

**VALENTIN MARCHEV
ROBERT WACHTER**

**CATALOGUE
OF THE
LATE
BYZANTINE COINS
1081 - 1453**

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(IN TWO VOLUMES)

VOLUME I

1081 - 1261

**BYZANTINE IMPERIAL COINAGE FROM
ALEXIUS I TO ALEXIUS IV (1081 - 1204)
ISAAC OF CYPRUS
BULGARIAN AND LATIN IMITATIVE COINAGE
DESPOTATE OF THESSALONICA
DESPOTATE OF EPIRUS**

2011

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© Robert Wachter

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CATALOGUE

Collecting Byzantine coins, and in particular coins from the Comnenan, Angelan, and Palaeologan dynasties, and from the Empire of Thessalonica, and the Empire of Nicaea, has become increasingly popular over the last two decades. Collectors from around the world have assembled new collections, and some of these collections already vie with the largest, oldest and most well known museum collections. There are many reasons for this increased interest in late Byzantine numismatics:

- *Variety.* From Alexius I's monetary reform until the fall of Constantinople, the Byzantine mints produced a tremendous variety of coin types and variations, with a wide range of iconographic subject matter.
- *Aesthetics.* The coinage of this period has a peculiar beauty, full of symbolic meaning. The period marked the height of a truly Byzantine style of numismatic iconography, and many of the types feature unusually complex subjects and designs. Many coin types were struck to have concave shape, which makes it more challenging for collectors to find well-struck and well-preserved specimens.
- *New Discoveries.* The coinage from the period has been studied and catalogued for two centuries. However, researchers and collectors continue to discover new and previously unknown issues. There are still hundreds of unanswered questions in the field. Even for coin types that are already well known, many have not been well studied or described in detail. Byzantine coinage from 1081 to 1453 remains an incomplete puzzle.
- *Affordability.* The majority of the issues from this period are still relatively inexpensive and available to collectors with limited budgets.
- *Opportunities.* It is undeniable that many coin dealers and most accidental sellers on eBay are not familiar with late Byzantine coinage. Sellers frequently offer coins for sale with the wrong attribution, and many do not even try to attribute the coins at all. It is common for sellers to offer rare and valuable coins at a small fraction of their market values.
- *Fewer Counterfeits.* It is of considerable importance that, at least up to now, the coinage has attracted relatively little interest of modern counterfeiters. Byzantine billon and late copper issues are one of the few numismatic fields that remain relatively free of counterfeits.

Although these circumstances have converged to inspire a whole new generation of collectors, new collectors quickly become discouraged by the difficulty in properly understanding and attributing the coins. Dealers and experienced collectors also face this problem on a regular basis.

Difficulty of Attribution

There are two major reasons for the difficulty in attributing late Byzantine coins. The first related to the objective state of the coins. The vast majority were poorly struck. The strikes were often uneven or incomplete, and the concave shape of the coin made it very difficult to strike a well-centered coin with even relief. The legends are often abbreviated and difficult to read even on well-struck specimens. Because of the miniaturization required to depict full length figures on such a small area, it is often difficult to discern the details of the imperial garments and insignia. In addition to these problems, many coins are in a poor state of preservation. These factors collectively make it very difficult to make a correct attribution.

The second reason is more subjective: until now, there has not been a single resource available to collectors to facilitate a quick, certain and accurate identification. The leading reference book for this period is Michael Hendy's epochal work *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire 1081 - 1261*, published in 1969. Hendy was the first to try to attribute coins to a particular ruler based the inscriptions on the coins, as well as from data available from coin hoards. Before Hendy, there had been no systematic attempt to differentiate many of the billon and copper coin types. Hendy broke down large groups of Latin and Bulgarian imitations, differentiating coin types, series within the coin types, and the sequence of the series. Hendy's work revolutionized the field of late Byzantine numismatics because it enabled more precise and specific attribution.

The publication of DOC IV thirty years later was, to a large extent, an update of Hendy's first edition. Hendy added a few more coin types and revisited some of his earlier analysis, conclusions and attributions, but did not introduce anything radically new. These two works are indispensable for attributing late Byzantine coinage. However, they also have some practical limitations for collectors:

- The analytical sections are separated from coin type descriptions. The coins from Alexius I to Theodore I appear in the first part of the catalogue, but the pages with the photos for these coins appear in the second part.
- Sometimes the resolution of the photos is insufficient to make out critical details, though in many cases it is unclear whether the problem lies in the photographs or the coins themselves. Few of the coins are ideal specimens. Many are in a poor state of preservation. This is not a criticism of the work as much as an observation about the limits of relying on photos, especially for any specific collection of coins from this period. It is practically impossible to assemble a photo base of ideal specimens, all with excellent quality and detail.
- Hendy's works are expensive and can be difficult to find.
- Hendy's works are already out of date. More than four decades have passed since Hendy published his first ground breaking work. During that time collectors have identified many new coin types and discovered many

new hoards. The understanding of medieval coinage is constantly evolving with the new data and discoveries. The new information has particularly helped researchers better understand coin circulation during the first half of the second millennium.

Byzantine coin collectors who do not have access to Hendy's works have usually relied on Philip Grierson's 1982 single-volume work *Byzantine Coins* and David Sear's book *Byzantine Coins and Their Values*, originally published in 1974, but revised and reissued in 1987. Grierson's work supports and relies on Hendy's views, but does not break significant new ground on the subject matter for this period. The illustrations in *Byzantine Coins* are from the coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, and the work does not add newly discovered types from the late Byzantine period.

David Sear's *Byzantine Coins and Their Values* is a single volume identification guide that relies heavily on the attributions as set forth in DOC. The work remains the most well known and widely cited reference book on Byzantine coins. Sear managed to summarize the coin descriptions so that the entire Byzantine coinage was gathered in a single compact volume. Sear also suggested reference prices for all the listed coin types. While Sear's book remains an invaluable reference for collectors who collect coins from the early and middle Byzantine periods, the work is not as useful for the final period of Byzantine numismatics, particularly the period after 1204. Too many types are omitted, and there are too many variations in the legends that Sear does not account for. For the types that are included, many types lack a photograph, and the descriptions are inadequate for proper and certain identification. Prices listed in Sear lost their relevance long ago, which is not surprising given the changes in the Byzantine numismatic market over the last three decades. These changes include both a new supply of coins discovered in the era of metal detectors, and new demand from a new generation of collectors.

In short, for many years there has been a real and growing need for an updated, affordable and user-friendly reference work for late Byzantine coins, specifically designed for collectors. There is currently no complete catalogue to facilitate quick, easy and accurate identification. The authors have spent thousands of hours studying the subject, reviewing all of the major references, searching for the most up to date information about recently discovered coin types, and organizing the material in a novel way useful to collectors.

The Catalogue of the Late Byzantine Coins, which we refer to as the Catalogue, or CLBC, is the realization of those efforts. We have tried to identify and describe in a two volume work all coin types and modules of late Byzantine coinage, from the reign of Alexius I to the final days of the Byzantine Empire. We have drawn on the following sources:

- All of the major references in the field of late Byzantine Numismatics: Hendy, DOC IV, DOC V, Grierson, Sear, Bendall, Donald, Jordanov, Dochev, Penchev, etc.

- Information in numismatic periodicals available to the authors.
- The enormous and growing volume of information and photos available on the internet and gathered by the authors in the last two decades, including auction catalogs and information posted in specialized internet forums.
- Information and photos from several private collections.

Limitations of the Catalogue

We are not academics. We never intended the Catalogue to be an academic or scientific publication in the strict and traditional sense. We have made no attempt to determine all sequences of specific issues, and the numbering system we adopted does not purport to be chronologically accurate. Our primary purpose has been to differentiate the coin types, and we hope that this is the standard against which our work will be judged. With this limited purpose in mind, we set out to develop a comprehensive and complete typology of late Byzantine coinage. We have illustrated all known coin types in the greatest possible detail. We have tried to strictly describe the inscriptions, and to specify when variations to the inscription commonly appear for a particular type. We have also specified the parameters of the relevant metric data based on information available to us. We tried to make the format as user friendly as possible, so that the reference is useful both to experienced collectors and those who are unfamiliar with the subject matter.

We hope that the field continues to attract more attention among full time academics. There are hundreds of worthwhile subjects that require more study and research to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the late Byzantine monetary economy: political relations, economic relations, coin production methods, the organization of the imperial mint and its workshops, the meaning and purpose of officinal symbols, the comparative history of coin emissions, coin type variability, and many others. To the extent that we make comments that touch on these issues, we do so only for the sake of commenting on Byzantine coinage typology and to assist in attributing coins types to a particular ruler and historical time.

Illustrations

The limitations of existing reference materials frequently makes it difficult to precisely and accurately attribute a coin based on the photographs and descriptions in those references. Quite often the details of a particular coin are difficult to match to a coin in a reference book because the two specimens show different details in different places. Even when a reference book shows multiple examples of the same type, the reader needs to imagine a composite image that combines the best features of the different specimens. To overcome these difficulties, we have

tried a different approach by creating graphics that combine all of the elements of a coin type and module into a single image. The images are not drawings of specific specimens; rather, they create an "ideal picture" of the coin type as it was conceived and intended.

The production of an individual coin was a complicated process. Many coin types were struck over a period of many years. These factors resulted in a significant variability within the coins of a given type. The depiction of the "ideal coin type" strips away stylistic variations and illustrates the essential features of the design. This requires the collector to do more than merely match the coin to a photograph in a book. The "ideal coin type" helps the collector to understand the essential design features and inscription that the collector should be looking for. Because many coins from this period have missing or obscure legends and design elements, this is often a necessary step if a collector hopes to positively attribute a coin.

Besides the fact that the style and design details in some individual coin types evolved over a long period, there are two other reasons why studying and understanding the "ideal coin type" helps with identification. The first is technology of the production process. The technology of striking Byzantine coins varied in different time periods. Many coin types from the late Byzantine period have a concave shape. Individual coins often show evidence of shifted dies and double strikes. This makes it very difficult to identify a coin type by matching a coin to photos in a catalog.

The second is that the iconography is full of symbolism. Most coins of the period lack full inscriptions and a close up portrait of the emperor. Instead, the coins frequently show the full length, three quarter or half length image of the emperor, sometimes together with Christ, the Virgin, the archangels and the saints. The coins were miniature icons, so it is important to understand the essential features of prototypes because these supply clues that help with attribution. To identify the figures on a poorly struck or poorly preserved specimen, every letter, every dot, and every dash has a specific meaning and serves as an important clue for identification. A collector remains ill-equipped to identify the coins without a foundational understanding the original prototype. We have recreated the prototypes and explained how and why the critical details are important. For example, we have explained the differences in the imperial costume, and helped the reader to identify particular vestments. We have explained the conventions for how particular saints are depicted, and explained what details to look for to identify a particular saint. We hope all of this information helps the reader to more fully appreciate the richness of the symbolic meanings that the coins intended to convey.

Scale

Unless otherwise noted, **all of the graphics** that appear in the **Catalogue are exactly twice the size** of the average coin for that type. For example, if the coin type has a 20 mm die diameter and an average flan diameter of 27 mm, the image in this Catalogue will have a die diameter of 40 mm and a planchet diameter of 54 mm.

Descriptions

To maintain standardized consistency that collectors and dealers depend on, all descriptions of coin types and variants in Volume I follow Hendy's descriptions. We have made changes or added notations where Hendy's descriptions appear to be inaccurate, or, in the case of rare types, where the details on available specimens are too incomplete to describe the entire image or inscription. In cases where Hendy appears to have simplified the descriptions, or to have guessed based on an incomplete image, we have tried to provide more information to assist with attribution. We have sometimes used a question mark in the descriptions where Hendy indicated a feature that we are not sure actually appears in the image.

Inscriptions on the coins have been written in the text of the Catalogue with a font that is as close as possible to the letters of the Greek alphabet from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. Erroneous letters and ligatures have not been noted in the descriptions for technical reasons, but are clearly visible in the graphic drawings. For some of the types we have indicated a portion of the inscription in brackets. This indicates that the letters in brackets are normally found in the inscription of the coin, but in some cases have been omitted by the engraver. The letters outside the brackets are that part of the inscriptions always present on the coins.

Numbering: *Issuer-Denomination-Type and Issuer-Type-Module*

We have introduced a new numbering system for the coin types. Our reasons are practical and objective. We developed this system in response to the shortcomings of earlier numbering systems. We wanted to develop a system that would be systematic and specific, and that would also be adaptable to account for inevitable future discoveries of new coin types.

Both Hendy's numbering system, which follows the pattern for the DOC series, and Sear's system have inconvenient drawbacks. Hendy assigned a letter to designate individual coin types. The lettering system causes confusion about the mint that issued the coins, and also makes it difficult to distinguish between module versions of a particular type. Sear's system is organized the coin types first by ruler, then by mint, then by denomination. Sear then assigned sequential

numbering from Anastasius I to Constantine XI. All of the coin types are in numerical order, but there were no gaps in the numbering to leave room for future discoveries. When Sear published the second edition, he found the type in the first edition that most closely corresponded to the newly discovered types, and then listed the new discoveries as if they were new subtypes.

The CLBC numbering system solves these problems and is very adaptable to new discoveries if and when a second edition becomes necessary. In the CLBC numbering system, the first number designates the *ruler* or issuer of the coin, the second number designates the coin *denomination*, and the third number designates a specific coin *type* within that coin denomination. The number in the third position defines the coin type and will remain unchanged regardless of new numismatic discoveries. Our individual coin type descriptions include attributions to particular mints, but the mint attribution does not affect the numbering.

This numbering system allows the collector to determine much information about the coin just from the number. The number conveys the issuer, the denomination, and - to a general but imprecise extent - of the chronological order of the types. We have sometimes tried to provide rough estimates of the time period that a particular type was issued. The reader should be aware that the tentative dates are guesses and estimates, based in part on the volume of known specimens and the timing of major historical events that may or may not have coincided with the introduction of a new type.

Some late Byzantine coinage requires a slight deviation from the *issuer-denomination-type* numbering system. In Bulgarian and Latin imitative coinage, as well as in some other coinage, all of the coins were billon or copper, and there were no gold, electrum, or silver coins. Therefore, the unique coin type for these non-standard coinages appears in the second position, and the third position indicates the module, as follows: *issuer-type-module*.

In some cases we have also added a letter at the end of the three-position numeric scheme. We use this final letter only for the sake of identifying easy-to-distinguish variants within a specific coin type. For coin types where two or more variants appear in roughly equivalent numbers, or where there is a good reason to suppose the sequence of the two variants, we have assigned a letter to each variant (i.e., Types **2.4.6.A** and **2.4.6.B**). For coin types with rare and unusual variants, we have assigned a letter only to the variant (i.e., Types **2.2.4** and **2.2.4.A**) to indicate that the variant is an exceptional deviation from the dominant type.

Modules

We have adopted a radically new approach in describing Byzantine coin type modularity, where applicable.

Researchers have known and identified large and small module coins for decades. But until now modules were usually distinguished depending on their external dimensions, and at least partly on the basis of weight. In the era of

Comnenan coinage this resulted in the introduction of the concept of both the “tetarteron” and “half- tetarteron,” without any confirmed exchange value between the fractions. In Latin imitative coinage and in Thessalonica and Nicaea coin issues large and small module copper trachy coins can be distinguished, but their exchange value is unknown.

It is well known that copper coins were struck with significant size and weight differences, even for coins struck in only a single module. Unlike the precious metal coins, the copper coins did not have a highly regulated standard weight or flan size. Rather, copper coins were struck to have an exchange value to the precious metal coins. In the case of modularity, they also very likely had an exchange value to each other, but the value was determined by distinguishing one module from the other, rather than based on the weight or external diameter of a particular individual specimen. We are convinced that the mints distinguished the modules based on the diameter of the die, which was much easier to strictly regulate, rather than the diameter of the flan. When we refer to the “die diameter” we do not mean the die tool that was used for striking. Rather, we mean the circular impression on the coin indicating the border of the image.

We are convinced that Byzantine coins were struck in three modules in the thirteenth century, and that die diameter is the only reliable method to attribute a coin to a particular module. When we refer to the three modules of the thirteenth century coinage, we are referring to three coinages: the Latin imitative coinage, the coinage of the Despotate of Thessalonica, and the coinage of the Empire of Nicaea.

Thousands of die circle measurements confirm that die diameters form three distinct groups, with practically no overlap. The first group includes specimens with die diameter greater than 20 mm, usually between 21 - 23 mm. We refer to these as “large module” coins. Historically researchers only distinguished between large module and small module. However, for several decades Bulgarian researchers Ivan Jordanov and Vladimir Penchev indicated the presence of numerous specimens of intermediate size. Our research convincingly shows that large quantities of coins were also struck in “medium module,” especially for the Latin imitations. In fact, more than half of the known Latin imitation coin types were struck in the medium module in the second quarter of the thirteenth century. The medium module group includes issues with a die diameter from 15 to 19 mm, with the vast majority falling within the narrow range of 16 - 17 mm. The third group of “small module” coins have die diameters less than 15 mm, and the vast majority fall within the range of 13 - 14 mm.

Rarity

We also offer a new system for determining the frequency of encountering each of the coin types. The system is not absolute and does not indicate the numbers and proportions of known specimens, as it is impossible to collect

comprehensive information for all known coins worldwide. The system is based on our observations of the quantities of coins listed in known references, as well as offered for sale in the global numismatic market over the last two decades.

We have judged each type on a rarity scale from 1 to 5, where:

- “1” marks those coin types which have been always offered on numismatic markets and are available in large quantities.
- “2” marks those coin types that are also relatively numerous and have been regularly offered on the market, but which might not be offered or readily available from time to time.
- “3” marks relatively rare coins that appear on the market periodically, in quantities from between one to several specimens per year.
- “4” marks rarer issues that appear infrequently on the market, perhaps once every two or three years.
- “5” marks extremely rare and unique issues. The group includes coins known to us only from major museums or private collections that usually do not appear on global markets, or that may appear once per decade on the international market.

We realize that there are limitations to such a system because the coins offered for sale over a particular period of time are not necessarily representative of the number of coins that remain in collections, and does not account for new discoveries. Even so, we believe that even a limited rarity evaluation system is valuable to collectors, though it should not be taken as a major criterion for determining the market value of a specific coin.

Conclusion

We have made every effort to make this Catalogue as useful and informative as possible. Our goal was to make it possible to quickly attribute coins from the period with absolute accuracy. And this is of greater importance both for collectors in the process of building their collections, and for coin dealers, who receive lots of unidentified coins more and more often and spent valuable time to identify and evaluate them properly.

As we have indicated throughout the Catalogue, many unanswered questions remain for many of the rare types, and we are always seeking information about these types to reach more definitive conclusions. In this regard, we invite collectors and dealers to submit additional photos or information about these rare types or other unpublished types that we might eventually include in a future second edition of Volume 1. We invite you to contact us at:

orthodoxcoins@gmail.com
and
cataloglbc@gmail.com

CHAPTER VI

ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS (1184 – 1191)

In 1184 Isaac Comnenus and a band of mercenaries usurped imperial authority in Cyprus. Most of what we know about Isaac Comnenus comes from the chronicle of Niketas Choniates. Isaac was a nephew of Manuel I, and during Manuel's reign he became Governor of Isauria. As Governor he led a military expedition against the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, and was captured in battle. His aunt, Theodora Comnena, had an affair with the new emperor Andronicus I, and pressured the new emperor to pay part of the ransom to secure his release. After his release, Isaac and his mercenaries went to Cyprus, where Isaac seized power and refused to recognize Andronicus I's authority. Isaac controlled Cyprus for the next 7 years until the English King Richard I, Lionheart conquered the island.

From a numismatic perspective, Isaac's coinage is fascinating and enigmatic. The coinage has not received the research attention it deserves, and we expect that there will be new discoveries and surprises in the future. Despite a relatively short seven year reign on a small island with a small population, Isaac issued at least 17 different coin types in three coin denominations. Some of these types are extremely rare or known only by unique specimens. Others are widely distributed both in Cyprus and the Balkans. What necessitated or enabled such coinage?

The first explanation was that there was a practical need for coins on the island following the rebellion, both for the local treasury and for general circulation. As a usurper, Isaac was almost certainly interested in the propaganda value of circulating coins in his own name. In addition, as a result of the rebellion, the supply of new official imperial issues circulating in Cyprus and issued by Andronicus and Isaac II Angelus probably decreased significantly.

The second reason is that Cyprus was a small island with semi-independent trade-based economy. The population was small and there was little arable land. The provincial economy was limited because it lacked overland access to the Empire's markets. However, Cyprus occupies an excellent strategic location in the Eastern Mediterranean. The island was an important stop on maritime trade routes between Western Europe and Asia. These features satisfied the prerequisites for an intensive coinage.

The probable source of income for the treasury was import duties, trade and port charges. Isaac probably required merchant visitors and sailors to exchange their money for Cypriot coins to purchase the provisions they required, setting exchange rates at fixed rates higher than the value of precious metals in the

Cypriot coins. The coinage had sufficient silver content to win general acceptance. Silver content has been verified in a few Cypriot billon trachy and tetartera that have been tested. The theory that Isaac imposed fixed exchange rates for the new Cypriot currency best explains both the rapid acceptance of the new coinage in general and the need for multiple denominations in particular.

This was also the strategy that John Comnenus-Ducas (1237 - 1244) employed even more aggressively in Thessalonica half a century later. Under John's rule, the Despotate's land possessions outside the city were extremely limited. However, the city was an important trade center with an established mint. There was constant pressure for new quantities of coins, both from authorities and from market demands for trade with the vast Bulgarian Empire under the rule of Ioan II Asen. Striking coins was probably the main revenue source in the Despotate's last years.

Isaac struck coins at two different mints. The location of the mints is unknown. Some have suggested Nicosia and Limassol, but this is conjecture based on the current population concentrations on the island rather than on historical data. Although it is generally accepted that there were two mints, it is difficult to attribute a particular coin to one mint or the other with any certainty. Relying on style or engraving differences to assign a specific coin type to the main mint is an indefinite and subjective criterion. It is also difficult to rely on formal design features. There are two design features that have been commonly accepted as distinguishing the coins. The "main mint" depicts the pendilia of Isaac's crown with side loops ending in triple drops, and spells his title ΔΕΣΠΟΤΗΣ. In contrast, the coins of the secondary mint have no loops on the pendilia and end in single pellets, and the emperor's title is usually spelled ΔΕΣΠΟΤΙ(С). Recently discovered new types do not strictly reconcile to these guidelines, but these features still help to explain and rank typology to an acceptable level.

We have arranged the coin types based on the chronological order Simon Bendall proposed in *An Unpublished Tetarteron and a Hoard of Coins of Isaac Comnenus of Cyprus (AD 1184 - 1191)*, Numismatic Circular, December 2005. However, consistent with the overall format of this Catalogue, we have first separated all of the coin types by denomination. We have also made the following additions and changes:

- Type **6.2.4** has been added as a probable issue of Isaac Comnenus.
- A version of Type **6.3.6** (DO 10, S. 1998) has been added.
- The coin variety Type **6.3.7** (DO 10 b, S. 1999) has been added.
- We have not included the tetarteron nomisma that Bendall showed (fig. 5) as a separate type because another better preserved specimen shows that it is very similar to Type **6.3.3**. We believe that the differences are not significant enough to warrant recognizing a new type.

Tentative order of issues

Main Mint

1st issue

Electrum aspron trachy, DO 1; S. 1990 = **6.1.1**

Billon aspron trachy, DO 2; S. 1991 = **6.2.1**

Tetarteron nomisma, DO 6; S. 1993 = **6.3.1**

Half tetarteron nomisma, DO 11; S. -. = **6.3.2**

2nd issue

Billon aspron trachy, DO 3; S. 1992 = **6.2.2**

Tetarteron nomisma, DO 7; S. 1994 = **6.3.3**

3rd issue

Electrum aspron trachy, DO (1 bis); S.-; NCirc., May 1989, 22 = **6.1.2**

Billon aspron trachy, DO -; S. -; NCirc., Oct. 2001, 23. = **6.2.3**

Tetarteron nomisma, DO 8; S. -. = **6.3.4**

Uncertain issues

Billon aspron trachy, DO -; S. -; Private Collection = **6.2.4**

Tetarteron nomisma = **6.3.5**

Secondary Mint

1st issue

Billon aspron trachy, DO 5; S. 1997 = **6.2.5**

Tetarteron nomisma, DO 10 a; S.1998 = **6.3.6.A** and **6.3.6.B**

and DO 10 b; S. 1999 = **6.3.7**

2nd issue

Billon aspron trachy, DO 4; S. 1995 = **6.2.6**

Tetarteron nomisma, DO 9; S. 1996 = **6.3.8**

Uncertain issue

Tetarteron nomisma, Hendy, 1985, Pl. 31, No. 13 = **6.3.9**

DOC IV, p. 362, Type D (Main mint), (8 bis).

Isaac Comnenus coinage is presented in this Catalog with the following typology:

- **2** types of electrum *aspron trachy nomisma*
- **6** types of billon *aspron trachy nomisma*
- **9** types of *tetarteron nomisma*

**THE COINAGE OF
ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)

6. 1. 1

Electrum Aspron Trachy
Weight 4.50 – 4.70 g
Die diameter 20 mm

Cyprus, Main mint
Diameter 29 – 32 mm
Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191
Avg diameter 31 mm
Rarity 5



OBVERSE: ΜΡ ΘΥ in field. Virgin nimbate, wearing tunic and maphorion, seated on throne without back; holds beardless, nimbate head of young Christ on breast.

REVERSE: Columnar legend ΙΓΑΛΚΙΟC on left, ΔΕCΠ(Ο)Τ or var. on right. Full-length figure of emperor wearing stemma, divitision, and chlamys; holds in right hand scepter cruciger, and in left, anexikakia.

References: Hendy, p. 136, and Pl. 19, 5.
DOC IV, Pl. XVIII, EL 1.
Grierson 1116; Sear 1990.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6. 1. 2

Electrum Aspron Trachy
Weight 3.20 – 4.30 g
Die diameter 21 mm

Cyprus, Main mint
Diameter 29 – 30 mm
Die axis – 180°

Struck 1184 – 1191
Avg diameter 30 mm
Rarity 5



OBVERSE: IC XC in field. Full-length figure of Christ, bearded and nimbed, wearing tunic and kolobion, possibly walking forward; right hand raised in benediction, holds Gospels in left. Stars in field on left and right.

REVERSE: Circular legend ICAA KIOC on left, AECTOTIC on right. MΘ in upper field. Full-length figure of emperor on left, crowned by Virgin nimbed. Emperor wears stemma, divitision, and chlamys; holds in right hand scepter cruciger, and in left, anagallis. Virgin wears tunic and maphorion.

References: Bendall, Simon, Numismatic Circular Vol. XCVII, No. 4, May 1989. DOC IV, p. 358 - 359, (1 bis)
Hendy -; Grierson -; Sear -.

Notes: The authors are aware of only three known specimens.

ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)

6. 2. 1

Billon Aspron Trachy

Weight 3.20 – 3.94 g

Die diameter 21 mm

Cyprus, Main mint

Diameter 28 – 32 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 30 mm

Rarity 2



OBVERSE: ΜΡ ΘΥ in field. Virgin nimbate, wearing tunic and maphorion, seated on throne without back; holds beardless, nimbate head of young Christ on breast.

REVERSE: Circular legend **ICAA KIOC** on left, columnar legend **Ο/ΓΕ/ΩΡ/ΓΙ/Ο/(C)** or var. on right. Full-length figure of emperor on left, and of St. George, beardless and nimbate, holding between them patriarchal cross on long shaft at the base of which a small globe. Emperor wears stemma, divitision, collar-piece, and chlamys; holds annexikaia in right hand. Saint wears chiton, lamellar body armour with pteryges, and probably cloak; holds sword in left hand.

References: Hendy, p. 136, and Pl. 19, 6 - 7.
DOC IV, Pl. XVIII, B 2.
Grierson 1117; Sear 1991.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6. 2. 2

Billon Aspron Trachy

Weight 3.40 – 4.42 g

Die diameter 20 mm

Cyprus, Main mint

Diameter 28 – 31 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 29 mm

Rarity 2



OBVERSE: IC XC in upper field, columnar legend OE/MM/Λ on left, NOV/HA on right. Bust of Christ Emmanuel, beardless and nimbate, wearing tunic and kolobion; blesses with right hand in front of chest, and holds scroll in left hand. Quincunx pattern in arms of the nimbate cruciger.

REVERSE: Columnar legend I/CA/AKI/OC on left, ΔEC/ΠO/TH/C or var. on right. Full-length figure of emperor wearing stemma, divitision, and chlamys; holds scepter cruciger in right hand, and anexikakia in left. “Manus Dei” in upper right field.

References: Hendy, p. 136 - 137, and Pl. 19, 8 - 10.

DOC IV, Pl. XVIII, B 3.

Grierson 1118; Sear 1992.

ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)

6. 2. 3

Billon Aspron Trachy

Weight 3.40 – 3.80 g

Die diameter 22 mm

Cyprus, Main mint

Diameter 28 – 29 mm

Die axis – 180 ° or different

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 29 mm

Rarity 5



OBVERSE: **IC XC** in field. Full-length figure of Christ, bearded and nimbate, standing on dais, wearing tunic and kolobion; right hand raised in benediction, holds Gospels in left. Two crosses on left and on right field.

REVERSE: Circular legend **ICAAKIOC** on left, **M** and **Θ** on right. Full-length figure of emperor on left, crowned by Virgin nimbate. Emperor wears stemma, divitision, and chlamys; holds scepter cruciger in right hand, and anexikakia in left. Virgin wears tunic and maphorion.

References: Bendall, Simon. *Two Rare Byzantine Coins of the Comnenian Dynasty*, Numismatic Circular Vol. CIX, No. 5, Oct. 2001 (No. 2).
Hendy -; DOC IV -; Grierson -; Sear -.

ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)

6. 2. 4

Billon Aspron Trachy
Weight 1.60 g
Die diameter 18 mm

Uncertain mint. Cyprus(?)

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191
Diameter 26 – 28 mm
Rarity 5



OBVERSE: **MP ΘV** in upper field. Full-length figure of Virgin nimbate, orans, wearing tunic and maphorion.

REVERSE: Columnar legend **(I)C / (ΑΚΙ/ΟC?)** on left, **Δ/CC/ΠΟ/ΤΙC** on right. Full-length figure of emperor wearing stemma, divitision and chlamys, holds in right hand scepter cruciger, and in left, anixiakia. “Manus Dei” in upper right field.

References: Private Collection - 1 specimen.
Hendy -; DOC IV -; Grierson -; Sear -.

Notes: For now, the attribution of this coin to Isaac Comnenus of Cyprus issues is tentative. The poor condition of the coin makes it impossible to read the ruler’s name in the inscription. While there is no doubt that the right column contains the inscription **ΔΑΚΚΠΟΤΙC**, the only sure letter in the left side is **C** located near the emperor’s scepter. Therefore, all other probable letters are depicted with dotted lines.

Although the attribution to Isaac Comnenus cannot be confirmed at this time, this appears to be the most likely probability. The emperor is depicted with short,

rounded beard. The pendilia have a bizarre three-peak shape. The ornaments of the chlamys and the divitision are typical both for Isaac of Cyprus and Andronicus I. The name of the ruler, with a letter **C** included in its starting position, rules out all Byzantine emperors of twelfth century, except Isaac Comnenus and Isaac II Angelus. The only argument for the later attribution of this coin is its low weight of 1.60 g.

The depiction of the ruler with a rounded beard excludes any attribution to Nicaean or Palaiologan coinage. The style of engraving is very different from that of Thessalonica mint.

There is some similarity between Type **6.2.4** and some trachy from the end of the twelfth century that were struck in Trebizond, particularly the coin, published in DOC IV, Part II, p. XXV under number (15 b). However, the octagonal cutting characteristic of Trebizond coins is absent, and the image of the Virgin is definitely different.

Until the discovery of another specimen with a clear inscription indicates otherwise, we attribute this trachy to Isaac Comnenus of Cyprus.



x 2

Photo: www.orthodoxcoins.com

ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)

6.2.5

Billon Aspron Trachy

Weight unknown

Die diameter 20 mm

Cyprus, Secondary mint

Diameter 27 – 29 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 28 mm

Rarity 5



OBVERSE: IC XC in upper field. Columnar legend O/Ε/Μ/ΜΑ on left, Ν/Ο/Υ/Η/Λ on right. Christ Emmanuel, beardless and nimbate, wearing tunic and kolobion, seated upon throne with back; right hand raised in benediction, holds scroll in left hand.

REVERSE: Circular legend ΙΣΑΚΚΙΟC on left, ΔΕCΠΟΤ(ΙC) on right. Full-length figure of emperor wearing stemma, divitision, collar-piece, and jeweled loros of simplified type; holds scepter cruciger in right hand, and anxikakia in left.

References: Hendy, p. 147, and Pl. 21, 12.

DOC IV, Pl. XIX, B 5.

Grierson 1120; Sear 1997.

Notes: Hendy questioned the attribution of this trachy, and suggested that it might either be issue of Isaac Comnenus and the Cyprus mint, or an issue of Isaac II from the Constantinople mint (1969, p. 147). Although the type is extremely rare, one or two hoards of Type 6.2.5 discovered in Cyprus later proved that it is an issue of Isaac Comnenus. The stylistic features also unmistakably point to the

secondary mint in Cyprus. In addition, the authors have a photo of a Type **6.2.6** coin overstruck on Type **6.2.5**. The photo shows a perfectly visible circular inscription **ICAAK** and a loose end of the loros on the left.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6. 2. 6

Billon Aspron Trachy
Weight 2.30 – 3.30 g
Die diameter 18 mm

Cyprus, Secondary mint
Diameter 27 – 29 mm
Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191
Avg diameter 28 mm
Rarity 3



OBVERSE: **MP ΘV** in upper field. Full-length figure of Virgin nimbate, orans, wearing tunic and maphorion.

REVERSE: Columnar legend **I/CA/AKI/OC** on left, **ΔΕC/ΠΟ/ΤΗ/C** or var. on right. Full-length figure of emperor wearing stemma, divitision and chlamys, standing on dais, holds cross on long shaft in right hand, and globus cruciger in left. “Manus Dei” in upper right field.

References: Hendy, p. 137, and Pl. 19, 11.
DOC IV, Pl. XIX, B 4.
Grierson 1119; Sear 1995.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6.3.1

AE Tetarteron

Weight 2.20 – 2.60 g

Die diameter 18 mm

Cyprus, Main mint

Diameter 19 – 21 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 21 mm

Rarity 4



OBVERSE: ΜΡ ΘΥ in field. Bust of Virgin nimbate, orans, wearing tunic and maphorion;

REVERSE: Circular legend ΙCΑ ΑΚΙΟC on left, ΔΕ ΣΠΟΤΗ(Σ) or var. on right. Bust (half-length figure) of emperor wearing stemma, divitision, collar-piece, and chlamys; holds scepter cruciger in right hand, and globus cruciger in left.

References: Hendy, p. 137, and Pl. 19, 12.
DOC IV, Pl. XIX, AE 6.
Grierson 1121; Sear 1993.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6.3.2

AE Half-tetarteron
Weight 1.62 g
Die diameter 12 mm

Cyprus, Main mint
Diameter 14 – 15 mm
Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191
Avg diameter 14 mm
Rarity 5



OBVERSE: **MP ΘΥ** in field. Bust of Virgin nimbate, orans, wearing tunic and maphorion.

REVERSE: Continuous circular legend **ΙΣΑΑΚΙΟΥΣΑΕΤΝ**. Bust of emperor wearing stemma, divitision, collar-piece, and loros (?); holds labarum on long shaft in right hand, and globus cruciger in left.

References: DOC IV, Pl. XIX, AE 11.
Hendy -; Grierson -; Sear -.

Notes: Hendy published one specimen of Type **6.3.2** in DOC IV. There is also one specimen in the Private Collection and shown in the photo below. The weight of the DOC IV specimen is 0.50 g and the diameter is 11 - 12 mm. Hendy commented in a footnote that given the low weight and small size, the coin may have been a one third or one quarter tetarteron. However, the photo suggests that the coin was either cut or struck on an unusually small core, or both. The specimen in the Private Collection is more than three times heavier than the specimen Hendy cited in DOC IV. The coin weighs 1.62 g and its external dimensions are 14 x 15 mm. This suggests that Type **6.3.2** was a normal half-tetarteron. The style and craftsmanship of this issue are extremely high. The engraving details are very precise despite the small size of the dies.

6.3.2



x 2

Photo: www.orthodoxcoins.com

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6. 3. 3

AE Tetarteron

Weight 2.40 – 3.40 g

Die diameter 19 mm

Cyprus, Main mint

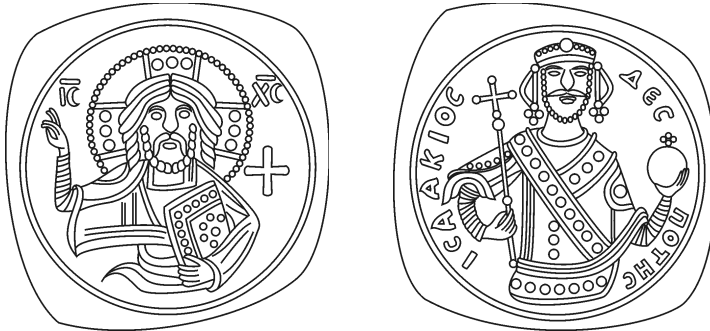
Diameter 20 – 22 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 21 mm

Rarity 4



OBVERSE: IC XC in field. Bust (or half-length figure) of Christ, bearded and nimbate, wearing tunic and kolobion; right hand raised in benediction, holds Gospels in left.

REVERSE: Circular legend ICΛAKIOC on left, ΔΕC ΠΟΤΙC or var. on right. Bust of emperor wearing stemma, divitision with orarion, and loros; holds scepter cruciger in right hand, and globus (cruciger?) in left.

References: Hendy, p. 137, and Pl. 19, 13 - 14.

DOC IV, Pl. XIX, AE 7.

Grierson 1122; Sear 1994.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6. 3. 4

AE Tetarteron

Weight 2.90 – 3.20 g

Die diameter 17 mm

Cyprus, Main mint

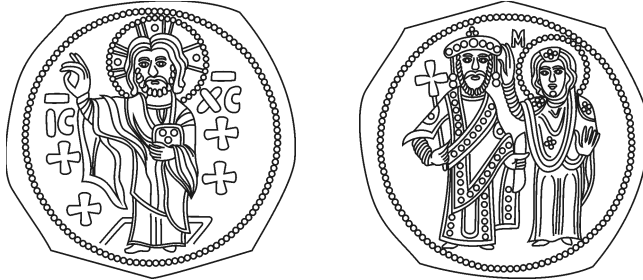
Diameter 18 – 20 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 18 mm

Rarity 3



OBVERSE: IC XC in field. Full-length figure of Christ, bearded and nimbate, standing on dais, wearing tunic and kolobion; right hand raised in benediction, holds Gospels in left. Two crosses on left and on right field.

REVERSE: No legend. Full-length figure of emperor on left, crowned by Virgin nimbate. Emperor wears stemma, divitision, and chlamys; holds scepter cruciger in right hand, and anixakia in left. Virgin wears tunic and maphorion.

References: DOC IV, Pl. XIX, AE 8.

Hendy -; Grierson 1123; Sear -.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6.3.5

Æ Tetarteron

Weight 1.85 – 2.00 g

Die diameter 15 mm

Cyprus, Main mint

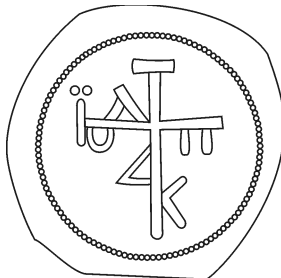
Diameter 16 – 18 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 18 mm

Rarity 5



OBVERSE: (KΘ)? BO H ΘH in upper field. Bust of emperor, wearing stemma, divitision, collar-piece, and loros (?); holds scepter cruciger in right hand, and globus cruciger in left.

REVERSE: Cruciform monogram, letters Ι C Α Κ Δ Π Τ.

References: Bendall, Simon. *An Unpublished Tetarteron and a Hoard of Coins of Isaac Comnenus of Cyprus (A.D. 1184 - 1191)*. Numismatic Circular, Dec. 2005. Hendy -; DOC IV -; Grierson -; Sear -.

Notes: The obverse legend is most unusual and is surely an abbreviation of ‘(Kyrie) Boethi’, ‘Lord protect’. As of publication, the authors are aware of only two known specimens. The coin is similar of a tetarteron Richard I struck in 1191 after taking control of Cyprus. Æ Tetarteron (0.82 g, 180 °). Monogram **R E X**.

Photo: www.cngcoins.com.



x 1

ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)

6. 3. 6. A

AE Tetarteron

Weight 2.60 – 3.45 g

Die diameter 19 mm

Cyprus, Secondary mint

Diameter 21 – 23 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 22 mm

Rarity 2



OBVERSE: IC XC in upper field. Columnar legend O/Ε/Μ/Μ/Α on left, NOV/ΗΑ on right. Full-length figure of Christ Emmanuel, beardless and nimbate, seated upon throne with back, wearing tunic and kolobion; right hand raised on benediction, holds scroll in left.

REVERSE: MP in upper field. Circular legend ICAAKIOC on left, ΔΕΣΠΟΤ(ΙC) or var. on right. Full-length figure of emperor on left, crowned by Virgin nimbate. Emperor wears stemma, divitision, collar-piece, and jeweled loros of simplified type; holds in right hand scepter cruciger, and in left, anexikakia. Virgin wears tunic and maphorion.

References: Hendy, p. 147, and Pl. 21, 13.

DOC IV, Pl. XIX, AE 10 a.

Grierson 1125; Sear 1998.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6.3.6.B

AE Tetarteron

Weight 2.80 – 3.00 g

Die diameter 19 mm

Cyprus, Secondary mint

Diameter 21 – 23 mm

Die axis – 180°

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 22 mm

Rarity 4

OBVERSE: as the obverse of Type **6.3.6.A**, but with **circular** legend **OEMMA** on left, **NOVHA** on right.

REVERSE: as the reverse of Type **6.3.6.A**.



x 2

Photo: www.wildwinds.com

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6.3.7

AE Tetarteron

Weight 2.80 – 3.00 g

Die diameter 19 mm

Cyprus, Secondary mint

Diameter 21 – 23 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 22 mm

Rarity 5



OBVERSE: IC XC in upper field. Columnar legend O/Ε/M/M/Α on left, NOV/ΗΑ on right. Full-length figure of Christ Emmanuel, beardless and nimbate, seated upon throne with back, wearing tunic and kolobion; right hand raised on benediction, holds scroll in left.

REVERSE: Cross in circle in upper field. Uncertain inscription on left and right. Full-length figure of emperor on right, crowned by Virgin nimbate. Emperor wears stemma, divitision, collar-piece, and jeweled loros of simplified type; holds in right hand anexikakia, and in left, scepter cruciger. Virgin wears tunic and maphorion.

References: Hendy, p. 147 - 148, and Pl. 21, 14.

DOC IV, Pl. XIX, AE 10 b.

Grierson -; Sear 1999.

**ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)**

6.3.8

AE Tetarteron

Weight unknown

Die diameter 19 mm

Cyprus, Secondary mint

Diameter 21 – 23 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 21 mm

Rarity 5



OBVERSE: **MP ΘV** in field. Full-length figure of Virgin nimbate, orans, wearing tunic and maphorion, turned to right. “Manus Dei” in upper right field.

REVERSE: Columnar legend (**I/CA/AKI/OC**)? on left, **Δ/EC/ΠO/TH/(C)** or var. on right. Full-length figure of emperor wearing stemma, divitision, and chlamys; holds in right hand labarum (cross?) on long shaft, and globus cruciger in left.

References: Hendy, p. 138, and Pl. 19, 15.

DOC IV, Pl. XIX, AE 9.

Grierson 1124; Sear 1996.

ISAAC COMNENUS OF CYPRUS
(1184 – 1191)

6.3.9

AE Tetarteron

Weight unknown

Die diameter 17 mm

Cyprus, Secondary mint

Diameter 20 mm

Die axis – 180 °

Struck 1184 – 1191

Avg diameter 20 mm

Rarity 5



OBVERSE: Ligature **ΟΛ** on left, **ΓΕ/ΩΡΓΙ/ΟΥ** on right. Bust of Saint George, beardless and nimbate, wearing chiton, lamellar body armour with pteryges, and cloak; holds in right hand spear, and in left, shield.

REVERSE: Circular legend **ΙΣΑΚΙΟΥ** on left, **ΔΕΣΠΟΤΗ** on right. Bust (three-quarter figure) of emperor wearing stemma, divitision, and chlamys; holds in right hand labarum (?) on long shaft, and in left, anexikakia.

References: Hendy, M. F. ‘Studies in the Byzantine Economy’, c. 300 - 1450, Cambridge 1985, Pl. 31, No. 13 (not mentioned in the text).

DOC IV, p. 362, Type D (Main mint), (8 bis).

Grierson -; Sear -.