

Review of Caza, Shawn M. 2021. *A Handbook of Late Roman Bronze Coin Types, 324 – 395*

London: Spink and Son Ltd. Pp. 345, ills. ISBN 978-1-912667-61-1

VIRGIL H. HUSTON JR.

This book is a welcome addition to the literature of late Roman bronze coins. It is not a catalog, *per se*, yet can be used for coin identification quite easily. Many references focus on identifying coins based on the emperor involved. This is fine if one can read the legends or recognize the portraits, but becomes much more difficult when portraits become less specific and legends are barely readable. The focus here is on reverse types and I find that useful.

Specifically, if one is unsure about the emperor, you can identify the potential reverse types the coin represents. With one or more reverse types to examine, this book identifies the emperors who issued such reverses, as well as mints and legend variations. This helps one narrow down potential specific coins and, combined with the examination of the obverses, aides significantly in identifying them and speeds up the process.

In addition, this book will be of use and appreciated by novices and specialists alike as it covers the basics as well as specialized details that are backed up by in-line footnotes at the bottom of each relevant page. I always find this more useful than the ‘Notes’ collections in an appendix many books have. Footnotes are plentiful and on each page. This is particularly helpful when the author disagrees with previous scholarship.

The book consists of a very short Introduction followed by a detailed introductory chapter. Then, there are eight chapters based on logical time divisions. At the end, there is an extensive bibliography and index of reverse legends that is indispensable. What is missing is a general index. An emperor index would have been useful, as well.

On a physical basis, the book is hardback with a glossy color cover, no dust jacket. It is attractive and comes in at 345 pages and the reverse types are illustrated with quality photographs. The short initial Introduction covers suggestions for using the book, a description of the format used for each reverse type, and a short glossary of terms that is useful, but more terms could have been included.

The extensive ‘An Introduction to Late Roman Bronze Coinage’ Chapter One is a treasure trove of information about the coins in general. For example, the life cycle of Roman coins and how they were minted is covered, from various flan production methods to striking. Mints (and years each was active) and mint organization and structure, mint and other marks, as well as series, issues and emissions are outlined.

One thing not always seen in coin references are discussions of how the coins were originally distributed and circulated. That is covered here, as is how coins were ‘lost’ and came down to us over the centuries. The author’s summary of the effects of losses to circulation, such as burial, on the coins as we see them today is informative. There is a useful section on weights and sizes and on fineness standards and metallic content. I find these sections suitable for collectors at all levels that reinforces my notion that this book is for everyone.

This first chapter is finished out by a short look at imitations and “barbaric” coins, followed by an examination of coin purchasing power when minted. Both sections discuss third century coinage in order to provide the background necessary for understanding the bronze types covered by this book. The coin values refer to the intrinsic and nominal values of the coins at the time they were in use, and the difficulty of us knowing what these coins were actually worth back then (buying power) is proven out in the discussion.

Specifically, the section on nominal values of the coins section is organized by the periods that correspond to the reverse type chapters, but starts earlier with 215 – 274 and the rise and fall of the Antoninianus; then 274 – 294, the Aurelian; 294 – 301, Diocletian’s first reform; 301 – 318, Diocletian’s second reform and the subsequent decline; 318 – 330, the Centenionalis and here (324) is where this book starts. Then follows sections that cover up to 395, Theodosius’ reforms and the final year covered. There is a brief one page look at coinage after 395, interesting if not very detailed.

The bulk of the book consists of eight reverse type chapters, with three of them broken into two or three sections. Here is how the author divides the years 324 – 395:

- Constantine Victorious (18 September 324 to 11 May 330)
- Plus ça change (11 May 330 to mid 341)
- Slowly but Steadily (mid 341 to April 348)
- Happy Birthday (April 348 to mid 362) and The Reign of Vetranio (1 March to 25 December 350)
- Interruptions (18 January 350 to August 353), The Reign of Nepotian (10 May to 7 June 351), and “Poemonius” or the “Treveri Revolt Issue”
- Paganism’s Last Gasp (Mid 362 to 17 February 364)
- House Valentinian (26 February 364 to August 378) and The Reign of Procopius (28 September 365 to 27 May 366)
- House Theodosius vs. House Valentinian (January 379 to January 395)

Each chapter has extensive front matter that provides an historical summary. In the case of Chapter Two, the period begins with Constantine’s final victory over Licinius at the Battle of Chrysopolis. The period of this chapter ends with Constantine’s dedication of Constantinopolis as an Imperial capital on 11 May 330. Following the historical summary is a coinage summary that includes metrology, obverse busts and standard types at the various mints. Volume of coins produced is discussed and I find, of note, extremely useful tables of mint and field marks produced by year that will make it possible to narrow down date ranges of coins to quite specific years.

We then move into the meat of each chapter, the Catalogue of Reverse types for the years covered. Each reverse type throughout the book reflects the same format, as follows in an example of a camp gate Centenionalis:

Legend: PROVIDENTIAE / PROVIDENTIAE CAESS

Translation: To the Foresight of the Emperors / Caesars

Design: Camp gate with two towers

Denomination: Centenionalis (1/96 L)

Dates: Late 324 to May 330

Mints: All: Londinium, Treveri, Lugdunum, Arelate, Ticinum (only CAESS), Rome, Siscia, Sirmium

(only CAESS), Thessalonica, Heraclea, Constantinopolis, Nicomedia, Cyzicus, Antioch, Alexandria

Personalities: Constantine I, Crispus, Constantine II and Constantius II

There is at least one photo and often more for each reverse. In many cases, including this example, obverses are shown, including here a series of three coins of Antioch camp gates with different bust sizes. A discussion of each reverse is included, as well as variants. Where the author disagrees with previous research, such differences are explained and footnoted.

I found this a book I could read through, unlike many coin catalog type books where only front matter is worth reading fully until you have a specific interest in certain coins within the catalog. Reading gave me a wonderful overview of the coins and historical summary of this period. One minor annoyance is there is a lot of repeating as each type is discussed, but there is no way around this I can see, as each are dealt with individually.

The photos, and there are many, are generally high quality, although one minor nitpick is that it looks like some have been enlarged and the text as part of images look enlarged from JPGs. All are completely readable and some of the photos could perhaps have been a bit lighter in tone. All these are minor quibbles.

The Bibliography is extensive (11 pages) and the Index of Reverse Legends is indispensable for identifying potential coins, particularly for those coins with hard to read obverse legends. This adds another element to the identification toolkit.

In conclusion, this is a comprehensive, well researched, most readable and worthwhile addition to the body of scholarship on Late Roman Bronze Coinage. It deserves its place on the bookshelf of anyone seriously interested in this coinage.