

THE ROMAN COIN COLLECTION AT STELLENBOSCH, A SEQUEL.¹

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This paper describes a new selection of ancient coins currently in the possession of the Department of Ancient Studies at the University of Stellenbosch. Discussion will focus mainly on the art and importance of coin portraiture during the Imperial, Imperial and Byzantine periods of Roman history, with specific reference to various relevant coin denominations from the respective eras.

The original coin collection was begun in the early 1960s with a legacy of about a hundred coins from one A P Richter to the former Department of Latin at the University of Stellenbosch. Most of these coins were purchased from Spinks and Son in London. The late professor Frans Smuts, former head of the Department of Latin, expanded the collection with funds made available by the University, thus procuring a small, comprehensive hand-picked selection of Roman coins ranging in period from about 300 BC to AD 1041. More recently the late professor Bert van Stekelenburg managed the department's numismatic collection and made a valuable contribution to our knowledge about the historical and artistic aspects of this collection. At present the collection hosts about 170 coins and spans the Republican; Imperial; Imperial, and Byzantine periods of Roman history.²

This collection contains true *exempla* of coins depicting events relating to both Roman myth and Roman history as displayed by the early Republican *denarii* which feature the

¹ In 1978 the late Prof. Bert van Stekelenburg published an article: 'Coins of the Roman Republic from the collection of the University of Stellenbosch. A historical description' in *Akroterion* 23.3 (9-23), describing some of the coins in this collection; their place within the Roman monetary system; some circumstances that prompted their issue; and some artistic aspects.

² The above image shows a small variety of coin denominations hosted, from left to right: a *pentanumium*, Justin II; *dupondius* with Germanicus; *quadrans* 5 BC, Augustus; *follis*, Galeria Valeria; *victoriatius* c. 229-240 BC; *as*, Titus; *decanumium*, Justinian I; *antoninianus*, Volusian AD 251-3; *follis*, Maximianus; *tetradrachm* from Alexandria, Probus; *sestertius*, Trajan c. AD 103-111; *as*, Domitian; *follis*, Justinian I. Descriptions for the coins used in the present article (*figures 1 – 37*) are found at the end of this paper. To view some of these coins, visit the web page: *Roman coins in the possession of the Department of Ancient Studies, Stellenbosch* at <http://www.sun.ac.za/as/coins/muntwerf>

characteristic helmeted head of Roma, city goddess of Rome, on the obverse, with, on the reverse, the Dioscuri on horseback.³

In this early Republican period the Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses adorned both obverse and reverse types. From around 110 BC other Roman deities gradually replaced the head of Roma as the obverse image on *denarii*. After roughly 60 years of *denarii* with the Dioscuri on the reverse, moneyers increasingly portrayed other gods driving either a two-horse (*biga*, Fig. 1), three-horse (*triga*) or four-horse (*quadriga*, Fig. 3) chariot.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Sometimes other animals, for instance, stags (Fig. 2) or dolphins were shown pulling the chariots. By the mid-century the charioteer gods reigned supreme.

During the nineties and eighties of the first century BC, at a time when Rome experienced ongoing civil unrest and political turbulence, coins with the obverse image of Apollo appeared frequently. Apollo, as an 'avenging god', (Fig. 5) but also as the god of archery, together with, on the reverse, Minerva (Fig. 3) driving a quadriga, was often displayed on coins of political rivals, foremost on the coins of Marian supporters and moneyers, for instance, the brothers Caius and L. Marcius Censorinus (Fig. 7).

Another popular god at this time found on a number of obverses is Veiovis (Vediovis), or 'little Jupiter' (i.e. the infant Jupiter), as he is commonly known. On a *denarius* (Fig. 4) of C. Licinius Macer, annalist and orator, the youthful Veiovis is portrayed as a deity with a destructive nature. Head turned left, diademed, with a cloak over his left shoulder, Veiovis hurls his thunderbolt with his right hand.⁴

Lightning hurled by him is supposed to have caused deafness. This youthful god, who



Fig. 4

³ Silver *denarii* from this period were extensively discussed previously, and will not be repeated here. Cf. Van Stekelenburg 1978.

⁴ Also known as a god of expiation and protector of runaway criminals, Veiovis proved less fortunate for the Macri, who suffered a crushing defeat in 66 BC. In this year Licinius Macer was impeached by Cicero under the *lex de repetundis*. He committed suicide to avoid the verdict.

usually carried a bundle of arrows, was sometimes accompanied by goats, and is often equated with Apollo.⁵ Young Veiovis' likeness to Apollo is demonstrated on a number of coins.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

In *figs. 4, 5*, for instance, they share both the diadem and thunderbolt as attributes. There are differences, however: handsome Apollo, the epitome of male beauty, god of brightness, music and art, is usually shown laureate (*Fig. 6*); sometimes he wears a fillet with his hair in ringlets (*Fig. 7*).



Fig. 8

As we move on to the **Imperial period** (49 - 27 BC), the Roman pantheon on the obverse declines in importance. Republican coinage from this period emphasises the features of human individuals, not only those of individual ancestral heroes, but foremost contemporary portraiture of principal contenders in the post-Caesarian power struggle. A new trend was set by Julius Caesar, who struck coins bearing his own image. His coinage, the first at Rome to show the image of a living person, made the concept of contemporary portraiture acceptable.

A *denarius* (*Fig. 8*), of the military leader Quintus Labienus, for instance, displays his severe features; his prominent bone structure and furrowed brow. With this depiction the artist

captured the harsh reality of a very turbulent period in Roman history.⁶

⁵ One of the oldest Roman gods, Veiovis is identified with the ancient Etruscan deity Veive, a god of revenge, who, similar to Apollo, often wears a laurel wreath and carries arrows. Over time Veiovis, also acknowledged for his power of healing (as was Apollo, who features frequently on the coinage of the eighties, a decade that witnessed the consequences of the virulent plague of 87 BC in Rome) became associated with the Greek Asclepius. Veiovis was worshipped at Bovillae in Latium, and had temples in Rome on the Capitoline hill and on the Tiber island.

⁶ The coin of Labienus (*Fig. 8*) is discussed in detail by Van Stekelenburg 1978.



Fig. 9

Octavian, formerly known as Caius Octavius, great-nephew and adopted son of Iulius Caesar, continued the trend set by Caesar. A *denarius* of 41 BC (Fig. 9), struck near the end of the triumvirate, is still typically Republican in character, styling Octavian as liberator and restorer of the *res publica*. This rare coin displays on the reverse the bare head of Octavius, with a slight beard.⁷ The legend reads: CAESAR IMP. PONT. III VIR. R. P. C. (*Caesar, imperator, pontifex, triumvir reipublicae constituendae* – Caesar, saluted imperator, high-priest, member of the triumvirate who restored the Roman Republic). Roman coinage from this period onwards reflects the transition from Republic to Empire.

From about 36 BC Octavian is portrayed without imperial titles, until 29 BC when his coinage took on the imperial characteristics displayed by his successors.⁸ These coins usually bear long legends on both sides. The image of the emperor, his name and titles adorned the obverse with the gods and personifications sharing the reverse. The portrait of the emperor was clearly regarded as a sign of supremacy. Both obverse and reverse designs were aspects of the same message. Whereas the portrait focused on the emperor, the reverse celebrated his eminence.

In January of 27 BC the senate conferred the name of “Augustus” on Octavian – a proclamation of his eminence in the state, a feature which became characteristic of imperial titulature on Roman coinage (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

⁷ According to Dio (48.34), Octavian did not shave before the age of twenty-five. However, the slight beard could also be an indication of Octavian in mourning, as depicted on some Octavian and Divus Iulius coins of 38 BC.

⁸ Cf. Sydenham 11.

During the early years of Augustus' principate he emphasized his reputation as a successful general. References to imperial achievements characterise his coinage. A *denarius* from 20 BC (Figs. 10, 11) commemorates the successful campaigns of his adopted son Tiberius, who installed a new king and re-established Roman power in Armenia. Under Tigranes Armenia became a client kingdom of Rome. The reverse shows an Armenian tiara, a bow case and quiver. The legend reads ARMENIA RECEPTA - Armenia regained.

At about 27 BC something miraculous befell Augustus, who, judging from his coin portraits and statues, appears to have found the fountain of youth (Fig. 13). From his coin portraits one can barely imagine that he had progressed from his forties in 20 BC (Fig. 10) to his frailer seventies in AD 9 (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

From 27 BC Augustus spent many years away from Rome. Even as far as Africa the power of the new emperor was felt. Coins and statues propagated the image of the Roman emperor. The bronze head (Fig. 13) of a young Augustus (c. 27-25 BC) from a statue in Meroë in the Sudan, for instance, became a monument to the all-embracing power of Rome and its emperor. Augustus' calm and youthful posture exudes a serenity and strength similar to that of the Prima Porta statue. The depiction of perpetual youth was, of course, deliberate. Over time the portrait of Augustus matured gradually, but remained essentially youthful, thus showing his unchanging portrait as a symbol of stability, a stability that would endure long after the period of transition between Republic and Empire.

Next we move on to some of the more interesting women of the Imperial period. The **Imperial coins** in the Stellenbosch collection display exquisite art with the portraiture of imperial women. Striking images of these women adorn both obverse and reverse sides, and present a showcase of a variety of women, often unconventional both in character and countenance. This kaleidoscope of Roman imperial women includes among others Augustus' stern and powerful consort, Livia; from the first century, the notorious Messallina and Poppaea; from the early second century, the revered Faustina Maior; from the later half of the second century, the empress Julia Domna; from the third century, the mysterious Otacilia Severa, and moving into the early fourth century, Galeria Valeria, supreme victim of despotism.



Fig. 14

personification with the attributes of either *Pax*, *Iustitia* or *Pietas*.⁹

Often these were identified with Livia, whom Augustus had presented as a model of proper Roman womanhood. Livia had become the most powerful, respected and feared woman in Rome and its provinces. Under Tiberius the image of a seated Livia on the reverse of *denarii* with the emperor on the obverse became a familiar sight to Roman subjects throughout the provinces.¹⁰

This *denarius* (Fig. 14) displays on the reverse Livia as *Pax*, seated, her feet on a footstool, holding a branch designating peace, and a sceptre, indicating imperial power. The legend reads PONTIF MAXIM in allusion to Tiberius who assumed the office of *pontifex maximus*, the chief priest of Rome, in AD 15. The coin was commonly associated with the tribute tax and became known as the ‘Tribute Penny’ alluded to in Matthew 22.19, Mark 12.15, and Luke 22.24.

Some of the Roman provinces produced a very distinct series of coinage. Greek Imperial coins, for instance, also known as Roman Provincials, are coins that were issued for local use in Greek cities while they were under Roman control. Our examples include two Alexandrian tetradrachms of low grade silver (billon) from the first century AD. Provincial tetradrachms were issued in silver but over time became so debased that they appeared to be either pure copper or bronze with a light silver wash (Fig. 22). Greek Imperial coins usually bear legends in Greek, but some cities also used Latin. The obverse usually depicts the portrait of the emperor or members of his family with the reverse dated to the regnal year (following the symbol “L” for “year”) of the emperor issuing the coin.

⁹ Roman Imperial reverse types used a large number of figures that personified ideas or virtues. These figures are portrayed with specific attributes that allow identification even in the absence of legends. Here ‘Peace’ holds a branch and a sceptre. The olive branch was used to symbolize peace, even as it does today. The sceptre was associated with nobility and power.

¹⁰ Yet coinage depicting Livia is rare. However, in AD 30 and 33 she appears on the Palestinian coinage of Herod Phillip as ΙΟΥΛΙΑ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΗ, the Greek equivalent of the title Augusta. Judean procurators dedicated their coins to her, as did Pontius Pilate. For a discussion of Livia/Julia coins as well as the name Julia given to her after her adoption into the Julian clan, see Strickert 1998:93-107.

Two of the most notorious women of the first century AD are depicted on the Alexandrian tetradrachms below. Both Poppaea (*Fig. 15*) and Messallina (*Fig. 16*) distinguished themselves as women with extraordinary skill, exquisite charm and ruthless seductive powers.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Valeria Messallina (c. AD 20-48) was married in about AD 38 to the future emperor Claudius. On this coin reverse (*Fig. 16*) a modestly portrayed empress Messallina is shown holding their offspring Octavia and Britannicus. This portrait discloses nothing about the rumours concerning Messallina's involvement with the political intrigue, murders and sexual promiscuity that fed contemporary Roman gossip.¹¹ Instead Messallina is presented here in the guise of *Eutycheia* (*Felicitas*), the personification of happiness and prosperity.¹² Though workmanship and artistic design varied considerably on Greek Imperial coins, especially so on reverse types, the younger Poppaea (c. AD 31-65) is shown on this tetradrachm of AD 64 as an elegantly draped, self-assured and determined young woman. She is depicted with a deceptively simple hairstyle from which a loose tendril escapes the "pony-tail" of bound hair at the back of her elegant, long neck. Poppaea, daughter of Poppaea Sabina the Elder (*ob.* AD 47), avenged her mother's forced suicide at the hand of her opponent Messallina. Poppaea inherited her mother's beauty and talent for political intrigue, and in AD 62 she usurped the place of emperor Nero's wife Claudia Octavia, daughter of Messallina, and eventually had her exiled and executed.

¹¹ Cf. Lightman 161-3.

¹² *Felicitas* is often depicted on coin reverses to convey either a message that the empress has given birth or that all is well in the empire.



Fig. 17

The first and second centuries AD bequeathed a very rich legacy of *aes* coinage. The *sestertius*, a large yellow brass or orichalcum coin of about 30 mm, valued at a quarter of a denarius, proved itself admirably suited for realistic portraiture and intricate designs. The *sestertii* of the second century often bear very attractive and artistic portraits of the imperial family. A *sestertius* (Fig. 17) shows Faustina the Elder, wife of Antoninus Pius.¹³ Coin portraits of Faustina are usually in high relief, emphasising her strong features and elegant posture. Here she is portrayed as a young mature woman with a very elaborate hairstyle (Fig. 17). The wavy tied locks and ‘bun’ on top of her head became the fashion of the period. This hairstyle, with a double tiara of

pearls, hair entwined with more pearls, distinguishes Faustina from all other empresses. Most coins of Faustina the Elder can be identified by this distinctive feature (Fig. 19). On this *denarius*, as on her other coins (Fig. 18), Faustina appears as a dignified Roman matron with no hint of frivolity.¹⁴ Here, in middle-age, her softened features still display an ever charming



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

empress. On Faustina's death in AD 141 Antoninus Pius had her consecrated and all coins struck posthumously bearing her portrait, bore legends reading DIVA FAVSTINA (Fig. 18). Broken coin legends (a split anywhere depending on design elements), usually a split between words (Figs. 17, 18, 20) were considered as an indication of higher respect.

¹³ In early Republican times the *sestertius* was occasionally issued as a small silver coin, a quarter *denarius*. It was not used on a regular basis. The larger bronze denomination fluctuated in weight and diameter from the second century onwards until it was reduced to about half the original size.

¹⁴ Not much is known about Faustina, but monumental inscriptions and evidence on coins suggest that she was involved in charitable works within the Roman community.



Fig. 20

Next we turn to Julia Domna, daughter of Julius Bassianus, a priest of Baal and Elagabalus. Julia Domna was born in Emesa in Syria in AD 170 and in AD 187 became the wife of the future emperor Septimius Severus. Endowed with charm, wit, beauty and political ingenuity, Julia Domna became one of the most powerful people in the Roman Empire during the era AD 193 to 217.

When Severus ascended to the throne in AD 193, Julia Domna received the title of Augusta (Fig. 20). As a patron of the arts she engaged in an intellectual circle consisting of philosophers, physicians, artists and writers. Much of the reign of Septimius was disturbed by warfare,

and while the emperor was caught up in military matters, Julia Domna was left to take care of and administer the Roman Empire. This portrait of Julia Domna accurately depicts her face. On the coins from early in the reign of Septimius, we see the face of a very determined young woman with a slightly cruel and cynical look. Her hairstyle set a new fashion trend of wavy locks rolling down both sides of her head, curling under at the ends.



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

The reverse of the coins of Julia Domna often displays the personification of *Fortuna* or *Tyche* (good luck or fortune, Figs. 21, 22), whose attributes include a rudder (to guide the world) and *cornucopiae* (horns of plenty); occasionally an olive branch or a *patera*.

From this time on, for the purpose of propaganda, idealised concepts such as *Fortuna*, *Salus* (Fig 24) and *Concordia* (Fig 28), are frequently shown to be of avail on the home front as well as in the troubled provinces.



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

Salus, for instance, the Roman personification of health, is depicted on a denarius of Macrinus (Fig 23), who was party to the murder of Caracalla, and became emperor in AD 217. *Salus* is seated comfortably (Fig 24), and feeds a serpent rising from an altar. In the classical Roman pagan religion, a serpent was associated with healing. The legend says it all: SALVS PVBLICA. The welfare of the republic featured strongly on this coin of AD 217, but all was not well in the Roman provinces.

After a revolt of the Syrian army, Macrinus was betrayed and put to death after a reign of only 14 months. In terms of securing Roman peace, well-being and security, the striking of *Salus* on his coins was but a pathetic and unsuccessful gesture by a weak emperor to inspire the army's loyalty.

Towards the middle of the third century, a new silver coin drove the *denarius* out of circulation. This denomination is known as an *antoninianus* (so called after Antoninus, the official name of Caracalla). It is equal in weight to one and a half *denarius*, tarified as being the equivalent of two *denarii* (double *denarius*). As debasement continued, *antoniniani* varied considerably in size, but in general the coin weighed anything between 5.6g and 2.5g.¹⁵ To distinguish *antoniniani* from *denarii*, obverse portraits on *antoniniani* show the emperor wearing a radiate crown. In the case of empresses the denomination is distinguished by a crescent placed beneath the bust.¹⁶ Although empresses are often portrayed with a diadem, this is not an indication of the denomination.

Our mystery woman for the third century appears on the *antoninianus* on the left (Fig. 25, page 77 top). Little is known about Otacilia Severa, the wife of Philip I, also known as Philip the Arab (Fig. 27). Even the reverses of coins struck in her name do not tell us much about

¹⁵ During the Republican era, *denarii* contained nearly 4g of high grade silver, but in the early Empire most coins weighed around 3.5g.

¹⁶ The crescent usually refers to an attribute of Luna, the moon goddess.

her but are simply typical reverses for a female personality of the mid Third Century. In AD 237 she gave birth to a son, the future emperor Philip II, shown here on an *antoninianus*, ten years later (Fig. 26).



Fig. 25



Fig. 26

In AD 244 Philip became emperor and had Otacilia made Augusta. Their son was raised to the rank of Caesar. Notwithstanding ongoing provincial unrest and military revolts, Philip's reign can be regarded as relatively benevolent.¹⁷ He was one of the very few soldier Emperors who had good relations with the Senate. Eventually, in AD 249, in an effort to quell rebellions along the Danube, Philip I was killed in battle near Verona. Some sources indicate that his son was killed at his side, others have it that Philip II was murdered in Otacilia's arms by the Praetorian Guard. No reliable accounts of the events of this time period have been found and scholars are in disagreement as to what happened to Otacilia. She seemingly survived; perhaps she was allowed to go into retirement.



Fig. 27

On the left we have a *dupondius* with the bust of Philip I. The style of portraiture is typical for the third century, and displays a coarseness which captures the violence of the age. Note the severity of the hairstyle, the protruding eyebrows and the serious eyes looking upward, perhaps in search for divine inspiration. He wears a radiate crown as opposed to the laureate crown worn by emperors depicted on *denarii*.¹⁸

These were perilous times and the personifications displayed on reverse coins contradicted contemporary events in no small way.

¹⁷ There was, for instance, no persecution of Christians during his reign, he gave donatives to the people, held spectacular games which celebrated the traditional founding of Rome, and outlawed male prostitution.

¹⁸ To distinguish the *dupondius* from for instance, the *as*, *dupondii* showed the radiate crown worn by the emperor. The *as* was struck in red copper, a colour that separated the *as* from the slightly larger *dupondius*.

At a time when Philip was subduing his rebellious legions and a number of pretenders to the throne, one finds Concord happily seated, leaning back and holding a sacrificial bowl and *cornucopiae*, CONCORDIA AVG.

Concordia (Fig. 28) personifies harmony or concord and is often seen on coins bearing the legend CONCORDIA MILITVM or a similar expression of an idea that all is well and there is agreement amongst those in power. This, however, was often only wishful thinking on the part of the emperor, who was soon to be murdered by the army and replaced by another favourite.

As with modern political jargon, the language of coin reverse designs has become conventional. Constant repetition of abstractions and symbols had by this time rendered them almost meaningless.



Fig. 28

Portraiture on coinage during the years of the Tetrarchy shows a distinct stylistic manifestation of tetrarchic ideology which replaced individual identity with impressions of power and distance. In style, imperial coin portraiture became abstracted and showed a uniform, simple block-like impression which often makes identification of individual emperors difficult.

Apparently this look-alike style (*similitudo*) depicted Augusti, together with their Caesars, with thickset necks, large jawbones and very prominent brows (Figs 31, 32). The uniform but less attractive imperial look unfortunately also included some of the feminine members of imperial families.

Our next lady at court is presented in this rather masculine style. Coin portraits of Galeria Valeria usually depict strong features with a firm jawbone and prominent chin (Fig. 29). The bust is often draped, sometimes cuirassed. Other coins portraying Valeria depict her as a more feminine and attractive lady, while the reverse of her coins mostly shows Venus holding an apple (Fig. 30).

Galeria Valeria was the daughter of the emperor Diocletian and she goes down in history as a victim of political circumstances. In AD 293 Diocletian appointed the Illyrian general Galerius as his co-emperor in the East.



Fig. 29



Fig. 30

Diocletian soon arranged the marriage of Valeria to the new ruler. Unlike Diocletian, who tolerated Christianity, despite the fact that he did not share his daughter's sympathy towards Christians, Galerius issued edicts to persecute Christians. However, shortly before his death in AD 313, he, possibly with influence from Valeria (at the time acknowledged as Augusta) issued an edict of tolerance towards Christian followers. Galerius entrusted his wife to the care of his co-ruler Licinius I (*Fig. 31*).



Fig. 31



Fig. 32

Valeria, however, apparently felt somewhat insecure around her caretaker and fled to the court of the adopted son of Diocletian, emperor Maximinus II, also known as Daia (*Fig. 32*). Alas, the ambitious Maximinus soon proposed marriage to the wealthy Valeria, who refused the infamy of an incestuous bond with an already married emperor.

Maximinus then exiled both Valeria and her mother to a district in Syria. During the civil war that ensued between Maximinus and Licinius, both women were on the run until Licinius

killed his rival in AD 313. About fifteen months later Valeria and her mother were recognised in Thessalonica and beheaded in that city.

During the **Byzantine period** a completely different bronze coinage was introduced by the emperor Anastasius (491-518 AD). From this time on the art of coin portraiture declined. Byzantine imperial representations became more stylised and depersonalised, and eventually the Roman profile bust was replaced by a fully facing bust of the emperor (*Figs. 33, 34*).¹⁹

Whereas Roman emperors were depicted holding an orb to signify the universal power of the ruler, frontal portraits during the Byzantine period showed the emperor holding a similar globe, but surmounted by a large cross, thereby rendering the image Christian (*Fig. 34*).²⁰



Fig. 33



Fig. 34

The image of the emperor, however, remained in essence military. The *folles* on the left, for instance, depicts the diademed, draped, and cuirassed profile bust of the emperor Justinian I (*Fig. 33*). In *Fig. 34* he is shown facing, with a plumed helmet, and a cuirassed bust, holding a *globus cruciger* in his right hand, with a shield covering his left shoulder.²¹ The Christian cross is displayed in the right field.²² The obverse broken coin legends now display the abbreviation DN (*Dominus Noster*) as the conventional beginning for imperial titulature, and include the abbreviated title of the emperor, the perpetual Augustus: P[PER]P[ETVVS]AVG[VSTVS].²³

¹⁹ This convention was introduced by Justinian I in AD 538.

²⁰ The *globus cruciger* first appeared in 423 on the reverse of the coinage of Theodosius II. On the coinage of Justinian I it became the symbol of Byzantine sovereignty, replacing the customary spear of the emperor.

²¹ As naturalistic representation of emperors became less important, emphasis on costume and insignia became more prominent. The simple diadem, for instance, is replaced by an elaborate helmet or crown with *pendilia* hanging down both sides of the emperor's face.

²² The transition from Roman to Byzantine coinage during the fourth and fifth centuries is characterised by the gradual replacement of pagan imagery with Christian religious imagery. The christogram, for instance, first appeared in AD 327 on bronze coins celebrating the victory of Constantine I over the pagan Licinius in 324. On coins of Theodosius II, a cross replaced the staff formerly carried by Victory. During the sixth century, she in turn is replaced by the image of the archangel Michael who carries a cross and a *globus cruciger*.

²³ During the Roman period split legends on the obverse of coins indicated that the ruler displayed was the senior Augustus. An unbroken obverse legend usually indicated a Caesar or junior Augustus. The

The image of Christ did not appear on coins until the seventh century under the reign of Justinian II. Most of these coins portray a bust-length figure of a bearded Christ on the obverse. From the ninth century on Christ is usually shown enthroned; nimbate; wearing a *nimbus cruciger*, a *pallium* and *colobium*, and holding a book of gospels with both hands. Sometimes he is depicted as the All- Sovereign Pantocrator. On many of these later Byzantine coins the emperor does not feature, and only Christ, King of Kings, is depicted. On the obverse of this anonymous *foliis* on the right, attributed to Michael IV (AD 1034-41), for instance, Christ Antiphonetes (epithet of Christ who gave his life for the salvation of mankind) is shown nimbate, standing facing and holding a *nimbus cruciger*. The Greek legend reads + EMMANOVHA (Fig. 35).²⁴ Christian iconography continues on the reverse, showing a jewelled cross with a pellet in each corner, dividing the Greek legend IC - XC - NI - KA (May Jesus Christ conquer) in quarters.²⁵



Fig. 35

The Byzantine period witnessed dramatic changes in its monetary system, not only in the art of coin portraiture, which spread political propaganda and religious ideology, but more so in currency. To maintain the Roman monetary tradition, a new system took shape under Constantine the Great. In AD 309 Constantine established the gold *solidus* (*nomisma* in Greek), in weight 4.5g, as the standard currency. The smallest denomination was the *nummus*, about 7000 to the *solidus*. The coinage reform of AD 498 ended the production of the plethora of tiny bronze coins which were in circulation at the time.

The new system centered on a *foliis* worth forty of the old, tiny coins. The value was spelled out on the reverse with a Greek numeral M, which was the symbol used for the number = 40.²⁶ This large bronze *foliis* of Justinian I (Fig. 36) clearly shows the large M, indicating the denomination; the decorative Christian cross above; and the emperor's year of

abbreviation PP (*Pater Patriae* – father of his country) formerly indicated a title held only by those Augusti deemed worthy of it.

²⁴ The *nimbus* (halo surrounding the head) indicates an aura of glorious power. Originally it was associated with Sol who was sometimes depicted on late Roman coins wearing either a radiate crown or a radiate nimbus. During the Roman Imperial period, from Antoninus Pius onward, emperors sometimes appeared nimbate.

²⁵ The reverse is on display at <http://www.sun.ac.za/as/coins/muntwerf>

²⁶ Some of the smaller denominations, for example, are the *pentanummium* (Fig. 37), indicated by the Greek numeral E = 5 *nummi*; the *decanummium*, I = 10 *nummi*; and the half *foliis*, K = 20 *nummi*. In some instances Roman numerals appear on 40 *nummi* coins.

reign: ANNO XIII (13 = AD 540). The letter B indicates the workshop from which the coin comes; the place of origin is abbreviated: NIK = Nicomedian mint.²⁷



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

These denominationally marked bronzes became standard throughout the Byzantine world and were discontinued only after the eighth century.

This concludes the present discussion of the Stellenbosch ancient coin collection. The paper focused mainly on the art and importance of coin portraiture during the Imperial and Byzantine eras, with specific reference to various relevant coin denominations from the respective eras. Roman Imperial coinage paid particular homage to the ambivalent role and importance of Imperial women who had coins struck in their own names, a trend which was less frequently observed after the fifth century AD. It was shown that the very naturalistic style of Roman Imperial coin portraits declined over centuries and became abstract under the Tetrarchy. This stylistic tendency continued during the Byzantine period with stereotyped hieratic imperial representations in low relief. Byzantine coin portraiture clearly illustrates how changes in imperial costume and insignia were adapted to suit ideology.

In this way the examples from our collection indicate how coins can be interpreted not only as historical documents of political propaganda, but how they also offered individual emperors a useful means of conveying particular religious messages through, for instance, the manner of presentation of imperial portraits.

Finally, thanks to the meticulous research, enthusiasm and interest of the previous custodians of the Stellenbosch ancient coin collection, the late Professors Frans Smuts and Bert van Stekelenburg, the collection has become an important resource for students interested in various aspects of the Classical world and of Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Medieval history.²⁸

²⁷ Each Roman mint was divided into several *officinae* (individual workshops) which marked the coins produced on site with individual letters or symbols. To indicate individual *officinae*, Eastern mints used the Greek letters Alpha through Iota.

²⁸ The present article is a revised version of a paper delivered in March 2004 at the autumn meeting of CASA (WP) held at Stellenbosch University. My sincere thanks to Prof. Jo-Marie Claassen for reading an earlier draft of the paper; and the two anonymous referees for their useful comments.

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Coin descriptions for figures 1 – 37.

Images listed below are copyright of the Department of Ancient Studies, University of Stellenbosch. References: RIC = *Roman Imperial Coinage*; BMC = *British Museum Catalogue of Coins of the Roman Empire*; S = *Sear Roman Coins and Their Values WildWinds DataBank*; SB = *Sear Byzantine Coins and Their Values WildWinds DataBank*; Syd = Sydenham, *The Coinage of the Roman Republic*.

- Fig. 1: AR denarius* c. 155-120 BC, L. Saufeius. Rev. Winged Victory in *biga*, holding whip, below L. SAVF, ROMA in ex. Obv. Helmeted head of Roma, X behind. Syd. 384.
- Fig. 2: AR denarius* 92 BC, C. Alius Bala. Rev. Diana holding a torch and a spear, quiver on her back, driving a *biga* of stags, below a grasshopper, with C. ALLI in the ex., wreath border. Obv. Diademed head of Diana facing right, behind BALA printed downward, letter below chin, border of dots. S220, Syd. 595.
- Figs. 3, 4: AR Denarius* 85 BC. Obv. youthful bust of Veiovis, head left, diademed, cloak over left shoulder, hurling thunderbolt with right hand. Rev. Minerva armed with spear and shield in *quadriga*, horses galloping. In ex. C. LICINIVS L. F. MACER. S274, Syd. 732.
- Fig. 5: AR denarius*, anonymous. Rev. Minerva in *quadriga*. Obv. Laureate head of Apollo right, thunderbolt below. Syd. 723.
- Fig. 6: AR denarius*, C. Vibius C. f. Pansa 90 BC. Obv. Laureate head of Apollo right, symbol below chin. Rev. Minerva in galloping *quadriga*, C. VIBIVS. C. F. in ex. S242, Syd. 684.
- Fig. 7: AR denarius*, c. 84 BC Marcius Censorinus. Obv. Diademed head of Apollo to the right with fillet and hair in ringlets, border of dots. Rev. Free horse galloping right, above symbol prow, below C. CENSOR and rudder in ex., border of dots. Syd. 714.
- Fig. 8: AR denarius*, undated, c. 40-39 BC, mint traveling with Quintus Labienus. Obv. Labienus facing right, Q. LABIENVVS PARTICVS IMP., border of dots. Rev. Parthian horse with bridle and saddle, bow case and quiver attached to saddle, border of dots. BMC 132.
- Fig. 9: AR denarius* 41 BC. Rev. head of Octavius right, slight beard, bare, around CAESAR IMP PONT III VIR R P C. Obv. head of Antony, bare, around M ANT IMP AG III [VIR R P C M BARB - not visible] AT Q P. S1504, Syd. 1181.
- Figs. 10, 11: AR denarius* Augustus 20 BC. Obv. Augustus facing right, AVGVST Rev. Tiara, bow case and quiver, ARMENIA RECEPTA. BMC 301.

- Fig. 12: AR denarius* Augustus c. AD 9. Obv. laureate head of Augustus right, CAESAR AVGVSTVS DIVI F. PATER PATRIAE. Rev. Gaius and Lucius Caesars standing facing each other, with shields and spears between them. Sacrificial implements in upper field, C L CAESARES AVGVSTI F. COS. DESIG. PRINC. IVVENT. S1597, RIC 207.
- Fig. 13: Bronze head of Augustus Roman*, about 27-25 BC. From Meroë, Sudan. Height: 47.75 cm.
- Fig. 14: AR denarius*, Tiberius AD 14-37. Rev. Livia as *Pax* seated, holding branch and sceptre, feet on footstool, PONTIF MAXIM. Obv. Tiberius, laureate, facing right, TI. CAESAR DIVI AVG. F. AVGVSTVS. S1763, RIC 30.
- Fig. 15: Billon tetradrachm*, Alexandria, Nero AD 54-68. Rev. draped Poppaea. Dated year 11 (64-65 AD). ΠΟΠΠΑΙΑ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΗ. Obv. radiate Nero right. ΝΕΡΩ ΚΛΑΥ ΚΑΙΣ ΣΕΒ ΓΕΡ ΑΥ. S2002, BMC 124.
- Fig. 16: Billon tetradrachm*, Alexandria AD 46. Rev. Messallina standing, holding Octavia and Britannicus, Greek legend - Messallina Caesarea. Obv. Claudius, head surrounded by Greek legend, year 6 = L digamma under chin. S1869.
- Fig. 17: AE sestertius* Faustina Maior, wife of Antoninus Pius AD 138-61. Obv. Faustina facing right, draped bust, DIVA FAVSTINA Rev. Ceres standing left, holding corn-ears and torch, AVGVSTA S. C. S4614, RIC 1116, BMC 1509.
- Fig. 18: AR denarius* struck under Antoninus Pius. Obv. Annia Galeria Faustina Maior, draped bust, facing right, DIVA FAVSTINA Rev. Vesta, veiled, seated left, holding *patera* and short sceptre, AVGVSTA. S4588, RIC 371, BMC 443.
- Fig. 19: Drawing of Faustina Maior.*
- Fig. 20: AR denarius* struck under Septimius Severus AD 193-211. Obv. Draped bust of Julia Domna right, IVLIA AVGVSTA Rev. Ceres seated left, holding corn ears and torch, CERERI FRVGIF. RIC 546.
- Fig. 21: AR denarius*, M. Cocceius Nerva AD 96-98. Rev. Fortune standing, holding rudder and *cornucopia*, FORTVNA AVGVST. Obv. Nerva laureate right, IMP. NERVA CAES. AVG. P. M. TR. P. COS. III. P. P. S3025, RIC 16.
- Fig. 22: Tetradrachm*, Alexandria. Rev. Tyche/ Fortuna standing left, holding rudder and *cornucopia*, Γ (gamma) in field, ΕΤΟΥΥ. Obv. Probus laureate right ΑΚΜΑΥΡ ΠΡΟΒΟΣ ΣΕΒ. Milne 4560.
- Figs. 23, 24: AR denarius*, Macrinus AD 217-18. Obv. Macrinus, laureate right IMP CM OPEL SEV MACRINVS AVG. Rev. Salus seated, feeding serpent rising from altar. SALVS PUBLICA. RIC 86.
- Figs. 25, 28: AR antoninianus*, Marcia Otacilia Severa. Obv. Otacilia facing right, M. OTACIL. SEVERA AVG. Rev. Concord seated left, holding *patera* and *cornucopia*, CONCORDIA AVG. S2625, RIC 125c.
- Fig. 26: AR antoninianus* c. AD 247. Obv. radiate head of Philip II facing right, IMP. PHILIPPVS AVG. Rev. Philip I and Philip II seated on curule chairs, LIBERALITAS AVGG. III. S2664, RIC 230.
- Fig. 27: Dupondius*, Philip I AD 244-9. Obv. radiate bust, IMP. M. IUL. PHILIPPVS AVG. Rev. SAECVLARES AVGG. *cippus* inscribed COS. III.
- Figs. 29, 30: AE follis* Antioch, Obv. Galeria Valeria wife of Galerius. Rev. Venus standing, holding apple, VENERI VICTRICI in ex. S3730.
- Fig. 31: AE follis*, Licinius I AD 308-24. Obv. Licinius facing right, laureate, IMP. C. VAL. LICIN. LICINIVS. P. F. AVG. Rev. Jupiter standing left, holding Victory, eagle at feet, IOVI CONSERVATORI AVGG., wreath, A III, in ex. ANT. RIC VII.
- Fig. 32: AE follis*. Maximinus II AD 309-313. Obv. Laureate head right, GAL. VAL. MAXIMINVS NOB. CAES. Rev. genius standing, holding *patera*, *cornucopia*, in ex. ALE GENIO CAESARIS, in field K - P, E.
- Fig. 33: AE follis*, Justinian I AD 527-65. Obv. Justinian facing right, diademed and draped and cuirassed, D. N. IVSTINIANVS PP AVG. Rev. Denomination M between two stars, decorative

cross above, symbol below M, in ex. THEU : between two crosses. Antioch (previously Theoupolis) mint. S216

Figs. 34, 36: AE follis, Justinian I Obv. Justinian facing, D.N. IVSTINIANVS PP AVG. Rev. denomination large M, decorative cross above, ANNO XIII (year of reign 13 = AD 540), B = workshop, NIK = Nicomedian mint. S201.

Fig. 35: Anonymous class C follis, attributed to Michael IV AD 1034-41. Obv. Christ Antiphonetes, nimbate, standing facing, + EMMANOVHA Rev. IC - XC - NI - KA divided by a jewelled cross. SB1825.

Fig. 37: AE Pentanummium, Justin II (565-578 AD). Antioch mint. Monogram / Large E+. S385.