

Reconsidering Medieval Coins in Canadian Museums: Byzantine Numismatics, Identity and Public Consumption of the Past

Context: Critics of Byzantine historical and archeological methods have argued that the isolation of numismatics has been disastrous for studying the Byzantine monetary economy (Hendy, 1985; Gândilă, 2018). Andrei Gândilă claims that Byzantine coins are the most undervalued and underutilized primary sources for critical historical and archaeological data (Gândilă, 2018). Others have criticized Byzantine studies' lack of rigour when examining Byzantine identity (Kaldellis, 2019). Such critiques have led to a call for a re-evaluation of the methods used in numismatics and broader interdisciplinary cooperation between numismatists, historians, and archaeologists (Kemmers and Myrberg, 2011). However, the omission of discourse between Byzantinists and museum curators about the presentation and representation of Byzantine identity in Western societies' museum exhibitions remains a serious oversight concerning Byzantine methodology. If Byzantinists want to put the history of Byzantium in the public spotlight and remove the orientalist tropes of its history, then interdisciplinary partnership with the non-specialist audience and general public needs to be improved. That is to say, knowledge of the past is only valuable to the public if it is socially meaningful (Holtorf, 2007). Byzantium was a multicultural society consisting of many cultures existing over a wide geographical area. Since Byzantine coins are both historical documents and archaeological artifacts, they provide an ideal focus for developing relationships with the public in a pluralist society. Byzantine coins displayed in Canadian museums are essential to constructing Byzantine identity in a pluralist society. Such coins provide a tangible and interactive vessel to educate and form connections with the past by connecting past and present identities.

Research Questions: 1) Is the museum the final archaeological context of a coin's life, and how do scholars convey the identity of Byzantine coins to museum curators? 2) How do Byzantine scholars and Canadian museums define Byzantium, and what are the differences and the effects of these definitions in the representation of Byzantine identity? 3) What discourse dominates Byzantine numismatics, and what collaboration has there been between academic institutions and Canadian museums for the representation of Byzantine identity? 4) Utilizing Byzantine coins, how should academia and museums collaborate to promote an experiential learning environment that reopens Byzantine studies to a pluralist society?

Hypothesis: That museums are the fourth, and in most cases, the final controllable context of a coin's existence and that museums, in part, have contributed to the misrepresentation of Byzantine identity by emphasizing the false label of Byzantium that orientalizes Byzantine material culture and identity in public institutions.

Objectives and Goals: My research objectives are: 1) To document and publish the Byzantine coin collection held in the Nickle Galleries at the University of Calgary and use this collection to highlight aspects of Byzantine identity. 2) In doing so, I intend to present this case study as a new line of discourse that promotes collaborative efforts between academia and museum curators that acknowledge museums as a fourth and controllable context. 3) Such collaboration will allow for the development of experiential learning methods that appeal more broadly to current topics in Canadian dialogue and 4) will contribute to dismantling orientalist tropes and facilitating

Byzantine studies at all levels of educational institutions and to the multicultural population of Canada.

Methodology: My multidisciplinary approach draws on methods used in Archaeology, Classics, Digital Humanities, History, Museum Studies, and Numismatics. **Phase 1:** I will perform a general historiographical survey of each discipline's methods and their treatment of Byzantine coins. This includes a comparative study of how Byzantinists have constructed and represented Byzantine identity, how coins were recovered or collected by scholars and institutions, how these methods have evolved, how data is recorded, what platforms are currently used, and how this data is synthesized and published. I will also survey the transmission of knowledge from academia to both public and private institutions in Canada, the United States and Greece. This includes the Royal Ontario Museum, Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. and the Stoa of Attalos Museum in Athens, Greece. **Phase 2:** I will perform a case study of the Royal Ontario Museum's Byzantine coin collection to aid in the development of my theoretical framework and methodology. The case study will identify gaps in discourse between local institutions and provide an experiential learning environment for myself. This research will also identify where nationalist narratives exist in representing Byzantine identity and how this affects the presentation of Byzantium in Canadian Museums. **Phase 3:** I will take the data collected in phases one and two and apply this information to my analysis, documentation and publication of the Byzantine coins held at the Nickle Galleries. I will use theoretical frameworks developed in Museum Studies (Powers, 2015) and the Digital Humanities (Heath, 2018), such as Linked Open Data and 3D modelling, to develop a new approach to the presentation of Byzantine coins and identity in museums. The case studies from the Royal Ontario Museum and Stoa of Attalos will form the basis for how past exhibitions of Byzantine coins were executed and provide the framework for a more pluralist and inclusive museum environment that promotes experiential learning for the general public. These outcomes will help dismantle orientalist narratives that plague Byzantine studies.