34 For a comprehensive die-study and statistical analysis of the SPEC PVBLIC coins and their exhaustive historiography, see: Ramskold 2019, 210–277. 278–294.

35 For the Christian interpretation of this type see: Maurice 1911, p. lxxxi–lxxxvii; Alföldi 1948, 84 f.; Bruck 1955, 27; Staufer 1955, 272–275; Dorries 1972, 58–67; Odahl 1975, 48–51.

36 Odahl 1975, 48-51; Odahl 1982/83, 69.

37 For the interpretation of the serpent as Licinius see: Bruun, Sutherland, and Carson 1966, 64; Bastien 1968, 111-119. For the interpretation of the serpent as barbaric hordes see: Toynbee 1944, 182. For the interpretation of the Chi-Rho as merely a Victory sign of Constantine see: Ramskold 2019, 281 f.

38 See: RIC VII Constantinople 19 & 26.

39 See: RIC VII Constantinople 42; Aurell 2020, 88 f.

mewhat regularly in various imperial mints. The ›Christian‹ interpretation of this type is based on Eusebius' description of the coin, arguing that the eyes were uplifted »in the manner of reaching out to God in prayer«[40]. The question remains if contemporary beholders of this type would have recognized this ›Christian‹ manner of prayer. If any Christian message is intended here, it is at the very least not explicit. Although the type may have been produced more regularly and in various imperial mints, Constantine only raises his eyes on 34 of his 382 gold coin types recorded in *RIC*[41].

The last type with a Christian symbol that was struck during the reign of Constantine concerns a bronze issue from Arles, on which a Chi-Rho appears between the standards of soldiers (**image I**)[42]. *RIC* records 48 types that were struck in Arles between 333–336, only fourteen of these 48 types depict the Chi-Rho. Besides the ambiguity and low quantities of the types with Christian symbols, a more important take from Constantine's coinage is the continuation of the pagan typology[43]. Sol and other pagan gods only began to disappear on reverses from 319 onwards, being replaced by abstract personifications or personal inscriptions, with the exception of the Sol issues from the mint of Sirmium[44]. Constantine deliberately continued to issue coins presenting himself as an adherent of Mars and a follower of Sol after his conversion. It seems that traditional pagan reverses represented political stability which was something that Constantine likely desired after years of civil war in the empire. Although several types with ›Christian‹ symbols or interpretations have been discussed, most of these could be dismissed of functioning as ›propagandistic‹ messages simply because of their small numbers and frequency. Erika Manders considered all of the Constantinian coin types together indicating which gods were most prominent on these coins, her visualisation indicates the marginal influence of these types with Christian symbols on the general numismatic iconography of Constantine[45]. Besides low quantities, the content of these Constantinian types were either no more than small Christian (*officina*) symbols or ambiguous types whose Christian interpretation is questionable. Considering the rarity and ambiguity of the Constantinian types with Christian symbols, it seems clear that it was not Constantine who ›Christianised‹ the numismatic imperial iconography. The question then subsequently remains, when are we able to speak of a Christianised numismatic imperial iconography?

After Constantine

After the death of Constantine in 337, his successors became less cautious with the use of Christian symbols on coins[46]. On the obverse of the coins of the successors of Constantine, Christian symbols remained extremely rare, however. Only a few gold types depict either a Christogram on the shield or a Chi-Rho on the cuirass of the emperor[47]. Only one bronze obverse type contains a Christian symbol and it is ironically a coin struck by the pagan emperor Julian the Apostate. This type concerns a bronze AE2 coin struck in Lugdunum bearing a portrait of Julian holding a shield decorated with a Christogram[48]. Besides these few rare types, no Christian symbols can be found on the ob-

40 Eus., Vita Constantini Book IV,15, trans. Cameron – Hall 1999, 158. For the ›Christian‹ interpretation of this type, see: Odahl 1982/1983, 69 f.; Odahl 2009, 136 f.

41 Additionally, Constantine also raises his eyes on 20 silver types and 8 bronze types. See, for example, RIC VII Nicomedia 86 (Silver), RIC VII Ticinum 185 (Bronze).

42 e.g. RIC VII Arelate 381; See also: Bardill 2012, 222.

43 Burnett 1987, 145.

44 Christodoulou & Hetaireia 1998, 15; Bruun 1958, 36 f.; for the image of Sol on the coinage and other visual mediums depicting Constantine, see: Bardill 2012, 159–202.

45 For the quantitative analysis of Constantine's coin types, see: Manders 2014, 6.

46 Odahl 1982/1983, 71.

47 For the specific gold types depicting the Christogram see: RIC VIII Treveri 338, RIC VIII Treveri 341, RIC VIII Treveri 344, RIC VIII Rome 232. For the Chi-Rho struck on gold medallions from Siscia see: RIC VIII Siscia 105, RIC VIII Siscia 106.

48 See: RIC VIII Lugdunum 204.

Metal	Obverse Christian symbol	Number of types	Reverse Christian symbol	Number of types
Gold	Absent	846	Absent	828
	Chi-Rho	2	Chi-Rho	24
	Christogram	4		
Silver	Absent	742	Absent	721
			Chi-Rho	20
			Labarum	1
Bronze	Absent	2,772	Absent	2,255
	Christogram	1	Chi-Rho	408
			Cross	2
			Labarum	88
			Manus Dei	20

Table 4: Christian symbols on Constantinian and Valentinian coinage 337–378 (*RIC*)

verse of the coins struck during the reigns of the Constantinian and Valentinian emperors (337–378). There are, however, two sides to each coin and it is indeed on the reverse that most of the Christian symbols can be found during this period.

Although Christian symbols are more common on the reverse compared to the obverse they remain a small minority in the corpus (**table 4**). On the reverses of the gold coins, we find a few types that contain a Chi-Rho on a banner, on a globe, above two enthroned emperors, or in the field of a seated Victory type[49]. Christian symbols also appear on a few reverses of silver coins as a Chi-Rho or a labarum added to a type. The Chi-Rho appears once more on a banner, between four standards, and on top of a standard[50]. The labarum, on the other hand, appears in the hand of the emperor on one specific type struck as a silver medallion in the mint of Treveri during the reign of Valens[51]. Overall, Christian symbols are rare on the precious metal coins and even if they are present they are no more than small additions to otherwise non-religious types, like the emperor standing with a spear or military standard[52]. The Chi-Rho is a minor addition and more importantly, the symbol is only present on a few types, most of the reverse types portray the emperor, one or two victories or an inscription within a wreath without any Christian symbolism. Only 6 (0.7%) obverse and 24 (2.8%) reverse types contain a Christian symbol of the 852 gold coin types. Of the 742 silver types, none of the obverses contained a Christian symbol and of the reverse types only 21 (2.8%) types contained either a Chi-Rho or in one case a labarum (**table 4**).

The fourth-century coinage is, however, not characterized by precious metal coins but rather by the massive output of bronzes. The bronze coins struck by the Constantinian and Valentinian emperors contain more and different Christian symbols, although even here they remain a minority in a bigger corpus of military types. Of the 2773 bronze coin reverse types struck between 337–378, 518 (18.7%) depict a Christian symbol which is significantly more than can be found on the gold or silver types but still less than one in five bronze types. Of these 518 types, 408 depict a Chi-Rho,

[49] See: RIC VIII Treveri 121 (banner), RIC VIII Rome 166 (globe), RIC VIII Siscia 106 (above enthroned emperors), RIC IX Antioch 21A (field of Victory type).

[50] See: RIC VIII Treveri 30 (banner), RIC VIII Rome 71 (between four standards), RIC IX Thessalonica 7 (on top of standard).

[51] See: RIC IX Treveri 22.

[52] For example, see: RIC VIII Aquileia 48 (standard) and RIC VIII Aquileia 141 (spear).

88 a labarum, twenty the ›hand of God‹ or *Manus Dei*, and two types depict the Christian cross (**table 4**).

The Chi-Rho types appear in a few variants. With one important exception, each of these types was, however, also struck without the Chi-Rho indicating that the Christian symbol is merely an addition to the type instead of an integral part of it. On some of the VICTORIAE DD NN AVG ET CAE types, a Chi-Rho appears above the wreath held by the two Victories[53]. Some of the GLORIA EXERCITVS types contain a Chi-Rho on the standard situated between the two soldiers[54]. A medallion type from Rome depicts a Chi-Rho between two bound captives, however, another medallion type from Rome depicts the same motif without the Chi-Rho[55]. Several types depict a standing emperor holding a banner with a Chi-Rho or a Chi-Rho in the field[56]. In all the abovementioned cases the Chi-Rho is no more than a small detail that in similar types is left out without any alterations to the iconographic motif.

There is one exception concerning the SALVS DD NN AVG ET CAES type struck on AE1 or large AE2's depicting solely a Chi-Rho flanked by an alpha and omega mainly struck by usurper Magnentius and his son Magnus Decentius (**image II**)[57]. The same iconographic motif was struck on the SALVS AVG NOSTRI type struck by Constantius II on large AE2's minted in Treveri[58]. This type appears on 68 (16.7%) of the 408 Chi-Rho types struck between 337–378 and is only struck by either Magnentius, Magnus Decentius, or Constantius II between 351–353. After Magnentius died in 353, the type immediately disappeared. The few SALVS AVG NOSTRI types struck by Constantius II in Treveri are remarkable but might be explained by re-used reverse dies with an altered legend since the SALVS DD NN AVG ET CAES type struck by Magnentius and Magnus Decentius was also struck in Treveri. Perhaps the emperor(s) or minting authority deemed the motif to be too closely associated with the former usurper Magnentius and therefore discontinued the striking of this type. Whatever

Image II: A Chi-Rho reverse type on a coin of Magnentius struck in Trier (352–353 AD)

the reasons the most prolific Christian type of this period was only struck for three years in a few specific western mints and therefore could not have had the same influence as some of the other described types.

A final Constantinian type depicts a Christian symbol together with the deceased Constantine I struck on bronzes in various mints between 337–340. This type shows the emperor on the reverse in a quadriga riding towards the *Manus Dei* (**image III**). The *Manus Dei* could be seen as a Christian symbol representing God the Father towards which Constantine ascended[59]. Twenty types depict the DIVO CONSTANTINO AVG from various mints throughout the empire, making it the most widespread type including a Christian symbol that depicts

[53] See: RIC VIII Treveri 315 (Chi-Rho) and RIC VIII Treveri 314 (without Chi-Rho).
[54] See: RIC VIII Siscia 90 (Chi-Rho) and RIC VIII Treveri 40 (without Chi-Rho).
[55] See: RIC VIII Rome 471 (Chi-Rho) and RIC VIII Rome 468 (without Chi-Rho).
[56] See: RIC VIII Rome 149 (Chi-Rho on banner) and RIC IX Cyzicus 7 (Chi-Rho in field).
[57] See: RIC VIII Treveri 323 (Magnentius) and RIC VIII Amiens 35 (Decentius).
[58] See: RIC VIII Treveri 333 (Constantius II).
[59] MacIsaac 1975, 324 f., 328. For the historical background of the symbol of the Manus Dei, see: Aurell 2020, 85–96.

Image III: Bronze coin depicting the deceased Constantine I struck in Constantinople (337–340 AD)

Image IV: Apotheosis or Gherardesca Diptych

Constantine I, although it was struck during the reign of his successors[60]. The Christian interpretation of the *Manus Dei* type is debatable. The imperial apotheosis as depicted on the *Manus Dei* coins was by no means a specific Christian iconographic theme. For example, on the so-called Apotheosis diptych, an unknown Roman emperor is led towards heaven where several Gods welcome him with their hands reaching out, an apotheosis looking much like the Constantinian *Manus Dei* coins (**image IV**)[61]. Considering that the imperial apotheosis with a *Manus Dei* receiving the deceased emperor was a well-known theme among both pagans and Christians, the Constantinian *Manus Dei* coin type could be interpreted as portraying both a pagan and a Christian apotheosis simultaneously, perhaps exactly what Constantine, and/or the minting authority, intended. In this manner, Constantine could satisfy both his pagan and Christian subjects without losing loyalty from either[62].

The cross appears only on two bronze reverse types struck between 337–378, on both types a tiny Greek cross appears on the banner of a military standard replacing the Chi-Rho that is found on the banner of other FEL TEMP REPARATIO types[63]. Finally, the labarum appears for the first time on a RESTITVTOR REI P type struck by Jovian in Arelate between 363–364[64]. The type shows the emperor standing left holding the labarum in his right hand. Subsequently, the labarum was added to some of the Valentinian GLORIA ROMANORVM types depicting the emperor advancing right while dragging a captive with his right hand and holding a labarum in his other hand (**image V**)[65]. Another Valentinian type, the RESTITVTOR REI P, shows the emperor standing while holding a labarum and a victory on a globe imitating the Jovian type that introduced the labarum to the reverse of bronze coins[66]. Unlike

60 For example, see: RIC VIII Nicomedia 25 & RIC VIII Treveri 68.

61 I thank Prof. Dr. Johannes Hahn for bringing this particular ivory diptych and its resemblance to the DIVO CONSTANTINO AVG type to my attention during the 2022 Numismatische Herbstschule at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in Münster.

62 Christodoulou and Hetaireia 1998, 15–17; Pfitzner 2016, 45–47.

63 See: RIC VIII Cyzicus 84 & RIC VIII Heraclea 107.

64 See: RIC VIII Arelate 335.

65 For example, see: RIC IX Antioch 10A.

66 For example, see: RIC IX Lugdunum 11A.

Image V: Reverse type of Valentinian I with the emperor holding a labarum and a captive struck in Thessalonica (364–367 AD)

previous types, on the GLORIA ROMANORVM and RESTITVTOR REI P types the labarum is an integral part of the type as there are no variants without this Christian symbol.

Christian symbols do not appear frequently on gold and silver types and only somewhat frequently on bronze types. Moreover, the types are still no more than small Christian symbols added to an otherwise military or imperial representation, types that often also appear without the Christian symbol. The arguments for the ambiguity of the Christian types of Constantine I can also be reiterated here. The ›hand of god‹ might as well be seen as the ›hand of gods‹ and seems to present a conscious ambiguous message of an imperial apotheosis that could be understood by both the Christian and pagan recipients. As discussed earlier, the Chi-Rho might be better interpreted as Constantine's victory sign that could refer to Sol and Christ simultaneously or after the death of Constantine to his legacy[67]. The coinage of the Constantinian emperors (337–363) seems to support this interpretation. The Chi-Rho appears primarily on Constantinian bronze reverse types (**figure 8**) struck by the direct successors of Constantine, Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius II. The last Constantinian emperor, Julian the Apostate, resorted to paganism and struck reverse types depicting the Apis bull[68]. Nonetheless, Julian's bronze reverse types also contain the Chi-Rho, although significantly less than on the coinage of his predecessors. On the other hand, the only bronze obverse type with a Christian symbol, a Chi-Rho, was also struck during the reign of Julian. During the usurpation of Magnentius and his son Magnus Decentius the use of the Chi-Rho on bronze reverses experienced a highpoint not only in quantity but also from the fact that the symbol became a stand-alone reverse type (**figure 8a–b**, **image II**). With the accession to the throne of the Valentinian dynasty, the Chi-Rho became a lot less common on bronze types and was replaced by the labarum (**figure 8**). The labarum is simply a military standard including a Chi-Rho, meaning that the Chi-Rho was still in use in the Valentinian period but solely appeared in the form of a labarum.

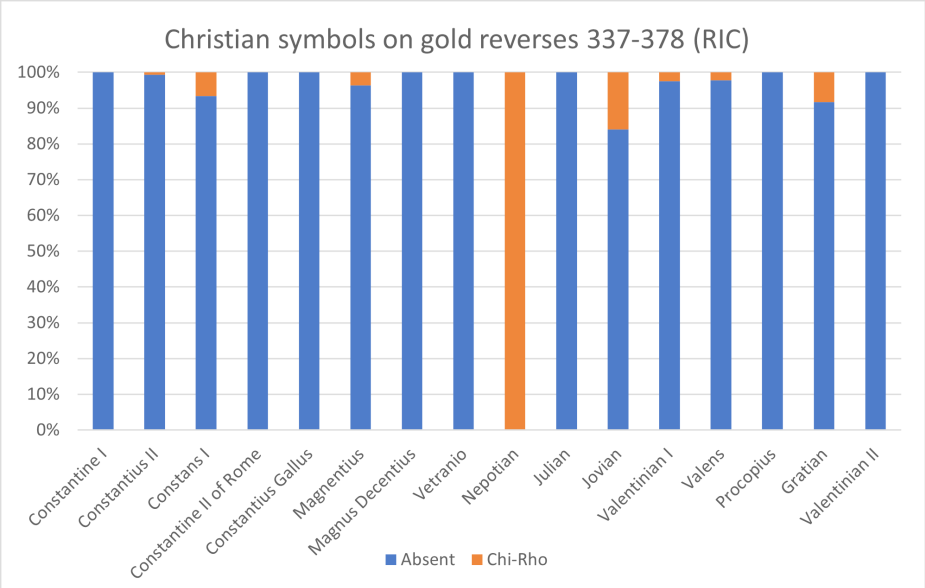
During the Valentinian period, there was one exception concerning the use of the Chi-Rho on bronze reverse types, namely the coins of the usurper Procopius. Procopius was a cousin of the emperor Julian and consequently part of the Constantinian dynasty[69]. It is in this fact that we need to search for the meaning of the Chi-Rho. The Chi-Rho appears on coins struck by Constantine, his sons, and usurpers trying to establish themselves as successors to Constantinian emperors. Magnentius, and later his son Magnus Decentius, also fits into this narrative as they might have attempted to gain legitimacy as usurpers by using the Constantinian symbol even though they did not have any familial bond with the family of Constantine (unlike Procopius)[70]. The same argument

67 For this interpretation see: Ramskold 2019, 281 f.; Lewis 2003, 25–29; Hahn 2021, 38–39; Ramskold – Tillack 2022, 156–174; Pozo 2025, 1–18.

68 For example, see: RIC VIII Lugdunum 237.

69 Jones, Martindale & Morris 1971, 110–112.

70 According to R. Macmullen the symbol of the Chi-Rho had been ›de-Christianised‹ in the fourth century, see, also: Macmullen 1977, 48 f.



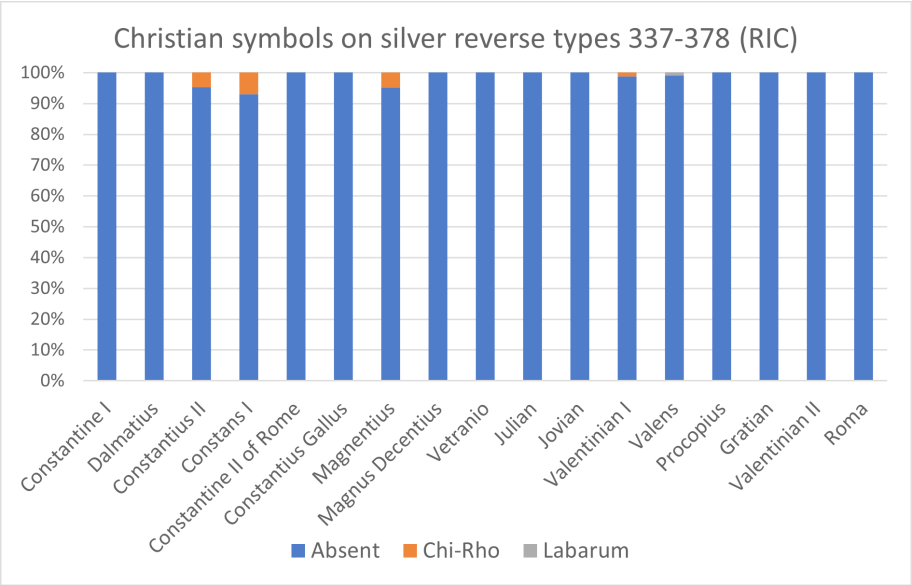
Christian symbol reverse	**Constantine I**	**Constantius II**	**Constans I**	**Constantine II of Rome**
Absent	1	227	112	38
Chi-Rho	0	2	8	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Constantius Gallus**	**Magnentius**	**Magnus Decentius**	**Vetranio**
Absent	20	52	18	2
Chi-Rho	0	2	0	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Nepotian**	**Julian**	**Jovian**	**Valentinian I**
Absent	0	75	21	80
Chi-Rho	1	0	4	2
Christian symbol rev.	**Valens**	**Procopius**	**Gratian**	**Valentinian II**
Absent	89	5	33	5
Chi-Rho	2	0	3	0

Figure 6: Christian symbols on gold reverse types 337–378 (*RIC*)

could be made for the coinage of Vetranio whose coinage generally imitated Constantinian types including the use of the Chi-Rho on bronzes (**figure 9**)[71]. It seems ultimately that the Chi-Rho is better understood as a symbol referencing the Constantinian family rather than a distinctive Christian statement.

Besides the ambiguity of the often uncommon types with Christian symbols there are still some pagan types struck in this period. These pagan gods appear on a series of coin types from Rome that depict Egyptian (pagan) deities struck between 337–364. These types are struck on bronze medallions exclusively in the mint of Rome during the reigns of Constantinian emperors Constans I, Constantius II, Constantius Gallus, and Julian, as well as on the coins of Magnentius and Jovian. The types portray the emperor as a profile bust sometimes with attributes like a small Victory, a consular sceptre or a shield. The reverse type, bearing the legend VOTA PVBLICA, depicts various Egyptian deities like Isis, the Nile, Anubis,

[71] Dearn 2003, 186.



Christian symbol rev.	Constantine I	Dalmatius	Constantius II	Constans I	Roma
Absent	1	1	202	106	2
Chi-Rho	0	0	10	8	0
Labarum	0	0	0	0	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Constantine II of Rome**	**Constantius Gallus**	**Magnentius**	**Magnus Decentius**	**Vetranio**
Absent	30	30	20	5	7
Chi-Rho	0	0	1	0	0
Labarum	0	0	0	0	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Julian**	**Jovian**	**Valentinian I**	**Valens**	**Procopius**
Absent	66	13	79	104	7
Chi-Rho	0	0	1	0	0
Labarum	0	0	0	1	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Gratian**	**Valentinian II**			
Absent	38	10			
Chi-Rho	0	0			
Labarum	0	0			

Figure 7: Christian symbols on silver reverse types 337–378 (*RIC*)

Harpocrates, and Nephthys[72]. These types are related to one of the last pagan festivals that had retained its place on the calendar. According to Andreas Alföldi, the VOTA PVBLICA types refer to the ceremony of the imperial vows on the 3rd of January which coincided with the ceremonies of ›navigium Isidis‹, an annual Roman festival in honour of the goddess Isis. The festival was connected to the emperor which is why the Christians of Rome tolerated these pagan traditions. The coins, or medallions,

[72] For these types see: RIC VIII Rome 475–513.

Christian symbol rev.	**Constantine I**	**Dalmatius**	**Hannibalianus**	**Helena**
Absent	60	26	4	15
Chi-Rho	0	0	0	0
Labarum	0	0	0	0
Cross	0	0	0	0
Manus dei	20	0	0	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Theodora**	**Constantius II**	**Constans I**	**Constantine II**
Absent	11	775	415	110
Chi-Rho	0	129	104	5
Labarum	0	0	0	0
Cross	0	1	0	0
Manus dei	0	0	0	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Constantius G.**	**Magnentius**	**Magnus Decentius**	**Vetranio**
Absent	121	106	50	0
Chi-Rho	16	76	47	20
Labarum	0	0	0	0
Cross	0	0	0	0
Manus dei	0	0	0	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Nepotian**	**Julian**	**Jovian**	**Valentinian I**
Absent	4	231	55	56
Chi-Rho	0	3	3	0
Labarum	0	0	1	31
Cross	0	0	1	0
Manus dei	0	0	0	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Valens**	**Procopius**	**Gratian**	**Valentinian II**
Absent	69	8	28	5
Chi-Rho	0	5	0	0
Labarum	33	1	18	4
Cross	0	0	0	0
Manus dei	0	0	0	0
Christian symbol rev.	**Roma**	**Constantino-polis**		
Absent	45	61		

Figure 8a: Christian symbols on bronze reverse types 337–378 (*RIC*)

were struck for the festival and only used for that one specific day[73]. The appearance of these pagan types among the ambiguous types with Christian symbols points towards the reality of this period in which Christianity was not (yet) the sole religion of the empire. Pagan traditions and Christian innovations existed next to each other, although Christian symbolism had the upper hand on the imperial coinage,

[73] Alföldi 1937, 12–14, 30 f., 50–53.

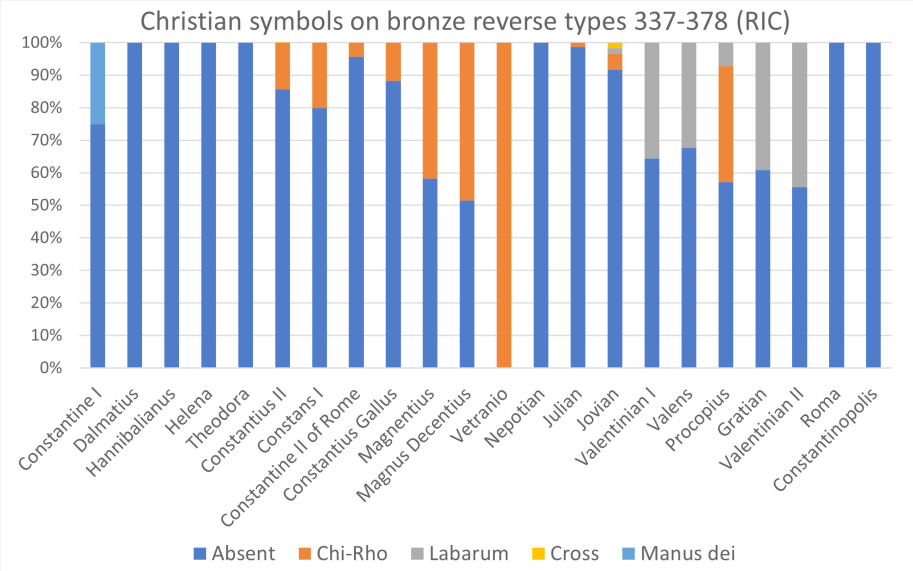
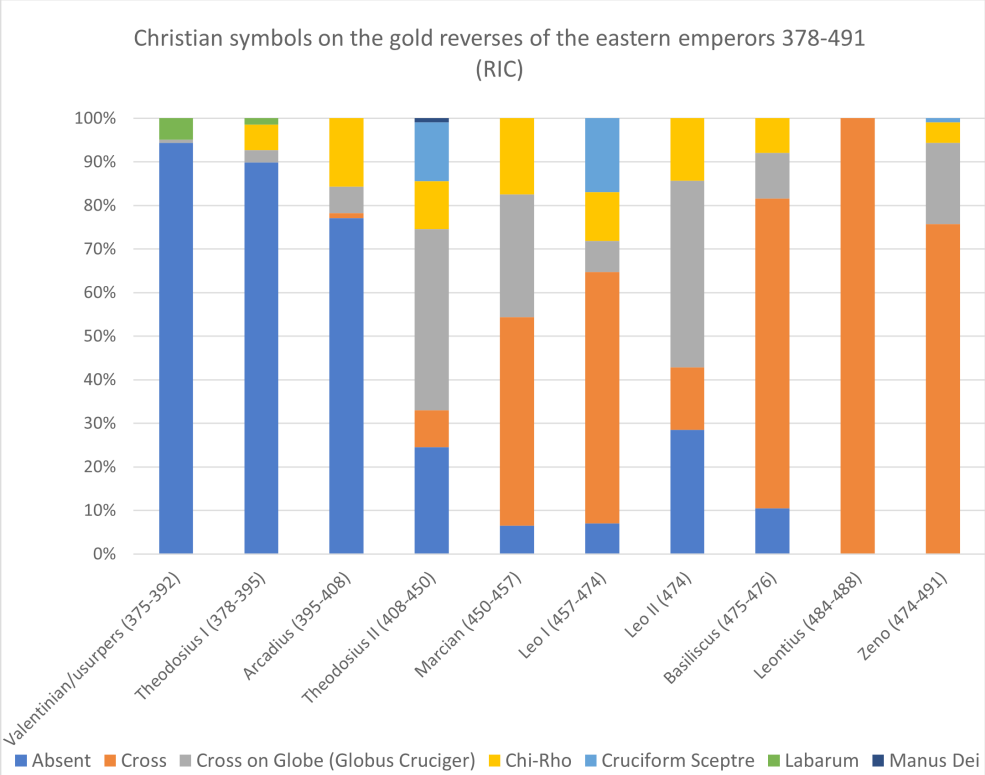


Figure 8b: Christian symbols on bronze reverse types 337–378 (*RIC*)

festival issues like these indicate that the complete ›Christianisation‹ of the coinage of late antiquity had yet to take place.

Christian symbols do appear more frequently on the coins of the Constantinian and Valentinian emperors compared to the coins struck by Constantine I between 312–337. Still, they remain a minority in a bigger corpus of military types. The amount of types containing a Christian symbol that the Constantinian and Valentinian emperors struck did not increase dramatically over time. In the fifty years between the death of Constantine and the accession of Theodosius I (337–378), the amount of Christian symbols found on coins remains relatively stable on gold, silver, and bronze types (**figures 6**, **7** & **8**). Except for the single gold type struck by the usurper Nepotian that coincidentally contained a Chi-Rho, Christian symbols were mostly absent from gold types of the other Constantinian and Valentinian emperors (**figure 6**) and even less present on their silver types (**figure 7**). Bronze types contain more Christian symbols, but overall remain a minority during the reigns of most of the Constantinian and Valentinian emperors (**figure 8**). A few exceptions concern the short-lived rule of emperor Vetranio whose twenty bronze reverse types all contain a Chi-Rho as well as the bronze types of the usurper Magnentius and his son Magnus Decentius well-known for their large Chi-Rho reverse type (**figure 8** & **image II**). The Valentinian emperors introduced the labarum to the bronze reverses which became an integral part of their GLORIA ROMANORVM and RESTITVTOR REI P TYPES resulting in the fact that the bronze reverses of the Valentinian emperors contained on average more Christian symbols than their Constantinian predecessors. Nonetheless, none of the Valentinian emperors' contain Christian symbols on more than 50% of their bronze reverses (**figure 8**).

Besides quantities, the symbols are no more than small additions to already existing military/imperial types and their Christian content could be considered ambiguous, especially in the case of the Manus Dei and Chi-Rho. The most important takeaway from the coinage of the period 337–378 is the continuity of the Constantinian prototypes. The types are much like the types with Christian meaning of Constantine I only appearing more regularly. An important factor of the cautious use of Christian symbols on coinage will likely have to do with the fact that there were still pagans in the empire. The festival issues from Rome dedicated to the Egyptian dei-



Christian symbols rev.	**Valentinian / usurpers**	**Theodosius I**	**Arcadius**	**Theodosius II**	**Marcian**
Absent	117	62	64	29	3
Cross	0	0	1	10	22
Cross on Globe	1	2	5	49	13
Chi-Rho	0	4	13	13	8
Cruciform Sceptre	0	0	0	16	0
Labarum	6	1	0	0	0
Manus Dei	0	0	0	1	0
Christian symbols rev.	**Leo I**	**Leo II**	**Basiliscus**	**Leontius**	**Zeno**
Absent	5	2	4	0	0
Cross	41	1	27	3	81
Cross on Globe	5	3	4	0	20
Chi-Rho	8	1	3	0	5
Cruciform Sceptre	12	0	0	0	1
Labarum	0	0	0	0	0
Manus Dei	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 9: Christian symbols on gold reverse types of the eastern emperors 378–491 (*RIC*)

Metal	Obverse Christian symbol	Number of types	Reverse Christian symbol	Number of types
Gold	Absent	965	Absent	415
	Hand of God	73	Cross	389
	Chi-Rho	35	Cross on Globe	187
	Cruciform Sceptre	34	Chi-Rho	85
	Cross	31	Cruciform Sceptre	51
			Labarum	7
			Hand of God	4
Silver	Absent	421	Absent	389
	Chi-Rho	5	Chi-Rho	26
	Cross	6	Cross	22
	Hand of God	6	Labarum	1
Bronze	Absent	1,103	Absent	954
	Cross	24	Chi-Rho	79
	Hand of God	17	Cross	74
	Chi-Rho	1	Labarum	29
	Cruciform Sceptre	1	Hand of God	8
			Cross on Globe	2

Table 6: Christian symbols on late Roman coinage 378–491 (*RIC*)

ties indicate that some numismatic pagan traditions lived on in these early Christian times. Considering the various (failed) usurpations of this period and even the rise of a pagan emperor, it seems obvious that any emperor wanted to satisfy both the Christian and pagan recipients of their coins. The ambiguous iconography of Constantine like the Chi-Rho and the *Manus Dei* was perfect for this goal, the types were not overtly Christian but might have been interpreted as Christian by Christian recipients. At least one bishop named Eusebius interpreted these types and the emperor on the obverse as »transparently displayed as a Christian«[74].

A state religion

During the reign of Theodosius I (r. 378–395), Christianity became the sole state religion of the empire. Pagan temples were closed opening the way for Christianity to enter the realms of imperial representation. Did Christian symbols finally claim a dominant place on the coinage of these emperors? Initially, this does not seem to be the case. The coinage of Theodosius differs little from that of the previous Valentinian emperors (**table 4** & **5**). When considering all types struck during the reign of Theodosius, the types with Christian symbols are only a small fraction of the total number of types. Only 10.1% of the gold reverse types depict a Christian symbol, 13.9% of the bronze types and only a mere 2% of the silver types (**table 5**). Christian symbols can only be found on the reverses of Theodosius' coin types, depicting either a Chi-Rho, labarum or a cross on globe in the hands of Victoria.

The *Globus Cruciger*, or cross on globe, is a new Christian symbol introduced on Theodosian gold reverse types. This symbol exists out of a combination of the Roman symbol of the

[74] For Eusebius' interpretation of the ›Christian types‹ of Constantine I, see: Eus., Vita Constantini book III-3, IV-15, IV-73/74, trans. Cameron – Hall 1999, 121 f., 158, 281 f.; Hillen 2024, 131–136.

Image VI: Three ›Christian‹ types struck on solidi of Theodosius II and Marcian

Christian symbols reverse	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Absent	62	48	160
Cross	0	0	0
Cross on Globe	2	0	0
Chi-Rho	4	1	23
Cruciform Sceptre	0	0	0
Labarum	1	0	3
Hand of God	0	0	0
Total	69	49	186
Christian symbols obverse	**Gold**	**Silver**	**Bronze**
Absent	69	49	186

Table 5: Christian symbols on the coins of Theodosius 378–395 (*RIC*)

Globus and the Christian symbol of the cross, combined they conveyed a message of Christian dominion. The globe already appeared on Republican and early imperial coins. Victory was, for example, often depicted standing or seated on a globe[75]. In imperial times, the globe was granted by Jupiter or a senior emperor to a new emperor indicating the granting of imperial dominion[76]. On the coins of Theodosius, the *Globus Cruciger* is held by Victoria on the reverses of two tremisses struck in Mediolanum[77]. The globe as a Roman symbol of power combined with the Christian cross in the hands of the personification of victory must have been intended as a message of Christian triumph. The type could therefore potentially be a reference to the triumph of Christianity over the pagan religions in 380. The propagandistic value of the type should, however, not be overstated as the type only appears on two types of the smallest gold coin denomination, the tremissis (**table 5**).

After the reign of Theodosius Christian symbols became more common on the coins of the late Roman emperors, while simultaneously some new symbols were introduced (**table 6**). On the obverses of solidi as well as some silver and bronze types, the *Manus Dei* symbol on which an empress, and sometimes an emperor, is crowned by the Hand of God became a fairly regular type often struck in imperial centres like Constantinople, Rome or Ravenna[78]. Although a *Manus Dei* could already be found on the DIVO CONSTANTINO AVG types struck during the reigns of the sons of Constantine, the *Manus Dei* now appeared on the obverse crowning the emperor instead of receiving a

[75] Arnaud 1984. For a Republican type depicting the globus, see: RRC 546/6.

[76] Angelova 2004, 5; Alföldi 1935, 135–137.

[77] See: RIC IX Mediolanum 23B & RIC IX Mediolanum 37B.

[78] For an overview of all Manus Dei types and their interpretations see: MacIsaac 1975, 322–328; e.g. RIC X Arcadius 11; RIC X Theodosius II (East) 206; RIC X Basiliscus 1004.

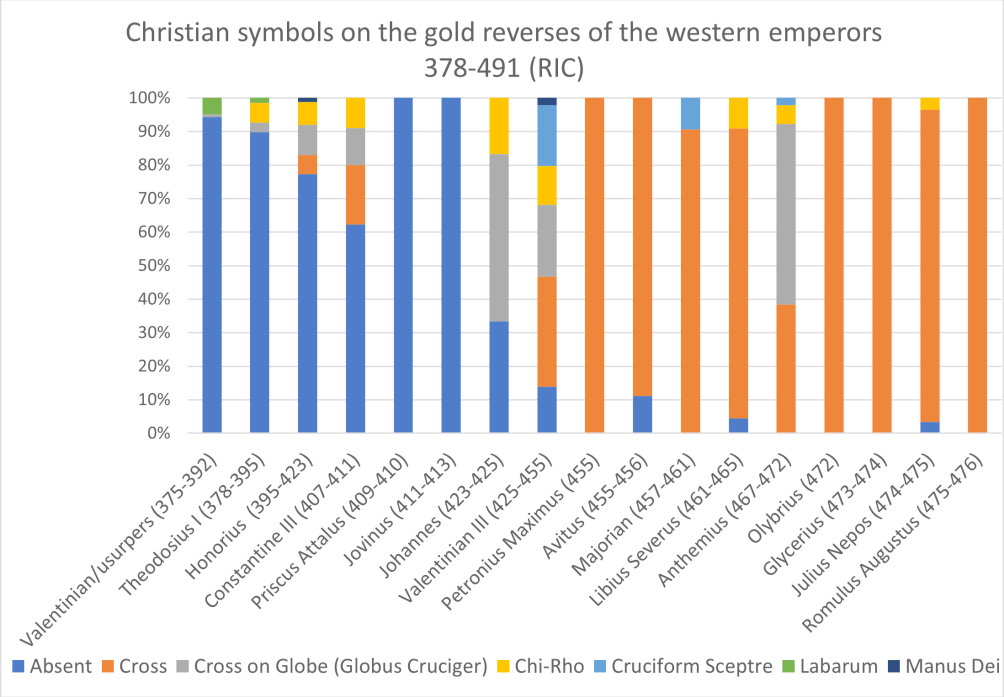


Figure 10a: Christian symbols on gold reverse types of the western emperors 378–491 (*RIC*)

deceased emperor. Considering all coin types struck between the reign of Theodosius I and the beginning of ›Byzantine coinage‹ in 491, 6.4% of all gold coin obverse types depict the Manus Dei and ~1.4% of the silver and bronze obverses (**table 6**) making this specific type the most ›dominant‹ Christian type on late Roman obverses. Other Christian symbols found on late Roman obverses consist of imperial attributes or small symbols added to the attire of the emperor. Symbols like a cross or Chi-Rho can sometimes be found on the *cuirass*, shield or behind the shoulder of the emperor[79].

Theodosius II was the first emperor to hold a cruciform sceptre, a ›Christianisation‹ of the consular eagle-tipped sceptre that could be found on Roman consular issues[80]. The cruciform sceptre could be seen as a ›Christianisation‹ of a former pagan type because the eagle on the sceptre that referred to Jupiter was now replaced by a Christian cross. However, the emphasis of the type still lies on the consular representation of the emperor with the traditional mappa and trabea. Considering the obverses of all coins struck between 378–491, only 15.2% of the gold coins and 3.8% of the silver and bronze coin obverses depicted a Christian symbol (**table 6**). The obverses of late Roman coins depicted imperial themes like coronations, consular representations or most of the time simply an imperial profile bust adorned with a diadem.

On late Roman reverse types, the cross was for the first time struck as a sole reverse type on a gold coin type of Arcadius[81]. This cross-type also appeared on small bronzes indicating that some Christian symbols were now able to reach all levels of society[82]. Theodosius II was the first emperor to ›Christianise‹ the reverse type of Victoria. On solidi struck in the fifteenth year of his reign Victoria no longer held an eagle-tipped sceptre but a long cross (**image VI**)[83]. This attribute change of Victoria

79 e.g. RIC X Arcadius 40 & RIC X Anthemius 2831.
80 e.g. RIC X Theodosius II (East) 221.
81 See: RIC X Arcadius 21.
82 e.g. RIC X Theodosius II (East) 440.
83 e.g. RIC X Theodosius II (East) 219.

Christian symbols rev.	**Valentinian / usurpers**	**Theodosius I**	**Honorius**	**Constantine III**	
Absent	117	62	68	28	
Cross	0	0	5	8	
Cross on Globe	1	2	8	5	
Chi-Rho	0	4	6	4	
Cruciform Sceptre	0	0	0	0	
Labarum	6	1	0	0	
Manus Dei	0	0	1	0	
Christian symbols rev.	**Priscus Attalus**	**Jovinus**	**Johannes**	**Valentinian III**	
Absent	7	8	2	13	
Cross	0	0	0	31	
Cross on Globe	0	0	3	20	
Chi-Rho	0	0	1	11	
Cruciform Sceptre	0	0	0	17	
Labarum	0	0	0	0	
Manus Dei	0	0	0	2	
Christian symbols rev.	**Petronius Maximus**	**Avitus**	**Majorian**	**Libius Severus**	
Absent	0	1	0	1	
Cross	3	8	29	19	
Cross on Globe	0	0	0	0	
Chi-Rho	0	0	0	2	
Cruciform Sceptre	0	0	3	0	
Labarum	0	0	0	0	
Manus Dei	0	0	0	0	
Christian symbols rev.	**Anthemius**	**Olybrius**	**Glycerius**	**Julius Nepos**	**Romulus Augustus**
Absent	0	0	0	1	0
Cross	35	4	13	27	21
Cross on Globe	49	0	0	0	0
Chi-Rho	5	0	0	1	0
Cruciform Sceptre	2	0	0	0	0
Labarum	0	0	0	0	0
Manus Dei	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 10b: Christian symbols on gold reverse types of the western emperors 378–491 (*RIC*)

could potentially be connected to Theodosius' victory over the Sassanians one year earlier in 421, after which he supposedly placed a monumental bejewelled cross on the Golgotha in Jerusalem. The cross symbolises the victory of the ›true religion‹ of the Romans over the Zoroastrian Sassanians[84]. Most reverse types struck in the fifth century kept depicting the

[84] Moorhead 1985, 173; Storch 1970, 116 f.; Somogyi 2016, 146–151; Kent 1960, 131 f. For doubts about the historicity of this event see: Milner 1996, 77–99.

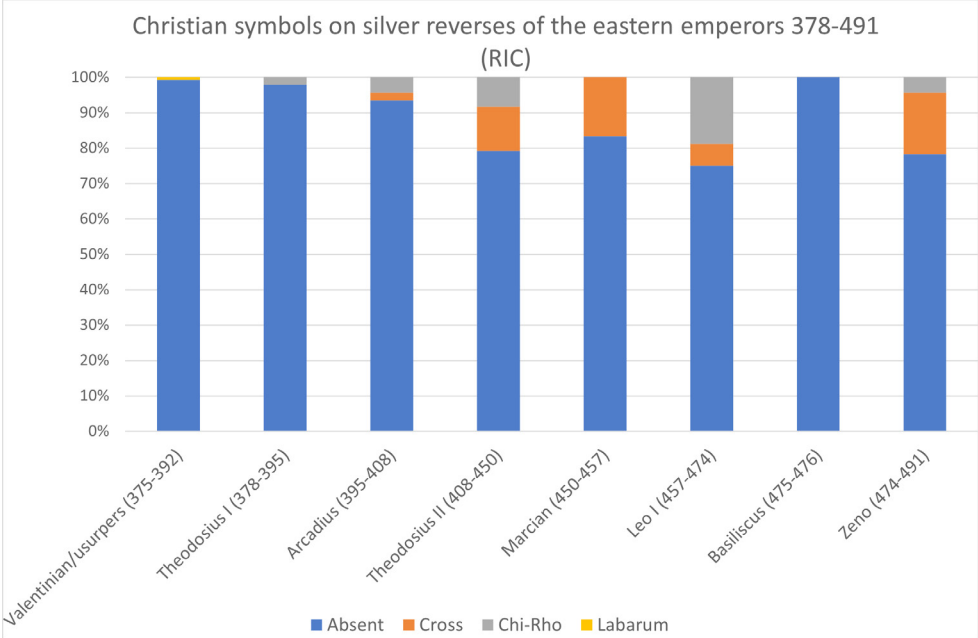
ancient types of Victoria or Constantinopolis, however, albeit (sometimes) with a Christian attribute. Some reverse types depict the emperor(s) holding Christian attributes like the cruciform sceptre, *Globus Cruciger* or long cross, but these are less common[85].

The first numismatic appearance of Christ occurred during the reign of Marcian, but only on an exceptional issue. On a solidus struck in 450 to commemorate the marriage between Marcian and Pulcheria, a cross-nimbated Christ stands in between the bride and groom (**image VI**)[86]. Only one coin of this type survives to this day, which might have been distributed during the wedding[87]. Except for this rare ceremonial issue, the rest of Marcian's reverse gold types consist of Victoria bearing a long cross or a *Globus Cruciger* or a small cross on the tremisses[88]. Besides the new symbols of the *Globus Cruciger*, Cruciform sceptre, (long) cross in the hands of Victoria or as a sole reverse type, and even Christ himself on the exceptional wedding solidus, the ›old‹ Christian symbols of the labarum and Chi-Rho also appeared on the coins of the late Roman emperors but to a significantly lesser degree than before. The labarum only appears on 37 (1.3%) types struck mostly by the Valentinian emperors, some late-fourth century usurpers or Theodosius I[89]. In the fifth century, the labarum appears only on five bronze reverses of Arcadius and one of Zeno (**figure 14**). Perhaps the labarum was associated with the Valentinian dynasty in the same manner as the Chi-Rho was associated with the Constantinian dynasty which might explain the sudden decline of the use of these two Christian symbols on the coins of the Theodosian and later fifth-century emperors. The Chi-Rho appears on 231 (8.4%) types and is subsequently more common than the labarum but its use declines in comparison to the fourth-century being replaced by the more overtly Christian crosses, globe on crosses, hand of God, and cruciform sceptres (**table 6**).

Overall, Christian symbols remain at least uncommon on the coins of the late Roman emperors (378–491). On the gold obverses, Christian symbols remain limited to some imperial attributes that appeared when the emperor was represented as a consul or on coins that portrayed the empress[90]. The majority of the obverses (91%) did, however, not contain any Christian symbols (**table 6**). Christian symbols could be found on 15.6% of the gold obverse types. On the obverses of silver and bronze coins, Christian symbols are considerably more rare, only being present on ~6% of the silver types and ~4% of the bronzes (**table 6**). On the reverses of late Roman coins, Christian symbols became more common. Christian symbols can be found on 63.5% of the gold coin types but only on 16.8% of bronze types and a mere 11.2% of silver types (**table 6**). The gold reverses show the most diversity of Christian symbols, the Chi-Rho still appears but is less frequent in comparison to the coins of Constantinian and Valentinian emperors (**tables 4** & **6**). This could be related to the hypothesis that the Chi-Rho might have been more understood as a Constantinian family symbol or reference to Constantine I rather than a reference to Christ[91]. By far the most dominant Christian symbol on the gold reverse is the cross, the ›cross-types‹ appear either in the hands of Victoria or as a sole cross surrounded by a wreath (**image VI**). Silver and bronze reverses still predominantly depicted ancient types with considerably fewer Christian symbols (**table 6**).

The prominence of Christian symbols on gold reverses only came into being during the fifth century. In the late fourth century only

85 e.g. RIC X Theodosius II (East) 237.
86 See: RIC X Marcian 502.
87 Pfitzner 2016, 51
88 Somogyi 2016, 147 f.
89 The Valentinian emperors and usurpers that struck coins until or even after 378 and therefore belong to this chapter concern: Valens (r. 364–378), Gratian (r. 367–383), and Valentinian II (r. 375–392). As well as the usurpers Magnus Maximus (r. 383–388), Flavius Victor (r. 384–388), and Eugenius (r. 392–394).
90 e.g. RIC X Leo I (East) 621; RIC X Theodosius II (East) 262.
91 See page 43; Ramskold 2019, 281 f.

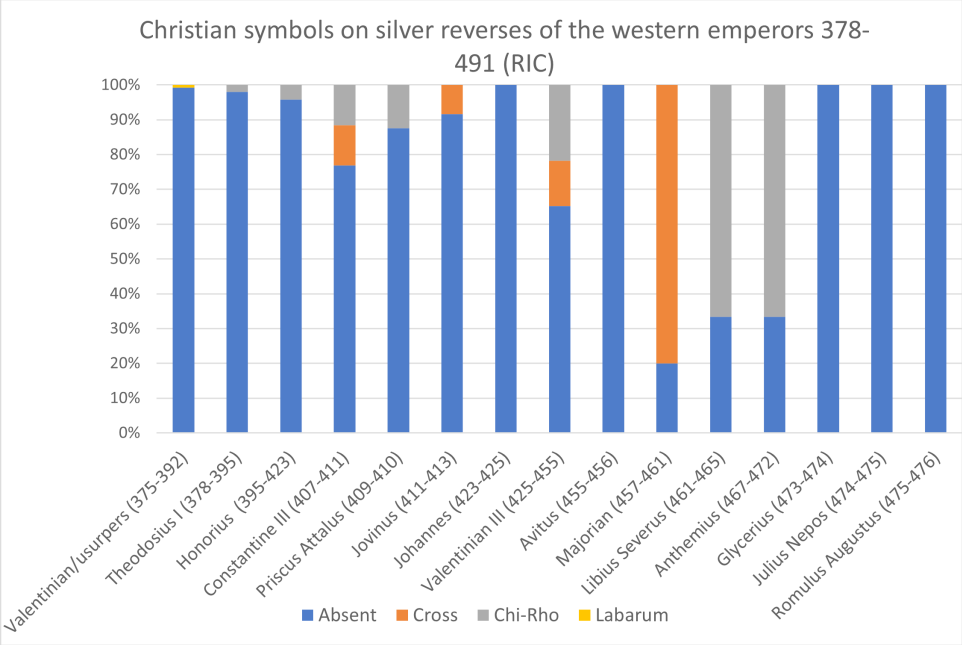


Christian symbols rev.	Valentinian/usurpers	Theodosius I	Arcadius	Theodosius II
Absent	123	48	43	19
Cross	0	0	1	3
Chi-Rho	0	1	2	2
Labarum	1	0	0	0
Christian symbols rev.	**Marcian**	**Leo I**	**Basiliscus**	**Zeno**
Absent	10	12	4	18
Cross	2	1	0	4
Chi-Rho	0	3	0	1
Labarum	0	0	0	0

Figure 11: Christian symbols on silver reverse types of the eastern emperors 378–491 (*RIC*)

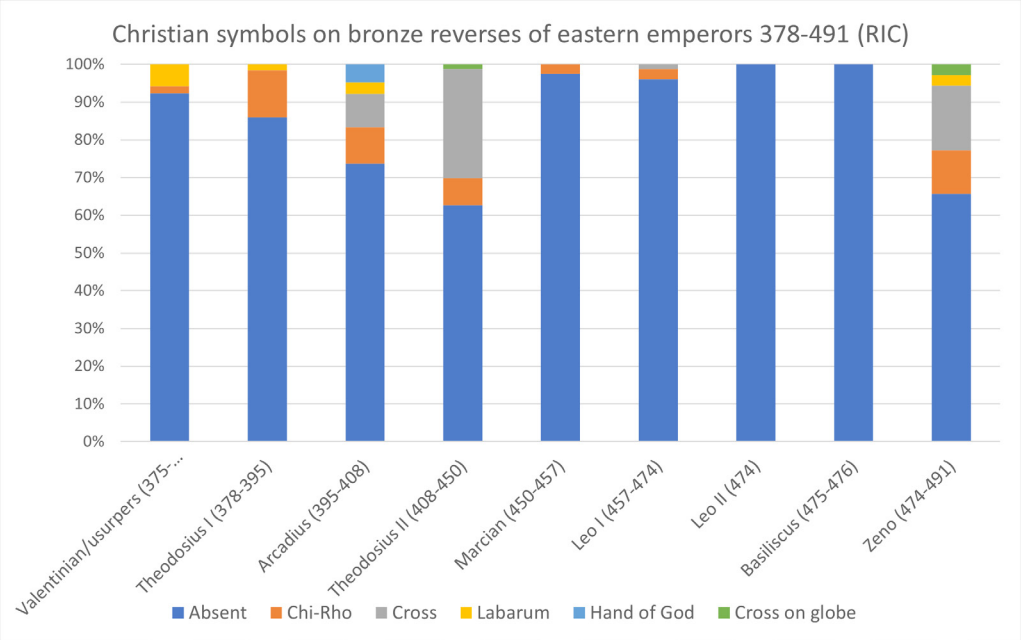
10.1% of the gold reverse types of Theodosius I depicted a Christian symbol (**table 5** & **figures 9–14**). After the division of the empire in 395, on gold reverse types of the eastern emperors Christian symbols began to dominate reverse types during the long reign of Theodosius II. The same development could be seen in the western part of the empire. On the coins of the emperors of the early fifth century only between 5 and 15% of the reverses contained Christian symbols (**figure 10**). The coinage of Johannes was the turning point in this case, as Christian symbols were present on the majority of his reverse types. There remains some differentiation in the use of Christian symbols but overall Christian symbols were present on the majority of the gold reverse types of the late Roman emperors in the east and west from the mid-fifth century onwards (**figures 9** & **10**).

A different trend can be seen on the silver and bronze reverse types of the late Roman emperors (**figures 11–14**). The use of Christian symbols on silver reverse types of the eastern emperors remains limited, one labarum type and a few crosses and chi-rho appear on some silver reverses but overall Christian symbols are absent (**figure 11**). On the silver reverses



Christian symbols rev.	Valentinian / usurpers	Theodosius I	Honorius	Constantine III
Absent	123	48	46	20
Cross	0	0	0	3
Chi-Rho	0	1	2	3
Labarum	1	0	0	0
Christian symbols rev.	**Priscus Attalus**	**Jovinus**	**Johannes**	**Valentinian III**
Absent	7	11	2	15
Cross	0	1	0	3
Chi-Rho	1	0	0	5
Labarum	0	0	0	0
Christian symbols rev.	**Avitus**	**Majorian**	**Libius Severus**	**Anthemius**
Absent	1	1	1	2
Cross	0	4	0	0
Chi-Rho	0	0	2	4
Labarum	0	0	0	0
Christian symbols rev.	**Glycerius**	**Julius Nepos**	**Romulus Augustus**	
Absent	1	3	1	
Cross	0	0	0	
Chi-Rho	0	0	0	
Labarum	0	0	0	

Figure 12: Christian symbols on silver reverse types of the western emperors 378–491 (*RIC*)

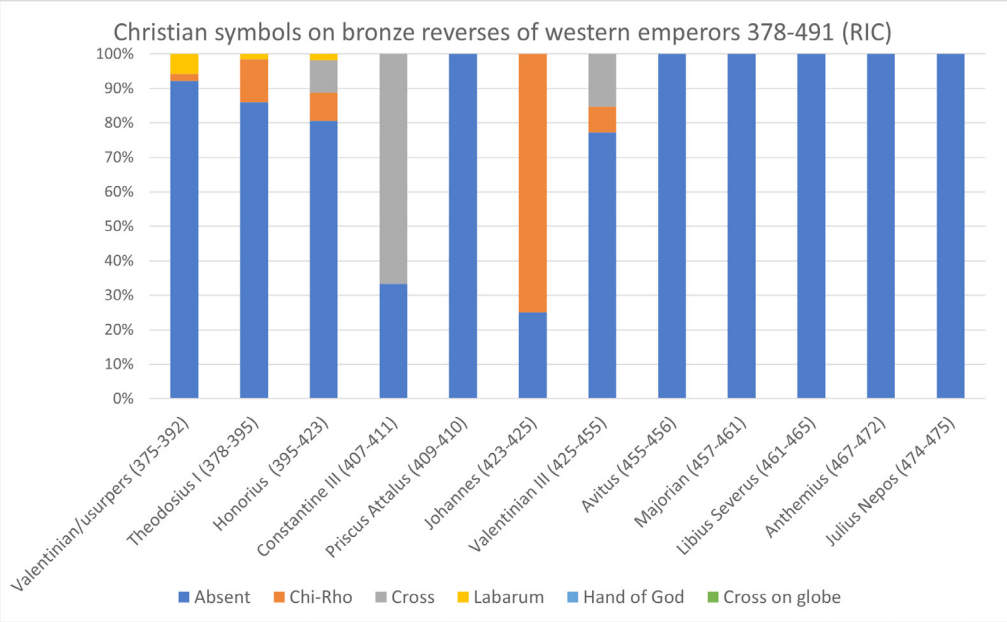


Christian symbols rev.	Valentinian / usurpers	Theodosius I	Arcadius	Theodosius II	
Absent	286	160	123	52	
Chi-Rho	6	23	16	6	
Cross	0	0	15	24	
Labarum	18	3	5	0	
Hand of God	0	0	8	0	
Cross on globe	0	0	0	1	
Christian symbols rev.	**Marcian**	**Leo I**	**Leo II**	**Basiliscus**	**Zeno**
Absent	39	73	1	8	23
Chi-Rho	1	2	0	0	4
Cross	0	1	0	0	6
Labarum	0	0	0	0	1
Hand of God	0	0	0	0	0
Cross on globe	0	0	0	0	1

Figure 13: Christian symbols on bronze reverse types of the eastern emperors 378–491 (*RIC*)

of the western emperors somewhat the same trend can be seen, Christian symbols are mostly absent only appearing in a few cases as a cross or Chi-Rho. There are a few exceptions, namely the reigns of Majorian, Libius Severus, and Anthemius, where the majority of silver reverses contain a Christian symbol these emperors did only reign for a few years, however, and had consequently very few silver types (**figure 12**)[92]. The bronze reverses of the late Roman

[92] In the RIC catalogue there are only five silver types of Majorian, three of Libius Severus, and six for the reign of Anthemius.



Christian symbols rev.	Valentinian/usurpers	Theodosius I	Honorius	Constantine III
Absent	286	160	87	3
Chi-Rho	6	23	9	0
Cross	0	0	10	6
Labarum	18	3	2	0
Hand of God	0	0	0	0
Cross on globe	0	0	0	0
Christian symbols rev.	**Priscus Attalus**	**Johannes**	**Valentinian III**	**Avitus**
Absent	2	2	61	3
Chi-Rho	0	6	6	0
Cross	0	0	12	0
Labarum	0	0	0	0
Hand of God	0	0	0	0
Cross on globe	0	0	0	0
Christian symbols rev.	**Majorian**	**Libius Severus**	**Anthemius**	**Julius Nepos**
Absent	16	4	10	1
Chi-Rho	0	0	0	0
Cross	0	0	0	0
Labarum	0	0	0	0
Hand of God	0	0	0	0
Cross on globe	0	0	0	0

Figure 14: Christian symbols on bronze reverse types of the western emperors 378–491 (*RIC*)

emperors were also mostly without Christian symbols, at least 60% of each emperor's bronze reverses were devoid of any Christian symbolism. Two short-reigning emperors, Leo II and Basiliscus, have no Christian symbols on their bronze reverses indicating moreover that the low number of types from short-reigning emperors can show tendencies that do not fit within the general trend (**figure 13**)[93]. Bronze reverses of the western emperors reveal a different image. A majority of the bronze reverse types contain Christian symbols on the coins of two short-reigning emperors, Constantine III (r. 409–411) and Johannes (r. 423–425), but because of their short-reigns, their coins will have been relatively rare in circulation[94]. Besides these two exceptions, Christian symbols remain a small minority on the reverses of the western emperors or from the reign of Avitus onwards are completely absent (**figure 14**).

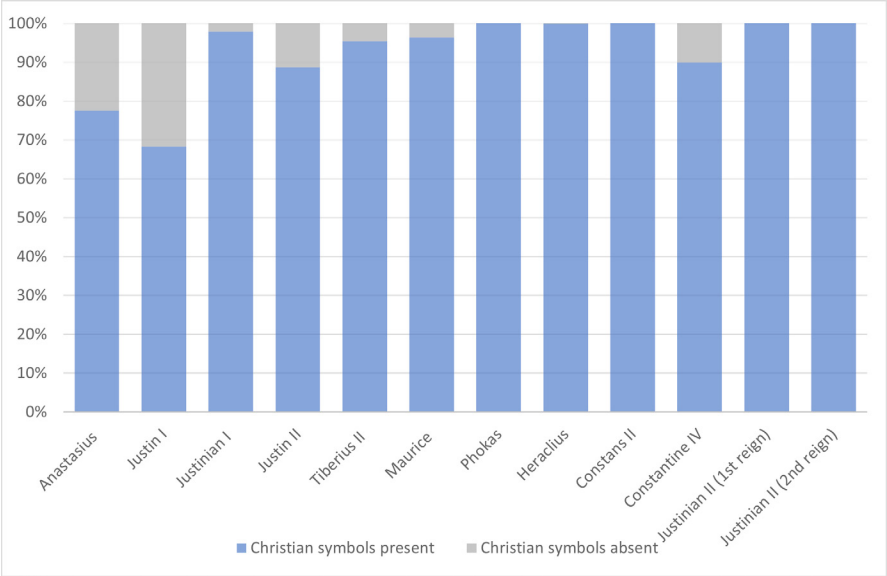
In the end, the coinage of the late Roman empire was only partly ›Christianised‹. The Christianisation took place primarily for the gold coin audience and even on these types the ›Christian‹ aspect was no more than a cross (on globe), Chi-Rho, *Manus Dei* or labarum added to an otherwise non-religious type, like Victory or Constantinopolis. These ›Christian‹ symbols are no more than a small cross on the attire, a Chi-Rho on a shield or a ›Christianised‹ imperial attribute. Unlike the gold reverses, the reverses of silver and bronze coins were also mostly devoid of Christian symbols with some exceptions regarding short-reigning (western) emperors. Finally, the obverses of each metal class remain almost completely devoid of Christian symbolism. Some crosses, Chi-Rho's or cruciform sceptres can be found on the attire or in the hands of the emperor. Besides those symbols, the Manus Dei crowning the emperor/empress from above also appears on some obverses (**table 6**). These are, however, a small minority in the large corpus of generic profile bust obverse types without Christian symbols. Of the 2,722 types, only 233 (8.5%) contain some Christian symbol on the obverse of the coin, however minor that might be. Christian symbols and types were mostly limited to gold coins. Even though the massively produced bronze coins in this period only partly contained Christian symbols (maximum 40%) because of the massive output and daily use of these small low-value coins it seems likely that these types would have been known by many more people than just the ›gold coin audience‹. Ultimately, however, the transformation from a pagan iconography to a completely Christianised obverse ruler image and reverse type had yet to take place.

Byzantine coinage

Zeno is the last emperor whose coinage is considered ›Roman‹, therefore his coins present the end of the ›Roman coinage‹ and subsequently the coinage of Anastasius represents the beginning of ›Byzantine coinage‹. This is only an arbitrary modern-day classification based solely on reformations in the bronze denominational system which started in 498[95]. This section will present the subsequent phase of the ›Christianisation‹ of imperial numismatic iconography on the coins of the early Byzantine emperors. As mentioned before, this section is not based on a typological catalogue, like *RIC*, but rather on the quantities of museum specimens in the catalogue of the *DOC* collection.

Anastasius, like Marcian, also issued a coin celebrating his wedding on which Christ appeared on the reverse between Anastasius and his bride[96]. It is likely that this coin would have functioned as a wedding token since only one specimen is recorded in the *DOC* catalogue

[93] The amount of bronze reverse types from Leo II and Basiliscus in the RIC catalogue is respectively one and eight.
[94] There are respectively nine and eight bronze reverse types for Constantine III and Johannes in the RIC catalogue.
[95] Whitting 1973, 89 f.; Grierson 1999, 1 f.; Metcalf 1961, 140 f.
[96] See: DOC I Anastasius – 2; Whitting 1973, 98 f.; Somogyi 2016, 148.



Ruler	Christian symbols present	Christian symbols absent
Anastasius	226	65
Justin I	142	67
Justinian I	1117	23
Justin II	566	72
Tiberius II	186	9
Maurice	724	27
Phokas	388	0
Heraclius	902	1
Constans II	685	0
Constantine IV	221	26
Justinian II (1st reign)	162	0
Justinian II (2nd reign)	97	0

Figure 15: Appearance of Christian symbols on Byzantine coins 491–711 (*DOC*)

struck in Constantinople in 491, the year of the marriage. Besides the slightly altered long cross of Victoria during the monetary reforms of 498, Anastasius' coinage is no more or less ›Christian‹ than the coins of his Roman predecessors. 226 (78%) of the 291 coins struck during the reign of Anastasius in the *DOC* catalogue contain at least some Christian symbols on the obverse or reverse (**figure 15**)[97]. On the coins of Justin I the Victoria reverse type was changed into what the *DOC* catalogue identifies as a ›facing angel‹ (**image VII**)[98]. However, when comparing the Victoria type that was struck on Justin's coins before 519 with the ›angel‹ type, the differences between what should be a female Victoria and a male ›angel‹ are far from obvious (**image VII**). According to Grierson the change of sex from female Victory to male (arch)angel could be attributed to »the disappearance of the high girdle below

97 Fagerlie 1967, 119–121.
98 See: DOC I Justin I – 2b.

DOC Justin I 1b

DOC Justin I 2b

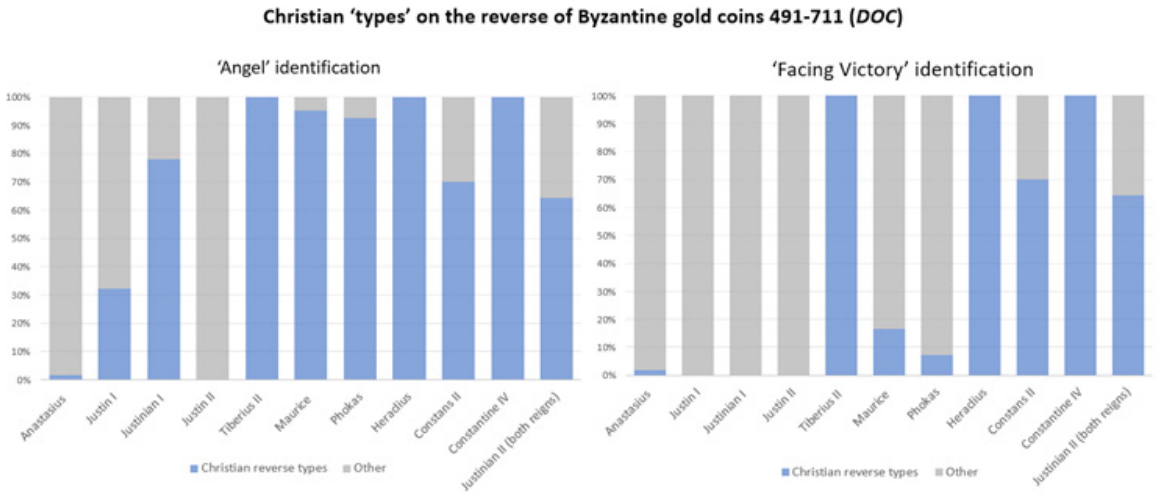
Image VII: Left: Victory reverse type on a solidus of Justin I from Constantinople (518–519 AD). Right: ›Angel‹ reverse type on a solidus from Justin I from Constantinople (519–527 AD)

Image VIII: Sixth-century depiction of angels from the churches of San Vitale (left) and San Apollinare Nuovo (right) in Ravenna

the breasts«[99]. In the Bible, angels are always referred to as male; therefore, in early Christian art, they were depicted as (young) men[100]. When comparing the ›angel‹ of Justin I's solidi reverses to angels in sixth-century Byzantine mosaics a resemblance can be found (**image VIII**).

Angels were initially depicted as people, but from the late fourth century onwards they were represented with wings modelled on the pagan female personification of victory. The only subtle difference is that Victoria wears a *peplum* which could expose a breast or a leg, whereas an angel is always fully covered by his toga[101]. In this case, both the ›angel‹ and Victoria are fully covered by their toga (**image VII**). The fact that the depiction of the Christian angel was modelled on that of Victoria makes the interpretation of this ›Christian‹ type high-

99 Grierson 1982, 52 f.
100 Martin 2001, 12; Peers 2001, 89–125.
101 Martin 2001, 23.



Ruler	Christian types (FV)	Other	Ruler	Christian types (A)	Other
Anastasius	1	57	Anastasius	1	57
Justin I	0	28	Justin I	9	19
Justinian I	0	96	Justinian I	75	21
Justin II	0	61	Justin II	0	61
Tiberius II	35	0	Tiberius II	35	0
Maurice	18	90	Maurice	103	5
Phokas	8	101	Phokas	101	8
Heraclius	315	0	Heraclius	315	0
Constans II	207	89	Constans II	207	89
Constantine IV	91	0	Constantine IV	91	0
Justinian II (both reigns)	98	54	Justinian II (both reigns)	98	54

Figure 16: Christian types on the reverse of Byzantine gold coins 491–711 (*DOC*)

ly problematic. There is indeed a resemblance with the depiction of angels in contemporary mosaics but at the same time the ›angel‹ also logically resembles ancient depictions of Victoria. Moreover, the legend of this reverse type still reads – VICTORI-A AVGGG – referring to Victoria. Finally, the ›angel‹ only appears on solidi, the smaller gold denominations still depict the seated or walking Victory type, who also holds a *Globus Cruciger*. Even if the minting authority intended to issue an image of an ›angel‹ on the reverse, the similarity to Victoria, the legend still referring to Victoria, and Victoria still appearing on the lower gold denominations would probably have led the average beholder to believe this type simply was Victoria. In this case, an older catalogue may even be more accurate, since Warwick Wroth, in his 1908 *Catalogue of the Imperial Byzantine Coins in the British Museum*, did identify these types as Victoria[102].

The identification of the ›angel‹ type becomes especially important when considering the ›Christianisation‹ of the reverse types of

[102] Wroth 1908, 1.

Image IX: The *Globus Cruciger* type on a solidus (538–565) and a follis (538–539) from Constantinople

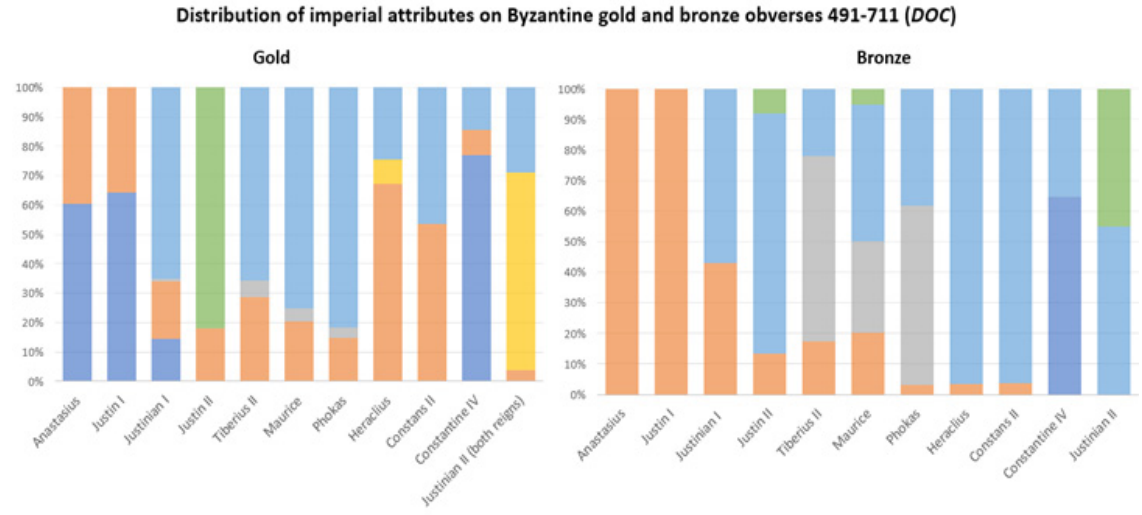
Byzantine gold coins. Accepting the ›angel‹ identification would lead to the conclusion that the solidi reverses of Justin I were partly ›Christianised‹ (9 out of 28–32%; **figure 16**) and those of his successor Justinian I were predominantly ›Christianised‹ (75 out of 96–78%; **figure 16**). When considering the ›angel‹ type simply as a ›facing Victoria‹ the solidi reverses do not contain any ›Christian‹ types until the reign of Tiberius II, with the only exception being Anastasius' wedding coin (**figure 16**).

An important step in ›Christianising‹ the ruler portrait was made by Justinian I with the addition of the *Globus Cruciger* to the hands of the emperor[103]. As discussed before, the *Globus Cruciger* did appear on late Roman gold reverses in the hand of Victoria or more rarely a standing junior or senior emperor on the reverse. Now, however, the *Globus Cruciger* appeared in the hands of the emperor on the obverse of regularly struck gold and bronze coins, ›Christianising‹ the ruler portrait most people would be familiar with (**image IX**)[104].

The *Globus Cruciger's* first appearance on the obverses of Byzantine coins can be precisely dated to the year 538. On the 12th of March in 538 the Byzantine army successfully repelled the Ostrogothic siege of Rome during the Gothic Wars (535–554)[105]. Perhaps, the sudden appearance of the *Globus Cruciger* on Justinian's coins could be related to this victory against the Arian Ostrogoths, who, although Christian, were seen as heretics by the orthodox Byzantines[106]. In this case, the sudden adoption of the symbol could be interpreted as a message of ›the triumph of orthodoxy‹. The globe, as a Roman sign of universal dominion, was now topped by a cross. The symbolic meaning of this imperial attribute was already described by the sixth-century historian Procopius of Caesarea:

> *In his left hand he (Justinian I) holds a globe, by which the sculptor signifies that the whole earth and sea are subject to him, yet he has neither sword nor spear nor any other weapon, but a cross stands upon the globe which he carries, the emblem by which he alone has obtained both his Empire and his victory in war*[107].

[103] Breckenridge 1959, 29-33; Boeck 2021, 28-31.
[104] For the history of the Globus Cruciger as a symbol of power, see: Schramm 1958.
[105] Lillington-Martin 2013, 613.
[106] For the role of Arianism within the Ostrogothic kingdom see: Brown 2007, 419-423; Moorhead 1992, 94-95; Chadwick 1981, 3; Burns 1984, 161.
[107] Prok. aed. I.II, trans. Dewing 1954, 33–37.



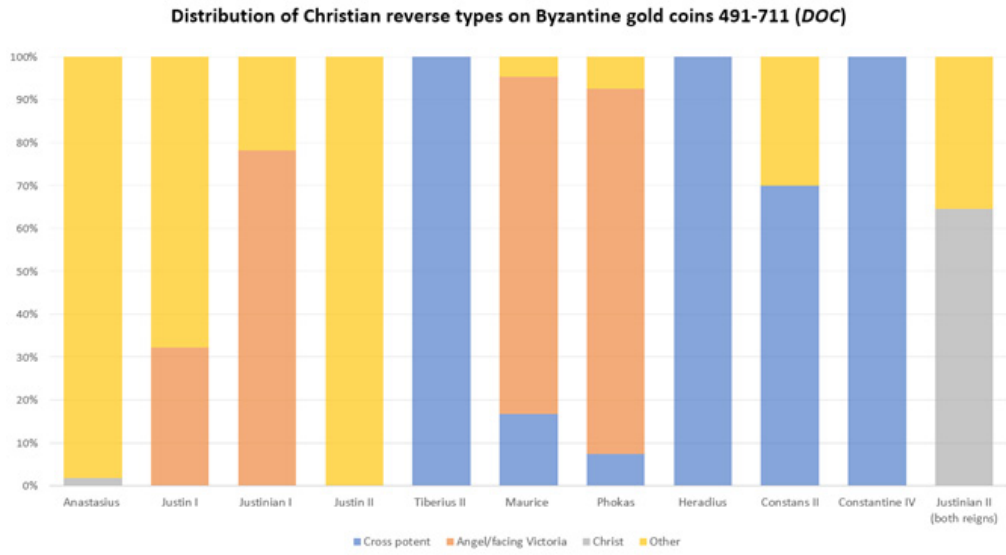
Gold

Emperor	Spear	Absent	Mappa	(Long) Cross	Gl. Cr.	Other
Anastasius	35	23	0	0	0	0
Justin I	18	10	0	0	0	0
Justinian I	14	19	0	0	63	0
Justin II	0	11	0	0	0	50
Tiberius II	0	10	2	0	23	0
Maurice	0	22	5	0	81	0
Phokas	0	16	4	0	89	0
Heraclius	0	212	0	26	77	0
Constans II	0	159	0	0	137	0
Constantine IV	70	8	0	0	13	0
Justinian II (both reigns)	0	6	0	102	44	0

Bronze

Emperor	Spear	Absent	Mappa	(Long) cross	Gl. Cr.	Other
Anastasius	0	229	0	0	0	0
Justin I	0	178	0	0	0	0
Justinian I	0	428	0	0	566	0
Justin II	0	75	0	0	438	45
Tiberius II	0	27	94	0	34	0
Maurice	0	128	190	0	284	32
Phokas	0	9	161	0	105	0
Heraclius	0	19	0	0	518	0
Constans II	0	13	0	0	325	0
Constantine IV	82	0	0	0	45	0
Justinian II (both reigns)	0	0	0	0	55	45

Figure 17: Distribution of imperial attributes on Byzantine gold and bronze obverses 491–711 (*DOC*)



Ruler	Cross potent	Angel/Facing Victoria	Christ	Other
Anastasius	0	0	1	57
Justin I	0	9	0	19
Justinian I	0	75	0	21
Justin II	0	0	0	61
Tiberius II	35	0	0	0
Maurice	18	85	0	5
Phokas	8	93	0	8
Heraclius	315	0	0	0
Constans II	207	0	0	89
Constantine IV	91	0	0	0
Justinian II (both reigns)	0	0	98	54

Figure 18: Distribution of Christian reverse types on Byzantine gold coins 491–711 (*DOC*)

The fact that this imperial attribute appeared not only on the gold but also immediately on the bronze coins indicates that this was an imperial message for all levels of society. Justinian holds a *Globus Cruciger* on 566 (57%) of his 994 bronze coins in the *DOC* catalogue (**figure 17**). On Justinian's solidi, the *Globus Cruciger* can be found on 63 (66%) of the 96 gold coins of Justinian I in the *DOC* catalogue (**figure 17**). The same symbol also appeared in the hands of Justinian's bronze horseman which was put on a monumental column in Constantinople in 543[108]. Justinian's attribute change was an important step in the ›Christianisation‹ of the numismatic ruler portrait. The emperor was no longer represented with a military or consular symbol, but rather with the *Globus Cruciger* indicating that his rule and successes were by the grace of God. The *Globus Cruciger* remained on the coinage of Byzantine emperors, although its dominance fluctuated, until the very end of the empire (**figure 17**)[109]. Perhaps the success of the *Globus Cruciger* is due to the subtle blending of Roman and Christian sym-

[108] Boeck 2021, 28–31, 57.
[109] Saxby 2017, 79 f.

Image X: Solidus (579–582 AD) from Ravenna depicting Tiberius II with a crown-cross and a *Globus Cruciger.* Reverse: Cross potent

bols creating a completely new hybrid model of Byzantine imperial imagery. Needless to say, this Roman-Christian symbol was subsequently adopted by many medieval and early-modern courts in Europe.

The coinage of Justinian's successor, Justin II, could be seen as a ›step back‹ in the gradual ›Christianisation‹ of Byzantine numismatic iconography (**figures 17** & **18**). This ›dechristianisation‹ did not go unnoticed by contemporary beholders:

> *And further, he (Tiberius II) also made a public profession of being a Christian; for Justin (II) had introduced in the coinage of his darics a female figure, which was generally compared to Venus, and this Tiberius discontinued, and had a cross struck upon the reverse of his coins: and this act, as he himself said, was dictated to him in a vision*[110].

During the reign of Justin II, the reverse type of the solidi was changed from the ›angel‹ type to Constantinopolis. This ancient personification was either misunderstood or deliberately misinterpreted as a female figure who was »generally compared to Venus« by John of Ephesus[111]. When Tiberius II replaced the Constantinopolis type with the cross-potent reverse type, John of Ephesus subsequently praised the emperor as making »a public profession of being a Christian«. Evidently, the content of the reverse type of the solidi mattered to John of Ephesus and, perhaps more importantly, he held the emperor responsible for any changes of the numismatic iconography[112]. It seems John of Ephesus did not understand the reverse type correctly, as Constantinopolis was depicted and not Venus, but he did interpret the type as ›pagan‹ or at the very least as ›not Christian‹. This is an important, and rare, contemporary reception to a Byzantine reverse type indicating that the sudden replacement of iconographic types could lead to negative reactions by contemporary beholders.

The replacement of the reverse type of Justin II is only remarkable if you consider the previous reverse type ›Christian‹. If this type inde-

[110] John of Ephesus, Ecclesiastical History book III-14, trans. Smith 1860, 140.

[111] The interpretation of the type as pagan might be a conscious misunderstanding of Justin's reverse type to fuel criticism of the emperor by the persecuted miaphysite author John of Ephesus, for this argument see: Hillen 2024, 137 f.

[112] For John of Ephesus comments on the coinage of Justin II see also: Cameron 1980, 83; Grierson 1999, 35. 52; Vorderstrasse 2009, 16. 23 f.; for John of Ephesus in general see: van Ginkel 1995.

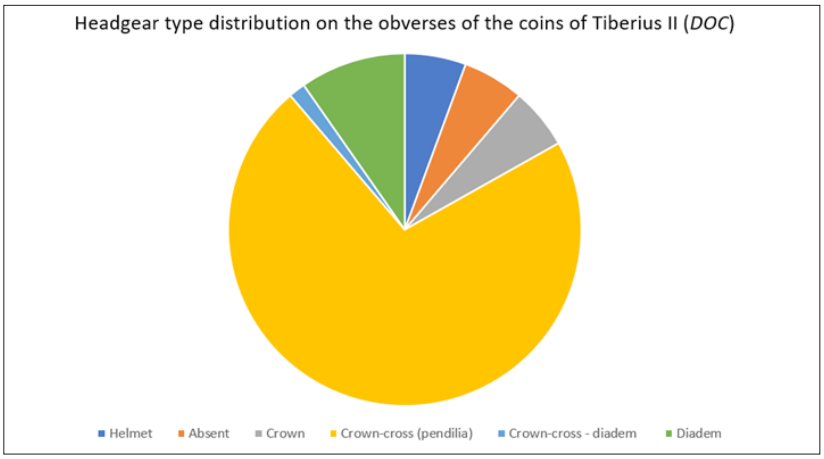
Image XI: The cross potent in the fourth-century mosaic of Santa Pudenziana (left) and the eight-century mosaic of Hagia Eirene (right)

ed depicted an ›angel‹, the replacement with the ancient personification of the city is somewhat surprising. If we, however, consider the ›angel‹ type simply as a variation of the Victory type, logically aligning with the legend, then the change into Constantinopolis is no more than a simple change of an ancient personification, from victory to capital (**figure 16**). This argument could also be connected to the text of John of Ephesus in two different ways: first, the author criticizes the Constantinopolis type as ›pagan‹ based on a wrong assumption, that it is a Venus-like figure, indicating that types could easily be misunderstood. Secondly, the author praises Tiberius II for changing the reverse type into a Christian image. This type was, however, different from any type that had been struck before; in other words, we do not know whether the author would have considered the ›angel‹ type a Christian symbol or whether he would have ›misunderstood‹ this type as well for an ancient goddess which it was extremely similar to. Whether Justin II radically changed the reverse type or not, the fact remains that Christian symbols were almost completely absent from his gold coins (**figures 17** & **18**).

The Constantinopolis reverse type was immediately replaced when Tiberius II inherited the throne changing the reverse type into that of the cross potent (**image X**). This type depicts a cross on a set of stairs, representing Golgotha[113]. This Christian image could be connected to examples found in Byzantine art, like the fifth-century mosaic of Santa Pudenziana in Rome and the eighth-century mosaic of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople (**image XI**)[114]. It is important to mention that this reverse change also impacted the lower gold denominations, on which the Victory types had always remained. This becomes especially important considering the earlier relation between the solidus reverse types and those of the lower gold denominations. When Justin I supposedly changed the reverse type of Victoria into that of

[113] Bellinger & Berlincourt 1962, 49–54, 61–64; Somogyi 2016, 149; Kent 1960, 131 f.; Breckenridge 1959, 34 f.

[114] For the dating of the mosaic of Santa Pudenziana see: Schlattler 1989, 155 f.; for the dating and historical background of the mosaic in the apse of Hagia Eirene see: Adams 1979.



Headgear type on the obverse	Number of coins
Helmet	11
Absent	11
Crown	11
Crown-cross (pendilia)	140
Crown-cross - diadem	3
Diadem	19

Figure 19: Distribution of headgear types on the obverses of the coins of Tiberius II (*DOC*)

the ›angel‹, the lower gold denominations kept depicting Victory. The reverse type change of Tiberius II was, however, immediately applied to all gold denominations (**figure 18**).

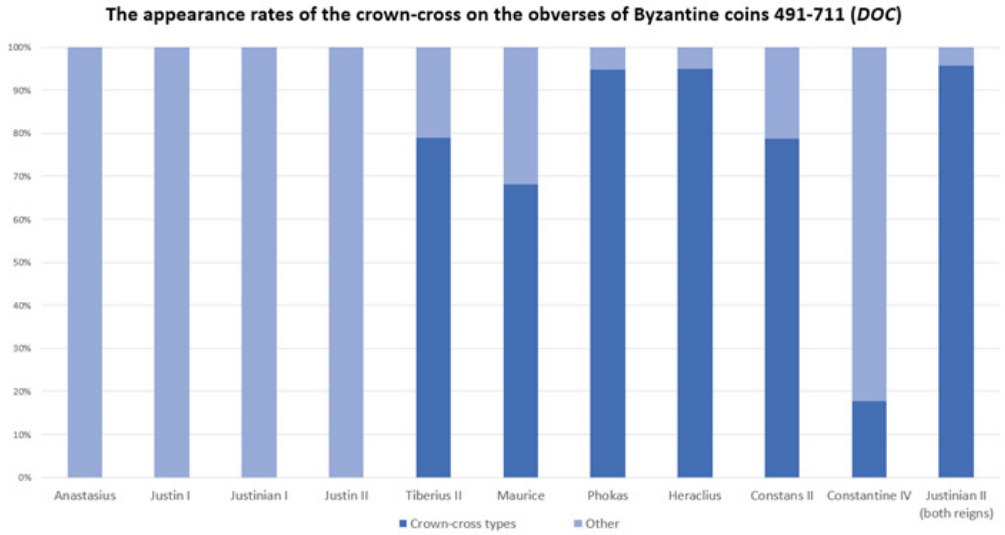
Tiberius' numismatic innovations did not only affect the gold reverse types, the ruler portrait was also altered during his reign. The headgear of the emperor was for the first time ›Christianised‹, replacing the diadem or military helmet with a crown topped by a cross on solidi and bronze coins (**image X**)[115]. The coronation ritual, in which the emperor was crowned by the patriarch in Hagia Sophia, was already in place since either the coronation of Leo I (457) or that of Anastasius I (491)[116]. The emperor was, however, rarely depicted with a crown on coins, and never with the crown cross. Considering all of Tiberius' coins together, his transformation of the headgear types becomes apparent, since 154 (78%) of his 195 coins in the *DOC* catalogue depict this new headgear type (**figure 19**). After Tiberius' headgear change, the newly introduced crown cross remained the most dominant headgear type on Byzantine coins in this period, except for the military coinage of Constantine IV (**figure 20**)[117].

It seems evident that the crown cross is a more distinct Christian headgear type than the diadem or helmet could have ever been. The suddenness of this transformation, together

115 Somogyi 2016, 149.

116 There is a debate concerning whether Leo I or Anastasius was the first emperor to be crowned by the patriarch, for Anastasius see: Winkelmann 1978, 472; Meier 2009, 70; Lilie 1995, 10; for Leo I, see: Winkelmann 1978, 470. The only crowns that appear on Byzantine coins before the reign of Tiberius II are the so-called ›three-pointed‹ crowns on the, earlier discussed, marriage coins of Marcian and Anastasius, as well as on rare bronze coins (half follis and decanummium) issued during the reign of Justin II in Antioch. For these crowns, see: DOC 1 Anastasius - 2; DOC 1 Justin I – 161–173; for the coronation ritual in Byzantium see: Boak 1919, 37; Herrin 2007, 30 f.

117 For the military coinage of Constantine IV, see: Hillen 2023, 81 f.



Emperor	Crown-cross types	Other
Anastasius	0	291
Justin I	0	209
Justinian I	0	1140
Justin II	0	638
Tiberius II	154	41
Maurice	511	240
Phokas	368	20
Heraclius	858	45
Constans II	539	146
Constantine IV	44	203
Justinian II (both reigns)	248	11

Figure 20: Appearance rates of the crown cross on obverses of Byzantine coins 491–711 (*DOC*)

with the introduction of the cross-potent type, raises questions, however, since it cannot be linked to the introduction of the coronation ritual. Tiberius' reign does not leave any obvious clue either. Being mostly known as an emperor who spent a tremendous amount of money and left the state nearly bankrupt. There are no significant events to which this sudden numismatic transformation could be linked, like the victory over the Zoroastrian Sassanians during the reign of Theodosius II or the successful defence of Rome against the Arian Ostrogoths during the reign of Justinian I. The only clue is that Tiberius' predecessor Justin II was the last emperor to be crowned with the diadem during the coronation ritual[118]. Perhaps, therefore, Tiberius II decided that since he removed the diadem from his coronation ceremony this headgear type also needed to be replaced on his numismatic self-representations.

Not all of Tiberius II's Christian innovations were there to stay (**figures 18** & **20**). Tiberius II's reverse-type innovation did, initially, not last. Maurice's solidi reverted to the ›angel‹,

[118] Cameron 1979, 10; MacCormack 1981, 241.

Image XII – The four different solidi types struck during the reigns of Justinian II (r. 685-695, 705–711)

or ›facing Victory‹, type (**image VII** & **figure 18**). Interestingly, the lower gold denominations struck under the authority of Maurice kept depicting the cross potent type, as well as the rare ceremonial silver coins. One exceptional semissis and tremissis type only struck in Rome, Carthage and Ravenna still depict Victoria but this time as a facing figure with only her head turned left. When comparing this Victoria type with the older Victoria type and the ›angel‹ type the differences are so marginal that the contemporary identification of the ›angel‹ seems even more unlikely than on previously discussed types[119]. On the coinage of the early seventh-century emperors little changed in terms of ›Christian‹ symbolism, except for the return of the cross potent type on Heraclius' gold coins which meant the end of the ambiguous ›angel‹ type that was last struck on Phocas' solidi (**figure 18**). Moreover, Constans II issued a bronze coin type including the new obverse legend εν τουτο νικα referencing the words Constantine would have seen during his vision before the battle at the Milvian Bridge in 312[120]. Although the legend refers to a by-now ›Christian event‹ the depiction of Constans II is not different from that of earlier emperors. In general, the Heraclian coinage is better characterised by the introduction of their heirs on the obverse and reverse of coins[121].

Overall, the Byzantine coinage of the seventh century was considerably more ›Christianised‹ than that of the fifth and sixth centuries (**figure 17**). Although variations of imperial attributes and some changes in reverse types remained present (**figures 17** & **18**) in general, the numismatic iconography of Byzantine coinage had been ›Christianised‹. Slowly, but surely, Christian symbols and types replaced, or merged with, the ancient Roman numismatic traditions. Apart from the rare and marginal ›marriage coins‹, Christ had not been present on any late Roman or Byzantine coin. It was not until the reign(s) of the last Heraclian emperor, Justinian II, that Christ himself finally appeared on regularly struck coins.

119 See: DOC I Maurice – 234/235, 282 & 287.
120 See: DOC 2.2 Constans II – 59a.
121 For the introduction of heirs on the coins of Heraclius and Constans II, see: Humphreys 2019.

Period	Obverse types (Image IX)	Reverse types (Image IX)
685–692 (Type A)	Bust of Justinian sometimes with a small beard – Chlamys – Crown-cross – Rh. Globus Cruciger	Cross potent on three steps
692–695 (Type B)	Christ Pantocrator cross behind head, long beard and mustache, and long hair – pallium and collobium – Rh. Raised in benediction – Lh. Closed book	Justinian II standing – *loros* – Rh. cross potent on base and two steps – Lh. *Akakia*
705–706 (Type C)	Christ Pantocrator cross behind head, short mustache and beard, and short curly hair – *pallium* and *collobium* – Rh. Raised in benediction – Lh. Closed book	Bust of Justinian with small mustache and beard – *loros* – Crown-cross – Rh. Cross potent on base and three steps – Lh. Patriarchal cross on globe (with PAX inscription)
706–711 (Type D)	Christ Pantocrator cross behind head, short mustache and beard, and short curly hair – *pallium* and *collobium* – Rh. Raised in benediction – Lh. Closed book	Two imperial busts (L. Justinian II bearded; R. Tiberius beardless) – Chlamys – Crown-cross – both holding on to Cross potent on base and two steps

Table 7: Classification of the solidi struck during the reign(s) of Justinian II

Christ Pantocrator and Justinian II

The iconographic numismatic innovations of Justinian II were unprecedented and would affect the Byzantine gold iconography until the last Byzantine coins ever struck. The iconography of Justinian II's solidi completely changed in 692, the obverse type no longer portrayed the emperor but Christ demoting the emperor to the reverse[122]. The gold coinage of Justinian II can be divided into four classes which may be distinguished as follows (**table 7**)[123].

The gold and silver obverse types struck during the first reign of Justinian II portray Christ broad-faced and with long hair, much like the sixth-century Pantocrator icon from the monastery of Saint Catherine in the Sinaï or the later twelfth-century Pantocrator mosaic in the monastery of Daphni (**image XIII**). There are no preserved examples of this Pantocrator type from Constantinople, but, according to the nineteenth-century restoration of the Fossati brothers, a likewise Pantocrator type would have been depicted in the dome of Justinian's Hagia Sophia[124]. On this type, Christ raises his right hand in benediction and holds a closed book in his left hand, a cross is situated behind his head but a nimbus is lacking (**image XIII**). The second Pantocrator type (type C & D) struck from 705 onwards raises more questions, on this type Christ is depicted with a longer thinner face and with a smaller curly beard and hair. Scholars have suggested that the dedication miniature in the sixth-century illuminated manuscript known as the Syriac Rabbula Gospels might have been the inspiration for type C & D Pantocrator (**image XIV**). Other examples of this Pantocrator type are very rare and only found in later depictions, like the mosaics in the Hagia Sophia in Kyiv and on a fresco in the church of Saint Panteleimon in Nerezi (**image XIV**)[125]. Although the direct inspiration for both Pantocrator types cannot be precisely reconstructed, it seems likely that they were both inspired by mosaics, frescoes, or icons that could be found in churches or (palace) chapels in Constantinople.

[122] Cormack 2000, 73; Breckenridge 1959, 27; Bellinger 1950, 107–111.

[123] This class division of the coinage of Justinian is based on that of the DOC catalog, see: Grierson 1968, 574–609 (685–695 AD). 644–663 (705–711 AD).

[124] For the restoration of Hagia Sophia's mosaics and the potential Christ Pantocrator in the dome see: Hoffmann 1999.

[125] Breckenridge 1959, 61 f.

Image XIII: Examples of the ›first Pantocrator type‹ on a sixth-century icon and eleventh-century mosaic

Image XIV: Examples of the ›second Pantocrator type‹ on an eleventh-century fresco, eleventh- and twelfth-century mosaic, and a sixth-century illuminated manuscript

More important than the inspiration for these depictions of Christ is the reason for the emergence of these types. The iconography of imperial coinage often reflected significant changes in imperial policy as far as they were susceptible of representation in numismatic iconography[126]. The connection between the emergence of these new obverse types and the reign(s) of Justinian has been examined in various studies, most notably by And-

126 Carile 2016, 75-98; Saxby 2017, 2–4.

ré Grabar, James D. Breckenridge, and Mike Humphreys[127]. A political interpretation has focused on the relation between the obverse legend surrounding Christ arguing that the rhetoric of humility would indicate the mutual paradoxical relationship between the emperor and God; the emperor is the top of the earthly world but at the same time he is a slave to the kingdom of heaven[128]. A theological interpretation connects the sudden emergence of these Pantocrator types to the council of Trullo in 691. Two canons were issued at Trullo concerning the representation of Christ that could potentially be connected to the transformation of the numismatic iconography of Justinian II's gold coins[129].

There has also been debate about the exact dating of these reformed solidi, mainly because of the simultaneous numismatic transformation of Umayyad coinage during the reign of caliph Abd Al-Malik. The Arabs had used Byzantine coins until this point, it seems reasonable to assume that since Christ himself now decorated the obverse of the gold coins these coins were no longer deemed acceptable[130]. The *DOC* catalogue dates the Pantocrator types to 692, however when comparing the new solidi types with the iconography on imperial seals it seems that the numismatic change might have already occurred sometime between 689–691[131]. The Arabic *dinari* bear the *Hijri* dates H 74–77 (AD 693–697) and therefore seem to be a reaction to the numismatic reform of Justinian II in 692 or 689/690. On the other hand, a comment in the text of the Byzantine historian Theophanes the Confessor (760–818) seems to suggest otherwise:

> *In this year (690/691) Justinian foolishly broke the peace with Abimelech; for he strove in his folly to move the population of the island of Cyprus and refused to accept the minted coin that had been sent by Abimelech[132].*

This text would date the transformation of the Arab gold coins to 690/691 meaning that the Pantocrator types, if issued in 692, could have been a reaction to the new Arab gold coins[133]. If this is the case, the sudden emergence of Christ on regularly struck Byzantine gold coins might have been a way of clearly distinguishing Byzantine coins from the newly emerged Arabic gold coins. Whether dated to 690 or 692, the ›Christianisation‹ of Justinian II's gold coins seems evident. Besides the introduction of Christ on the obverse, the ruler portrait, now for the first time on the reverse, also experienced important changes in this period. The ›reverse type‹ depicts the emperor standing, holding the cross potent in his right hand and an *Akakia* in his left. On the solidi struck between 705–711, the emperor bears a patriarchal cross in his left hand on an orb that has PAX inscribed in it. The legend on the reformed solidi reads – SERVUS CHRISTI – employing a new concept of imperial power, instead of the ›secular‹ triumphant emperor Justinian II depicts himself as an instrument of the divine will. Finally, even Justinian II's attire was ›Christianised‹, instead of the *chlamys* or military attire of his predecessors Justinian II appeared in the *loros*, the specific imperial attire for special occasions such as Easter or Pentecost. This visual innovation lasted for centuries not only being depicted on coins but also in mosaics, illuminated manuscripts, and ivories[134].

Considering quantities, an important notion to make is that the Pantocrator types were only struck on gold and some (ceremonial) silver coins. Bronze obverses simply depicted the

127 Breckenridge 1959, 18; Humphreys 2013, 229–244; Grabar 1957, 77–84. See also Woods 2024, 123–138 (non vidi).
128 Cormack 2000, 74.
129 Breckenridge 1959, 84-87; Humphreys 2013, 233 f.
130 Humphreys 2013, 239–241; Breckenridge 1959, 76; Miles 1967, 205–229; Grierson 1960, 241–264; Grabar 1957, 77–84; Treadwell 2012, 145–146.
131 Humphreys 2013, 235 f.; Breckenridge 1959, 92.
132 Theophanes the Confessor, Χρονογραφια, trans. Mango – Scott 1997, 509.
133 Breckenridge 1959, 74 f.
134 For the loros see also: Parani 2003, 18–27.

Obverse Christian symbols	Reverse Christian symbols	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Christ Pantocrator	Cross-potent - crown cross	85	3	0
Christ Pantocrator	Cross-potent	13	1	0
Crown cross – *Globus Cruciger*	Cross-potent	44	3	1
Absent	Cross-potent	6	0	0
Crown cross – *Globus Cruciger*	Cross with M/K/I	0	0	49
Crown cross – *Globus Cruciger* – long cross – Cross-potent	Absent	0	0	9
Globus Cruciger	Absent	0	0	5
Crown cross – Cross-potent – patriarchal cross	Cross	1	0	14
Crown cross – Patriarchal cross	Cross-potent	3	0	22

Table 8: Christian symbols on the coins of Justinian II in the *DOC* catalogue

emperor-type that appeared on gold reverses. Nonetheless, the impact of the numismatic reform of Justinian II seems evident: Christian symbols are present on all of the coins struck by Justinian II (**figure 15** & **table 8**). Christ himself appears on 85 (55.9%) of the 152 gold coins and on 4 (57.1%) of the 7 silver coins (**table 8**). Christ does not appear on the bronze coins, but Christian symbols do appear on all of these coins mostly on the obverse (**table 8**). The reverses, on which Justinian II appears himself, are dominated by the new imperial attributes of cross potent and the patriarchal cross, as well as the crown-cross (**figure 17** & **table 8**). Although the cross-potent type was more dominant on gold reverses of the earlier emperors of the Heraclian dynasty in comparison to Christ on the gold reverses of Justinian II (**figure 18**) the cross-potent type was often combined with the depiction of heirs. On Justinian II's gold coins, Christ appeared alone without any imperial message being present beside him, making this the logical endpoint of the ›Christianisation‹ of the Byzantine numismatic imperial iconography. Although the Pantocrator types disappeared for a while during the crisis of Byzantine iconoclasm, they re-emerged and persisted until the last Byzantine coins that were struck. Centuries after the reign of Justinian II, in the late tenth century, the image of Christ also began to appear on regularly struck bronze coins without the emperor being present on the reverse[135]. These so-called anonymous bronzes truly presented a Christian message without any imperial message besides it either on the obverse or reverse. After the reign of Justinian II, the God that delivered Constantine his triumph at the Milvian bridge finally appeared himself on regularly struck (gold) coins and would stay there for centuries to come.

Quantifying the phenomenon of ›Christianisation‹

After discussing the appearance of Christian symbols and types on the coinage of late Roman and Byzantine emperors, the question remains when it would be appropriate to speak of a ›Christianised‹ numismatic iconography. This obviously depends on the definition of when numismatic iconography could be seen as ›Christian‹, in that regard there are a few important remarks to be made. First of all, although coinage was used to spread political, ideological, and religious messages, it had above all a monetary function that worked on

[135] For the tenth-century anonymous bronzes, see: Whitting 1955, 89–99.

trust. Therefore radical changes of iconographic types were dangerous as they could lower the trust in the coins as a method of payment or lower the trust in the emperor himself, as occurred during the reign of Justin II. Secondly, the numismatic medium was, aside from its obvious monetary function, a prime medium of imperial communication. The emperor's portrait decorated the obverse of the Roman and Byzantine coins from the reign of Augustus until the numismatic reformation of Justinian II[136]. Christian symbols would, therefore, mostly appear on the reverse or as imperial attributes on the obverse.

This article has primarily considered ›Christianisation‹ from an iconographic perspective analysing the appearance of Christian symbols or types as a way of indicating when this medium is ›Christianised‹. One could, however, also consider that a generic type could acquire a Christian connotation because of the accompanying legend referring to a specific Christian meaning. In general, reverse legends can offer valuable information about how a reverse type was meant to be understood. Legends on the reverse of coins can specify the meaning or signify a specific part of the reverse type[137]. In the case of the earlier-mentioned εν τουτο νικα bronze types of Constans II, the traditional image of the emperor was now connected to the words Constantine saw in the sky before the battle at the Milvian bridge. In this manner, a Christian connotation could be bestowed upon a type that in itself did not seem particularly ›Christian‹. That being said, the examples of this practice are not plentiful. Another consideration could be given to types that do not have any Christian symbols but fit within a ›Christian‹ ruler iconography. For example, the rare Ticinum solidus that is only known from an auction depicts Constantine in a frontal manner something that becomes standard in later (Christian) Byzantine imperial images, the question is whether this should be connected to Christianity or more generally to the artistic transformation in late antiquity[138].

Christian types only occurred on gold, and sometimes silver, reverses and depicted a Christian image that could also be found in contemporary churches, chapels, or palaces. One exception concerns the full-scale Chi-Rho type that dominated the bronze reverses of Magnentius and Magnus Decentius and appeared on some bronzes of Constantius II. As discussed before, however, the connotation of the Chi-Rho seems to have been more related to the Constantinian dynasty and might have been used as a way to acquire legitimacy by the usurpers Magnentius and Magnus Decentius (**figure 8**). Byzantine bronze reverses were dominated by denominational, *officina*, and mint marks which left little room for other imagery. It took until the late tenth century for Christ to appear on bronze coins and completely Christianise the bronze coinage. On gold coin reverses Christian types became common but there was little variation, only a few different examples appear in this period, namely the ›angel‹, the cross potent, and Justinian II's Pantocrator types (**figure 18**). The ›marriage‹ coin of Anastasius already falls into a grey category, although the ›Christian‹ aspect seems evident the type depicts an imperial wedding making Christ more of an attribute than anything else. As earlier discussed, the Christian ›angel‹ type interpretation seems far from obvious, considering this type as simply a variation of the well-known Victoria types substantially changes the amount of Christian gold reverse types (**figure 16**). Only two types could be considered a true ›Christian‹ type without any doubt, these concern the cross-potent and

[136] For the introduction of the imperial bust during the reign of Augustus see: Burnett 2011.

[137] For the relation between reverse legend and type, see: Betjes 2022, 132–140.

[138] For this exceptional solidus type see: Haymann 2019. For the most recent auction this gold type was sold see: Numisbids, https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=lot&sid=2807&lot=424 (last visited 20-8-2024).

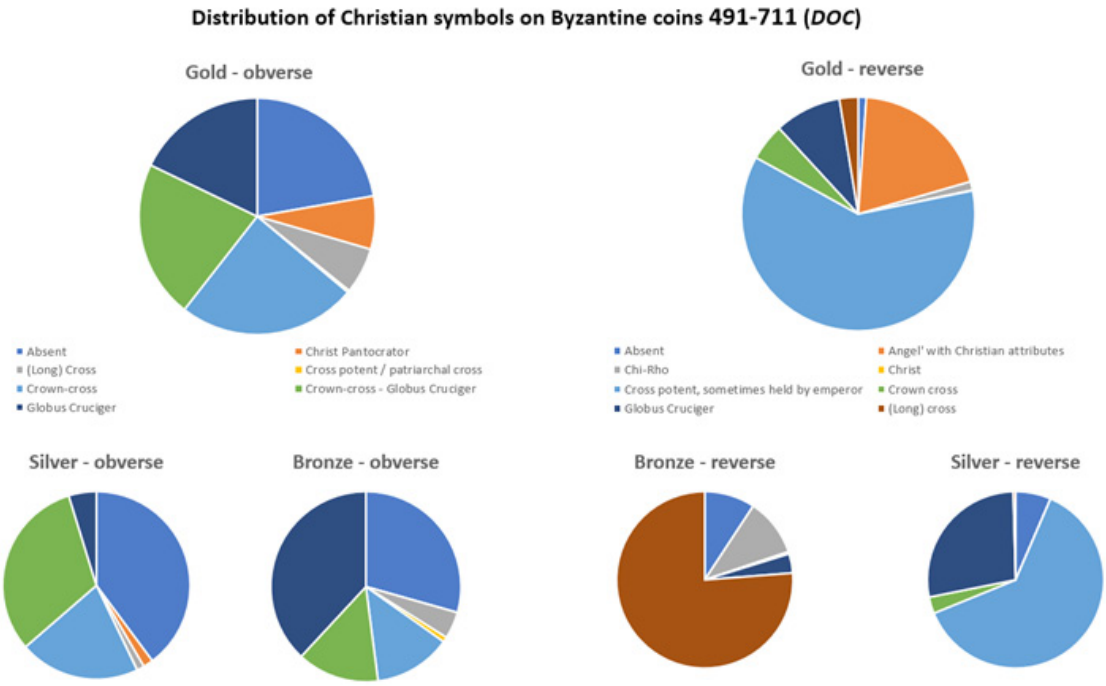
the Pantocrator types. In both cases, there is a direct reference to Christ and a connection could be made with Christian art presumably found in contemporary churches.

Considering these notions, a few different answers could be given to the question of when we could speak of a ›Christianised‹ imperial numismatic iconography. If we only consider when Christian symbols started to appear on the coins more regularly than non-Christian symbols the transformation could already be completed during the reign of some of the Constantinian emperors or contemporary usurpers. The transformation could already be completed on the gold reverses of the short-reigning emperor Nepotian (3rd–30th of June 350) (**figure 6**). The same argument could be made for the bronze reverses of the usurpers Magnentius (350–353), Magnus Decentius (351–353), and Vetranio (350) who primarily depict the Chi-Rho, in the case of Magnentius and Magnus Decentius as a full-scale reverse type (**image II**; **figure 8**). As argued before, the Chi-Rho is better understood as a Constantinian legitimacy symbol rather than an outright Christian statement. Besides the ambiguity of the Chi-Rho, on the gold, silver, and bronze coins of most of the emperors who reigned between 337–378 ›Christian‹ symbols were a relatively small minority (**figures 6**, **7** & **8**). The period of 337–378 is characterised by ambiguous small Christian symbols as additions to existing military/imperial types.

After Christianity became the state religion, Christian symbols became more frequent on late Roman coins. Christian symbols rapidly conquered the reverse types of late Roman gold coins (**figure 9**). From the (long) reign of Theodosius II (408–450) onwards the majority of the gold types of the eastern emperors depicted at least a Christian symbol, however marginal that might have been (**figure 9**). For the western emperors, this shift takes place during the reign of Johannes (424–425) (**figure 10**). In the early fifth century both in the east and the west the majority of the gold types contained some Christian symbol, a substantial difference from the fourth century (**figures 6** & **10**). Christian symbols did, however, remain rare on silver types in the east (**figure 11**). Only on the coinage of a few short-reigning emperors in the west were Christian symbols common on silver reverse types (**figure 12**). Overall, silver reverse types were considerably less ›Christianised‹ in the fifth century than gold reverses. Finally, on bronze reverses Christian symbols also remained relatively rare both in the east and the west, with the exceptions of the reigns of Constantine III and Johannes who both reigned for a few years likely resulting in the fact that their coins were relatively rare in circulation (**figures 13** & **14**). Christian symbols remained mostly limited to the gold audience and even for them they existed out of no more than a cross (on globe), Chi-Rho, Manus Dei, or labarum added to an otherwise non-Christian type, like Victory or Constantinopolis.

On Byzantine coinage, Christian symbols appeared on at least 75% of the coins of all considered emperors (**figure 15**). Considering the ›Christianisation‹ of the ruler's portrait on the obverse of the coins, a quite different periodisation emerges. Christian symbols were completely absent on the obverses of Theodosius I (**table 5**), on the coinage of his successors they did appear but only rarely and almost exclusively on gold coins (**table 6**). On the obverses of Byzantine coins, Christian symbols initially appeared only rarely until the introduction of the *Globus Cruciger* in 538 by Justinian I to regularly struck gold and bronze coins. Although some attribute variation remained after the reign of Justinian I, the *Globus Cruciger* remained the most dominant imperial attribute on Byzantine coins overall (**figures 17** & **21**). Justinian's reign could, therefore, be considered a key moment of change for the ›Christianisation‹ of the imperial portrait on the obverse (**figure 17**).

Considering reverses, the ›Christianisation‹ is considerably ›earlier‹ than on the obverses of late Roman coinage. Already during the (short) reigns of Nepotian and Vetranio in 350 did the majority of respectively gold and bronze reverse types depict Christian symbols



Christian symbols reverse (gold)	Number of coins	Christian symbols reverse (silver)	Number of coins	Christian symbols reverse (bronze)	Number of coins
Absent	15	Absent	15	Absent	382
Angel' with Christian attributes	262	Angel' with Christian attributes	0	Angel' with Christian attributes	0
Chi-Rho	16	Chi-Rho	0	Chi-Rho	437
Christ	1	Christ	0	Christ	0
Cross potent, sometimes held by emperor	826	Cross potent, sometimes held by emperor	144	Cross potent, sometimes held by emperor	9
Crown cross	69	Crown cross	7	Crown cross	7
Globus Cruciger	125	Globus Cruciger	64	Globus Cruciger	145
(Long) cross	35	(Long) cross	1	(Long) cross	3,146
Christian symbols obverse (gold)	**Number of coins**	**Christian symbols obverse (silver)**	**Number of coins**	**Christian symbols obverse (bronze)**	**Number of coins**
Absent	300	Absent	92	Absent	1,212
Christ Pantocrator	98	Christ Pantocrator	4	Christ Pantocrator	0
(Long) Cross	85	(Long) Cross	3	(Long) Cross	188
Cross potent / patriarchal cross	4	Cross potent / patriarchal cross	0	Cross potent / patriarchal cross	36
Crown-cross	330	Crown-cross	48	Crown-cross	542
Crown-cross - Globus Cruciger	291	Crown-cross - Globus Cruciger	73	Crown-cross - Globus Cruciger	576
Globus Cruciger	241	Globus Cruciger	11	Globus Cruciger	1,572

Figure 21: Distribution of Christian symbols on Byzantine coins 491–711 (*DOC*)

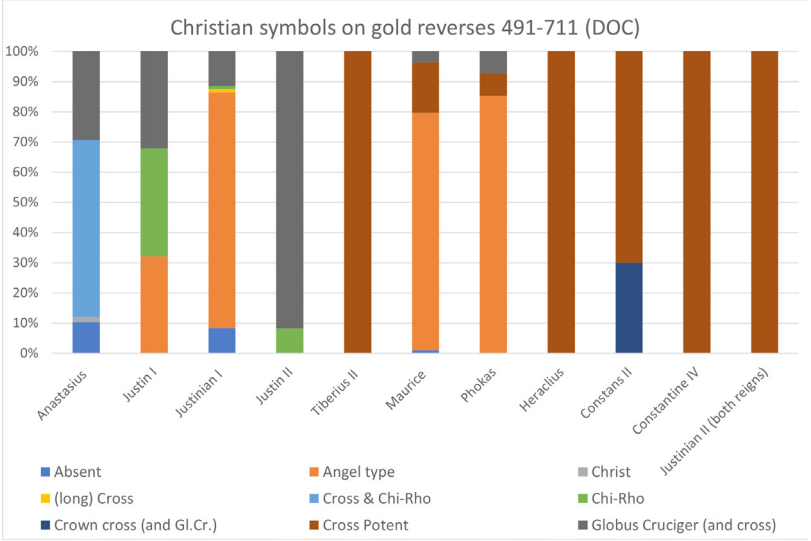


Figure 22: Christian symbols on gold reverses of Byzantine coins 491–711 (*DOC*)

Ruler	Absent	Angel	Christ	Cross & Chi-Rho	Chi-Rho	Crown cross (& Gl.Cr.)	Cross Potent	Globus Cruciger (& cross)
Anastasius	6	0	1	34	0	0	0	17
Justin I	0	9	0	0	10	0	0	9
Justinian I	8	75	0	1	1	0	0	11
Justin II	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	56
Tiberius II	0	0	0	0	0	0	35	0
Maurice	1	85	0	0	0	0	18	4
Phokas	0	93	0	0	0	0	8	8
Heraclius	0	0	0	0	0	0	315	0
Constans II	0	0	0	0	0	89	207	0
Constantine IV	0	0	0	0	0	0	91	0
Justinian II (both reigns)	0	0	0	0	0	0	152	0

(**figures 6** & **8**). It is however not until after the reigns of Theodosius II in the east and Johannes in the west that over 50% of the gold reverse types consistently contained Christian symbols (**figures 9** & **10**). This trend continues on Byzantine coinage as 52 (89.6%) of the 58 gold coins of Anastasius depict a Christian symbol, although the depicted Christian symbols change over time they continue to appear on at least 90% of all gold coins (**figure 22**). On the few silver coins that are recorded in the *DOC* catalogue, we find a majority of Christian symbols on the coins of Justin I and all the succeeding emperors, only on Anastasius' mere four silver coins Christian symbols are absent (**figure 23**). Finally, on bronze reverses Christian symbols are depicted on the majority of the coins of each of the considered emperors, important to note is that these symbols are in most cases no more than a small cross or Chi-Rho added to the large denominational mark (**figure 24**).

Another periodisation emerges when focusing on ›Christian‹ types instead of symbols. As stated before ›Christian types‹ were more rare than Christian symbols, only appearing on

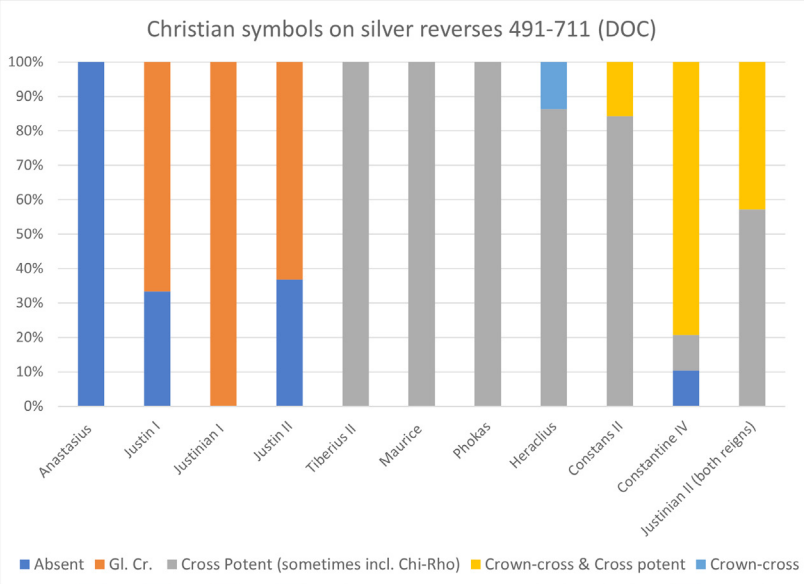


Figure 23:
Christian symbols
on silver reverses of
Byzantine coins 491–711 (*DOC*)

Ruler	Absent	Gl. Cr.	Cross Potent (sometimes incl. Chi-Rho)	Crown-cross & Cross potent	Crown-cross
Anastasius	4	0	0	0	0
Justin I	1	2	0	0	0
Justinian I	0	49	0	0	0
Justin II	7	12	0	0	0
Tiberius II	0	0	5	0	0
Maurice	0	0	9	0	0
Phokas	0	0	4	0	0
Heraclius	0	0	44	0	7
Constans II	0	0	43	8	0
Constantine IV	3	0	3	23	0
Justinian II (both reigns)	0	0	4	3	0

gold, and some rare silver, coins. When accepting the *DOC* identification of ›angel‹, ›Christian images‹ start to appear on 9 (32%) of the 28 gold reverses of Justin I and become dominant during the reign of Justinian I (527–565) being present on 75 (78%) of his 96 gold coins in the *DOC* catalogue. Interpreting the ›angel‹ as Victoria shifts the key moment of change to the reign of Tiberius II (578–582) and the introduction of the cross potent (**figures 16** & **18**). On silver reverses, the cross potent was the only Christian type to appear which dominated the coinage since its introduction by Tiberius II (**figure 23**). Ultimately, the most important Christian image emerged during the reign of Justinian II and appeared on the obverse of gold and some silver coins demoting the emperor to the reverse. The emperor had appeared on the obverse for over 700 years at this point and although Christian symbols were gradually introduced the radical replacement of the emperor with Christ himself should be considered the most important moment of change in the history of Byzantine numismatic iconography.

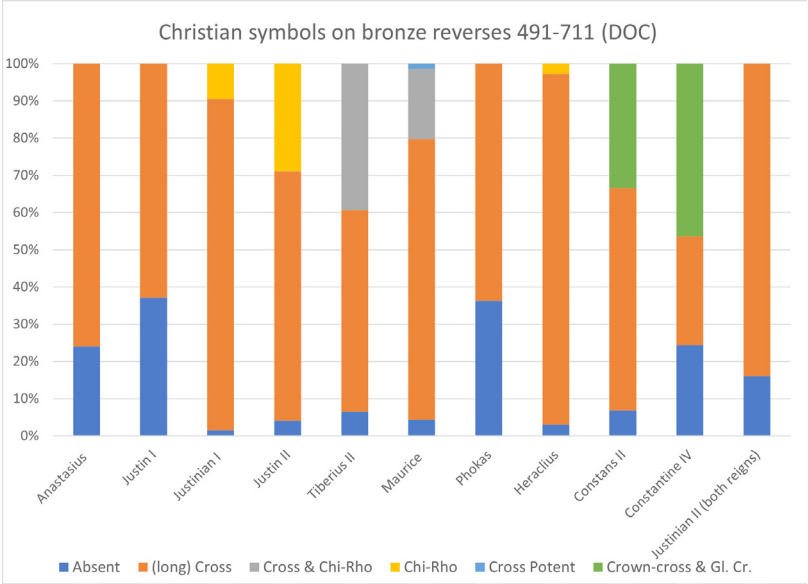


Figure 24: Christian symbols on bronze reverses of Byzantine coins 491–711 (*DOC*)

Ruler	Absent	(long) Cross	Cross & Chi-Rho	Chi-Rho	Cross Potent	Crown-cross & Gl. Cr.
Anastasius	55	174	0	0	0	0
Justin I	66	112	0	0	0	0
Justinian I	15	885	0	94	0	0
Justin II	23	374	0	161	0	0
Tiberius II	10	84	61	0	0	0
Maurice	27	479	119	0	9	0
Phokas	100	175	0	0	0	0
Heraclius	16	506	0	15	0	0
Constans II	23	202	0	0	0	113
Constantine IV	31	37	0	0	0	59
Justinian II (both reigns)	16	84	0	0	0	0

Finally, the ›Christianisation‹ of numismatic iconography could be analysed by looking at the differences between the three metal classes. The gold coins could be considered the most important precious metal coins, especially the solidi, as they were primarily used to pay the army and finance other high-cost affairs by the Byzantine government[139]. Most Christian symbols can be found on gold coins from the Theodosian period onwards until the reign of Justinian II (**figures 9**, **10**, **18**, **21** & **22**). The only exception are the bronze reverses in the Constantinian and Valentinian periods which actually contain more Christian symbols than the gold coins but at this time Christian symbols were merely minor additions to existing military or imperial types (**figure 8**). Overall it is on the gold coins where Christian

[139] For an overview of the wages of the soldiers, and the coin in which they were paid, in the period from Diocletian until Constans II see: Treadgold 1995, 147–157; Beyeler 2011; Kemmers 2019, 59; Hendy 1985, 221–223.

symbols are introduced and most dominantly appear. In Byzantine times, Christian symbols start to appear regularly on silver and bronze coins as well but gold coins remain the most ›Christian‹ (**figure 21**). The ›Christian‹ types remain limited to the gold, and some silver, coins meaning that these types only reached a specific (gold coin) audience, at least until the introduction of Christ on bronzes in 969 (**figures 18**, **22** & **23**).

What do all these different figures and classifications of the quantities of these coins tell us? First of all, these figures indicate that quantities matter. Initially, Christian symbols did not appear regularly on Roman coins. The coinage of Constantine cannot be considered ›Christian‹ under any circumstances, the types that could potentially have a ›Christian‹ connotation are ambiguous, rare, and generally struck in specific mints. Some short-reigning emperors and usurpers already contained a majority of Christian symbols on their gold or bronze reverses in the fourth century, but these are exceptions and the symbol in question was no more than a small Chi-Rho whose Christian connotation at this period in time is questionable (**figures 6** & **8**).

It took until the mid-fifth century before the majority of the coins portrayed at least a Christian symbol, however marginal that might have been (**figures 9** & **10**). The different classifications make it difficult to identify a specific key moment of change for the ›Christianisation‹ of the imperial numismatic iconography.

There are different possibilities all depending on when the iconography is considered ›Christian‹: the one gold reverse type issued by Nepotian contained a Chi-Rho (350) just like the twenty bronze types of Vetranio (350) making their respectively gold and bronze types already ›Christianised‹. Considering emperors who reigned longer than a few months, the majority of Theodosius II's (408–450) gold reverses contain a Christian symbol mostly on the reverse and the majority of the gold reverses of Johannes (423–425) (**figures 9** & **10**). On the coinage of the Byzantine emperors Christian symbols were always in the majority (**figure 15**). On the reverse of gold and bronze coins since the reign of Anastasius (491–518) and on the rare silver coins since the reign of Justin I (518–527) (**figures 22–24**). The majority of the gold and bronze coins of Justinian I (527–565) contain a Christian symbol on the obverse, as well as on the reverse (**figure 17**). Changing the criteria to ›Christian types‹ appearing on gold, and some silver, reverses, either during the reign of Justinian I (527–565) did most gold reverse types depict Christian imagery accepting the ›angel‹ identification, considering the ›angel‹ a ›facing Victoria‹ changes the key moment of change to the reign of Tiberius II (578–582). For silver coins, this transformation can be also dated to Tiberius II's introduction of the cross potent (**figures 16**, **18** & **23**).

Although the emergence of Christian art is a well-trodden subject in academia, the effect of this artistic transformation on the monetary medium of coinage has only been the subject of a few studies. Most of these studies have not considered the quantities of the coins they discuss, which is a problem considering these coins could be used to spread imperial ideological or religious messages. These messages, however, become only relevant when it is clear how many people the messages were supposed and able to reach. In general, the late Roman and early Byzantine coinage could be characterized by continuity rather than by change, the great transformation of Greco-Roman art into (early) Christian art did, perhaps logically, not immediately affect this monetary medium.

The quantitative approach of this article has put even the most important changes into perspective by indicating that they were most of the time a minority in the bigger corpus. The introduction of the *Globus Cruciger* by Justinian I and the crown cross by Tiberius II are the only exceptions because these Christian imperial attributes immediately appeared on gold and bronze coins evidently being meant as a message to all people. However ›slow‹ the ›Christianisation‹ of the imperial coinage might have been, the imperial numismatic iconogra-

phy does ›Christianise‹ in the end and therefore deserves to be added to the corpus of (early) Christian art. Although the transformation was gradual, ultimately, coinage was an important and widespread medium that spread a ›Christian‹ iconography, something that could and would never be matched by mosaics, frescoes, or sculptures. To understand this medium to the fullest extent, however, it has to be studied quantitatively.

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