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Communicating messages through coins: a new approach to the emperor Decius¹

ERIKA MANDERS

The image of the emperor Decius (AD 249-251) in modern literature has largely been determined by the religious edict that Decius issued and the consequences hereof.² This decree, enforced by the emperor shortly after his accession to the throne in 249, urged all inhabitants of the Empire to sacrifice to the gods, eat the sacrificial meat and swear that they had always sacrificed.³ Obviously, these obligations caused conflicts for the Christian minority of the population and resulted in their persecution.⁴

Modern scholars have offered various motives that could explain the emperor's promulgation of this edict. Decius might have had the intention to revive traditional religion, to restructure religious organization in the Roman Empire, or to ensure the loyalty of the Roman Empire's inhabitants after the disrupting civil war that marked the beginning of his reign.⁵ Be that as it may, the scholarly preoccupation with Decius' religious measures can be explained partly through the impact of these measures, and partly because the literary sources provide hardly any (reliable) information on other aspects of the emperor's reign. Yet, literary texts form only one part of the evidence for Decius' emperorship; other sources should not be ignored.

The aim of this article is to reconstruct Decius' image, as it was communicated to the inhabitants of the Roman Empire through imperial coinage. In comparison to other media, such as statues or buildings, coins representing this particular third-century emperor are handed down to us in considerable quantities.

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- 1 My gratitude goes to the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome which kindly hosted me in the Fall of 2009, during which I completed this article. Thanks are also due to Olivier Hekster and Daniëlle Slootjes for commenting on earlier drafts of this article.
 - 2 See for instance Bleckmann 2006; Rives 1999; Pohlsander 1986.
 - 3 Evidence for Decius' decree: *libelli* (for the most complete collection see Knipfing 1923, writings of Cyprian (*Epistulae* 5-41, *De Lapsis*) and the letters of Dionysius of Alexandria (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VI and VII) as well as an account of a martyrdom in Smyrna (*Passio Pionii*, see Musurillo 1972, 136-167). See Rives 1999, 136.
 - 4 Whether the edict was targeted against Christians from the beginning remains a subject of scholarly discussion. See, for instance, Gradel 2002, 368 and Clarke 2005, 626.
 - 5 For Decius' edict as an attempt to revive traditional religion see for instance Pohlsander 1986. For Decius' edict as a means to restructure religious organization, see Rives 1999. For Decius' edict as an attempt to ensure subjects' loyalty, see Bleckmann 2006.

However, Decius' coinage has never been analyzed thoroughly.⁶ An analysis of messages broadcast by this medium might offer additional insights into the rather obscure reign of this short-lived emperor and, if this proves to be necessary, enables us to adjust Decius' existing image in modern literature, which is heavily influenced by his religious measures. Furthermore, this article hopes to demonstrate how coin types can be used in order to gain insight into imperial ideology.

Contextualizing Decius

Sources describe the circumstances in which Decius attained the purple in 249 in different ways. The most extensive accounts of Decius' reign appear in Zosimus' and Zonaras' writings, composed respectively around 500 A.D. and in the twelfth century A.D.⁷ According to them, the ruling emperor Philippus Arabs (244-249) had sent Decius, as governor of Moesia and Pannonia, to the Danubian legions in order to secure loyalty and restore discipline. After a few successes, these legions hailed Decius as emperor. Subsequently, Decius marched against Philippus Arabs and defeated him. Decius became emperor and remained so until his death in June 251 in battle against the Goths.⁸

The way in which Decius came to power was not exceptional for the third century. The period from 235, the year in which the last Severan emperor Severus Alexander was murdered, until the accession of Diocletian in 284 is often referred to as 'the age of the soldier emperors'.⁹ Through the severe military problems, which characterized the third century in general and the second half of the third century in particular, and, consequently, the emperors' dependence on the armed forces, the power of the troops increased. Many third-century rulers were murdered by their own legions and soldiers acclaimed persons of their own choice, mostly their generals, emperor. As a result, emperors succeeded each other rapidly and usurpers sprang up everywhere.

The military problems and rebellions that were characteristic of the third century also occurred during Decius' emperorship; the Carpi and Goths were threatening the Empire and a usurper named Licinianus claimed, though unsuccessfully,

6 Previous analyses of Decius' coinage have focused primarily on the *divi* series. A brief general analysis of Decius' coins, however, does appear in Mattingly 1949.

7 Zosimus 1.21-3 and Zonaras 12.19-20. See further Rives 1999, 138-139.

8 Potter 2004, 245-46.

9 See for instance Johnes, Hartmann and Gerhardt 2008.

imperial power.¹⁰ Next to these difficulties, Decius' emperorship fell within a period of grave financial problems. These problems started at the beginning of the third century with Septimius Severus' and Caracalla's raise of the soldiers' pay, which had repercussions on the economic situation of the whole third century.¹¹ In addition, the many wars that were fought contributed to the exhaustion of state finances. To meet the financial deficits, the precious metal content of imperial coinage was debased continually throughout the third century, with galloping inflation as a consequence.¹² From Caracalla onward, 'a massive and deliberate manipulation of the coinage came into play'.¹³ Caracalla lowered the weight standard of the gold coin, tampered with the silver coinage and introduced a new silver coin.¹⁴ This *antoninianus*, characterized by a radiate obverse portrait, had the same silver content as the *denarius*, but was the double of its value.¹⁵ Caracalla's monetary policy was followed by subsequent emperors and especially after 253 the debasement rapidly accelerated. It reached its nadir between 260 and 274; whereas the silver content of the *antoninianus* was 47.7% in 238, it was reduced to 2.7% and even below that under Claudius Gothicus' rule.¹⁶

Decius' reign thus formed part of a period in Roman history that was marked by external and internal problems. Especially in such circumstances the representation of imperial power was important; imperial propaganda could bolster the loyalty of the emperor's subjects and therefore preserve the unity within the Empire.¹⁷

Contextualizing communication

Before analyzing the messages that were disseminated through Decius' coins, the medium in question has to be understood in its proper context too. Important in this matter is ascertaining the original function of the particular message bearers. Regarding the aim of this article – an analysis of the messages

10 Drinkwater 2005, 38-39. For the situation in the Roman Empire during the third century, see for instance Bowman, Garnsey and Cameron 2005; Hekster, De Kleijn and Slootjes 2007; Hekster 2008; Johne, Hartmann and Gerhardt 2008.

11 Harl 1996, 126 and 128.

12 Johne 2008, 855.

13 Watson 1999, 126.

14 Watson 1999, 126.

15 Harl 1996, 128; Corbier 2005, 333. Whereas Elagabalus stopped the minting of *antoniniani* in 219, Pupienus and Balbinus began issuing them again in 238 (Corbier 2005, 334).

16 Howgego 1995, 136; Hedlund 2008, 6.

17 On imperial ideology and the unity within the Empire, see Ando 2000.

broadcast by Decius' coins – this means that the principal motive lying behind the production of coins has to be clarified. Imperial coins were struck first and foremost to serve as means of state payment, the army being its largest recipient.¹⁸ Coins were thus originally minted and brought into circulation because of economic needs. Yet, this need not mean that coins' ideological importance should be undervalued; the repeated introduction of new types demonstrates coins' significance in the distribution of messages.¹⁹ Moreover, the fact that emperors, even the short-lived ones, issued coin types immediately after their accession and that the minting of coins by other persons than the emperor was considered a challenge to imperial power underlines the ideological value of coins.²⁰

Another aspect of contextualizing this medium consists of mapping its scope. How many people could be informed by coins? Who came in touch with imperial coins and who actually understood them? A coin, ancient or modern, has a widespread effect; 'it will be an object existing in multiple copies that will be distributed to a large number of people who may be scattered over a wide geographical area'.²¹ Consequently, many people came in touch with coins and, thus, with the messages present on them.

The scope of this particular medium was not only limited geographically; levels of literacy also were an issue in how many people were actually reached by the disseminated messages. On coins, text and image often work closely together. On many coins the image either presents a visualization of the legend or the legend forms a textual rendering of the image. This cooperation between text and image facilitated not only illiterates' understanding of the messages present on them, it also reduced the various possibilities of how Romans could interpret a message.²² In other words, it limited different

18 Kemmers 2006, 240 (with n. 763).

19 The study of coinage as a message medium has now been generally accepted. In an article published in 1956, however, Jones questioned the importance of coins as a message medium (see Jones 1956). In his scepticism he was followed by Crawford who argued that 'the mint is presumably following a general directive to make the coinage as like earlier coinage as possible; the result is as far removed from anything resembling propaganda as one can imagine' (Crawford 1983, 59). Equally, strong arguments against Jones and Crawford were made, most notably by Levick and Wallace-Hadrill (Levick 1982; Wallace-Hadrill 1986). For an overview of the debate on 'coins and messages', see Hedlund 2008, 29-32.

20 Herodian reports that soldiers showed coins bearing a portrait of Perennis, the commander of the Praetorian Guard, to the emperor Commodus. Before this moment, Commodus did not believe that Perennis wanted to betray him. After he saw the coins, however, he recognized the danger and executed Perennis (Herodian 1.9.2-7).

21 King 1999, 124. On the circulation of coins see for instance Howgego 1994.

22 Modern scholars hold various opinions concerning the extent to which coin types were actually seen and understood. On the basis of literary evidence, Howgego states that 'it is at least possible to establish the minimal proposition that coin types might, on occasion, make an impact' (Howgego 1995, 74). Moreover, symbols which were particular to coinage were

practices of looking.²³ In many cases, the combination of text and images therefore provides a key to the modern scholar analyzing coins' messages; it clarifies how the majority of the Romans may well have interpreted those communications.

The material of which the message bearer was made and that decided its value also influenced the size of the audience that came in touch with it. As for coins, it is hard to imagine that the poor frequently (if at all) used coins of high denominations or had access to medaillons.²⁴

Finally, in regards to the issue of responsibility for the contents of the messages that were spread by coins, there is the question as to who actually decided on which messages had to be spread. As for imperial coinage, although many scholars have dealt with this question before, it is impossible to provide an accurate answer, in part because imperial coins do not provide us with the name of the responsible magistrate in question, as was common in Republican times. Nevertheless, we can assume that decisions about imagery and legends originated at the top.²⁵ Whether the emperor himself or officials such as the *tresviri monetales*, the secretary *a rationibus* or the *procurator monetae* had been responsible for minting, each coin struck in an imperial mint can be considered an official document and thus an official expression of imperial authority.²⁶ Moreover, whether the coins were spreading messages *from* or tributes *to* the emperor, they had to display the emperor as he wished to be seen or at least as people thought that he wished to be seen.²⁷

found in numerous parts of the private sphere (see also Howgego 1995, 74). In my opinion, this shows that coins were certainly seen and possibly also understood. The fact that so many new coin types were introduced during each reign supports this.

23 Different people look at imagery in different ways. Concerning the practice of looking, see especially Sturken and Cartwright 2001.

24 Although *donativa* could consist of gold coins and the poor had thus access to them, these coins would have come into the hands of the rich rapidly, see Rowan 2009, 97 with n. 269.

25 Hekster 2007, 349.

26 Wallace-Hadrill 1986, 67; Noreña 2001, 147.

27 Levick 1982; see further Wallace-Hadrill 1986, 68; Hekster 2002, 89. See further Howgego 1995, 70. Obviously, the emperor had to anticipate how different sections of the Roman population wished to see him to some extent. The difference between Hadrian's first and second series of coins forms the most telling example of the emperor's influence on coin imagery; the first series was minted during the emperor's absence from Rome and bore the title *pater patriae*, whereas the second series, minted during the emperor's presence in the capital, did not display this particular title. See further Birley 1997, 81 and 201.

Method

What kind of messages were disseminated and how can they be used in order to gain insight into imperial ideology? The obverses as well as reverses of imperial coins communicate messages regarding the emperor and his reign. However, the messages on the obverses, consisting usually of the emperor's portrait and his titulature, are more static and less susceptible to major changes than the messages presented on the reverses.²⁸ A telling example of coins obverses' static nature forms the imperial titulature present on Decius' coins; IMP (C(AES)) AVG in combination with the emperor's name forms the legend that is present on all of his types.²⁹ In contrast with this, all sorts of messages were put on the reverses: wishes or promises concerning the future, a special connection between the emperor and one or more deities, important deeds of the emperor and significant events. This changeability and variety gives us more insight into imperial ideology. Therefore, the focus will lie here on the coins' reverses.³⁰

Decius' coin types that are listed in the *Roman Imperial Coinage* form the basis of the analyses presented in the following, since this catalogue provides the best overview of the coin types that were issued under Decius' reign.³¹ Decius' standard coins, i.e. types displaying the emperor's portrait and titulature on the obverse, and Decius' *divi* series will be discussed separately. As for Decius' standard coin types, they will be analyzed quantitatively as well as qualitatively, since a combination of these two approaches leads to a better understanding of the imperial image spread by these coins.³² The quantitative analysis forms the starting point of the investigation. Examining coin types quantitatively in order to map imperial representation implies finding out

28 The portrait of the emperor on the obverse's coin was essential for the coin's valuation and thus for its circulation, see Lendon 1990, 112-119. The obverses of imperial coins do not all bear the emperor's portrait, sometimes they also display members of the imperial family or deities.

29 With the exception of the *divi* coins. As to the imperial portrait on the obverses of Decius' coins, the head is either laureated or radiated, whereas the bust is either draped or cuirassed or both.

30 Naturally, we must not forget that both the obverse and the reverse belong to the same coin. On the reciprocal relationship between the obverse and the reverse, see Wallace-Hadrill 1986 and King 1999, 129. The latter points out that 'each obverse is meant to be seen as interacting with its own reverse (...)' with regard to a group of six coins minted under Augustus.

31 Although the catalogue, based on coin hoards, is old and not wholly up to date, it outlines the types that were produced under Decius in the imperial mints.

32 Regarding the definition of a coin type, the distinction between the coin types that is made by the editors of the *Roman Imperial Coinage* is maintained here. For a combination of a quantitative and qualitative approach, see Manders forthcoming.

which forms of propagating imperial ideology were used frequently on Decius' coins, as well as which messages were rare.³³ The basis for this analysis is formed by representational categories, which I constructed through an analysis of the 8227 coin types issued during the third century.³⁴ Decius' standard coin types are divided into these categories. The difference between the specific coin types is based on both the images and especially the legends present on the types' reverses. By means of this categorization, a distinction can be made between coin types propagating different types of messages. Subsequently, the percentages of coin types belonging to the various representational categories can be calculated, which gives us insight into the ideological spearheads of Decius' regime. Unfortunately, the development of imperial representation on Decius' coin types within his reign remains obscure since his types cannot be dated accurately.³⁵ However, a quantitative approach enables us to make some careful observations regarding the question of audience targeting.

Whereas the outlines of Decius' image communicated by his standard coins will be mapped by a quantification of coin types and inscriptions, a qualitative approach places these results in their necessary contexts. The latter implies that, if possible, the contemporary circumstances will be brought in to explain the appearance of particular coin types and to place them in a broader perspective.

The messages on Decius' coin types

During Decius' short reign, a considerable number of imperial coin types was issued; in the *Roman Imperial Coinage* 190 specimens are listed.³⁶ From these 190 types, 160 display the emperor's portrait and titulature on the obverse, whereas thirty types belong to the so-called *divi* series. The latter series consists of consecration types that bear portraits of deified predecessors of Decius and the legend *DIVO* together with the specific emperor's name on the obverse. From these two groups of Decius' coins, only the *divi* series has received much attention in modern literature.³⁷

33 A quantitative analysis of coin *types* is justified by the existing correlation between coin types and actual coin numbers. See Manders 2007, 286-288 and Manders forthcoming.

34 See Manders 2007, 284-286 and Manders forthcoming.

35 This is not exceptional for third-century coinage as a whole, see *RIC* IV.1 - V.2.

36 Seven hybrids and one type with a blank reverse are not included here.

37 See for example Mattingly 1949; Radnoti-Alföldi 1955; Pohlsander 1986, 1830-31; Butcher 1996, 522; Rives 1999, 142-143; Gradel 2002, 368; Potter 2004, 244; Bleckmann 2006, 64; Hekster 2008, 68. Considering the rarity of Decius' consecration types, it seems debatable whether the prominence of the *divi* series in modern literature is justified (see *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 77-98).

Standard types

From the 160 types bearing Decius' portrait and titulature on the obverse, 132 were minted in Rome, 21 in Milan and 7 in Antioch.³⁸ The reverses of these 160 types display seven types of imperial representation:

1. Dynastic representation	All forms of representation promoting the family of the emperor and his (intended) successors.
2. Military representation	All forms of representation emphasizing the armed forces, military victories and the role of the emperor as general.
3. Divine association	All forms of representation connecting the emperor and his reign with the gods/the divine.
4. <i>Saeculum aureum</i>	All forms of representation featuring the prosperity that the emperor will bring/has brought.
5. Virtues	All forms of representation promoting the virtues of the emperor.
6. Geographical messages	All forms of representation referring to (personifications of) geographic entities.
7. <i>Aeternitas</i> messages	All forms of representation propagating the eternal existence of Rome.

Table 1 Representational types visible on Decius' coins

³⁸ Since the majority of Decius' coin types were issued in Rome and only a small number in Antioch and Milan, it is not profitable to see whether the messages that were put on coins differed according to the mint.

When the types are distributed over these seven categories, the following image emerges:

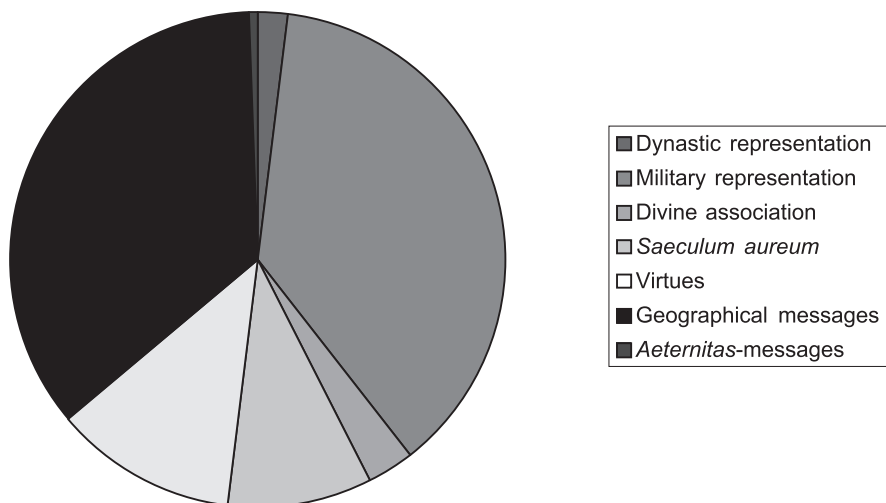


Fig. 1 Proportions of coin types distributed over the representational categories for the period A.D. 249-251

Figure 1 shows that the emphasis within Decius' representation of power lay heavily on military representation and geographical messages. 37,5% of the total number of Decius' coin types (sixty out of 160 types) present a military theme. Out of these sixty military types, thirty bear the legend GENIVS EXERCITVS ILLVRICIANI and four the legend EXERCITVS INLVRICVS (*sic*).³⁹

³⁹ GENIVS EXERCITVS ILLVRICIANI: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 3a), 3b), 4a), 4b), 16a), 16b), 16c), 17a), 17b), 18, 39a), 39b), 40, 103, 104a), 104b), 105a), 105b), 105c), 105d), 117a), 117b), 117c), 117d), 117e), 118a), 118b), 118c), 119a), 119b). EXERCITVS INLVRICVS (*sic*): *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 102a), 102b), 102c), 102d). These military coin types also convey a strong geographical message. Yet, since the legends GENIVS EXERCITVS ILLVRICIANI and EXERCITVS INLVRICUS refer explicitly to a specific military unit, the coin types bearing this legend are solely divided into the category military representation.



Trajan Decius (*RIC* IV.3, 16c)
Obverse: IMP C M Q TRAIANVS DECIVS AVG
Reverse: GENIVS EXERC ILLVRICIANI
(Geldmuseum Utrecht, inv. RO-07695)

These types might express public thanks on the emperor's behalf to the troops who had appropriated the imperial purple for him, or they may have aimed to secure the loyalty of these troops in Decius' battle against Germanic tribes. Probably, the emperor had grasped how essential the loyalty of these specific military units was, since the legions in the Danubian area were already playing a leading role in electing emperors and in military activities.⁴⁰ The remaining twenty-six military coin types refer to the concept of *victoria* in general (eighteen types),⁴¹ to *victoria Germanica* (one type; probably evoking a victory over the Goths)⁴² and to Decius' *adventus* after a military campaign (seven types; perhaps pointing to Decius' arrival in Rome after his victory over Philippus Arabs).⁴³ Roughly the same number, that is 35.6% of Decius' coin types (57 types), display a geographical message.⁴⁴ Out of these 57 coin types, seven glorify Illyria and

40 Alföldy 1989a, 100. See also Alföldy 1989b, 385 and John 2006, 125-134. Securing and/or advertising the loyalty of these legions was almost certainly the aim of the four types with the legend EXERCITVS INLVRICVS (*sic*), since an image of Fides accompanies the legend on all four types.

41 *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 7a), 7b), 7c), 29a), 29b), 29c), 42a), 42b), 48, 108a), 108b), 108c), 126a), 126b), 126c), 126d), 126e), 126f).

42 *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, no. 43. See *RIC* IV.3, p. 113.

43 *RIC*, Trajan Decius, nos 1a), 1b), 11a), 11b), 34, 111a), 111b). Huttner 2006, 40.

44 Many of these geographical types also convey a military message; they display military standards. Yet, since the legends only explicitly refer to specific geographical entities and not to military troops, these coin types are solely divided into the category 'geographical representation'.

fifteen Pannonia, the latter probably expressing the emperor's piety towards his homeland.⁴⁵ The majority of these geographical coin types (i.e. thirty-five types), however, refers to the province Dacia by means of the legend DACIA or DACIA FELIX and, on thirty-two out of these thirty-five types, a depiction of the province's personification.⁴⁶



Trajan Decius (*RIC* IV.3, 12b)
Obverse: IMP C M Q TRAIANVS DECIVS AVG
Reverse: DACIA
(Geldmuseum Utrecht, inv. RE-07680)

A possible motive for Decius to have Dacia featured so prominently on his coins was to associate himself with his great predecessor Trajan, who fought two successful battles against the Dacians in 102 and 107. Already early in his reign Decius had linked himself with Trajan by adopting his name.⁴⁷ Decius' 'Dacia propaganda' may then have formed the next step in Decius' association

45 GEN ILLVRICI: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 9, 15a), 15b), 38a), 38b), 116a), 116b). PANNONIAE: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 5, 20, 21a), 21b), 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 41a), 41b), 124a), 124b), 124c), 124d). Regarding the Pannonia types, since they display veiled personifications of (the two) Pannonia(e) and since the emperor was born there, they probably advertise the emperor's piety towards his homeland. The latter hypothesis finds support in that, out of all third-century emperors, only Aurelian and Quintillus celebrated Pannonia on their coins (*RIC* V.1, Quintillus, nos 60 and 61. *RIC* V.1, Aurelianus, no. 113). Whereas the Illyrian emperor Quintillus' place of birth is unknown, Aurelian may well have been born in Pannonia (see Kienast 1996, 231).

46 DACIA: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 2a), 2b), 12a), 12b), 13, 35a), 35b), 35c), 36a), 36b), 101a), 101b), 101c), 101d), 101e), 101f), 101g), 112a), 112b), 112c), 112d), 112e), 112f), 113a), 113b), 113c), 113d). DACIA FELIX: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 14a), 14b), 37a), 37b), 37c), 114a), 114b), 114c). Three out of 35 DACIA types do not show the province's personification but a Genius with *polos*, *patera*, *cornucopiae*, and standard (*RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 35a), 35b), 35c).

47 Potter 2004, 241; Rives 1999, 142.

with Trajan. Both initiatives, in this light, would betray Decius' attempts to legitimize his power by presenting himself as Trajan's heir, at least in some respects.

Besides the categories 'military representation' and 'geographical messages', 'virtues' (11.9%) and '*saeculum aureum*' (9.4%) occupy the largest proportion of types. Within the category '*saeculum aureum*', *pax*, having a military connotation, was emphasized most (6 types).⁴⁸



Trajan Decius (*RIC* IV.3, 27)
Obverse: IMP C M Q TRAIANVS DECIVS AVG
Reverse: PAX AVGVSTI
(Geldmuseum Utrecht, inv. RE-07673)

FELICITAS SAECVLI and ABVNDANTIA were each propagated on four types, while VBERITAS adorns only one type.⁴⁹

Out of the nineteen types presenting an imperial virtue, eight display *liberalitas*, five present *virtus*, three show *aequitas*, two mention *pudicitia*, and one emphasizes *pietas*.⁵⁰ Comparison to the propagation of these specific virtues highlights two peculiarities. First, *liberalitas* is the virtue propagated most on Decius' coinage.

48 *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 6, 27, 107a), 107b), 125a), 125b).

49 FELICITAS SAECVLI: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 115a), 115b), 115c), 115d). ABVNDANTIA: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 10a), 10b), 33a), 33b). VBERITAS: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, no. 28.

50 LIBERALITAS AVGG: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 19, 106, 120a), 120b), 120c), 121, 122, 123. VIRTVS: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 8, 109a), 109b), 109c), 127. AEQVITAS AVGG: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 44a), 44b), 45. PVDICITIA AVGG: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 46a), 46b). PIETAS AVGG: *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, no. 32.



Trajan Decius (*RIC* IV.3, 120b)
Obverse: IMP C M Q TRAIANVS DECIVS AVG
Reverse: LIBERALITAS AVG S C
(Geldmuseum Utrecht, inv. RE-07693)

This is remarkable because Decius seems clearly to have considered military representation his most important self-representational priority (see figure 1); one would thus expect *virtus*, referring to the emperor's military capacities, to have been the most prominent virtue on his coins. Apparently, satisfying the *plebs urbana*, originally a key ingredient in legitimizing imperial power, also occupied at least a modest place in Decius' ideology. Second, the propagation of *pudicitia* is exceptional. As has been pointed out in relation to Hadrian's chastity, coin types displaying Pudicitia on the reverse normally appear only together with an obverse promoting an empress or other female member of the imperial family.⁵¹ However, Decius – like Hadrian – deviated from this tradition. No indications that *pudicitia* applied to imperial women are found on Decius' coins. Apparently, the virtue *pudicitia* referred to Decius himself. As Carlos Noreña has already pointed out in his article on Hadrian's *pudicitia* types, marital stability depended on the sexual chastity of both the husband and the wife.⁵² It is therefore possible that Decius wanted to set a moral *exemplum* for his subjects. In addition, *concordia* of the imperial household was associated symbolically with *concordia* of the Roman state. It seems that Decius did not just wish to set an example, but also wanted to emphasize political harmony by means of these *pudicitia* types.

51 Noreña 2007, 302.

52 Noreña 2007, 311.

Only 3.1% of Decius' total number of coin types (5 out of 160 coin types) belongs to the category 'divine association', whereas the third-century mean lies at 21.8%.⁵³ Analysis of the five coin types with a 'religious message' yields the following observations. First, only one coin type depicts a deity, namely Mars.⁵⁴ Decius' predilection for military types explains his attention to the war god easily enough. Second, the remaining four types bear the legend VOTIS DECENNALIBVS and show a laurel wreath.⁵⁵ These coin types publicize vows made for the success and perpetuity of Decius' emperorship. Which conclusions can be drawn regarding Decius' 'divine association'? The low percentage of 'religious' coin types indicates that Decius' priority in his coinage did not lie with propagating his connection with the divine. In addition, within the limited number of coin types propagating divine association, the majority were types bearing the legend VOTIS DECENNALIBVS, obviously minted to publicize Decius' attempts to safeguard his emperorship. How does the above information relate to interpreting Decius' edict? Since Decius' coins seem to demonstrate that religion as such (that means in this case piety towards the Roman gods) was not (emphatically) emphasized within Decius' ideology, and that it was subordinated to the success of Decius' emperorship, the logical conclusion would be to suggest that Decius' decree was a means of legitimizing his power. Decius' religious measures do not seem to have been enacted because of a comprehensive religious policy; more likely, Decius employed religion to bolster subjects' loyalty to him after the disrupting civil war that marked the beginning of Decius' reign.⁵⁶ Any restructuring of Roman religion and persecution of Christians seem to have been side-effects.

The category 'dynastic representation' also yields few examples; only 1.9% percent of Decius' types belong to this category. Two types accentuate *concordia Augustorum* and one glorifies Decius' wife, Herennia Etruscilla.⁵⁷ Although only three dynastic types were minted during Decius' reign, these dynastic claims seem to indicate that Decius, having two sons, might have wanted to create his own dynasty in order to safeguard imperial succession.

53 Manders forthcoming.

54 RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, no. 128.

55 RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 30, 110a), 110b), 110c).

56 The coins thus support Bleckmann's interpretation of Decius' edict (Bleckmann 2006, 57-71). In fact, the conclusions drawn from imperial coinage and thus (at least to an extent) from the emperor's own wishes and points of view, offer much stronger evidence than the evidence from the biased writings of Christian authors, see for instance Pliny, *Epistulae* 10.52-53.

57 CONCORDIA AVGG: RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 31 and 131. HERENNIA ETRVSCILLA AVG: RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, no.130.

Finally, less than one percent of all coin types bear *Aeternitas* messages – effectively only one coin type issued during Decius’ reign belongs to this category. This particular coin type propagates ROMAE AETERNAE, thus promoting the eternal existence of Rome.⁵⁸

Divi series

Apart from the coin types discussed above, Decius issued a *divi* series which honored eleven deified predecessors: Augustus, Vespasian, Titus, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Septimius Severus, and Severus Alexander.⁵⁹



Trajan Decius (*RIC* IV.3, 86b)
Obverse: DIVO TRAIANO
Reverse: CONSECRATIO
(Geldmuseum Utrecht, inv. RE-07685)

Claudius, Lucius Verus, Pertinax, and Caracalla are the only four deified emperors excluded from the series. The omission of these particular *divi* is difficult to explain, though perhaps the choice of *divi* should be seen as a deliberate selection of emperors who were deemed truly worthy of the honour.⁶⁰ The types, all *antoniniani* and minted in Milan, bear portraits of the particular *divi* together with the legend DIVO AVGVSTO/VESPASIANO/etc. on the obverses, whereas

⁵⁸ *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, no. 47.

⁵⁹ *RIC* IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 77, 78, 79, 80, 81a), 81b), 82a), 82b), 83a), 83b), 84a), 84b), 85a), 85b), 86a), 86b), 87, 88, 89, 90, 91a), 91b), 92a), 92b), 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98.

⁶⁰ Potter 2004, 244.

the reverses display the legend CONSECRATIO and depict either an eagle or an altar, both common icons signaling *consecratio*.

Modern scholars have provided various explanations for the consecration types. Recently, the issues have been presented as a rewriting of the Roman past. According to Potter, Decius was trying to rewrite the more distant past by showing only a select number of *divi* on his consecration coins.⁶¹ Bleckmann on the other hand argues that, with the *divi* series, Decius wanted to divert attention from the circumstances under which he came to power. In his view, Decius was rewriting recent history.⁶² Additionally, Butcher has suggested a more practical explanation for the *divi* coins; in his eyes, the series could be considered a compensation for the overstriking of *denarii*, which were minted by the emperors present on the coins belonging to the *divi* series. After all, the overstriking of *denarii* began under the rule of Decius.⁶³ However, most modern authors consider the *divi* series in the context of Decius' presumed traditionalism; whether the worship of the emperors who had made Rome great is interpreted as a reference to Roma Aeterna, as a revival of Roman religion, or both, these interpretations all presuppose that the worship of the eleven emperors who had contributed to Rome's success expresses Decius' traditionalism or, as Pohlsander puts it, his conservatism.⁶⁴

Curiously enough, no modern author stresses how exceptional the *divi* series itself was. The grouping together of these eleven *divi* in one series of consecration coins was a novelty in the representation of imperial power, and Decius was the only Roman emperor who minted such a series. With this series of coins, Decius may have wanted to invoke the support of his deified predecessors in a period when problems within the Empire were ubiquitous. The eleven emperors who had made Rome great could be of assistance in countering the problems that Decius faced. Another possible motive for the issuance of the consecration series could have been some sort of attempt to legitimize Decius' power, either by venerating good emperors collectively or, more specifically, by connecting himself with Trajan.⁶⁵ The latter had issued a series of 'restoration coins' during his reign.⁶⁶ This Trajanic restoration series includes coins

61 Potter 2004, 244.

62 Bleckmann 2006, 64.

63 Butcher 1996, 522.

64 Mattingly 1949, 81; Pohlsander 1986, 1830-31; Rives 1999, 142-143; Hekster 2008, 68.

65 On the *divi* coins as a means of legitimizing imperial power by venerating good emperors collectively, see Dmitriev 2004, 211-224.

66 Titus, Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan all issued restoration coins. Restoration coins are characterized by the word REST(ITVIT) which forms part of the reverse legend and is connected with the issuer of the coins. These coins were restorations of coins issued by earlier emperors or, in Trajan's case, Republican officials. See further Komnick 2001.

referring to various themes and people, such as Republican heroes (e.g. Horatius Cocles, M. Furius Camillus, P. Decius Mus, and Cato) and several deified emperors (Divus Iulius Caesar, Divus Augustus, Divus Claudius, Divus Vespasianus, Divus Titus, Divus Nerva).⁶⁷ Trajan's restoration series differs from Decius' consecration series in two respects. First, Decius' consecration coins are not restoration coins.⁶⁸ Second, whereas Decius' series includes only consecration coins, Trajan's series includes other coins next to consecration coins. Nevertheless, Decius' consecration series might refer to the consecration types within Trajan's restoration series. After all, Trajan and Decius were the only emperors to issue coin types referring to a considerable number of deified rulers who reigned in the distant and more recent past. If this was the case, then Decius probably used this link with the *optimus princeps* as a means of legitimizing his power. As we have seen before, there are more indications for attempts by Decius to link himself to Trajan for propagandistic reasons; he connected himself with the *optimus princeps* by adopting Trajan's name, and possibly through his 'Dacia propaganda' on his coins. It remains however notable that, while the worship of Decius' deified predecessors by means of these coins betrays traditionalism, the grouping together of these eleven *divi* in one series of consecration coins was exceptional and innovative.

Different metals, different audiences?

The next step in analyzing Decius' messages disseminated by his coins is to investigate whether Decius may have intended specific messages for specific audiences. Since, as mentioned above, the use of a particular metal influenced the scope of a message present on a coin, specific audiences could deliberately be targeted by means of placing different messages on coins of different metals.⁶⁹ Whereas Decius' *divi* coins are all *antoniniani*, Decius' coin types bearing his portrait and titulature on the obverse consist of *aes*, silver and gold types. Figure 2 shows the representational styles visible on coin types of these three metals.

67 *RIC* II, Restored coins of Trajan, nos 765-836. On Trajan's restoration coins see Komnick 2001, 110-138, 155-157, 175-178.

68 'Die Divus Augustus-Münzen von Tiberius und die Münzen der Konsekrationsemission des Traianus Decius können ebenfalls nicht als restituierte Münzen angesprochen werden, da sie über keine Prototypen verfügen', Komnick 2001, 4-5.

69 On coins targeting specific audiences, see Lummel 1991; Hekster 2003; Kemmers 2005; Kemmers 2006.

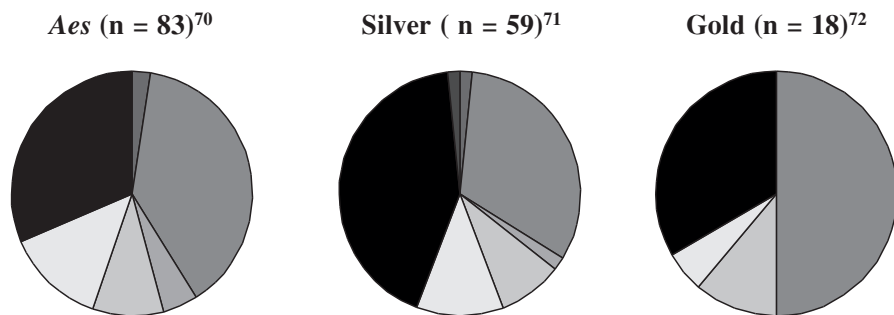


Fig. 2 Proportions of coin types of different metals distributed over the representational categories

When we look at the three graphs, it is immediately striking that the gold coins present the least variety of messages. Yet, in comparison with silver and *aes* types, fewer gold types were issued. The silver coins display most representational styles. Some representational types were put forward on all three metals; military representation, geographical messages, representations of virtues and of a *saeculum aureum* did occur on gold, silver and *aes* coins. Since these message types were put on all metals and therefore reached the largest possible number of inhabitants of the Roman Empire, we may assume that Decius considered these four ideological aspects especially important. Again, this might perhaps be an indication that religion did not play such a prominent role within the emperor's ideology.

As for the specific messages, some military and geographical messages were also broadcast on all three metals. Regarding military representation, the emperor's *adventus*, references to *victoria* and glorifications of the Illyrian troops can be found on gold, silver and *aes* types.⁷³ All types of geographical messages which were broadcast by Decius, that is references to Dacia, Pannonia and Illyria, were visible on coins of all three metals. It seems therefore perhaps possible to suggest that these messages were aimed at the widest possible audience.

⁷⁰ *Aes*: *semis*, *as*, *sestertius*, double *sestertius*, *dupondius*.

⁷¹ Silver: *denarius*, *antoninianus*, silver *quinarius*.

⁷² Gold: *aureus*.

⁷³ *Adventus*: RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 1a), 1b), 11a), 11b), 34, 111a), 111b). *Victoria*: RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 7a), 7b), 7c), 29a), 29b), 29c), 42a), 42b), 43, 48, 108a), 108b), 108c), 126a), 126b), 126c), 126d), 126e), 126f). Illyrian troops: RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 3a), 3b), 4a), 4b), 16a), 16b), 16c), 17a), 17b), 18, 39a), 39b), 40, 103, 104a), 104b), 105a), 105b), 105c), 105d), 117a), 117b), 117c), 117d), 117e), 118a), 118b), 118c), 119a), 119b).

There are also messages that were put forward on only one or two particular metal(s) and may therefore hint at targeting a specific audience. Whereas the imperial virtue *liberalitas* was not propagated on silver types and only on one gold type, this message figured on seven *aes* types.⁷⁴ Possibly, the *liberalitas* message was mainly directed at the urban *plebs* that depended on receiving *congiaria*.⁷⁵

Conclusion

For the Roman central authorities, imperial coinage formed an effective instrument for spreading messages; it reached a large and differentiated audience. Apart from their economic value, coins were thus ideologically significant markers. They provide us with insights into the spearheads of a specific regime: what did the emperor consider important? Modern scholars sometimes forget that coinage gives tangible information on various aspects of particular reigns. Especially in the case of scarce and one-sided literary evidence, an analysis of coins offers new or other perspectives. As for Decius, the numismatic evidence turns the stereotypical image of this emperor upside down. The coins issued under his reign strongly suggest that the attention paid to his ‘religious policy’ in modern literature needs to be reconsidered; his coins give the impression that no such policy existed. After all, Decius’ numismatic propaganda, as it was communicated by his standard coins, consisted mainly of military and geographical messages. This might also have consequences for the interpretation of Decius’ famous edict, which seems to have been issued in order to legitimize his power and not as part of a comprehensive religious policy. In addition, it needs to be stressed that the *divi* series was exceptional both in the third century and within Decius’ his own coinage. All of the above considered, Decius’ coins testify that the reign of this short-lived emperor encompassed much more than persecuting Christians.

74 LIBERALITAS: RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, nos 19, 106, 120a), 120b), 120c), 121, 122, 123. The propagation of *uberitas* and *abundantia* might form another example; *uberitas*, fruitfulness, did solely appear on a gold coin type, whereas references to abundance (*abundantia*) were displayed only on one gold and three silver types. VBERITAS: RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, no. 28. ABVNDANTIA: RIC IV.3, Trajan Decius, 10a), 10b), 33a), 33b).

75 On *liberalitas* coins targeting specific audiences, see Metcalf 1993.

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Samenvattingen

Erika Manders

Communicating messages through coins: a new approach to the emperor Decius

Voor de Romeinse centrale autoriteiten vormden rijksmunten een effectief instrument voor de verspreiding van boodschappen; zij bereikten een grote en gedifferentieerde groep inwoners van het Romeinse Rijk. Rijksmunten waren dus niet alleen van economisch belang, maar hadden ook een grote ideologische waarde. Ze verschaffen moderne onderzoekers inzicht in de ideologische speerpunten van een specifieke heerschappij: hoe wilde de keizer zichzelf en zijn regime presenteren aan zijn onderdanen? Op deze manier bieden rijksmunten concrete informatie over keizers en hun regeringen. Zeker wanneer we beschikken over schaarse en/of eenzijdige literaire bronnen kan een analyse van rijksmunten nieuwe of andere inzichten opleveren. Dit is zeker het geval bij keizer Decius (249-251 n.Chr.). Deze Romeinse heerser staat vooral bekend om het religieuze edict dat hij uitvaardigde aan het begin van zijn heerschappij, waarbij hij de inwoners van het Romeinse Rijk verplichtte om te offeren aan de Romeinse goden, het offer vlees op te eten en te zweren dat ze altijd geofferd hadden. In zowel werken van christelijke auteurs uit de Oudheid als in de moderne literatuur ligt de nadruk op dit offeredict en de grote gevolgen die het decreet had voor de christelijke inwoners van het Rijk; andere aspecten van Decius' regering zijn onderbelicht gebleven. Een analyse van Decius' munten laat echter zien dat het beeld van Decius bijstelling behoeft. De boodschappen op zijn munten lijken aan te tonen dat van een veelomvattende religieuze politiek ten tijde van zijn heerschappij moeilijk sprake geweest kan zijn – militaire thema's en geografische propaganda domineren zijn munten – en dat de keizer minder traditioneel was dan altijd wordt aangenomen.

Theo Nissen

Putten 1990; De chronologie van de maille tierce

In 1990 werd in de gemeente Putten, provincie Gelderland, een door brand samengeklonterde brok munten gevonden. De inhoud verkeerde in een deplorabele toestand. Na restauratie zijn de munten, in totaal 95 stuks, door het toenmalige Koninklijk Penningkabinet te Leiden gedetermineerd. Hoewel de vondst geen onbekende munttypen bevat heeft ze in de samenstelling twee opmerkelijke eigenschappen. In de eerste plaats is het de aanwezigheid van vijf Franse mailles tierce met de ronde O, een type dat volgens de literatuur eerst vanaf 1306 in omloop kwam. De overige munten moesten daarentegen gedateerd worden met een TAQ van 1288 en een TPQ van 1284. Geen enkel muntexemplaar uit de periode van 1288 en later komt in de vondst voor. Dit gegeven pleit krachtig voor de stelling dat de emissie van de betreffende maille inderdaad vroeger dan 1306 moet worden geplaatst, zoals al eerder door de Engelse historici Mayhew en Phillips is geopperd. Een tweede opmerkelijk punt is het feit dat maar één munt van het graafschap Gelre en geen enkele van het bisdom Utrecht voorkomt. Van de determineerbare munten is 78% afkomstig uit de Zuidelijke Nederlanden en Frankrijk en 21% uit het graafschap Holland.

Jan Pelsdonk

De schatvondst 's-Hertogenbosch 1998

In 1998 werd tijdens een opgraving in het centrum van 's-Hertogenbosch een pot met 2.119 munten en een zilveren gesp gevonden. De eerste publicatie over deze vondst

verscheen in 2011. De op 1304 gedateerde vondst is de grootst bekende Nederlandse schatvondst uit die tijd. In de pot bevonden zich naast zeer zeldzame munten ook tot nog toe onbekende munten en varianten. In het artikel wordt eerst ingegaan op de ouderdom van de schat en sommige munten – waarbij ook de onzekerheden die optreden bij de vaststelling ervan aan bod komen – en de eigenaar van de schat. De nadruk ligt op de numismatische aspecten van de vondst, waarbij gaandeweg een beeld wordt geschetst van de geldomloop rond 1300. Het laatste deel van het artikel bestaat uit een uitgebreide beschrijving, onderverdeeld in drie delen: De Nederlanden, het Duitse Rijk en Frankrijk. Sommige munten worden nader gedateerd en de meest interessante exemplaren zijn afgebeeld.

Hanfried Bendig

Dirk Iden Kruitkremer – Ein Falschmünzer in Emden und Jever; Das Geheimnis der Taler mit Karl dem Grossen und dem Heiligen Ludger

De daalders Delmonte 785-787, met de afbeeldingen van Karel de Grote c.q. de Sint Ludger, zijn in het verleden aan verschillende muntheren toegeschreven, namelijk Baar, Batenburg, Bergh, Culemborg en Pallant. Op basis van meerdere bronnen, waaronder stempelvergelijking, kunnen deze munten worden toegeschreven aan Dirk Iden. Iden was in de periode 1563-1571 muntmeester in Oost-Friesland. Aangevoerd wordt dat de letters op Dirk Idens munten met dezelfde letter-puncoenen zijn geslagen als die op de daalders Delmonte 785-787.

Lei Lennaerts

De slagletters van Victor Theodoor van Berckel

De graveur Theodoor Victor van Berckel (1739-1808) ontwikkelde aan het begin van zijn carrière een heel kenmerkende letterstijl die hij gedurende de rest van zijn werkzame leven handhaafde. Hij maakte een serie letterponsen in verschillende corpsgrootten die een duidelijke samenhang vertonen. Deze slagletters gebruikte hij voor zegelstempels, penning- en muntstempels.

Vanuit zijn ervaring als beroepsgraveur bestudeert de auteur het gebruik van slagletters vaktechnisch en vergelijkt de uitkomsten met schriftelijke bronnen. Met deze gegevens wordt vroeg werk van Van Berckel getraceerd en wordt een uitspraak gedaan wanneer zijn opleiding als graveur plaatsvond en werd afgerond. Volgens sommige bronnen is Van Berckel de maker van een aantal vroege vroedschapspenningen uit 's-Hertogenbosch. De auteur onderzoekt de beweringen door de letters op deze penningen te vergelijken met ander werk van Van Berckel. De uitkomsten blijken deze claims voor een deel te bevestigen. Het laatste deel van het onderzoek betreft de samenwerking tussen de Amsterdamse zilversmid en medailleur Johan Michiel Lageman en Van Berckel. Lageman stelde eerdere auteurs voor een raadsel omdat het onderlinge verschil in kwaliteit van zijn werk erg groot is. Letteronderzoek toont aan dat een aantal stempels met de signatuur van Lageman door andere graveurs is gemaakt. Van Berckel speelt bovendien een belangrijke rol als maker van de penningstempels uit de beginperiode van Lageman als medailleur.

Er is een aantal conclusies te trekken uit dit onderzoek: De signatuur op een penning betreft lang niet altijd de naam van de graveur. Ook een jaartal op een penning, zelfs als het om een vast jaartal in de stempel gaat, zegt vaak niets over het werkelijke productiejaar van die stempel. De hoofdconclusie: over het algemeen is letteronderzoek een betrouwbaar hulpmiddel bij het toeschrijven van werk aan een bepaalde graveur.

Summaries

Erika Manders

Communicating messages through coins: a new approach to the emperor Decius

For the Roman central authorities, imperial coins formed an effective medium through which messages could be disseminated; they reached a large and differentiated audience. Imperial coinage was thus not only economically important, but also ideologically. They provide modern scholars with insights into the ideological spearheads of a specific reign; how did the emperor want to present himself and his emperorship to his subjects? In this way, imperial coins offer concrete information about emperors and their reigns. Especially when literary sources are scarce and/or one-sided an analysis of imperial coins might produce new or other insights, such as in the case of the emperor Decius (AD 249-251). This Roman ruler issued an edict which forced the inhabitants of the Roman Empire to sacrifice to the gods, eat the sacrificial meat and swear that they had always sacrificed. Both in the works of ancient Christian authors and in modern literature emphasis lies on this decree and its consequences for the Christian population within the Empire; other aspects of Decius' rule are underexposed. Yet, an analysis of Decius' coins demonstrates that the emperor's image needs to be adjusted. The messages on his coins seem to suggest that Decius had no comprehensive religious policy – military themes and geographic propaganda dominated on his coins – and that the emperor was less traditional than has always been assumed.

Theo Nissen

De vondst Putten 1990; De chronologie van de maille tierce

The hoard Putten 1990 contained 95 coins. They were poorly preserved, but most coins were identified after restauration. It must have been concealed in between 1284 and 1288. The hoard's significance is twofold. In the first place, it contained five French maille tierce à l'O ronde. Traditionally, this type's introduction was dated 1306. This date has been challenged by among others, Mayhew and Phillips. The hoard Putten 1990 corroborates their view and suggests an introduction in 1288 at the latest. Secondly, whereas the hoard was found in the present-day province of Gelderland and close to Utrecht, it contained only one Guelders coin and none from Utrecht. Instead, 78 % of the identifiable coins came from the Southern Low Countries and France, and 21 % from Holland.

Jan Pelsdonk

De schatvondst 's-Hertogenbosch 1998

In the center of the Dutch town of 's-Hertogenbosch, in 1998 archaeologists found a jug that contained 2,119 coins and a silver brooch. The first publication on this coin hoard was published in 2011. The hoard's TPQ is dated on 1304, it is the largest known Dutch coin hoard from the period. In the jug where - amidst others - some rare and unknown coins as well as some varieties. The article first describes the age of the hoard and some of the coins - including the uncertainties that occur in the process of determining them - and the owner of the treasure. It focuses on the numismatic aspects of the coin hoard, with which gradually a picture emerges of the money circulation around 1300. The last part of the article includes a detailed description, divided into three parts: the Netherlands, the German Empire and France. Some coins are more closely dated and the most interesting pieces are depicted.

Hanfried Bendig

Dirk Iden Kruitkremer – Ein Falschmünzer in Emden und Jever; Das Geheimnis der Taler mit Karl dem Grossen und dem Heiligen Ludger

The “talers” Delmonte 785-787, showing Charlemagne and Saint Ludger respectively, have been attributed to several seigneurial mints: Baar, Batenburg, Bergh, Culemborg and Pallant. Based on several sources, including comparison of dies, these coins are attributed to Dirk Iden, the mintmaster in East-Frisia in the period 1563-1571. All letters on Dirk Idens coins were made with the same punches as used on Delmonte 785-787.

Lei Lennaerts

De slagletters van Victor Theodoor van Berckel

The engraver *Theodore Victor van Berckel* (1739-1808) developed a very distinctive font style at the beginning of his career. A font style that he would maintain during his entire working life. He created a series of letter punches in a range of font sizes that display a clear and coherent style. He used these letter punches for cachets, medal dies and coin dies.

The author uses his expert knowledge as a professional engraver to study the use of letter punches from a technical point of view and he compares the results with written sources. With this information it was possible to trace early work by *Van Berckel* and also to judge when his training as an engraver took place and when it was completed. According to some sources *Van Berckel* was the maker of a number of early attendance tokens for the city council of 's-Hertogenbosch. The author investigates the claims by comparing the punched letters of these tokens with other work by *Van Berckel*. The results prove to confirm these claims in part. The final part of the research concerns the study of the collaboration between the Amsterdam based silversmith and medalist *Johan Michiel Lageman* and *Van Berckel*. Earlier researchers were puzzled by *Lageman*, because there is such a wide variation in the quality of his work. Study of the punched letters shows that a number of dies signed by *Lageman* were in fact made by other engravers. In addition *Van Berckel* played an important role as creator of medal dies in the early years of the career of *Lageman* as a medalist.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this research: by no means does the signature on a medal always reveal the name of the engraver. A year on a medal, even if it is a fixed date in the die, often says nothing about the actual date of production of that die. The main conclusion: in general the study of punched letters is a reliable tool to attribute work to a particular engraver.

Over de auteurs

Hanfried Bendig (1942) studeerde in Oldenburg en Basel (waar hij voor de legendarische firma “Münzen & Medaillen AG” duizenden munten heeft gedetermineerd) en werkte korte tijd als onderwijzer. Sinds 1969 is hij munthandelaar in Bremen (“Bremer Münzenhandlung”). Als numismaat zijn de munten van noordwest Duitsland één van zijn specialiteiten.

Lei Lennaerts (1965) is aan de Vakschool in Schoonhoven opgeleid als graveur. Na zijn scholing in 1985 was hij een jaar stagiair aan 's Rijks Munt Utrecht waarna hij in 's-Hertogenbosch een betrekking kreeg als graveur/stempelmaker bij een gerenomeerd bedrijf in de goud- en zilverbranche. Op numismatisch gebied ligt zijn belangstelling voornamelijk in de munt- en penningproductie van de achttiende eeuw, met als specialisme het leven en werk van Theodoor Victor van Berckel. Voor dit doel richtte Lei Lennaerts in 2008 met een aantal medestanders het Van Berckel Genootschap op.

Erika Manders (1980) holds a PhD in Ancient History from the Radboud University Nijmegen. Her postdoctoral research focuses on the representation of imperial kinship on Roman provincial coinage, 31 BC - AD 284.

Theo Nissen (1945), werkzaam geweest binnen eerst de accountancy en later de ICT, is al meer dan 30 jaren actief op het terrein van de numismatiek. Hij heeft diverse bestuursfuncties in numismatische verenigingen vervuld zoals voorzitter van de Numismatische Kring Brabant, bestuurslid van het Koninklijk Nederlands Genootschap voor Munt- en Penningkunde en secretaris van de stichting De Beeldenaar. Hij heeft een grote belangstelling voor de geschiedenis van het munt- en geldwezen, in het bijzonder met betrekking tot de Nederlandse gewesten tot en met de 16e eeuw. Op zijn naam staan diverse publicaties.

Jan Pelsdonk (1971) is onderzoeker van muntvondsten en beheerder van de collectiebestanden en NUMIS bij het Geldmuseum en conservator van het Numismatisch Kabinet van Teylers Museum. In zijn vrije tijd is hij secretaris van het Koninklijk Nederlands Genootschap voor Munt- en Penningkunde, de Stichting Nederlandse Penningkabinetten en de Nederlandse Museumvereniging (afdeling Historische Musea) en redacteur van De Beeldenaar.