



Summary :

The mint of Constantinople displays a remarkable duration of life (326-1453). At the beginning it did not differ from other provincial mints, however, gradually joined the first place and – temporarily – the exclusiveness on state production of coins. It was the most complicated Byzantine mint regarding its organization and the quality of its products, interwoven with state financial policy and fluctuated from an excellent level (during the largest period of time), up to a bad one (mainly after 1261).

Date

326-1453

Geographical Location

Constantinople

1. Introduction

Our issue touches significant aspects of the Byzantine history, economy and numismatics, carried along with at several times by the results of the historic and archaeological research. Thus it still raises disputes among the scholars,¹ especially after the cosmogony of the last decades because of an abundance of new facts that gave answers to old questions, though raised new questions as well. Through this crack Byzantine economy passes as well, which is a theme impossible to be analyzed within the framework of this entry. Thus, the characteristic attributes of Mint of Constantinople and some significant aspects of the organization and the operation of this institution will be pointed out, whereas through a historical flashback will become clear its importance and its position among the other Byzantine mints through the ages.

2. History of the mint's organization

2.1. Early Byzantine period

2.1.1. 4th century

Soon became apparent that Constantinople would be evolved to something extraordinary. Everything shows that for the function of its mint a wider plan was applied which among other things foresaw the closing of the mint at Pavia (Ticinum) (326).² In spite all these, its coin production started all the more in a discrete way during the second half of the year 326. Its two officinae (this number of officinae is known to us only for the bronze coins until 379) were soon reinforced from Pavia Aquileia and Sirmium, while its development was steady and rapid.³ Up until the year 328 the number of officinae had been increased to 7 (with special responsibilities each one of them), and to 11 in 330! Unique in wealth and size was the series of silver coins struck here for Constantine the Great. The mint mark was usually CONS or C·A (on silver coins).⁴

The period after 340 was a problematic one for Constantinople, but after Constantine's administrative reforms its status was elevated, while intense became the presence of its issues in the Eastern Balkans, in Greece and in Asia Minor.⁵ The number of officinae remained high with the exception of a short brake during Julian's reign (361-363), who decreased the number of all the state functionaries.⁶

The reforms of 368 foreseeing the highest metal purity for the gold and the silver coins⁷ had an effect on the issues as well. Bars of gold stamped as of standard purity 0,995 (!) were used as raw material⁸ and upon the coins was engraved CONOB (Constantinopoli obryziacus, [solidus] made of pure gold [cut] at Constantinople. OB later was interpreted as the numeral 72, since that's how many solidi were cut from a liter of gold).⁹ Something alike did happen as well in relation to the silver.¹⁰ From the year 379 Constantinople struck coins made of gold and silver from 10 officinae and its production started competing that of Antioch which was dominating



throughout the East.¹¹

2.1.2. c. 400-498

During the 5th century Constantinople might not have been the most productive mint (Kyzikos and Antioch on occasion joined the first place), it produced money, however, without interruptions and usually plenty of it. In addition, it undertook the circulation of special issues (and it had the exclusiveness over the tremisses throughout the East). Its mark after 430 was firmly CON. That period of time appeared on bronze coins some phenomena of analphabetism with regard to the Latin language. Under Leo I started the use of the Greek mint mark ΚΟC, while under Zeno the rarer ΠΟΛ («Πόλις») were in use as well.¹²

2.1.3. 498 - c. 600

The traditional mint mark CON came back in use after Anastasios' reform (498). During his years of reign 5 officinae struck bronze coins, more or less in proportion to Rome. The 5th officina differentiated from the others, probably because it was filled with men from the closed mint of Herakleia.¹³

Following the reconquista of the 6th century the mints were increased in number. Constantinople became the main imperial mint for the production of gold coins, while it showed a massive contribution on bronze coinage production.¹⁴

2.2. Middle Byzantine period

2.2.1. c. 600-1092

The big wars against the Persians and the Arabic flux radically changed the picture. On the one hand appeared a lack of metal supplies and under Herakleios the mint functionaries used as raw material among other things candelabra and church vessels from Saint Sophia.¹⁵ On the other hand the money production was centered at the capital city and until 630 all of the local mints of the East had closed. Since then and until the 11th century exclusive supplier of coins for the Balkans and the East would be Constantinople (with Cherson and Thessalonica as temporary exceptions to the rule).¹⁶ The change of the way of coin issuing at Rome and at Ravenna (8th c.) and the gradual loss of the West increased even more the importance of the capital's mint.¹⁷ In 743 finally stopped the use of the (useless any more) mint mark CONOB.¹⁸ After the closing of the last western mint (912)¹⁹ Byzantine gold was struck exclusively at Constantinople.

The prolonged 11th-century crisis led to great coin debasement regarding all the metals.²⁰

2.2.2. 1092-1204

The problem was resolved by Alexios' I reform (1092). Constantinople remained the main imperial mint, supported by the mint of Thessalonica, whereas two (;) more cities supplemented the coin production.²¹ From the 12th century on, less attention was paid to the exact weight of the gold coinage.²² However, we observe – only at Constantinople²³ - a strict organization and control of the production through an abundance of control signs and stylistic details, from which we presume nowadays the coin's exact place of issue.²⁴ The officinae were organized in groups producing each one of them a certain value. After their production the coins were stamped into apokombia (purses, «αποκόμβια») or sakkia («σακκία») at specific amounts and were delivered to the vestiarion («βεστιάριον»)²⁵

After 1195 and before 1204 large amounts of trachy, mainly older ones, were systematically and carefully clipped off (they took care not to cut off the emperor's figure)²⁶ at the Constantinopolitan mint. The reasons (Bulgarian wars or debasement of the trachy) are under discussion.²⁷



2.3. Late Byzantine period

2.3.1. 1204-1261

After the capture of Constantinople the Latins issued imitations of the Byzantine coins (aspron trachy, maybe hyperpyra as well)²⁸ at the palace mint using the bronze statues which adorned the city as raw material according to the sources.²⁹

2.3.2. 1261-1453

During the Palaiologan period the mint of Constantinople remained the most important one of a state ever growing less and less, but not the only one. At first place Thessalonica (until c. 1370) and Philadelphia (sporadically) supplemented the coin production, while the former one was competing with the mint of the capital city in the production of trachy and assaria (13th – first half of 14th c.).³⁰

The Constantinopolitan coin products of that period were marked by the exclusive use of the signs of the person in charge each time.³¹ There is an immense typological variety, although the striking is of bad quality,³² whereas the mint ceased from issuing the gold hyperpyron al pezzo³³, which in the middle of the 14th c. was completely out of production.³⁴ Until the Fall of Constantinople by the Ottomans the mint continued in spite of the general decline to operate by striking coins for its supporters' payment...,³⁵

3. Administrative organization and staff

3.1. Early Byzantine period

3.1.2. 4th-6th c.

At Constantinople there were two institutions being charged with coin production,³⁶ under the jurisdiction of the *rationalis summae rei* at the beginning and of *comes sacrarum largitionum* later, perhaps already since 330.³⁷

3.1.2.1 *Moneta publica*

Moneta publica or *fiscalis*, the ordinary mint of Constantinople, serving individuals as well by turning their metal supplies to coins,³⁸ was situated on the 12th region between Hexakionion, Xerolophos and Saint Mokios.³⁹ The supervisor of the mint (*procurator monetarum*), gave account to *comes sacrarum largitionum* and guaranteed the calculations upon his personal honor, a certain guaranteeing amount of money and his physical integrity. Supervisors of each one of the mint's departments were the *officinarios*, each one in charge of an *officina*. The head of each *officina* was a *praepositus monetarum*, as every single category of employees (*monetarii*) had a *praepositus* in charge of. *Monetarii* were slaves or freedmen. Their profession was closed and intermarriage was expected. In order to change career a *monetarius* should have taken the permission directly by *comes sacrarum largitionum* and indirectly by the emperor and left behind wealth and family.⁴⁰

Monetarii did not enjoy confidence, since many times they were involved in issues of forgery, in spite of the severe (usually capital) punishments.⁴¹ Quite characteristic is the case of notorious Alexander, Justinian's *logothetes*, who had the nickname *Psalidios* (the one who trims gold coins down in size) because of his skill at illegally trimming gold coins.⁴²

3.1.2.2. *Moneta auri*

The service responsible for the issue of gold and silver coins made of state bullions was directly connected with the emperor's court and in theory it was shifted from one place to another along with the emperor.⁴³ Its mint had its own staff, was directly under the orders of *comes sacrarum largitionum*, while its name (perhaps *moneta auri* or *comitatensis*) remains uncertain.⁴⁴ In 368-9, after



Valentinian's and Valens' reforms it was determined that the gold and the silver coinage would be produced (as a rule) by the (trustworthy) *moneta auri*, while the bronze coinage by *moneta publica*.⁴⁵ During the 4th century this service included among other things a department for the bars of gold (*scrinium auri/aureae massae*) to which 53 *aurifices solidorum* belonged, who most probably were in charge for the striking of gold *solidi*, as well as of the silver coins.⁴⁶ It has been proven that the producers of gold and silver coins had access on a common reserve of dies.⁴⁷

In 395 with the empire divided the court mint was essentially turned into imperial one, since the emperor rarely left the capital thereafter.⁴⁸ The palace preserved the monopoly over the coins made of precious metals and whenever a provincial mint struck gold coins, it did so (typically or essentially) through detached court officials (*palatini sacrarum largitionum et monetarii auri*) operating as a supplementary mint of the capital and engraving its mint mark (CONOB) on the coins.⁴⁹

The imperial mint, the *charage* («χαραγή»), is occasionally mentioned in the sources as *choneia* (smelting place, «χωνεία»), *chrysoplysia* (gold-washing place «χρυσοπλύσια»), *chrysepseteion* (gold foundry, «χρυσεπητείον»), *chrysourceion* (gold-working place, «χρυσουργίον»), *basilikoi thesaurotypoi* («βασίλικοι θησαυρότυποι») and others, since it was tightly connected with the *officinae* of recasting and refining gold, as well as with the treasury.⁵⁰ It was sheltered at Great Palace, in the first *schola*, under an eight-column dome («οκτακίονο θόλο») which during the 10th century was named *Palaia Charage* («Παλαιά Χαραγή»).⁵¹ Its ruins have been archaeologically traced.⁵² Its location remained within the same palace according to the sources for the 12th and the 13th century. After 1261 we do not know anything about its location.⁵³

3.2. Middle Byzantine period

3.2.1. 7th-10th century

At the beginnings of the 7th century the office of *comes sacrarum largitionum* was abolished and his duties were shared among various *sekreta* («σέκρετα»). For the 9th century we know that the archon of the *charage* («άρχων της χαραγής», the master of the mint) gave account to *chartoularios* of the *vestiarion* («χαρτουλάριο του βεστιαρίου»). *Chrysepsetes* («χρυσ(ο)επητήης», in charge of the alloy?) belonged to the *sekretion* of the *eidikon* («σέκρετον του ειδικού») and *zygostates* («ζυγοστάτης», in charge of the weight control and the title?) to the *offikion* of the *sakellion* («οφφίκιον του σακελλίου»).⁵⁴

The building where the old *moneta publica* had been sheltered still existed, but its function is not known.⁵⁵

3.2.2. 11th century - 1204

After the administrative reforms of the fiscal services in the 11th century the *eidikon* («ειδικόν») ceased to exist, while in the 12th century the *sakellion* ceased as well. Very probably the whole of the monetary officials belonged since then to the *vestiarion*.⁵⁶

The uprising of 1201 gave to the eyewitness Nikolaos Messarites the opportunity to describe the tragic working conditions of the mint workers under a state of coercion.⁵⁷

As far as the 12th century is concerned there is some evidence proving that there was a second mint in operation (as a place of exchange as well as for the striking of private metal supplies) near Constantine's forum where bankers and money-exchangers were working. Highly probably it was destroyed by the fire of 1203.⁵⁸

3.3. Late Byzantine period

3.3.1. Period of Latin occupation (1204-1261)



As far as the period of the Latin occupation is concerned we are in the darkness. It is unknown if the real control of the coin production was in the hands of the Latin emperor or of the Venetians.⁵⁹ What is certain is that the fiscal organization of the Latins by far fell short of the Byzantine one.⁶⁰

3.3.2. Palaiologan period (1261-1453)

During the Palaiologan period the coin minting remained under the supervision of the vestiariion, in charge of which was thereafter his *prokathemenos* (προκαθήμενος, president), whose job it was to look after “the revenue and expenditure” (τὰ ς εἰ σόδοις τε καὶ εἰ ζόδοις).⁶¹

According to a theory that has been expressed, under Manuel II (1391-1425) a second mint (or a supplementary to the official one) struck silver coins made of private bullions.⁶² There are facts as well suggesting that coins were struck by private bullions charging fees for the service,⁶³ whereas at least from the middle of the 14th century the mint or a part of it passed into the hands of private bankers.⁶⁴ This common practice with regard to the West announced a new era, finding, however, Constantinople the capital city of another empire.

* *The entry is still in editing process (ed.note)*

1. As a simple example we mention the dispute that rose around the attribution of 11th- and 12th-century trachy related to the activity or not of certain Byzantine and Latin mints and their organization, the circulation of their products, the economic and historical interpretation of the coin hoards, the existence or not of Bulgarian imitations, the chemical analysis of the specimens and their trustworthiness and so on.

2. *RIC* VII p. 355, 359. Hendy, M., *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450* (Cambridge 1985) p. 381.

3. *RIC* VII pp. 562-563, 566-567.

4. *RIC* VIII pp. 440-442.

5. *RIC* VIII pp. 91-95, 440, 444.

6. *RIC* VIII pp. 444-445. Harl, K., *Coinage in the Roman Economy, 300 B.C. to A.D. 700* (Baltimore-London 1996) p. 171. Cf. *Amm. Marc.* 22, 4, 9-10.

7. Hendy, M., as above pp. 387-388. Harl, K., as above pp. 159-161.

8. *RIC* IX p. xxxv. Harl, K., as above p. 160 and note 6.

9. Morrisson, C., “Byzantine Money: Its Production and Circulation” in A. Laiou (ed.-in-chief), *The Economic History of Byzantium* (DOS 39, Washington, D.C. 2002) pp. 911, 919. For the temporary mint mark COMOB and comes auri see *DOC Late Roman* pp. 54-55.

10. *RIC* X pp. 13-17. In the East, although the silvers were stamped as of relatively high purity, did not bear the mark PS (= pusulatum, pure silver) as they did in the West (*ibid.* 25).

11. *RIC* IX p. 202 (Antioch). *RIC* X p. 25 (officinae).

12. *RIC* X pp. 11-12 (tremisses), 38-40 (production-mint marks).

13. *RIC* X pp. 38-39.



14. Hendy, M., as above pp. 401-403, pl. 11, maps 34, 35. Morrisson, C., as above pp. 912-914 pl. 1, map 1α.
15. Θεοφ. Χρονολογ. 303. Cf. Harl, K., as above p. 200 and note 45.
16. Hendy, M., as above p. 424. Morrisson, C., as above pp. 913-914 pl. 2, map 1β. Harl, K., as above pp. 201-202. Cf. Penna, V., *Chalkous, for everyday dealings. The unknown world of bronze coinage* (Athens 2006) pp. 186-187.
17. Hendy, M., as above pp. 421-423. Morrisson, C., as above p. 915. Harl, K., as above pp. 203-205.
18. Grierson, P., *Byzantine Coins* (London-Berkeley-Los Angeles 1982) p. 157 (since Artavasdos). Morrisson, C., as above p. 919 (ordinary use stopped at Constantinople in 720)
19. At Reggio in Calabria. See Morrisson, C., as above p. 914 note 18 with a reference to the relevant article of Castrizio.
20. Morrisson, C., as above pp. 930-932. Oikonomides, N., "The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy" in A. Laiou (ed.-in-chief), *The Economic History of Byzantium* (DOS 39, Washington, D.C. 2002) p. 1019 ff. Hendy, M., as above p. 235-236. *DOC* 4,1 pp. 21-22.
21. Hendy, M., as above pp. 434-437 and pl. 14. Cf. Morrisson, C., as above pp. 915-916 and pl. 3.
22. Morrisson, C., as above p. 943. Cf. *DOC* 4,1 pp. 123-124 (more and more attention to the alloy, rather than to the weight).
23. *DOC* 4,1 p. 128.
24. Cf. Grierson, P., as above p. 225 ff. (in general) Morrisson, C., "The Emperor, the Saint, and the City: Coinage and Money in Thessalonike from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Century," *DOP* 57 (2003) pp. 173-178 (the case of Thessalonica's mint).
25. *DOC* 4,1 pp. 99-106, 128.
26. Hendy, M., *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire, 1081-1261* (DOS 12, Washington, D.C. 1969) pp. 179-180.
27. Grierson, P., as above pp. 236, 331 note 236 with bibliography. *DOC* 4,1 p. 45-46, 59ff. Metcalf, D., "M.F. Hendy, Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection, IV. Alexius I to Michael VIII 1081-1261, Washington D.C. 1999 (book review)" *NC* 160 (2000) pp. 396-401.
28. Stahl, A., "Coinage and Money in the Latin Empire of Constantinople," *DOP* 55 (2001) pp. 197-199.
29. Νικ. Χων. Χρ. Διηγ. 648-650. But cf. Metcalf, D., *Coinage of the Crusades and the Latin East in the Ashmolean Museum Oxford*² (extended and revised, London 1995) p. 231 (low tin content of the coins).
30. *DOC* 5,1 pp. 57-62.
31. *ibid.* p. 56.
32. *ibid.* pp. 10-11, 53.
33. *ibid.* pp. 47-48. Morrisson, C., "Byzantine Money: Its Production and Circulation" in A. Laiou (ed.-in-chief), *The Economic History of Byzantium* (DOS 39, Washington, D.C. 2002) p. 943.
34. *DOC* 5,1 p. 42 (florin of John V), pp. 44-45 (the last hyperpyra). Morrisson, C., as above p. 961.
35. Hendy, M., *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450* (Cambridge 1985) pp. 447, 545-546.



36. *DOC* 4,1 pp. 110-111 for a general view upon this issue.
37. *RIC* VII pp. 16, 20-21. Morriison, C., as above p. 911. *DOC* Late Roman pp. 49-50 (with sources referring to the duties of comes at taking care of the proper rendering of emperor's image on coins).
38. Hendy, M., as above p. 389-390 with a reference to the laws *CTh.* 9, 21, 7-8.
39. Not. Urb. Const. 13, 12. Κων/νος Ζ', *Περί βασιλείου τάξεως*, 1, pp. 97-98. Hendy, M., "Aspects of Coin Production and Fiscal Administration in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Period," *NC* (1972) p. 131. *DOC* 4,1 p. 110.
40. *RIC* VII pp. 22-23. *RIC* X p. 23. For the term monetarius see Hendy, M., *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450* (Cambridge 1985) pp. 423-424 with a reference to 9th-century lead seals.
41. *RIC* X p. 23. Papathanassiou, M., "Metallurgy and Metalworking Techniques" in A. Laiou (ed.-in-chief), *The Economic History of Byzantium* (DOS 39, Washington, D.C. 2002) pp. 123-124. Cf. Penna, V., as above pp. 201-202.
42. *PLRE* III A p. 43 see entry Alexander (5) (J. Martindale). Προκόπιος, *Υπέρ των πολέμων*, 7, 1, 30-31.
43. *RIC* VII p. 24. *DOC* Late Roman p. 50. *RIC* X p. 25. Cf. Hendy, M., as above pp. 391-392.
44. *RIC* IX p. 203 (CONCM), 217 (COMTM). Hendy, M., as above p. 390. *RIC* X pp. 23-26. *DOC* Late Roman p. 54.
45. *CTh* 12, 6, 12-13. 9, 21, 7.
46. Hendy, M., as above p. 393. *RIC* X p. 24.
47. *RIC* X p. 26.
48. Hendy, M., as above p. 398.
49. *RIC* X pp. 25-26. Hendy, M., as above p. 400. Morriison, C., as above p. 911.
50. *DOC* 4,1 p. 96 note 2, 128. Matschke, K.-P., "Mining" in A. Laiou (ed.-in-chief), *The Economic History of Byzantium* (DOS 39, Washington, D.C. 2002) p. 119. «Βασιλικοί θησαυρότυποι» Mesarites, N., *Palastrevolution*, ed. A. Heisenberg, *Nikolaos Mesarites. Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos* (Wuerzburg 1907) p. 25 (ch. 9 verse 34).
51. Κων/νος Ζ', *Περί βασιλείου τάξεως*, 1, 8, 2-7. Cf. Hendy, M., "Aspects of Coin Production and Fiscal Administration in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Period," *NC* (1972) p. 131 note 2.
52. Penna, V., as above p. 173
53. *DOC* 4,1 pp. 128-129.
54. Morriison, C., as above p. 913 (from the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos and the *Taktikon* of Uspenskij).
55. Κων/νος Ζ', *Περί βασιλείου τάξεως*, 1, 97-98. Cf. *DOC* 4,1 p. 110.
56. Hendy, M., *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450* (Cambridge 1985) p. 433. *DOC* 4,1 p. 96.
57. Mesarites, N. (ed. A. Heisenberg as above) pp. 25-26 (ch. 9).



58. *DOC* 4,1 pp. 128-129.

59. Cf. the treaty between Theodore I Laskaris and podestà Giacomo Tiepolo (1219) and the demands of Michael VIII from the ambassadors of Baldwin II (1259) (*DOC* 4,1 p. 129. Γ. Ακροπολίτης, *Χρον. Συγγρ.* 78). For the disassociation of the above-mentioned treaty from the right of striking metal coinage see Stahl, A., as above p. 203.

60. *DOC* 4,1 pp. 95, 129. Cf. Stahl, A., as above pp. 205-206.

61. *DOC* 5,1 p. 55. Oikonomides, N., as above p. 1029.

62. Morrisson, C., as above p. 917 with a reference on Bendall and Hendy. *DOC* 5,1 pp. 58, 219.

63. *DOC* 4,1 pp. 119-120.

64. *DOC* 5,1 p. 58. Cf. Matschke, K.-P., as above p. 120.

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