

# THE FACE OF CHRIST

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## Early Christian Iconography On The Coins of Justinian II

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### Introduction

In 692 Justinian II (r. 685-695, 705-711) incorporated the Image of Christ on his Gold Solidi. His coins were the first to do so. The coins from his first reign (Type A) features a Greco-Roman mature depiction of Christ. The coin of his second reign (Type B) features a more Eastern depiction of Christ. Through my research I plan to discover what influenced the change in depiction for Justinian II and what Type prevails as the **Face of Christ**.

### PHOTO DESCRIPTIONS

1. Youthful depiction of Christ as Medallion (ANS Collection)
2. Blundered Type A Depiction of Christ (ANS Collection)
3. Type A depiction of Christ (Metropolitan Museum)

### Two Coin Types

The two coin types by Justinian II feature two different depictions of Christ. The coin from his first reign (Type A) features a figure with a mature appearance, containing long wavy hair parted down the middle and a long beard commonly known as the Greco-Roman depiction. The coin from Justinian's second reign (Type B) features a youthful figure with a triangular shaped head, short curly hair, and a short beard commonly known as the "more truthful" depiction.



Type A Gold Solidus of Christ from Justinian II first reign (692-695 A.D.) (ANS Collection)



Type B Gold Solidus of Christ from Justinian II second reign (705-711 A.D.) (ANS Collection)

### Current Findings

**The prevailing image of Christ that survives after Justinian II's mint is the Type A.** Evidence of this is seen in depictions of Christ in Rome and throughout the Byzantine Empire. Depictions like *Christ the Light of the World* in the vault of the Zeno Chapel, S. Prassede, Rome, 9<sup>th</sup> c. and the depiction of Christ on the coins of Michael III (r. 842-867) further solidify this fact.



*Christ the Light of the World* in the vault of the Zeno Chapel, S. Prassede, Rome, 9<sup>th</sup> c.

### What next ?

My research on the depictions of the coins is ongoing and will be published in my final Honors in the Major Paper. While I have found sufficient evidence to determine the prevailing image of Christ is a result of early painters attempting to solidify a recognizable image for Christ in the 7th-8<sup>th</sup> centuries there is still more study to be done on how and why this affected later depictions of Christ.

### References

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### Preceding Antecedents



*Christ*, from the Apse Mosaic of Santa Pudenziana, 5th century



*Monks of Beth Zagba Presenting the Book to the Holy Savior*, from the Rabbula Gospels, (586 A.D.)



*Gold Solidus of Christ* from the reign of Michael III (843-856 A.D.)

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