Some Dynastic Bronze Coins of Constantine the Great.

By

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One of the many controversial problems connected with the coinage of Constantine the Great is the proper dating and interpretation of the Dynastic Consecration Coins of the types REGVIES OPTIMORVM MERITORVM and MEMORIAE AETERNAE with obverses of Constantius Chlorus, Maximianus Herculis and Claudius Gothicus. OTTO VÖTTER was the first to understand the dynastic significance of these coins¹ and he explained them as struck in order to emphasize Constantine’s claim on the whole empire on hereditary grounds. The coins were used as imperial propaganda against Licinius; because of the variations in weight, VÖTTER concluded that the coins must have been issued on two different occasions and that the locial dates were the months immediately preceding Constantine’s two wars against Licinius, i.e. 314 A. D. and 324 A. D.²

In his Numismatique Constantinienne, JULES MAURICE readily accepts VÖTTER’s point of view³ and catalogues coins of the Requies type for the mints Treveri, Roma, Aquileia, Arlate, Siscia and Thessalonica; according to him coins of the heavier denomination were struck in the three former mints, the coins

¹ Ahnmünzen Kaiser Constantin des Grossen, Mittheilungen des Clubs der Münz- und Medaillenfreunde 1895. pp. 76–79. 88–89.
² Ahnmünzen p. 77.

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of lighter standards in all six. The Memoriae coins were struck solely in Rome and in accordance with Voetter Maurice speaks of an earlier issue of 314 A.D. and a later of 324 A.D.

Now, this classification based on weights seems to need revising. A visit to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna during the autumn 1954 proved that consecration coins of two different standards were struck in the mint of Rome only. The average weight of 49 coins of the reverse REQUIES OPTIMORVM MERIT in Vienna was 3.05 grm., the average weight of 15 coins of the reverse REQUIES OPTIMORVM MERITORVM 1.36 grm., all of them struck in Roma. All Reqvis coins struck in Treveri, Arelate, Aquileia, Siscia and Thessalonica were of lighter standard with an average weight less than 1.5 grm.

Checking the Numismatique Constantinienne, it is easy to see that Maurice does not succeed in proving that coins of heavier standards were struck in Treveri and Aquileia. For Treveri (I, p. 406) he does not give any weights for the heavy denominations and he illustrates what he describes as an early consecration issue with a small size coin (Pl. XXII, 3). To support the theory of two denominations having been struck in Aquileia he refers (I, pp. 314, 325 f.) to the coins in Vienna (from the collections Markl and Voetter) but all these coins are in fact of lighter standards. The illustration of an early, heavy coin (Pl. XX, 9) clearly shows a small size one. Accordingly neither Treveri nor Aquileia struck any consecration coins of the heavier standard.

Even if the mint of Rome apparently struck coins of the Reqvis type at two different standards, it seems impossible to speak of two denominations of the MEMORIAE AETERNAE types. Five different reverses are known; as can be ascertained in the exceptionally fine collection in Vienna the coins differ very little with regard to style and flan-size. The weights in Vienna are as follows:

Lion r., with club: 9 coins, average weight 1.76 grm. (heaviest 2.0, lightest 1.32 grm.) Lion r.: 24 coins, 1.88 grm. (2.4—1.46 grm.). Lion l.: 4 coins, 2.04 grm. (2.48—1.73 grm.) Eagle l., looking r.: 24 coins, 1.74 grm. (2.4—1.02 grm.). Eagle r., looking l.: 29 coins, 2.03 grm. (3.09—1.36 grm.).

These figures are corroborated by the many coins I have come across in other collections (William, Hunter, Guildhall of London and others). The weight figures seem to indicate that there are of the same denomination. The average groups differ very little indeed despite within each group. In the last group (eagle r., lion coin of 3.99 grm. is quite exceptional and may indicate one end of a long series of coins of continuous weight.

Maurice’s and Voetter’s division of the series is thus deprived of the only positive evidence. It is still possible that one or more of the coins struck earlier, the others considerably later. Such an arrangement seems highly improbable.

Apparently both Voetter and Maurice were misled by the idea of dividing the Memoriae coins into two types because the Reqvis coins of Roma unquestionably are of two different standards, partly because the Reverse is of a particular character suggesting strikingly similar coins from earlier series against Licinius.

A few words should be added with regard to the dynastic issues. Clearly the coins must have been struck at the time of the first Civil War, fought in the year 316 A.D. and proved elsewhere1; only after the settlement by Licinius with Constantine A.D. the mints of Siscia and Thessalonica issued a series of Constantine. A survey of the three mints of Luxor, Nagytétény and Langwith concludes that the consecration issues to be earlier than 320 A.D.2. And, no doubt, the year 317 which in the mints of Siscia and Thessalonica received their princely honours was the appropriate time for expressing dynastic ideas.

When discussing the dynastic issues of the Macedonians, Maurice had difficulty to explain the absence of the lion r. type (according to Voetter and Maurice) in this mint.

1 The author’s The Constantinian Coinage of Augustus
2 Arelate p. 42 f.
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These figures are corroborated by the altogether 79 coins I have come across in other collections (BM, Ashmolean, Fitzwilliam, Hunter, Guildhall of London and Bibliothèque Nationale). The weight figures seem to indicate that all the Memoriae coins are of the same denomination. The average weights for the five groups differ very little indeed despite weight differences within each group. In the last group (eagle r., looking l.) the heaviest coin of 3.99 grm. is quite exceptional and does not stand at the one end of a long series of coins of continually decreasing weight.

Maurice’s and Voetter’s division of the Memoriae coins is thus deprived of the only positive evidence supporting it. Theoretically it is possible that one or more of the five groups were struck earlier, the others considerably later, but in reality such an arrangement seems highly improbable.

Apparently both Voetter and Maurice had been attracted by the idea of dividing the Memoriae coins into two issues, partly because the Requies coins of Roma unquestionably were struck at two different standards, partly because their dynastic, anti-Licinian character suggested strikings before Constantine’s two wars against Licinius.

A few words should be added with regard to the dates of the dynastic issues. Clearly the coins must have been struck after the first Civil War, fought in the year 316 A.D. as I have tried to prove elsewhere; only after the settlement in Serdica in 317 A.D. the mints of Siscia and Thessalonica came into the possession of Constantine. A survey of the three important hoards of Luxor, Nagyatád and Langwith conclusively proves the consecration issues to be earlier than 320 A.D. and later than 317 A.D.3. And, no doubt, the year 317 when the sons of Constantine received their princely honours was the most appropriate time for expressing dynastic ideas.

When discussing the dynastic issues of Arelate I had some difficulty to explain the absence of the heavy denomination (according to Voetter and Maurice) in this mint against the sup-

1 The author’s The Constantinian Coinage of Arelate, pp. 17—21.
2 Arelate p. 42 f.
posed presence of heavy coins in Treveri and Aquileia. The above study has shown that, in reality, the difficulty did not exist; Treveri and Aquileia never struck any heavy coins.

Accepting the date 317 A. D. for the dynastic coins of Arelate it also became necessary to explain why the light denomination had been struck in Treveri, Arelate, Roma, Aquileia, Siscia and Thessalonica, but not in Ticinum, Lugdunum and Londinium. Later I have been able to elucidate the co-operation between the mints in the Constantian part of the empire in the years 317–327 A. D. when arranging the Vota coinages of the Western mints. In this connection it was easy to see that the entire coinage of each single mint was built up of fairly independent sections of coinage, the Sol coinage with the reverse types SOLI INVICTO COMITI, IOVI CONSERVATORI, PRINCIPI(A) IVVENTVTIS and CLARITAS REIPVB(LICAe), the Vota coinage, later the Providentia coinage etc.

In the Western Group consisting of the mints of Londinium, Treveri and Lugdunum, Lugdunum was exceptional in so far as the mint struck the very earliest Vota issues of the year 317 A. D. but not the complementary reverse types of the Sol coinage with observes of the Caesars. The Vota issues clearly ceased after the initial stage. The two other mints struck no early Vota issues or any Vota V at all. All three mints, however, struck the Vota X for the sons of Constantine in closely co-ordinated issues, probably 323–324 A. D. With regard to the Sol coinage of the mints of Londinium and Treveri with Caesarian observes we are entitled to assume that Lugdunum must have been closed 317–about 320 A. D. while the other mints were working all the time.

The Italian Group, consisting of the mints of Roma, Ticinum and Aquileia struck Vota coins on three different occasions, 318 A. D., 321–22 A. D. and 325–26 A. D. (Aquileia was closed during the last period). In addition Rome struck a number of own types such as ROMAE AETERNAE – XV, VOT X ET

1 Arelate p. 40 ff.

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XV F, VOT XV, VOT XX and VOT XXI were the chief mints in Italy with a higher number of dynastic issues in the years after the reconciliation in 316 A. D. when Constantine had been introduced, but no Vota coins issued. Again, Lugdunum could have been introduced into the Sol coinage, whereas Rome with its still relatively small number of dynastic issues struck no coins.

In Italy both Aquileia and Ticinum struck dynastic issues of higher activity after 317 A. D. This might explain why Aquileia struck dynastic issues of later years because of the reason that Aquileia was the more important mint for the region. However, it is quite natural that no comments were made about the coins issued.

In the case of Roma, the mint struck dynastic issues for the sons of Constantine in the years 323–324 A. D. There is no early Vota coins in the mint and the Sol coinage with observes of the Caesars was not struck. The mint was closed in 317 and the other mints were working all the time.

The enormous output of Rome is an indication of the importance of the old capital and the influence of the city. Also other sections of the empire struck coins in the same period and with a high frequency of striking in the mint.

Concluding we may say that the dynastic issues of Constantine in an admirable way mirror the cultural and political life of the empire. Considering the fact that the following picture of the dynastic coinage is correct.

The first issue REQUIES OPTIMO ROMA, only, probably during the war 316 A. D. earlier, and this issue was immediately
coins in Treveri and Aquileia. The above
in reality, the difficulty did not exist;
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RMAE AETERNAE — XV, VOT X ET
olicy and the Imperial Vota, Nordisk Numismatl.
in the Autumn 1935).

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XV F, VOT XV, VOT XX and VOT XV FEL XX, being the
chief mint in Italy with a higher number of types and a higher
frequency of striking.

Against this background it is easy to explain the absence of
dynastic issues in Londinium, Lugdunum and Ticinum; during
the years after the reconciliation in Serdica the output of Lon-
dinium was very small. True, the Sol coinage with Caesarian
obverses was introduced, but no vows were struck, no dynastic
coins issued. Again, Lugdunum closed before the Caesars had
been introduced into the Sol coinage, very early 317 A.D. There-
fore it is quite natural that no commemorative consecration were
ever struck in this mint.

In Italy both Aquileia and Ticinum show sporadic outbursts
of higher activity after 317 A.D. Therefore it seems difficult
to explain why Aquileia struck dynastic coins while Ticinum
omitted to do so. Possibly the reason was that the coins of Aqui-
leia — on geographical grounds — more easily could be used as
a means of imperial propaganda in the newly conquered areas,
to which Constantine concentrated his activities after the war; 2
the dynastic issues were struck in the chief Western mints of
the empire, Treveri, Arelate and Roma and in the three mints
situated in the actual area itself or in the immediate neighbour-
hood.

The enormous output of Rome is easily explained by the spiri-
tual importance of the old capital and by the economic signifi-
cance of the city. Also other sections of coinage give proof of
a high frequency of striking in the mint of Roma.

Concluding we may say that the dynastic coins struck by Con-
stantine in an admirable way mirror the flexibility of the bronze
coinage, faithfully adapted as it was to the economic and politi-
cal need of the day. Considering the facts given above we conceive
the following picture of the dynastic coinage:

The first issue REQVIES OPTIMOR MERIT was struck in
Roma only, probably during the war 316 A.D., possibly slightly
earlier, and this issue was immediately followed by the MEMO-

1 Cf. SIECK, Regesten p. 165 f., Arelate p. 19.
RIAÆ AETERNAE with a reduction of standards by one third. After the war, early in the year 317 A.D., as is proved by the participation of the mints of Siscia and Thessalonica, the Reqvies-type of even more reduced standards was issued in the main mints of the Constantinian part of the empire, in Treveri, Arelate, Roma, Aquileia, Siscia and Thessalonica.

Miscellanea

Ad Verg. etc.

E codicibus Vergilianis aevo antem maxima eclogae quintae partem Palatinus, versum 15 his verbis iubeto certet Amyntas, quod E. de Saint-Denis,\textsuperscript{8} alter, Romanus, priores plerique editores iam indicaverit. Forniger, Conington, Jahn, Hossi. Metricis autem rationibus probare licet Palatino ut omisisse. De iis enim quibus de caesuris et elisionibus utilissimum 126 eclogarum versibus (eo de quibus minorem cum penthemimere non conatus horum versuum in hephthemberpenthemimere praeeditis 13\textsuperscript{52} in hephthember Georgicorum libris I et II, qui amenti sunt, quod in Georgicis mul- 134 versibus hephthemenem coniuncta occurrit, in nullo eorum in facilissimas particulae que elisiones 134 etiam fieri potest ut a n t e que caes.

\textsuperscript{8} Vergili Opera, Romae 1930.
\textsuperscript{1} Virgil, Bucoliques, Texte établi et tr. \textsuperscript{2}ème éd. Paris 1949.
\textsuperscript{2} P. Vergilii Maronis Bucolica, ed. C. Heslop.
\textsuperscript{3} V. p. 49 libri nostri Metrische Stildiffere. Uppsala 1932, et quos libros ibi haudivin