

Two medallions of the Valerianic Dynasty

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate and discuss two very different items which fall under the general heading of 'medallions', both apparently struck during the joint reign of Valerian I and Gallienus (AD 253-260). One piece has been known about for a very long time and has been published in several reference works, but there are still questions to be asked about it. The second is a recent discovery which appears to be of a previously unpublished type.

The first of these two medallions was illustrated by Gnecci in 1912 from a plaster cast in the Museo Vaticano in Rome, and was described as portraying Saloninus, the second son of Gallienus¹. Gnecci stated that the medallion itself had been missing since 1797, and it has been suggested that it must have been among items looted from the museum by the army of Napoleon Bonaparte. It eventually reappeared at Christie's in London in 1949, when it formed part of the collection sold by order of The Earl Fitzwilliam's Wentworth Estates Company². It was described in the catalogue as 'unpublished and probably unique', and again ascribed to Saloninus. It was purchased from the sale by A.H. Baldwin and Sons Ltd., in whose stock it recently came to light again.

There are problems in verifying the previous provenance of this medallion. The Wentworth Estates collection was in fact that formed by the second Marquis of Rockingham, who lived from 1730 to 1782 and who twice held the post of Prime Minister of Great Britain³. If the medallion had indeed been in the Vatican Museum until 1797, therefore, it could not have been in the Rockingham collection during the lifetime of its owner, and we would have to accept that it had been added at least fifteen years after his death, although there is no evidence to suggest that his descendants continued to collect. Also, the first, partial, sacking of the Vatican Museum's collections did not take place until 12th February 1798⁴, so if Gnecci is to be believed, the medallion was already missing before this. All that is now certain is that the

Vatican Museum possessed a plaster cast in the early twentieth century. If the original had belonged to Lord Rockingham, it must either have left the Vatican long before Napoleon's time or can never have been there at all. If it did come from the Vatican, at whatever time, we have no idea how it came to be in the collection of an English noble family. It is perhaps not over-fanciful to suggest that Rockingham acquired the medallion from another source in Italy, and that the Vatican had only ever possessed a plaster cast. The Wentworth sale catalogue lists the collection of the Museo dei Patri Cortosoni (acquired in Italy in 1748) and that of the Abbé Visconti, President of the Society of Antiquaries in Rome (purchased around 1774) as sources for the Rockingham collection.

The medallion is of copper alloy, measuring 32 x 33 mm and weighing 18.05 grams. It bears a bare-headed and draped bust of a young prince on the obverse, with the inscription SPES PVBLICA (Illus. 1). On the reverse is an image of Romulus and Remus suckled by the she-wolf, with the legend SALVS VRBIS (Illus. 2). This medallion was published again in 2000 by the late Professor Göbl, who ascribed it to the mint of Viminacium, on the Danube, and identified the bust as that of Valerian II, Gallienus's elder son⁵. It seems that there are still unanswered questions about this piece, regarding whose portrait it bears, where and when it was struck, and what the significance of its designs and inscriptions might be.

1. Gnecci, F.: *I Medaglioni Romani*, Milan, 1912, vol. 3, p. 61, no. 6, and pl. 155, 17.
2. Christie, Manson and Woods, (*Sale*) *Catalogue of the Highly Important Collection of Roman Brass Coins and Medallions...* (30-31 May 1949), lot 363.
3. Hopper, R.J.: The Second Marquis of Rockingham, Coin Collector, *Antiquaries Journal* 62, 1982, p. 316-346.
4. Tocci, L.M.: *I Medaglioni Romani e I Contornianti del Medagliere Vaticano*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1965, XXIV.
5. Göbl, R.: *Die Münzprägung der Kaiser Valerianus I / Gallienus / Saloninus (253/268), Regalianus (260) und Macrianus / Quietus (260/262) (= MIR 36, 43, 44)*, Vienna, 2000, Table 24 and pl. 67, no. 866.

Göbl placed the medallion alongside a second piece of similar module. This bears the inscriptions PIETAS SAECVLI, with a similar but slightly larger bust, and IOVI EXORIENTI, with a representation of the infant Jupiter riding on the goat Amalthea⁶. Göbl stated, when discussing the coin issues of the Viminacium mint, that for Valerian II there are only 'Anfangsreverse', or 'beginning-reverses' for princes entering priestly colleges, and that the two medallions – the only ones from this mint – also bear 'Einführungstypen', or 'introductory types'⁷. He did not, however, explain why he attributed the two medallions to this mint, or indeed to Valerian II. There seems to be a circular argument which runs as follows. If the medallion is of Valerian II, it may well have been struck at Viminacium, since the prince is considered to have been based in the Danube frontier area, under the tutelage of Ingenuus, during the period when he held the rank of Caesar. If the medallion was minted at Viminacium, it must represent Valerian II, since the mint was moved from there to Cologne in 257, in order to strike coins to pay the Rhine army, and Saloninus was not raised to the rank of Caesar until 258, after his elder brother's death. In other words, each assumption seems to be based on an acceptance of the other, but there does not appear to be any evidence for either assumption in isolation. There is nothing in the style or iconography which links the medallion with known Viminacium issues, and the bust is too worn to identify it with either of the two princes, whose profiles, as represented on coins, are very similar.

It may instead be instructive to look for other medallions of the Valerianic dynasty which seem to be similar in style, inscription or design. The main distinguishing features are a fairly small portrait and the absence of any identification in the inscriptions. These features are most commonly found on medallions of a dynastic type which bear portraits of two members of the imperial family face to face. The inscription surrounding the portraits usually reads either CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM, for Valerian I and Gallienus, Gallienus and Salonina and Gallienus and one of his sons⁸, or PIETAS AVGVSTORVM, for Valerian I and Gallienus⁹. All these medallions were attributed to the Rome mint by Göbl, but a silver piece, which he described as an 'Abschlag', or restrike, of a gold multiple and attributed to Cologne, combines CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM for Gallienus and Salonina with PIETAS AVGVSTORVM for Valerian I and Valerian II¹⁰.

All these issues were clearly designed to convey the message of a united imperial family and a secure succession conferring benefits on the empire. Dynastic propaganda was much favoured by Valerian I, but it is notable that it was no longer utilised after his capture by the Sassanians, the ignominy of which must have convinced Gallienus that drawing attention to the ancestry of himself and his sons was likely to be counter-productive¹¹. It seems probable that the two medallions showing a portrait of one of the young princes without identification formed part of the same propaganda campaign as those with face-to-face portraits, and that they were intended to associate the youngest members of the imperial family with those virtues and values which the emperors claimed that their rule would bring. Although it is quite possible, therefore, that they were struck at the time of the raising of Valerian II to the rank of Caesar, as Göbl suggested, there seems to be no reason why they could not equally well have been struck at any time during the period 256-259/60, when one or other of the princes held that rank. Failing any hard evidence, it is also much more probable that these 'propaganda medallions' would have been struck in Rome, rather than at a frontier mint such as Viminacium, which existed purely in order to strike coins to pay the soldiers stationed in that area. The reverse legend SALVS VRBIS and the design of the wolf and twins would certainly suggest that the Fitzwilliam sale piece was intended to have a particular relevance to the imperial capital.

This leaves the question of which of the princes is more likely to have been portrayed on these two pieces. As already stated, the portraits themselves are of no assistance, owing to the condition of the two medallions. There is no sign on either of the unusual lock of long hair which is sometimes found on portraits of Valerian II, and which has been seen as linking him with the cult of Isis¹². The two obverse legends are equally unhelpful; PIETAS SAECVLI and SPES PVBLICA both fall into the category of 'desirable abstracts' with which the imperial family wished

6. Göbl, as in n. 5, no. 865.

7. Göbl, p. 98.

8. Göbl, nos. 326a, 330b and 331c, where the prince is identified as Valerian II.

9. Göbl, nos. 324a and 325a.

10. Göbl, no. 894a.

11. de Blois, L.: *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus*, Leiden, 1976, p. 25.

12. Brenot, C.: Valérien Jeune était-il Myste d'Isis?, *Revue Numismatique*, 6th series, vol. 15, 1973, p. 157-65.

to be associated. The reverse legend IOVI EXORIENTI is unparalleled on coins or medallions of the period, but the representation of the infant Jupiter and the goat Amalthea does of course occur on common coins of Valerian II of Rome, Viminacium and Cologne, with the legend IOVI CRESCENTI. This might tend to suggest that this medallion, and by extension the other similar one, were struck for Valerian rather than Saloninus, but it would be dangerous to assume this.

There is a third possibility, but one which does not appear worthy of serious consideration. Gallienus is said to have had a third son, Marinianus, who is recorded as having become consul at New Year 268 and having been killed along with other relatives and prominent supporters of Gallienus after the murder of the emperor later in the same year. Although it is theoretically possible, therefore, that this prince was portrayed on one or both of these medallions, the absence of any similar issues dated to the sole reign of Gallienus renders this highly unlikely.

The second piece under discussion belonged until 2002 to a private collector in Germany, and is said to have been found in Trier. It is of silver or billon, measuring 20 mm in diameter and weighing 3.29 grams, and is therefore not dissimilar in these respects to antoniniani of the joint reign of Valerian I and Gallienus. That it is not an antoninianus is immediately apparent from the fact that it bears a laureate bust of Gallienus, who is shown holding a spear over his right shoulder and a shield bearing a Medusa head. The obverse legend reads GALLIENVS AVG GERM III (Illus. 3). On the reverse is the inscription FIDES MILITVM, and an eagle is portrayed, standing on a thunderbolt and holding a wreath in its beak, with a military standard on either side (Illus. 4).

It is not immediately apparent what this item is, where it was struck and for what purpose. The only clue lies in its obverse legend: GERM III presumably indicates that it must be roughly contemporary with those coins on which Gallienus is styled GERMANICVS MAX(imus) TER(tius). This legend, associated with the design of a trophy and captives, appears on antoniniani of Rome which Göbl includes in his series 2 at Rome, dated to AD 255-6; the reverse is used on coins of both Valerian I and Gallienus, and is relatively common for both¹³. The

same reverse, with GERMANICVS shortened to GERMAN, appears on a rare issue of Gallienus from Cologne, belonging to the earliest series from that mint, dated to AD 257¹⁴. Since the inscription GERMANICVS MAX V is common on antoniniani of Göbl's issue 1 from that mint, it may be surmised that those issues with the earlier legend were superseded very soon after it commenced operation. A left-facing bust with spear and shield is virtually unknown on coins or medallions of the joint reign from Rome, whereas it is common on issues of Cologne, and we may therefore conclude that the little medallion emanated from the latter mint.

If questions of date and mint can be answered relatively easily, it is much harder to establish the purpose of this issue. The only comparable piece recorded by Göbl is a somewhat corroded item struck in bronze. The obverse bust is very similar, and the reverse legend reads ROMA REDVX, with an 'Adventus'-type depiction of the emperor on horseback¹⁵. The obverse legend is read as GALLIENVS AVG GERM V, but the last part is corroded and unclear. There is certainly enough room for a III rather than a V, and the published reading may reflect what might have been expected to be there. It would be unwise to claim that there is an obverse die-link between this item and the newly-discovered piece, but it is certainly not impossible on the basis of the published photograph.

Göbl described the bronze item as an 'Abschlag', or restrike, of a special gold issue of Cologne, as he did in the case of three other pieces, one of them the silver dynastic medallion mentioned earlier¹⁶. The problem with this is that no example is known of any of these pieces in gold. This does not, of course, prove that none was struck in gold, but neither does it explain the reason for the existence of the silver and bronze pieces.

If the item specifically under discussion was struck at the Cologne mint, it might be assumed to have been part of an issue intended for distribution among those serving in the Rhine army. The reverse legend, FIDES MILITVM, would support this suggestion: this was a

13. Göbl, nos. 93c and 93q.

14. Göbl, no. 883g.

15. Göbl, no. 897.

16. Göbl, nos. 894a, 895b and 896b.

legend common on contemporary antoniniani of Cologne, the design of which was similar except for the fact that the eagle stands on a globe rather than a thunderbolt¹⁷. The reverse legend ROMA REDVX on the companion piece is less readily associated with the frontier in Germany, but the 'Adventus' design of the emperor on horseback may well relate to the arrival of Gallienus to take command of the Rhine army in 257.

If these items had been struck in gold, it would have been logical to regard them as having formed part of a military donative, associated with an official ceremony and intended to bolster the loyalty of the soldiers to the emperor. It has been argued that the distribution of gold medallions served to counter the effect on military pay of the debasement of the normal coinage¹⁸. It is possible that some examples were indeed struck in gold, even if none is known today, but even this would not explain why restrikes should have been made in lesser metals. Perhaps a leap of imagination is required to offer a possible explanation, even if this risks accusations of speculation.

There have been many occasions in comparatively recent times when a relatively small issue of a commemorative medal in gold or other precious metal, intended for distribution to selected individuals, has been accompanied by a much larger issue of the same type in base metal, often brass or pewter, for sale to the public or for distribution to school children. It may not be beyond the bounds of possibility that something similar happened in the Roman Empire. An occasion such as the arrival of the emperor in an area far from Rome, with its attendant ceremonies, must have aroused much the same excitement in sections of the civilian population as did, for instance, the visit of the king or queen to a foreign outpost of the British Empire in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. If the occasion was marked by the distribution to the military of gold medallions, most of which were probably sold and melted down at some time thereafter, low-value issues struck from the same dies might have been made available for sale to those who wanted a memento of the occasion. This is an unsubstantiated hypothesis, of course, but it does not seem to contradict the evidence currently available



Captions for illustrations

- 1, 2. Bronze medallion of a prince
(obverse and reverse).
- 3, 4. Silver/billon medallion of Gallienus
(obverse and reverse).

17. Göbl, no. 871.

18. de Blois, as in n. 11, p. 95-96, quoting A. Alföldi and R. MacMullen.