

Elena Baldi

Title: A *pentanummium* of Justinian I (527-565) from Cherson

Date: 527-565

Geography: Cherson, Crimea

Culture: Byzantine

Medium: Bronze

Dimensions: w. 3.11 g; ø 16 mm; axis 6

Current Institution: Princeton University, USA

Catalogue Number: 12074

Link to Object: <https://figgy.princeton.edu/catalog/08b1269e-9a0f-46fc-af6e-6a2e4e47f7ef>
[last accessed 24th January 2025]



Figs 1-2. Coin 12074, Justinian I (527-565), *pentanummium*, obverse and reverse images.
Photographs: Elena Baldi. Courtesy of Firestone Library, Princeton University.

alt="monog Justinian obv" and alt="monog Justinian rev"

Keywords: Numismatics; Justinian I; Byzantium: *Pentanummium*; Cherson

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This copper alloy coin housed in the Princeton Numismatic Collection (Catalogue Number 12074) was struck under Justinian (527-565) at the mint of Cherson. It is of a type that appears to be recovered and therefore to have circulated only in the Crimean Peninsula and surrounding areas.

Cherson, founded as a Greek colony during the 6th century BC, is located on a small independent peninsula adjacent to the city of Sevastopol; the ancient site was discovered thanks to the foundation of the latter in 1827. Under the Roman Empire, Cherson was part of the Kingdom of Bosporos, a so-called client kingdom; nevertheless, the city benefited from a certain degree of autonomy and had been allowed to striking provincial coinage until AD 341, reflecting its privileged status¹. After Hunnic and Gothic invasions and occupation, the city became a client state of the Byzantines, and became absorbed into the empire in AD 527; it is in this context that the coin was struck.

The coin is a *pentanummium*. It presents on the obverse the profile image of emperor Justinian I in full military gear – with cuirass, *paludamentum* and diadem. This portraiture reflects the conventions that had been used previously by late Roman Emperors, and was still in use until the reign of Justinian, particularly in copper coins of lower denominations. On the reverse, we have the monogram of the city of Cherson, reading *ρολις Χερσωνος* (polis Chersonos), rather than the contemporary Byzantine denomination mark for 5 *nummi*, the Greek numeral €̅. The object itself is of remarkable quality, and it has been suggested that either the coins were struck in Constantinople, or, more likely, that mint engravers were sent from the capital to train local workers.

The iconography of the type has been studied recently by Trivero *et al.* who noticed that the obverse has been minted in two variants: (type a) shows a smaller bust represented with a wider diadem, topped by a single pearl, whereas (type b) has a wider bust with a narrower diadem and two pearls.² Our coin displays a larger bust with two pearls in the diadem, therefore it belongs to type b.

On the reverse, the monogram is found with five variants (types a-e), illustrated in Trivero *et al.*³ In detail, the letter O is placed above the monogram, either at the center (type a), or to the left (type b), to the right (type c), or at the center, but with a dwarfed R (type d) or substituted by a horizontal bar (type e). In our coin, the letter O is at the center with a regular R, and is therefore identifiable with type a.

This monogram type represented a sudden change in iconography with regards to the previous issues of small denomination (often identified as AE3), however maintaining the late Roman portraiture tradition, with a profile bust on the obverse. All numismatists who have studied these monogrammed issues have interpreted the monogram as *ρολις Χερσωνος* (*polis Chersonos*) and therefore as an indication of the city or mint; they deduce that the iconographic shift is a clear sign of the autonomous nature of the city.⁴ However, Trivero *et al.* suggest an alternative

¹ Pagona Papadopoulou, “Mint of Cherson,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Black Sea*, 2008, <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=12305> [last accessed January 20th, 2025] [last accessed January 20th, 2025], 1-2.

² Alberto Trivero Rivera *et al.*, *The Chersonense Copper Coinage between Roman and Byzantine Empire*, https://www.academia.edu/34901540/The_Chersonense_copper_Coinage_between_Roman_and_Byzantine_Empire_by_A_Trivero_R_A_Gennari_A_Ortu_M_Cecchinato_V_Zarkho [last accessed January 20th, 2025], 40-42

³ Trivero *et al.*, *Chersonese Copper Coinage*, 40

⁴ Papadopoulou, “Mint of Cherson,” 1-2; W. Hahn, *Money of the Incipient Byzantine Empire (Anastasius I – Justinian I, 491-565)* (Vienna: Österreichische Forschungsgesellschaft für Numismatik am Institut für Numismatik

interpretation that connects the adoption of the monogram to the creation of two political figures for the city during the reign of Anastasius: the *defensor civitas* and the *curator civitas*, or *Πατήρ της πόλεως*.⁵ The former had military and civic functions, while the latter soon acquired primarily economic and fiscal responsibilities. According to this interpretation, the *Πατήρ της πόλεως*, would be the person in charge of different civic activities, likely to have included the authority of minting the city coinage. Following this line of thought, the authors suggest a new interpretation of the monogram, that could be read as ΠΑΤΕΡ [ΡΟΛΙΣ] ΧΕΡΣΩΝΟC or ΧΕΡΣΩΝΟC, in which the minting authority, and not the city, would be represented, showing therefore the two major authorities on the same coin: the emperor and the *pater polis*.

Coin Description

Authority: Justinian I (526-565)

Mint: Cherson

Obverse: DN IVSTINI-ANVSPPA(VC), profile bust right, with cuirass, paludamentum and diadem

Reverse: monogram: ρολις Χερσωνος or πατερ (ρολις) Χερσωνος

Ref.: Hahn 253a, DOC 108, Tolstoi 519-520, Ratto 627, BNP1

The coin was acquired by the University of Princeton in 2015 and forms part of the Donald collection

Biography

Elena Baldi is Byzantine Numismatics Cataloger and Linked-Open-Data Coordinator, Princeton University. With a BA in Archaeology (York, UK), MA in Conservation of Historical Objects (Durham, UK) and PhD in Numismatics (Bologna, Italy), her research interests are Byzantine and Ostrogothic Numismatics, and Numismatic Studies of the Late Antique Mediterranean, specifically Ravenna (Italy) and Butrint (Albania).

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und Geldgeschichte, 2000), 65; V. Sidorenko, “The Copper Coinage of Byzantine Bosphoros (ca 590-659),” in *Kiev–Cherson–Constantinople. Ukrainian Papers at the XXth International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Paris, 19-25 August 2001)*, edited by Alexander Aibanin and Hlib Ivankin, with a foreword by Ihor Ševčenko (Kiev/Simferopol/Paris: Ukrainian National Committee for Byzantine Studies, 2007), 91.

⁵ Trivero *et al.*, *Chersonese Copper Coinage*, 41.

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Trivero Rivera, Alberto, Alain Gennari, Angelo Ortu, Marco Cecchinato, and V. Zarkho. *The Chersonense Copper Coinage between Roman and Byzantine Empire*, https://www.academia.edu/34901540/The_Chersonese_copper_Coinage_between_Roman_and_Byzantine_Empire_by_A_Trivero_R_A_Gennari_A_Ortu_M_Cecchinato_V_Zarkho [last accessed January 20th, 2025].

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