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Notes on Two Imperial Image Obverse Types: The Falconer and the Seated Couple

David Woods [1]

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the origin and significance of the main images on two well known obverse types from the so-called Imperial Image phase of Arab-Byzantine coinage: first, the so-called falconer on the obverse of a group of coins conventionally attributed to the pseudo-Damascus mint and, second, the seated couple on the obverse of coins from the mints of Scythopolis and Gerasa.[2] It is my argument that one cannot properly understand the image on either type without fuller attention to the rich artistic and cultural environment within which they were struck, and that those who sanctioned or engraved these coins did not work in cultural isolation or focus solely upon the current or recent coin types from the Byzantine empire, but were open to older classical influences from a variety of media. These influences may have significantly affected how they adapted current or recent coin types or, even when there was little or no adaptation, re-interpreted them nonetheless. Curiously, this principle has been well observed in recent efforts to explore the significance of the bar or globe on a pole on steps as normally depicted on the reverse of coins of the so-called Standing Caliph type, but the same broad-minded and flexible approach has been noticeably absent in considering the significance of these other types.[3]

The Falconer

There is a great deal of variety in the depiction of the alleged falconer from one die to the next within this group of coins, but they generally agree in depicting a single figure standing face forward with a long cross in his right hand and a bird perched near the end of his outstretched left arm.[4] On some dies, he is depicted with a chlamys and robes descending freely down his body (Fig. 1a). On other dies, he is depicted without a chlamys and belted tightly about his waist so that his lower tunic flares out like a skirt (Fig. 1b). It is clear, therefore, that this figure was re-interpreted at least once and adapted accordingly. I will refer to these figures as the cloaked and belted figures

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[2] S. Album and T. Goodwin, ***Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean 1: The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period*** (Oxford, 2002) [***SICA 1*** henceforth], pp. 82-84, identify ten different obverse types within the Imperial Image series. The obverse types under discussion here correspond to their types 'IX. 'Hunting Figure'' and 'I. Justin and Sophia' respectively. For the most detailed argument in support of the identification of this 'hunting figure' as a falconer, see A. Oddy, 'Arab Imagery on Early Umayyad Coins in Syria and Palestine: Evidence for Falconry', ***Numismatic Chronicle*** 151 (1991), pp. 59-66.

[3] For efforts to explain the bar or globe on a pole on steps in terms of the Arab understanding of the universe, or of traditional Semitic astral symbolism, or of the classical architectural heritage (Roman monumental columns), see N. Jamil, 'Caliph and *Qu*ṭ*b*. Poetry as a Source for Interpreting the Transformation of the Byzantine Cross on Steps on Umayyad Coinage', in J. Johns (ed.), ***Bayt al-Maqdis: Jerusalem and Early Islam,*** Oxford Studies in Islamic Art IX (Oxford, 1999), pp. 11-57; W. Schulze, 'Symbolism on the Syrian Standing Caliph Copper Coins: A Contribution to the Discussion', in A. Oddy (ed.), ***Coinage and History in the Seventh Century Near East 2*** (London, 2010) [***CHSC 2*** henceforth], pp. 11-21; S. Heidemann, 'The Standing Caliph Type – The Object on the Reverse', in ***CHSC 2***, pp. 23-34.

[4] For a collection of obverse dies at x1.5 - 2 actual size, see A. Oddy, 'Symbolism and Design on the Early Umayyad Coinage', in T. Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins and History*** (London, 2012), p. 109-23, at p. 111, Fig. 1.



Figure 1a: 'the cloaked figure'



Figure 1b: 'the belted figure'

respectively. Here one should note two important differences between the cloaked and belted figures.[5] First, the bird stands upon an orb when depicted in association with the cloaked figure, but directly upon the hand or wrist of the belted figure. Secondly, the left arm is not explicitly depicted in the case of the cloaked figure, so that the orb with bird seems to be hovering in mid-air. It is clear, from the context, however, that an arm has to be understood. In contrast, the left arm is always very clearly depicted in the case of the belted figure.

Since no Byzantine coin depicts an emperor standing with a long cross in one hand and a bird in the other, it is clear that the originator of this basic type did not base it directly on one Byzantine coin. Consequently, two explanations have been offered as to the origin of this type. First, Oddy explained it as a development of an Imperial Image type produced at Damascus (Fig. 2).[6]



Figure 2

This type depicts a single figure standing face forward with a long cross in his right hand and a *globus cruciger* in his left hand. However, it also depicts what seems to be a large bird perched on a T-shaped stand in the field immediately to the left of the figure. Oddy argues that the originator of the type at the pseudo-Damascus mint simply transferred the bird from the stand besides the figure in the original Damascus type to the figure's left hand in his new type. The assumption is that both types depict a falcon, but with the standing figure in a slightly different pose in each case. In contrast, Schindel and Hahn offer a more complex explanation.[7] They argue that the originator of the type at the pseudo-Damascus mint derived the main standing figure from the depiction of the senior emperor from among a pair of emperors depicted either on a type of follis (Class 5) issued under Heraclius during the period c.629-40 (Fig. 3) or on a type (Class 8) issued under Constans II

[5] I identify A. Oddy, 'Symbolism and Design on the Early Umayyad Coinage', in T. Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins and History*** (London, 2012), Fig. 1, nos 5-6, as clear examples of what I am calling 'cloaked figures' and nos 1, 2, 7, 8, 13, 14 as clear examples of what I am calling 'belted figures'. Other dies seem to represent intermediate stages in the evolution from one type to the next. Hence Fig. 1, nos 3-4, seem to retain cloaks despite their belted appearance otherwise.

[6] Oddy, 'Arab Imagery on Early Umayyad Coins in Syria and Palestine: Evidence for Falconry', ***Numismatic Chronicle*** 151 (1991). He defends this interpretation in his 'Symbolism and Design on the Early Umayyad Coinage', in T. Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins and History*** (London, 2012), pp. 109-110.

[7] N. Schindel and W. Hahn, 'Notes on Two Arab-Byzantine Coin Types from Seventh Century Syria', ***Numismatic Chronicle*** 170 (2010), pp. 321-30.

during the period c.655-58 (Fig. 4).[8] They then argue that he decided to add a bird to this figure's left hand on the basis of a misunderstanding of a Victoriola depicted in the left hand of Heraclius on types of silver miliaresia issued c.620-29 (Fig. 5).[9]



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Neither explanation convinces in full, but that by Schindel and Hahn is by far the weaker. They effectively ignore the occurrence of the cloaked figure with orb with bird (Fig.1a), and focus solely on a small number of specimens within the belted figure type where some head, or head-like object, seems to occur beneath the figure's left arm (Fig 1b). This naturally leads them to seek the origin of this type in some Byzantine type depicting two heads, that is, two figures alongside each other, but this is not hard to find in a period of Byzantine history when joint-rule of some sort was the norm. Furthermore, there is little real similarity between even the belted figure (Fig 1b) and the figure of the senior emperor in military dress on the two types of follis of Heraclius and Constans (Figs. 3 and 4), since the belted figure stretches his left arm well out from his body as he supports the bird, but the senior emperor on these folles holds his left arm akimbo. Nevertheless, the key point here is that the alleged 'severed head' coins only form a small sub-type within the standing figure with bird type, and their origin cannot be properly investigated except in the context of the other sub-types within this larger group also. As Oddy highlights, other coins seem to depict a bag hanging beneath the left arm rather than any sort of head or bust, and there must be a strong suspicion that the heads or busts result from a misinterpretation of this bag.[10]

The strength of Oddy's argument lies in its relative simplicity and in the fact that the engravers in the so-called pseudo-Damascus mint did imitate the coinage of the Damascus mint, which is why their mint has been so named. Indeed, the cloaked figure with the strangely hovering orb (Fig. 1a) clearly derives directly from the emperor with orb as depicted on the Damascus type with the bird to the left (Fig. 2). This type depicts the emperor holding the orb so close to his chest that only the

[8] For these two types of follis, see P. Grierson, ***Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection 2: Phocas to Theodosius III, 602-717*** (Washington, D.C., 1968) [***DOC 2*** henceforth], pp. 295-300 and 454-55 respectively.
[9] Grierson, ***DOC 2***, p. 269.
[10] Oddy, 'Arab Imagery on Early Umayyad Coins in Syria and Palestine: Evidence for Falconry', ***Numismatic Chronicle*** 151 (1991), p. 61; id., 'Symbolism and Design on the Early Umayyad Coinage', in T. Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins and History*** (London, 2012), p. 110.

left shoulder is visible, as in the Byzantine original, but at the pseudo-Damascus mint the orb slowly drifts away from the emperor's body until the point where someone finally felt the need to add the depiction of a left arm also. However, Oddy's argument also suffers from some serious weaknesses. First, it is not clear that the bird depicted perched on the apparent T-shaped stand on the issues from Damascus is in fact a falcon. It may have been intended to represent any of a large variety of birds from a Roman imperial eagle, although this had normally been depicted with open wings, or a Christian dove, to some bird native to Damascus or its greater environs.[11] The key factor leading Oddy to identify it as a falcon is the fact that it appears to be perched on a stand such as was typically used in falconry, although a variety of other domesticated or pet birds could have been depicted with a similar stand. However, as he helpfully catalogues, the same T-shaped object also occurs in association with two other objects, or combination of objects, on obverses associated with reverses bearing the Damascus mint mark in Greek, and in association with six other objects, or groups of objects, on obverses associated with reverses bearing the mint mark in Arabic.[12] This proves that there is no intrinsic connection between the bird, whatever its identity, and the T-shaped object beneath it. Indeed, it is worth noting that the pseudo-Damascus mint also produced a close imitation of this type, but without the T-shaped object beneath the bird (Fig. 6).[13]



Figure 6: Pseudo-Damascus Fals (© CNG, Inc.)

More importantly, the fact that the bird seems to have been but one of a series of variable symbols – including palm-branch, star, and crescent – used in the field to the side of the main image suggests that its real purpose was to distinguish one batch of product from another batch of product in the manner of the issue marks on the Roman coinage of the late third and fourth centuries AD. Hence there is no intrinsic connection between the bird and the main image, the standing figure. It was an engraver in the pseudo-Damascus mint who first made this connection when he decided to place the bird on the left hand of the standing figure instead.

A second weakness in Oddy's argument is that he does not distinguish properly between the cloaked figure with bird (Fig. 1a) and the belted figure with bird (Fig. 1b). These seem to represent two different stages of development in the depiction of this figure, and need to be treated separately. In the case of the belted figure, Oddy is probably correct to argue that he represents a falconer. The change from the ceremonial to the more utilitarian clothing supports this interpretation. More importantly, the fact that some dies depict the belted figure with a staff or a spear in his right hand rather than a large cross seems to confirm that he had indeed come to be understood as a hunter by

[11] For an example of the continued use of the eagle as an imperial symbol into the mid-seventh century, see W. Schulze, 'The Byzantine 'Eagle' Countermark – Re-attributed from Egypt to Palestine', ***Israel Numismatic Research*** 4 (2009), pp. 113-20, attributing the use of the eagle counter-mark to the besieged Byzantine defenders of Caesarea in Palestine c.637-40. It may not be irrelevant that the insignia of the *dux Arabiae* in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, dated c.400, includes two large birds, probably identifiable as ibises. See O. Seeck, ***Notitia Dignitatum. Accedunt Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae et Latercula Provinciarum*** (Berlin, 1876), p. 80.

[12] See Oddy, 'Symbolism and Design on the Early Umayyad Coinage', in T. Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins and History*** (London, 2012), pp. 118-19, Fig. 11 and Fig. 13 respectively.

[13] See Classical Numismatic Group, eAuction 306, Lot 473.

this point (Fig. 7).[14] However, it is by no means certain that this was how the originator of the cloaked figure with bird had initially intended him to be understood. Indeed, the very fact that subsequent engravers seem to have felt the need to transform the depiction of the cloaked figure until he better resembled a falconer proves he was not initially a very convincing depiction of such a figure. One does not doubt that the Imperial Image type from Damascus with the bird to the side of the standing figure did play an important part in inspiring the engraver in the pseudo-Damascus mint that it would be acceptable to depict a bird in association with the standing figure, the Byzantine emperor presumably, but the crucial question here is whether this was the only image to influence him in this direction. Did some other image influence him to set the bird on the figure's left hand in particular rather than elsewhere?[15]



Figure 7

No investigation of the origin and significance of the depiction of an apparent falconer on Arab-Byzantine coinage can afford to ignore the fact that moneyers in England began to depict a similar standing figure with bird on the reverse of several groups of silver pennies, or sceattas, struck c. 720-30 (Fig. 8a and b).[16]



a b

Figure 8
a: Anglo-Saxon Sceatta Series K, type 20 (© T. Abramson)
b: Anglo-Saxon Sceatta Series L, type16/18 variety (© T. Abramson)

Such are the similarities between the Anglo-Saxon and Arab-Byzantine types, that it has even been suggested that the Anglo-Saxon moneyers may have imitated Arab-Byzantine coins reaching

[14] See Oddy, 'Symbolism and Design on the Early Umayyad Coinage', in T. Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins and History*** (London, 2012), Fig. 1, no. 2 (staff); Schindel and Hahn, 'Notes on Two Arab-Byzantine Coin Types', Fig. 10 (spear); T. Goodwin, 'The Chronology of the Umayyad Imperial Image Coinage: Progress over the Last 10 Years', in Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins,*** pp. 89-107, Fig. 4, d; W. Schulze and A. Oddy, 'The Spear on Coins of the Byzantine-Arab Transition Period', in this volume.

[15] There were other possibilities. One notes that a type of Anglo-Saxon sceatta depicts what appears to be a large bird of prey perched upon the shoulder of the bust on the obverse (Series K, Type 42). See T. Abramson, ***Sceatta List*** (2012), pp. 123-24, Group 41 according to his new arrangement of the coinage.

[16] The relevant types are mostly attributed to what are conventionally known as Series K and L within the Anglo-Saxon corpus. See Abramson, ***Sceatta List***, pp. 112-15, Groups 33 and 35 according to his new arrangement of the coinage. See also his Groups 23 and 112.

England as a result of commerce or pilgrimage.[17] However, there are two important differences between the Anglo-Saxon and Arab-Byzantine types. First, the Anglo-Saxon coins depict the figure with bird standing in a crescent-shaped object generally identified as a boat. This has no obvious equivalent upon any Arab-Byzantine type. One could perhaps argue that it represents a misinterpretation of the curved line representing his cloak on the cloaked figure type, but against this one notes that the dress of the standing figure on the Anglo-Saxon coins bears a far closer similarity to that of the belted- rather than the cloaked figure on Arab-Byzantine types. Secondly, the Anglo-Saxon coins depict the standing figure with his face turned towards the bird rather than with face forward in the manner of the Arab-Byzantine coins. At this point, one needs to bear in mind that Anglo-Saxon moneyers often based their obverse and reverse types on those of late Roman coins issued during the first half of the fourth century AD.[18] It is important to note, therefore, that their depiction of the standing figure with bird bears a closer resemblance to a standing imperial figure on a base billon type issued c.348-50 (Fig. 9a) than it does to any depiction of the standing figure with bird on Arab-Byzantine coinage.



a b

Figure 9
a: Centenionalis of Constans I minted at Antioch (© CNG, Inc.)
b: Centenionalis of Constantius II minted at Antioch (© Wildwinds.com)

This particular late Roman type was produced at most of the operative mints across the empire as part of a series of coins whose common reverse legend proclaimed that they were celebrating the **FEL TEMP REPARATIO** 'The Restoration of Happy Times'.[19] It depicts the emperor in military dress standing facing left in a galley, and with a phoenix on a globe in his right hand outstretched before him and the labarum in his left hand behind him.[20] In other words, this type explains the two chief characteristics that serve to distinguish the Anglo-Saxon from the Arab-Byzantine types as already explained. It is obvious, therefore, that the originators of the Anglo-Saxon type imitated this late Roman type rather than an Arab-Byzantine coin.[21] This is not to claim that these Anglo-Saxon

[17] See e.g. P.D. Whitting, 'The Byzantine Empire and the Coinage of the Anglo-Saxons', in R.H.M. Dolley (ed.), ***Anglo-Saxon Coins*** (London, 1961), pp. 23-38, at 31; A. Gannon, ***The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage, Sixth to Eighth Centuries*** (Oxford, 2003), p. 95.

[18] E.g. some sceattas imitate the **VRBS ROMA** follis, with reverse depicting the wolf and twins, issued c.330-40, while several of the most common series imitate the **VIRT EXERCIT** follis, with reverse depicting a single standard bearing the legend **VOT/ XX** within its flag, issued c.320-21. See Gannon, ***The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage***, (Oxford, 2003) pp. 145-47, 171-76.

[19] See J.P.C. Kent, ***The Roman Imperial Coinage VIII: The Family of Constantine I, AD337-364*** (London, 1981), Trier nos 212-17, 239-40; Lyons nos 69-78, 95-99; Arles nos 99-101, 116-17; Rome nos 107-35, 148-52; Aquileia nos 97-99, 108-09; Siscia nos 197-209; Thessalonica nos 107-13, 119-21; Heraclea nos 62, 66, 68; Constantinople nos 80, 83; Nicomedia nos 61, 64; Cyzicus no. 66; Antioch nos 121, 124.

[20] On the significance of the various types within this series, see e.g. K. Kraft, 'Die Taten der Kaiser Constans und Constantius II', ***Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte*** 9 (1958), pp. 140-86. Even though the type with the emperor standing in the galley was produced in the names of both emperors at the time, the brothers Constans I and Constantius II, it is generally assumed that it probably refers to Constans' expedition to Britain during the winter of 342/43.

[21] I refer to originators because it seems to me that the surviving specimens may point to several independent attempts at copying the same model, whether by the same or successive engravers in the same workshop. One variant (Series L, Type 13) is unusual in that it depicts the figure with the bird in its left hand, in closer imitation of the Roman model

engravers, or their imitators, necessarily understood what they were copying. Indeed, the fact that some die-engravers added a T-shaped stand beneath the figure's left arm on some variants suggests that they did not (Fig. 8b). They saw a real bird rather than statue on a globe, interpreted it as a falcon, and then provided it with a stand. Other engravers decided to drop the bird and replace it with a second cross instead, so that the figure in the boat was actually depicted holding two crosses. They clearly saw something else in this figure whether a missionary saint travelling to proclaim the gospel overseas, a pilgrim travelling to or from the Holy Land, or the church in England on its journey through life.[22]

The fact that the originator of the standard figure with bird type in Anglo-Saxon England created a type so similar to the standing figure with bird type on Arab-Byzantine coinage by using a late Roman reverse type naturally raises the question whether the same late Roman reverse type did not play some role in influencing the originator of the standing figure with bird type on Arab-Byzantine coinage to depict the standing figure in the way that he did also. However, the possibilities were probably a little more complicated in the Byzantine East than they were in Anglo-Saxon England. By the time that Anglo-Saxon moneyers began the re-introduction of a common coinage in England during the late seventh and early eighth centuries AD, most of their late Roman inheritance had probably already been lost, the towns and associated infrastructures having been destroyed either by the climate or by the three centuries of invasion and civil-war since the Romans had abandoned Britain during the early fifth century AD. However, the situation in the Byzantine, or former Byzantine, East was quite different. It still preserved much of its Roman inheritance by the late seventh century thanks both to long continuity of Byzantine, or east Roman rule, before the recent Arab conquests and a climate better suited to preserve ancient monuments. Hence the inhabitants of late seventh century AD Syria would have been surrounded by constant reminders of the Roman past in the form of statues, frescoes, and mosaics, whether in public buildings such as baths, churches, or local administrative complexes, or in private dwellings. Many such art-works would have included some depiction of the emperor responsible for the construction, or restoration, of the relevant building. Most of these works may be presumed to have continued relatively unharmed until the rise of iconoclasm within the Islamic state under 'Abd al-Malik and the subsequent rise of iconoclasm within Byzantine society under Leo III, except perhaps when they also included some depiction of the Christian cross.

The relevance of this is that Constantius II, one of the two emperors responsible for the production of the late Roman type discussed above, spent much of his reign based at Antioch in Syria and was also a prolific builder who sought to strengthen the eastern frontier against the Persian threat.[23] The region would have been rich with art-works in his honour and when during the period c.348-50 the phoenix played as important a part in imperial iconography as it did, sometimes even appearing alone as the main device on the coinage (Fig. 9b), many of these works would probably have included some depiction of this bird in association with the emperor. It is my argument, therefore, that the originator of the cloaked figure with bird type at the pseudo-Damascus mint was primarily influenced to depict this figure with a bird in his hand because he was familiar with some antique local art-work depicting an emperor – probably Constantius II – with a phoenix on globe in his left

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than usual, and has made a rather clumsy attempt to convert the galley into a chair. See Gannon, ***The Iconography of Anglo-Saxon Coinage***, (Oxford, 2003) p. 98.

[22] See C.E. Karkov, 'The Boat and the Cross: Church and State in Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage', in T. Abramson (ed.), ***Studies in Early Medieval Coinage 2: New Perspectives*** (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 61-69.

[23] Antioch was his principal winter residence, after a summer spent campaigning in Mesopotamia, for the period 337-50. See T.D. Barnes, ***Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*** (Cambridge, MA, 1993), pp. 219-24. On his building activities, see N. Henck, 'Constantius ὁ Φιλοκτίστης?', ***Dumbarton Oaks Papers*** 55 (2001), pp. 279-304.

hand, a variation of the late Roman coin type.[24] However, there remains a more intriguing possibility that deserves, at least, to be mentioned.

The late Roman coin discussed above bore the reverse legend **FEL TEMP REPARATIO** 'The Restoration of Happy Times', and the reason why the emperor was depicted with a phoenix rather than an eagle or a Victory upon the globe, and why the phoenix itself formed the main image on another type within the same series, was that the phoenix was the great symbol of renewal acceptable both to pagans and Christians alike.[25] The relevance of this here is that Constans II (641-68) chose imperial renewal as the theme for the first part of his reign also.[26] Hence his folles struck at Constantinople during the period 641-56 (Classes 1-5) proclaimed the legend **ANANЄO'**, an abbreviation of the Greek *ananeosis* 'renewal', alongside the denomination mark on the reverse.[27] Unfortunately, relatively little Byzantine art survives from the seventh century, and almost none at all from the reign of Constans II, so it is impossible to tell what new imagery, if any, he used in an effort to broadcast this theme across his empire. However, the phoenix was an ancient Christian symbol of renewal, and he may well have circulated images of himself holding a phoenix upon a globe in the same manner as the fourth century emperors.[28] It is not impossible, therefore, that the originator of the cloaked figure with bird type at the pseudo-Damascus mint may have been influenced by some recent depiction of Constans II with phoenix rather than some ancient depiction of Constantius II with phoenix. He would not necessarily have to have understood the true significance of the phoenix in either case. However, the possibility that he recognised the bird in his model as the phoenix, and understood the significance of the same, deserves serious consideration. This would transform his decision to depict this bird in the hand of the standing emperor on his coin into a political statement, a celebration of some apparent upturn in the military and political affairs of the Byzantine Empire as a sign of renewal. This seems unlikely, but is not impossible. It is more likely that he saw the emperor with a phoenix upon a globe in his hand as nothing more than an interesting variant in the imperial image, with no real thought as to the identity of the bird or what exactly it signified.

The Seated Couple

As has long been noted, each of the five main mints engaged in the production of Phase 2 Arab-Byzantine copper used a different main obverse type, so that Damascus preferred a single standing emperor based on the obverse of the folles (Class 1-4) struck under Constans II during the period 641-48, Heliopolis preferred two standing emperors based perhaps on the obverse of a follis (Class 2) struck under Heraclius during the period 613-16, Tiberias preferred three standing emperors based perhaps on the obverse of a solidus (Class 4) struck under Heraclius during the period 632-

[24] T. Goodwin, 'The Chronology of the Umayyad Imperial Image Coinage: Progress over the Last 10 Years', in Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins,*** pp. 93-94, suggests that the Pseudo-Damascus coinage was not a city coinage, but was struck for 'a tribal leader on the desert fringe'. This does not affect the present argument in that such a figure would very likely have occupied an abandoned Roman fort, if available, a suitable environment in which to discover frescoes of long deceased emperors. One thinks of the early 4th-century frescoes from the legionary shrine in the Temple of Luxor, Egypt, depicting Diocletian and his court. See I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'The Imperial Chamber at Luxor', ***Dumbarton Oaks Papers*** 29 (1975), pp. 225-51.

[25] In general, see R. Van den Broek, ***The Myth of the Phoenix according to Classical and Early Christian Traditions*** (Leiden, 1972).

[26] On this theme in general, see J.F. Haldon, 'Constantine or Justinian? Crisis and Identity in Imperial Propaganda in the Seventh Century', P. Magdalino (ed.), ***New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*** (Aldershot, 1994), pp. 95-107.

[27] See Grierson, ***DOC 2***, pp. 442-51.

[28] It would be interesting to know how contemporary Byzantine propaganda presented the result of the naval battle of Phoenix c. 655 since, while it is usually described as a Byzantine defeat, it clearly resulted in large losses for both sides. See C. Zuckerman, 'Learning from the Enemy and More: Studies in "Dark Centuries" Byzantium', ***Millenium*** 2 (2005), pp. 79-135, at 114-15. News of this event may have provided an opportunity for a brief re-introduction of the phoenix within imperial iconography in a visual pun upon the location of this battle.

41, Emesa preferred a single imperial bust based perhaps on the obverse of solidi (Class 1-2) struck under Constans II during the period 641-51, and Scythopolis preferred two seated figures based on the obverse of the follis struck under Justin and Sophia during the period 566-78 (Fig. 10a and b).[29] So why did the mint at Scythopolis resort to a model so much older than that used at the other mints?[30]



a b

Figure 10
a: Follis of Justin II minted at Nikomedia in 571/2
b: Fals minted probably by Mu'awiya at Scythopolis/Baisan c.670

This choice could simply reflect the fact that a relatively large number of the folles of Justin and Sophia seem to have been in circulation in the region about Scythopolis.[31] However, one must be careful not to exaggerate this phenomenon, since neither of the figures quoted for two excavations at Scythopolis, where this type numbers 104 out of 1,590 coins (6.5%) and 310 out of 2,163 coins (14%) respectively, suggests that it dominated within the local currency. More importantly, these figures are of little real value in themselves, since they do not tell us about the proportions of different coin types in circulation at the crucial period, the actual start of minting at Scythopolis. Alternatively, this choice could reflect the greater respect felt for the larger weight and diameter of this coin compared with more recent Byzantine issues. However, Justin reduced the weight of the follis from 1/18 pound (18.1g) to 1/21 pound (15.5g) during the first year of his reign, and to 1/24 pound (13.6g) during the fifth year of his reign, a weight standard maintained until 616.[32] Hence the coins of his predecessor Justinian I were heavier than his, while most of his were no heavier or larger than those of his successors. In other words, there was nothing particularly attractive or distinctive about the module of his follis compared with that of Tiberius II (578-82), Maurice (582-602) or Phocas (602-10).

Finally, one needs to consider the possibility that it was the nature of the obverse design itself that encouraged the mint at Scythopolis to choose this particular type of follis for imitation. Here one should note that if it was simply a matter of choosing, or being assigned, an obverse design different from those already in use at, or assigned to, the other main mints, then there remained other possibilities. For example, a double bust was used on the obverse of solidi and folles of the Heraclii during their initial revolt 608-10,[33] on the solidi of Heraclius issued at Constantinople during the

[29] As T. Goodwin, 'The Chronology of the Umayyad Imperial Image Coinage: Progress over the Last 10 Years', in Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coins***, pp. 89-90, notes, this apparent level of organization does not necessarily point to central control or co-ordination. On these apparent models, see Album and Goodwin, ***SICA 1***, pp. 82-83.
[30] The mint at Damascus, followed by the Pseudo-Damascus mint, also used an obverse type with single seated emperor which, as Album and Goodwin, ***SICA 1***, pp. 82, have suggested, may have been loosely based on the obverse of a follis produced at Antioch c.529-33, or on 'a seal or some other non-numismatic source'. I suggest that it probably represents a halving of the seated pair on the follis of Justin and Sophia.
[31] As suggested by N. Amitai-Preiss, A. Berman, and S. Qedar, 'The Coinage of Scythopolis-Baysān and Gerasa-Jerash', ***Israel Numismatic Journal*** 13 (1999), pp. 133-51, at 136.
[32] See W. Hahn and M. Metlich, ***Money of the Incipient Byzantine Empire Continued (Justin II – Revolt of the Heraclii, 565-610)*** (Vienna, 2009) [***MIBEC*** henceforth], pp. 9-10. There were some minor regional variations also.
[33] Hahn and Metlich, ***MIBEC***, pp. 203-06.

period 613-31,[34] and on the solidi and hexagrams of Constans II issued at Constantinople during the periods 654-63 and 654-68 respectively,[35] just to mention the more obvious examples. Again, a group of three busts was used on the obverse of folles of Heraclius issued at Ravenna during the period 616-26, and on reverse of the folles of Constans II issued at Constantinople during the period 666-68.[36] The fact that the authority at Scythopolis did not resort to these other potential obverse types, despite their continued availability, suggests that it may have chosen the twin seated type for some more positive reason, and not simply because of a lack of other choices.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the coinage of Scythopolis is the inclusion of the name of the mint to the left and right of the seated couple on the obverse (Fig. 10b) rather than in the exergue on the reverse (Fig. 10a). Since the third century AD, it had been Roman practice to include some abbreviated form of the name of the mint on the reverse, normally in the exergue. For the most part, the other Arab-Byzantine mints continued to inscribe the name of the relevant city on the reverse, although over time, and with the need to find space for extra Arabic legends on the reverse, the mint mark was sometimes displaced to the obverse, whether in Greek or Arabic.[37] None of the other main mints tolerated a 'frozen' mint mark on the reverse in direct imitation of their immediate Byzantine model.[38] Instead, they changed the mint mark of their model to reflect their real location. In contrast, Scythopolis retained the mint mark of its immediate model 'frozen' in the exergue of its coinage, whether **NIKO** for Nicomedia, **CON** for Constantinople, **KYZ** for Cyzicus, or varied corrupt efforts at the same, but replaced the obverse legend of its model with the real mint name instead. Hence it replaced the Latin legend **DNIVSTI – NVSPPAVG** with the Greek legend **CKYΘO – ΠOΛHC**. Most importantly, there is no evidence of any phase or variant at Scythopolis where some form of the Greek name of the city did occur on the reverse.[39] The decision to place the mint name on the obverse rather than the reverse seems to have been deliberate, and to have occurred from the very start of production. The big question, therefore, is why the mint at Scythopolis decided to break with the long accepted Byzantine usage continued by its contemporary Arab-Byzantine mints, and whether this is also related to the associated decision to imitate an obverse type so much older than those imitated by these other mints.

An obvious interpretation of the decision to place the name of Scythopolis on the obverse to the left and right of the two seated figures is that it was intended to identify one of these figures as Scythopolis, that is, as the personification of the city. Here one needs to remember that it had long been customary by the early Byzantine period to symbolise cities by means of their guardian spirit or *Tyche* and that this *Tyche* was normally depicted with a mural crown and seated upright on a chair.[40] The *Tyche* of Scythopolis had featured prominently upon the Roman provincial coinage of that city until it ceased production in 240/1, but she had been depicted in a number of different ways

[34] Grierson, ***DOC 2***, pp. 247-57.
[35] Grierson, ***DOC 2***, pp. 427-33, 440-42.
[36] Grierson, ***DOC 2***, pp. 374-75, 459-60.
[37] Damascus struck a type with obverse depicting a single standing emperor with the legend **ΔAMACKOC** to his right and reverse with the mint mark in Arabic in the exergue. See Album and Goodwin, ***SICA 1***, nos 566-68. Emesa struck a type with obverse depicting an imperial bust with the mint mark in Arabic to its right and reverse with the mint mark in Greek on either side of the denomination **M** and the Arabic *tayyib* 'good' in the exeregue. See Album and Goodwin, ***SICA 1***, nos 538-58.
[38] Diospolis struck an Imperial Image type with an obverse depicting a single standing emperor surrounded by the legend **ΔIOC – ΠOΛHC**. However, the associated reverse seems to imitate the reverse of a coin from Scythopolis. The idea of putting the mint mark on the obverse was probably copied from the same coin also. See T. Goodwin, ***Arab-Byzantine Coinage***, Studies in the Khalili Collection IV (London, 2005), p. 154.
[39] There was a variant where the name of the city in Arabic was placed in the exergue and, bizarrely, the 'frozen' mint mark was shifted to the left side of the denomination **M** in replacement of the date. See A. Oddy, 'The Early Umayyad Coinage of Baisān and Jerash', ***ARAM*** 6 (1994), pp. 405-18, at p. 417, no. 10.
[40] In general, see S.B. Matheson, ***An Obsession with Fortune: Tyche in Greek and Roman Art*** (New Haven, 1994).

over time so that it becomes clear that she had no fixed definitive form (Fig. 11a and b).[41] The practice of symbolising cities in this way had continued into the Christian period, despite what one might have considered the problematic pagan associations of such imagery, and a mosaic roundel from early sixth-century Scythopolis seems to depict a bust of its *Tyche* in traditional pagan manner (Fig. 12).[42] However, *Tychai* could be Christianized to some extent, as when the artist responsible for the depiction of the *Tyche* of Madaba in a sixth-century mosaic from a private residence in that town added a cross to the top of her long sceptre (Fig. 13).[43]



Figure 11
a: AE of Scythopolis in name of Lucilla Augusta dated CY 239 (AD 175/6): Tyche standing right, foot on river-god swimming right, holding scepter and cornucopia. (© CNG, Inc.)
b: AE of Scythopolis in name of Gordian III dated CY 304 (AD 240/1): Tyche seated right, cradling the infant Dionysos. (© CNG, Inc.)



Figure 12: Tyche from Scythopolis (© T. M. Kristensen)

[41] See R. Barkay, ***The Coinage of Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth-Shean),*** Corpus Nummorum Palaestinensium V (Jerusalem, 2003), pp. 133-39.
[42] In general, see B. Poulsen, 'City Personifications in Late Antiquity', in S. Birk, T.M. Kristensen, and B. Poulsen (eds.), ***Using Images in Late Antiquity*** (Oxford, 2014), pp. 209-26.
[43] For detailed colour photographs, see M. Piccirillo, ***The Mosaics of Jordan*** (Amman, 1992), pp. 51-67. For discussion, see R. Avner-Livy, 'A Note on the Iconography of the Personifications in the "Hippolytos Mosaic" at Madaba, Jordan', ***Liber Annuus*** 46 (1996), pp. 363-74.



Figure 13: Mosaic from the so-called Hippolytus Hall, Madaba

The relevance of all this is that the original depiction of Justin and Sophia seated upright together looks very much like a depiction of two *Tychai* seated together. The main change which the originator of the Arab-Byzantine type has made to their depiction is that he has removed the orb from his left-hand figure, Justin originally, and replaced it with a cross-sceptre, so that the two seated figures are now identically equipped. The obvious explanation for this action is that he believed that, as a symbol of imperial power and world-domination, the orb was inappropriate to the figure whom he wished to represent, the *Tyche* of a provincial city presumably, which, as even its proudest citizens would admit, did not possess such power.

It is my argument, therefore, that the originator of the two seated figures type at Scythopolis has subtly recast the original depiction of Justin and Sophia to represent two urban *Tychai* instead. Since he only names Scythopolis, the expectation seems to be that those handling the coins would have no difficulty in identifying this other town. It was not unusual to depict two or more *Tychai* together; this could be done for a variety of reasons. For example, the personifications of Rome and Constantinople, the Old and New Romes, were often depicted together in the fourth century AD because of the similarly elevated status of both the two great imperial cities of the empire.[44] Alternatively, two *Tychai* might be depicted together in order to emphasize a real friendship or association between two cities, as when Julius Terentius, commander of the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, commissioned a wall-painting in a temple at Dura Europus in 239, depicting, among other things, the *Tychai* of Dura Europus and Palmyra sitting alongside each other (Fig.14).[45] Finally, it is important to note that not everything that looks like a *Tyche* is necessarily

[44] See J.M.C. Toynbee, 'Roma and Constantinopolis in Late Antique Roman Art from 312 to 365', ***Journal of Roman Studies*** 37 (1947), pp. 135-44; also G.W. Bowersock, 'Old and New Rome in the Late Antique Near East', in P. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis (eds.), ***Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*** (Farnham, 2009), pp. 37-50.

[45] In general, see L. Dirven, 'The Julius Terentius Fresco and the Roman Imperial Cult', ***Mediterraneo antico*** 10 (2007), pp. 115-27.

identifiable as such, since it is arguable that the two apparent *Tychai* which the artist depicted alongside the *Tyche* of Madaba in the above-mentioned mosaic were intended to personify urban virtues allegedly possessed by Madaba rather than the *Tychai* of two associated cities.[46]



Figure 14: Wall-painting from the Temple of Bel at Dura Europus

In this particular case, the possibility that the authority responsible for minting at Scythopolis may have wanted to flatter the city by associating it with some powerful city or individual is lessened by the fact that the two seated figures are depicted in the exact same manner as if equals. Hence if the obverse was intended to depict two *Tychai*, then they probably represent two cities of approximately similar status, so the second Tyche is unlikely to represent either Damascus, the capital of the caliphate, or Tiberias, the capital of the jund. However, one notes that there was clearly some form of close association between Scythopolis and Gerasa during the late seventh century. Coins struck in the name of Gerasa were of the same basic type and module as those struck in the name of Scythopolis, and are often dealt with together for this reason.[47] The main difference as far as the obverse is concerned is the that coins of Gerasa restore the *globus cruciger* to the left-hand figure in closer imitation of the original obverse on the follis of Justin and Sophia (Fig. 15). Furthermore, they usually depict a star between the heads of the two figures rather than the cross as depicted on the obverse both of the Phase 2 coins struck at Scythopolis and of the original imperial coins struck for Justin and Sophia. The transformation of the cross into a star suggests that the engraver did not really understand, or care, what he was copying, and encourages the belief that his restoration of the *globus cruciger* to the left-hand figure was probably the result of a similar ignorance or carelessness. Such an interpretation is consistent with the generally cruder style of these coins also. The suspicion must be that the coins struck in the name of Gerasa were struck in imitation of those struck in the name of Scythopolis.[48] Whatever the case, the fact that both mints

[46] D. Woods, 'Rome, Gregoria, and Madaba: A Warning against Sexual Temptation', ***Studia Patristica*** 64 (2013), pp. 9-14.

[47] See A. Oddy, 'The Early Umayyad Coinage of Baisān and Jerash', ***ARAM*** 6 (1994); N. Amitai-Preiss, A. Berman, and S. Qedar, 'The Coinage of Scythopolis-Baysān and Gerasa-Jerash', ***Israel Numismatic Journal*** 13 (1999).

[48] A group of coins of similar type and module to those of Scythopolis and Gerasa have been attributed to Abila, but none actually preserve its name clearly and fully. See A. Oddy, 'The Coinage of Abila in the Early Umayyad Period', ***ARAM*** 23 (2011), pp. 337-46. Even if these were attributable to Abila, however, their crude style and corrupt Greek suggests that they are poor imitations of the coinage of Scythopolis once more.

struck the same basic type of coin on the same unusual module proves some form of close association. Hence if the originator of the two seated figure obverse at Scythopolis did intend to depict two urban *Tychai*, as I have argued, that of Scythopolis itself together with that of some other town of similar status, then that town is most likely identifiable as Gerasa.



Figure 15: Fals of Gerasa minted in the 670s

Conclusion

A common theme emerges from this discussion of the production of two very different obverse types at two different groups of mints, that is, the brief flickering of an iconographic independence drawing inspiration from the classical past. An engraver at the pseudo-Damascus mint was probably inspired to add a bird to the imperial orb by some fourth-century depiction of an emperor holding an orb surmounted by a phoenix, while an engraver at Scythopolis was probably inspired by some ancient depiction of the *Tyche* of Scythopolis to recast the seated figures of Justin and Sophia as the *Tychai* of Scythopolis and some associated city, very likely Gerasa. There were limits to what these engravers could achieve in that they seem to have been expected to produce obverse types that resembled those already in circulation and looked appropriately 'imperial'. Nevertheless, they drew upon their classical artistic inheritance to push against these limits. Unfortunately, none of those who imitated either of their obverse types subsequently seems to have understood what these engravers had been trying to depict, so the emperor with orb surmounted by a phoenix was rapidly transformed into a hunter with falcon, and the *globus cruciger* was mistakenly restored to one of the *Tychai*. This incomprehension of, or worse still a lack of concern for, classical iconographic traditions points either to the emergence of a new generation of engravers less schooled in the ways of the past or the increased Arabicisation of the mints. In either case, our two engravers arguably represented the last of their breed.