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Νίκαι πάρεσμεν, αἱ γελῶσαι παρθένοι,
νίκας φέρουσαι τῇ φιλοχρίστῳ πόλει.
ἔγραψαν ἡμᾶς οἱ φιλοῦντες τὴν πόλιν,
πρέποντα νίκαις ἐντυποῦντες σχήματα.

Here we are, the Victories, the laughing maidens,
bearing victories to the Christ-loving city.
Those who love the city fashioned us,
stamping figures appropriate to the victories.¹

Wilkinson has recently demonstrated that several epigrams attributed to Palladas of Alexandria are best interpreted in reference to Constantine I's defeat of Licinius and his subsequent foundation of Constantinople, so that Palladas must have lived c. 259-340, substantially earlier than previously suspected.² His re-interpretation of the evidence has won widespread acceptance, and duly so.³ However, it is possible to improve upon his interpretation of the above epigram, although still in accordance with his larger thesis.

This epigram had traditionally been understood to refer to paintings or statues of Victory.⁴ However, Wilkinson has convincingly argued that it is better interpreted in reference to struck coins instead.⁵ The problem then lies in identifying the particular type, or types, of coin to which Palladas refers here. Obviously, the relevant type ought to display at least one figure of Victory on the reverse, but Constantine depicted a Victory on a large number of his reverse types. The fact that Palladas refers to a 'Christ-loving city', best identified as Constantinople, suggests that the type in question was in widespread circulation sometime after the foundation of that city on 8 November 324,

1 Ed. Paton 1918, 328. However, the reading φιλοχρήστῳ has been restored to read φιλοχρίστῳ after Irmischer 1961. Trans. Wilkinson 2010, 8.

2 Wilkinson 2009; Wilkinson 2010.

3 See e.g. Barnes 2011, 13-16; Bardill 2012, 252-253; Potter 2013, 267-268.

4 See e.g. Cameron 1964; Ando 2000, 296.

5 Wilkinson 2010, 8-10.

but it is difficult to be any more precise than this. Furthermore, while the phrase ‘those who love the city’ need not refer so much to the mint-workers engaged in the actual production of the coins as to the emperors who were thought to have authorized them, there was always more than one emperor after 324, so this detail does not allow us to narrow down the possible time of production either.⁶

Wilkinson highlighted the possible relevance of three different coin types to this epigram. First, he drew attention to a *folles* with a reverse type depicting two Victories inscribing a shield above a cippus and surrounded by the legend VICTORIAE LAETAE. This seems initially attractive in the present context because of the correspondence between the description of the Victories on the coin as *laetae* and the description of the Victories in the epigram as ‘laughing maidens’. However, this reverse type was used on *folles* produced at only six mints—London, Trier, Lyons, Arles, Ticinum, and Siscia—and only during the period c. 318–320.⁷ Given these centres and this period of production, this type probably did not feature very strongly among the coins in circulation in the East several years later, and seems a rather unlikely subject of an epigram composed there for this reason. The second type to which Wilkinson drew attention depicted a seated Victory holding a globe surmounted by a smaller Victory. This type seems attractive in the present context because it does indeed depict a Victory bearing a Victory, so fulfilling the words of the epigram in the most literal way possible. However, this reverse type was only used on *solidi* struck in the name of Constantine I himself and only at four mints—Nicomedia, Thessalonica, Sirmium, Ticinum—during his journey to Rome in 326.⁸ Hence it was a relatively rare type. Finally, he drew attention to a third type depicting a standing Victory with her right foot on a ship’s prow, a long sceptre in her right hand and a shield at her left foot. This reverse type was used on a type of *folles* produced at every mint throughout the empire during the period 330–340.⁹ Wilkinson favoured identifying this coin type as the subject of the

6 Constantine remained sole Augustus following his defeat of Licinius until his death in 337, but he also led a college of junior emperors, or Caesars, whose number had increased to four by 337. See Barnes 1982, 7–8.

7 See *RIC* 7, London nos 154–182; Trier nos 208A–09, 213–236; Lyons nos 63–90; Arles nos 185–189, 190–195, 198–201; Ticinum nos 82–87, 90–95; Siscia nos 47–108. For gold multiples of the same basic legend and type, see Ticinum no. 25 (315); Thessalonica no. 7 (317).

8 See *RIC* 7, Nicomedia no. 70; Thessalonica no. 131; Sirmium no. 56; Ticinum no. 179. For the date, see Ramskold 2013, 433–440.

9 See e.g. *RIC* 7, Lyons nos 241, 246, 251, 256, 259, 266, 273, 279; Trier nos 523, 530, 543, 548, 554, 563, 589; Arles nos 344, 352, 357, 363, 369, 374, 380, 386, 393, 401, 408, 416; Rome nos 332–34, 339, 355, 371, 387, 397, 407; Aquileia nos 123, 129, 137; Siscia nos 224, 241; Thessalonica nos

epigram.¹⁰ He argued that the description of the Victories as possessing ‘figures appropriate to the victories’ was probably a reference to the military accoutrements associated with Victory on this type, the prow of a warship and a shield, where these refer to Constantine’s recent defeat of Licinius in a naval battle of Callipolis.

However, there are two reasons to doubt Wilkinson’s identification of this last type as the subject of this epigram. The first, and most important, reason lies in the fact that the epigram describes the Victories as ‘bearing victories to the Christ-loving city’ as if the coins could be interpreted in commemoration of the victories of Constantinople itself.¹¹ However, such an interpretation must exclude any allusion to Constantine’s defeat of Licinius for the good reason that Constantinople did not yet exist when Constantine defeated Licinius. True, there had been an earlier city on the same site, Byzantium, but it seems to have operated as Licinius’ capital before his defeat, and it has been argued that Constantine razed most of it to the ground precisely for this reason.¹² Hence Constantinople itself could not, and did not, claim any credit for the defeat of Licinius. It was a consequence rather than a cause of the same. The second reason to doubt this identification lies in the nature of this *folles* itself, the smallest and least impressive of all the coins in issue during this period, a base metal coin with minimal silver content. Given that Victory appeared on so many other gold and silver types during the same period, one has to question whether Palladas would really have devoted an epigram to this particular denomination coin. True, he does mention the *folles* in another epigram, but the emphasis is on the bronze statues being melted down to create *folles* rather than upon these coins themselves, and the reference is brief, factual, and almost unavoidable.¹³ Finally, one should not forget that while the type of *folles*

188, 230; Heraclea nos 115, 120, 125, 130, 135, 144; Constantinople nos. 63, 79, 86; Nicomedia no. 196; Cyzicus nos 73-74, 92-93, 107-108, 120-121; Antioch nos 92, 114; Alexandria nos 64, 71.

¹⁰ He is followed by Barnes 2011, 128; Bardill 2012, 252.

¹¹ In reality, the victory always belongs to an emperor, usually Constantine himself as Augustus, rather than to a city. Wilkinson 2010, 9 supports his interpretation by reference to a rare bronze medallion from Rome depicting Victory crowning Constantinople (*RIC* 7, Rome no. 343), but the accompanying legend (VICTORIAE AVGVSTI) makes it clear that victory properly belongs to Constantine, not his city. It is important to note that most Victory types issued by Constantine do not celebrate a specific victory, so that these coins seem to celebrate a general characteristic of the dynasty rather than real events. Furthermore, Victory tends to become a vague goddess of dynastic celebration closely associated with imperial anniversaries rather than military achievements.

¹² Stephenson 2009, 192-194; Barnes 2011, 111-113.

¹³ *AP* 9.528. See Wilkinson 2009, 38.

favoured by Wilkinson here was produced at all mints throughout the empire, it only formed a small part of their total output of bronze coinage at any one time.¹⁴ Hence it was not a significant type, even among the bronze types.

The beginning of a solution to this problem lies in the realization that the claim that the coins bear figures 'appropriate to the victories' (σχήματα πρέποντα νίκαις) does not necessarily refer to some details within their design itself. Instead, the appropriateness of these figures may refer to the metal upon which they have been stamped, and of which they therefore consist, and which gives them their colour also. Furthermore, it is not clear in this case whether the term 'victories' should not be interpreted in reference to depictions of the goddess of Victory rather than to military successes of some sort, as Wilkinson has done. Hence Palladas may refer to figures 'appropriate to the Victories', that is, to depictions of the goddess in general rather than to figures 'appropriate to the victories', that is, to military successes, where it is their metal and colour which makes these figures so appropriate to the Victories. So what metal is most appropriate for the depiction of a Victory? Precious metal, gold most of all, but one should not necessarily exclude silver.¹⁵ Hence Palladas may refer to the appearance of Victory on a gold coin, or perhaps a silver coin also, probably a relatively common coin, so most likely either the standard gold coin, the *solidus*, or the standard silver coin, the *siliqua*. Here one notes that a Victory advancing left with wreath (or trophy) and palm-branch was the main device on most *solidi* issued during the period c. 326-347 until the introduction of a new standard type depicting Roma and Constantinopolis enthroned together.¹⁶ Similarly, a standing Victory remained the main device on most *siliquae* issued

14 E.g. even at its introduction the type was struck in only three of the eleven workshops striking bronze at the mint at Constantinople, and this was reduced to one by the end of its production. Similarly, it was only struck in one of the ten workshops striking bronze coinage at Antioch. In all cases, most production was devoted to the GLORIA EXERCITVS type depicting two standing soldiers with two (later one) standards between them.

15 In general, see Janes 1998, esp. 18-20. Perhaps the most famous statue of Victory in the Roman world, that which Augustus set in the senate house at Rome in 29 BC, was golden, that is, of gilded bronze. See Pohlsander 1969.

16 For the dominant type with Victory advancing left, see e.g. *RIC* 7, Constantinople nos 2-3 (326), 46-50 (330), 68-71 (333), 90-98 (335/336), 114-15 (336/337); Nicomedia nos 110-13 (325/326), 139 (327); Cyzicus no. 75 (330-333); Antioch nos 83 (329), 93 (335), 96-97 (335/336), 98-104 (336/337). See also *RIC* 8, Constantinople nos 1, 55; Nicomedia nos 26-28; Antioch nos 3-8. A second type depicted a seated Victory inscribing a shield supported by a small genius with a vota legend celebrating an imperial anniversary. See e.g. *RIC* 7, Constantinople nos 72 (333), 107-108, 116 (335); Nicomedia nos 103, 171, 175-180 (335). See also *RIC* 8, Constantinople nos 3-10; Nicomedia nos 1-2; Antioch nos 9-29.

c. 326-340 until it was replaced by a new standard type depicting a legend within a wreath.¹⁷

A second point to bear in mind is that when Palladas describes these Victories as 'bearing victories to the Christ-loving city', he does not necessarily refer to their actual appearance on the coins themselves. Nor does he necessarily allude to their roles as symbols of a real military victory of some sort. Instead, he may allude to their role, or to that rather of the gold coins on which they were depicted, in winning victory for Constantinople in some metaphorical battles with the other cities of the East. Here one notes that pagan sources criticize the behaviour of Constantine I during his last years, that is, when Constantinople had become his main residence, on the basis that his excessive gifts and generosity squandered public money.¹⁸ While the Christian Eusebius of Caesarea tries to present the same phenomenon in a more positive light, even he has to admit that Constantine's generosity proved a problem when it encouraged false conversions to Christianity.¹⁹ Hence pagan and Christian sources criticize the fact that Constantine spent massive sums during his final years. But this generosity attracted the educated elite to his court at Constantinople in search of patronage, men such as the philosopher Sopater, if not Palladas himself also, as well as those whom Constantine deliberately sought out to fill his new senate there.²⁰ Since the *solidus* with advancing Victory as its main reverse device remained in production as late as c. 347, it is important to note that Constantine's son and successor in the East, Constantius II, continued to promote the status of Constantinople when, among other things, he promoted its senate as an imperial senate on par with that at Rome, perhaps sometime during the period 337-342 even.²¹ It is not surprising, then, that when the young Libanius visited the city c. 340, he found many distinguished literary figures there attracted from all over the place.²² Constantius also pursued an extensive building program there, even if it can be difficult to credit particular projects to his name.²³ So although the military situation required Constantius II to spend most of his reign until 350 based at Antioch in Syria, he did not neglect his

17 See e.g. *RIC* 7, Constantinople nos 5 (326), 54 (330-35), 126-28 (336), 136 (337); Nicomedia nos 117 (326), 140-141 (326/327), 186 (336/337); Antioch nos 105-107 (336/337). See *RIC* 8, Constantinople nos 15-20; Nicomedia no. 3; Cyzicus nos 1-2.

18 Julian, *Caes.* 335b; Amm. Marc. 16.8.12; *Epit. de Caes.* 41.16; Zosimus 2.38.1.

19 Euseb. *VC* 4.1.1-2, 54.3.

20 On Sopater, see Woods 2006.

21 Skinner 2008.

22 Lib. *Or.* 1.30.

23 Henck 2001, 284-293.

father's dynastic capital. Consequently, when Palladas mentions 'those who love the city', he may well refer to Constantine I and Constantius II as the successive rulers and promoters of Constantinople.

It is arguable, therefore, that the Victories of the first line of this epigram speak from the reverses of a group of *solidi* of the standard type issued c. 326-347 and boast of their role in winning victories for Constantinople in its metaphorical battles with the older cities of the East as it sought to assert itself as the true political and cultural capital of the region. The clear implication is that these coins have bought its victories for Constantinople rather than that the city has won them in the more appropriate fashion, whatever the precise nature of the contests. In other words, Constantinople is guilty of bribery. Therefore, despite the fact that, as Wilkinson has stated, "there is nothing obviously disdainful or sarcastic about these four lines", it is difficult to interpret this epigram other than as an attack upon Constantinople, and a mockery of the manner in which it has relied upon generous imperial patronage to win ever greater distinction at the expense of its older urban rivals.²⁴ In this way, and despite his lighter tone, Palladas anticipates here the criticisms which Libanius and Eunapius make against Constantinople for the damage which it does to the other cities of the East.²⁵

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²⁴ For different readings of the tone of this epigram, see Wilkinson 2010, 11.

²⁵ See e.g. Lib. *Or.* 1.279, *Or.* 30.37; Eun. *vs* 462.

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