

# The Coinage of Chersonesus

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THIS long-awaited work<sup>1</sup> by one of the Soviet Union's leading numismatists is a critical survey of the coinage of Chersonesus from its earliest issues at the beginning of the fourth century BC down to the final eclipse of the city in the twelfth century AD, a period of some 1500 years, spanning its early autonomous period as a Greek colony, the centuries of Bosporan and Roman domination, and finally the long years as an outpost of the Byzantine Empire. The only work comparable in scope was that of Koehne<sup>2</sup> (1848) when numismatic material was scarce and inadequately classified. Since then a great deal of fresh material has come to light and much research has been carried out, but the accounts of this are scattered over a large number of publications (primarily Russian) which are often difficult to come by. V. A. Anokhin has rendered a signal service by giving us in one volume the substance of all this material together with the results of his own valuable research. This is presented in historical sequence, each section divided into chapters dealing with (a) the chronology of the coin issues, (b) the currency organization, and (c) a historical sketch of each period. This is a useful method for reference, but one that inevitably leads to a certain amount of repetition.

The first section deals with the autonomous period, 390–110 BC, during which a large number of Æ and Æ coins were issued, the majority figuring the head of the city's supreme deity, the Tauric Artemis, known as the Maiden. Origins and metrology are discussed, the coinage of Heracleia Pontica being seen as the source from which the designs were copied with Persian weight-standards. The monetary organization, the author thinks, was in the hands of a triumvirate, the nomophylakes. The historical outline is interesting in that it makes the fall of the neighbouring city of Theodosia to the Kingdom of the Bosporos in 387 BC a key date, since from then on Heracleia Pontica channelled all its trade through Chersonesus. Much attention is given to the publication of the famous oath,<sup>3</sup> which the author thinks is connected with an influx of refugees at that time and the consequent change in the political regime in Chersonesus accompanied by an increase in prosperity, which had a marked effect on the currency. There was, for example, a relative abundance of silver, in contrast to the situation in the neighbouring states of Olbia and the Bosporos where it was scarce.

The coinage of the period 110 BC–AD 138 when the city was under foreign influence, first Bosporan and then Roman, is examined in considerable detail, and the author

<sup>1</sup> V. A. Anokhin, *Monetnoe delo Khersonesa (IV v. do n. e.–XII v. n. e.)* (Archaeological Institute of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences), Kiev, 1977. Pp. 176+32 plates. Published in English as *The Coinage of Chersonesus. IV Century BC–XII Century AD* (British Archaeological Reports International Series 69), Oxford, 1980. Pp. 182, with the same plates. Translated from the Russian by H. Bartlett Wells.

<sup>2</sup> B. V. Koehne, *Research in the History and Antiquities of Chersonesus*, Leningrad, 1848.

<sup>3</sup> The full text of this (as known) is given in Appendix 16 to E. H. Minns's *Scythians and Greeks*, Cambridge, 1913.



argues with conviction for new datings which differ in particular from those of Bertier de la Gard and Zograf<sup>4</sup> which have long been accepted. It was during this period that the remarkable issue of gold stateres took place; these are dated and now extremely rare. Permission to make this issue is thought to have been given as a mark of Roman gratitude for Chersonese support in the war against the rebel king, Mithradates VIII of the Bosphoros.

The account of the issues of the period AD 145–268—called the ‘second liberation’ to distinguish it from the earlier and very brief period of liberation at the time of Julius Caesar—during which tetrassarii, tresses, dupondii, and assarii were issued, all bearing the legend ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑC, is essentially a modified version of the author’s own important article published in 1963<sup>5</sup> which mapped this coinage for the first time. The problems associated with coins bearing the names of officials and the Maiden’s monogram ΠΑΡ respectively are discussed, and the author reaches the credible conclusion that they serve to distinguish civic issues from those of the Temple, although the thesis of a mint actually attached to the temple is rejected, as is the widely held notion of a ‘reign of the Maiden’. There is a useful discussion of comparable issues in other northern Black Sea mints such as Tyra and Olbia. The last issue of coins in this period, evidently a large one to judge from the number of dies, appears to have been made under Gallienus, as it was in so many other Roman provincial cities. Literary and epigraphic evidence, however, shows that Chersonesus continued to be an Imperial concern, and did, in fact, survive the hardships of the fourth and fifth centuries better than any other Black Sea city, due in large part to its importance as a key point in the defence line against the northern marauders. Find evidence indicates that its monetary needs were met by imported coin,<sup>6</sup> principally from Constantinople.

The start of the medieval period is dated to the reign of Zeno, when the city (now called Cherson) reopened the mint, although, judging by the number of coins of this period found on the site, issues must have been very limited. No locally struck coins of the following reign of Anastasius are known, although penta from Constantinople are fairly plentiful. The author refuses to allocate any of the next issue (penta with standing figure on the reverse and legend VICTOR) to Justin I, although his distinguished Soviet colleague I. V. Sokolova does so, and there is evidence that she is right.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the pieces known of this type are of Justinian I. The type was known to Tolstoi,<sup>8</sup> but not recognized for what it was, and it is only since

<sup>4</sup> A. L. Bertier de la Gard, ‘New or little-known coins of the Chersonese’, *Bulletin of the Odessa Historical and Antiquarian Society (Zapiski Odesskogo obshchestva istorii i drevnostei)*, 26 (1906); id., *The Chersonese* (Historical Commission Report, 21), 1907; id., ‘Numismatic reports on the cities of the Crimea’, *Bulletin of the Odessa Historical Society*, 32 (1912); id., ‘The significance of monograms on the coinage of Chersonesus’, *Numismatic Department of the Russian Archaeological Society (Zapiski numizmaticheskogo otdeleniya Russkogo arkheologicheskogo obshchestva)* 1, part 1 (1906); A. N. Zograf, *Ancient Coins* (Materiali i issledovaniya po arkheologii SSSR, 16), Moscow, 1951.

<sup>5</sup> V. A. Anokhin, ‘The coinage of Chersonesus, 1st to 3rd centuries AD’, *Numizmatika i Epigrafika*, 4 (1963), 3–88.

<sup>6</sup> A. M. Gilevich, ‘Ancient coins of other cities excavated in Cherson’, *Numizmatika i Sfragistika*, 3 (1968), 3–61.

<sup>7</sup> I. V. Sokolova, ‘Bronze coins of Justin I and Justinian I struck at Byzantine Cherson’, *Bulletin of the Hermitage Museum (Soobshcheniya Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha)*, 32 (1971).

<sup>8</sup> J. J. Tolstoi, *Byzantine Coins* (Leningrad, 1912–14), item no. 514 under Justinian I.

systematic excavations began on the site this century that its true origin has been recognized.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately many specimens have defective inscriptions.

There is no argument about the following issue of penta, as they all bear Justinian's name and the monogram of the city, but there is much divided opinion about the coins of the succeeding period with two Imperial standing figures on the obverse, specimens of which are relatively plentiful, most of them similar in size and weight to those struck at the main Byzantine mints.<sup>10</sup> All three issues have hitherto been attributed (except by Koehne) to Maurice Tiberius, but Anokhin does not accept this and makes out a good case for the reattribution of the first two with the XEPCONOC legend to the later years of Justin II and to Tiberius II,<sup>11</sup> and the third bearing the titles of Maurice Tiberius to that emperor. The provenance of the known specimens of these coins is not commented on by the author, although the fact that so very few of those found on the site have the Imperial titles must have some significance. Leading Russian numismatists have given this problem a great deal of thought in recent years, but a thoroughly satisfactory explanation has yet to be found. Anokhin for his part does not explain why, if the figures shown on these issues represent different people, the images are so similar. The final issue for this period is of Heraclius; it is of similar type to the preceding and shows his son by his side and his consort on the reverse. It is dated provisionally to 615–29. The provenance of none of the surviving specimens is known, but this is not commented on.

The absence of issues for Focas and for the remainder of Heraclius' reign is presumably a consequence of the political and military upheavals of the period, but no attempt at historical analysis is made. Heraclius appears to have been the last emperor to issue struck coins in Cherson, and although cast pieces with a design similar to certain issues of the sixth century exist, Anokhin argues convincingly for their allocation to the eighth century. Countermarks are found on certain Cherson coins originally struck in the seventh/eighth centuries which have been variously interpreted: those found on 'Maurice' coins which are similar to Heraclius' monogram and possibly struck by him; and those found on coins of Tiberius III which resemble the letter B. The over-striking was possibly carried out in Kerch (at that time in the Bosphoros Kingdom) indicating either a revaluation or independence from the central authority. This was Golenko's view, but Anokhin rejects it. The question is difficult to resolve without more specimens of known provenance (very few are known).<sup>12</sup>

He also discusses in detail the problematic Π/X and Π/Π coins published in 1964 by I. V. Sokolova and dated by her to the ninth century, after the establishment of Cherson as a theme.<sup>13</sup> They were apparently produced by a novel casting process in baked-clay moulds, but Anokhin maintains that this process dates them to an

<sup>9</sup> L. N. Belova, in numerous excavation-reports.

<sup>10</sup> I. V. Sokolova, 'Dating the Cherson coins of Maurice Tiberius and Basil I', *The History of Our Country: The Numismatic Evidence*, Leningrad, 1977.

<sup>11</sup> W. Hahn, 'The numismatic history of Cherson in early Byzantine times—a survey', *NCirc.* 86 (1978), 414–15, 471–2, 521–3.

<sup>12</sup> K. V. Golenko, 'Gegenstempel auf Chersoner Münzen des Maurikios Tiberios', *HBN* 18/19 (1965), 5–12; P. Grierson, 'The Crimean countermarks of Heraclius', *NC* 7 6 (1966), 221–4.

<sup>13</sup> I. V. Sokolova, 'A hoard of Chersonese coins of the mid-ninth century', *Trudi Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha*, 12 (1971).

earlier period, and that the inscription ΠΧ (taken to mean *Πολις Χερσονος*) must pre-date the establishment of the theme.

The theme was set up by Theophilus in 834 as part of the renewed measures to strengthen the northern defences and reinforce imperial authority. These measures, differing from other themes, apparently included the right to issue coins. These were all cast, possibly because of the lack of technical workers. The earliest is a piece attributed to Theophilus himself with the legend DN/TH,<sup>14</sup> an attribution not accepted by others on the ground that all Theophilus' issues, even in Italy, spelled the emperor's name with Θ, and DN had been out of use for several years. The next issue, similar in format but with MB on the obverse, has long been attributed to the joint reign of Michael III and Basil I, but the author disputes this on the grounds that there are too many surviving specimens (249 according to A. M. Gilevich in 1974)<sup>15</sup> for a reign of only one year; he takes the monogram to stand for Michael Basileus, i.e. Michael's sole reign, again a questionable interpretation, since there are no other examples of 'B' being used to stand alone for 'Basileus', and it leaves the coins of the joint reign undifferentiated.

The author has run to earth several previously unknown coins of great interest with M, Π, and A on the obverse (+ on the reverse) and he argues through their relationship with skill and ingenuity, but one is not totally convinced of the solution proposed. The four issues of Leo VI and Alexander are discussed in detail and a probable sequence laid out. All have a cross-on-steps reverse and it is this fact, along with others, that disqualifies the coin with A on the obverse<sup>16</sup> and ΠΧ on the reverse, hitherto attributed to Alexander's sole reign, but now classified as mid ninth century.

The numismatic complexities of the reign of Constantine VII (913–59) are examined at some length. This has long been a problem with two emperors named Romanus reigning at different periods, either alone or jointly with Constantine, plus the difficulty of identifying the portrait pieces. The author classifies the coins into ten issues: basic to his judgements are the two important articles by I. V. Sokolova of 1965 and 1968<sup>17</sup> with whose conclusions he agrees to a large extent with the notable exception of (a) the first issue, with the ⚡ monogram, which he considers to be of Constantine alone, (b) the double-portrait piece with Constantine on the obverse and a female on the reverse, previously identified as his mother Zoe, but by Anokhin as his wife Helen, and (c) the Romanus monogram issues. He solves the problem of the double-portrait piece with one male and one female image accompanied by the letters PO and XP respectively by making the piece a family coin doing duty for Constantine, Romanus, Christopher, and Helen! A further change is the dissociation of the small coins bearing a ⚡ from the large ones with a somewhat similar monogram.

<sup>14</sup> L. N. Belova, 'Unpublished Cherson coins', *Sovetskaya Arkheologiya*, 7 (1941).

<sup>15</sup> A. M. Gilevich, 'Byzantine coins from the Cherson area', *Numizmatika i Sfragistika*, 5 (1974).

<sup>16</sup> For another coin with A on the obverse, see A. Oreshnikov, 'Byzantine coins of Cherson', *Transactions of the Moscow Numismatic Society (Trudi Moskovskogo numizmaticheskogo obshchestva)*, 3, part 2 (1905), item 31.

<sup>17</sup> I. V. Sokolova, 'Dating of some Cherson coins', *Numizmatika i Sfragistika*, 3 (1968), 86–98; id., 'Cherson coins of the tenth century with imperial portraits', *Numizmatika i Epigrafika*, 5 (1965), 116–20.

In discussing the large-sized coins with the Ɱ monogram hitherto attributed to Romanus I he draws on the excellent work done by A. M. Gilevich<sup>18</sup> and I. V. Sokolova,<sup>19</sup> who based their arguments on the fact that hoards of tenth-century Cherson coins found at the site itself or at other places occupied by the Byzantines, such as the Sarkel fortress, contain no Ɱ specimens. Ɱ specimens were unearthed there in association with later material, and to this telling evidence Anokhin adds the interesting fact that many of them were slightly concave and bore traces of hammer blows. These, it is concluded, were struck after the coins had been cast, for while scyphates could be, and were, struck in Constantinople, they had to be hammered into shape at Cherson; furthermore, since the issuing of concave coins did not begin until about 1020, it is evident that the Ɱ coins date from the eleventh century at the earliest. The principal type has a thickset cross-on-steps on the reverse, but there are many minor variations, and some pieces have no reverse design at all. It is concluded that all these coins were issued by either Romanus III or Romanus IV. Another reallocation derives from this change, viz. the large-sized coin with Ɱ on the obverse and a reverse exactly similar to that on the Ɱ pieces. (Size and weight are also similar.) This coin has in the past been assigned to Basil I and his son Constantine, but Anokhin makes a very convincing case for allocating it to Basil II and his brother Constantine VIII whose reign ended in 1025.

In his final chapter the author gives an interesting outline of the probable course of events at Cherson in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, during which there was a steady erosion of the city's economic position by the activities of the Pechenegs and later by Genoese traders. Cherson appears to have lost its right to issue coinage and to have continued using the Ɱ piece, which would explain the abundance of these coins, which seem to have remained in circulation until well into the twelfth century.

Mr Anokhin has written a book of great value for students of the coinage of Chersonesus with an assemblage of specimens (including many unpublished) and a survey of the source material that is impressive. It is a work that has long been needed, and one that fills an important gap in Black Sea numismatic studies. It does, however, suffer to some extent from the deficiency noticeable in some modern Russian numismatic works in that they pay too little attention to Western material (in the book under consideration only the Greek resources of the British Museum are cited to any extent) with consequent narrowing of the basis for judgement. The value of the work would also be enhanced by a wider examination of die-links in the Greek section, and throughout by the inclusion of chemical analyses, especially in the early Byzantine period where questions of provenance are of much importance. The original book is well produced, as is Mr Wells's translated version, but the illustrations in neither are as sharp as could be wished.

<sup>18</sup> A. M. Gilevich, 'Coins from excavations in the harbour district of Cherson, 1963-4', *Antichnaya Drevnost i Srednie Yeka*, Gorky University, Sverdlovsk, Report no. 7 (1971), 62-80; id., 'Coins from the Cherson excavations in 1965-6', *ibid.*, Report no. 9 (1973), 28-38.

<sup>19</sup> Sokolova, *loc. cit.* (note 17 above).