

## BOOK REVIEW

*Monuments in Miniature: Architecture on Roman Coinage.* By NATHAN T. ELKINS. New York, NY: The American Numismatic Society, 2015. Pp. viii + 230. Hardback, \$100.00. ISBN: 978-0-89722-344-7.

At an estimated 2–3% of the total Roman coin supply, reverses featuring architectural or monumental iconography loom far larger in the scholarly imagination than they ever did historically. The study of Roman coins with architectural iconography is a long-lived sub-discipline, one which has had as its primary aim the reconstruction of buildings now lost to the archaeological record. In this excellent new treatment, Elkins rightly notes the futility of these efforts, given the abbreviated iconography and the purposes of this medium, and further stresses that the importance of *architectura numismatica* has been overstated by modern scholarship. As he says: “The extreme paucity of architectural reverse types ... should remind modern scholars that we have over exaggerated the role that denotative images such as building played in Roman society” (116).

While recognizing that his choice of material perpetuates the historical attention given to these coins, Elkins takes a measured approach to the material, employing a methodology that emphasizes the contextualization of numismatic typologies within art historical and archaeological frameworks. This method provides a vital corrective to previous studies, which have sidelined the important questions of why Romans chose to depict architectural images on their coins and what those images meant within their contemporary visual world. Elkins balances these purposes gracefully and presents a study that explores these types within the contexts of Roman society, history and material culture.

Following its introduction, this study is arranged chronologically, with the first chapter comparing Roman architectural types to Greek and Parthian coinages, and then addressing the advent of architectural coin designs in the Roman Republic. Elkins begins with an overview of the types, illustrated with unfortunately muddy black-and-white images but accompanied by thorough coverage of the secondary literature. He offers a discussion of the monument or monuments depicted on each type as well as historical contextualization. This serves the read-

er in good stead when he turns to his broader discussion in the second half of the chapter, which argues convincingly for the advent of architectural types on coins as a consequence of the Lex Gabinia of 139 BCE. Elkins then seeks to draw parallels between the coin iconography and the development of Second Style wall painting. This argument is a departure from standard art historical readings and would have benefited from a greater discussion of the uncertain dates of, and the flexible boundaries between, the styles of wall painting. Issues of media also might have been raised, given the differences of audience and technical skill in die engraving and painting. Given Elkins' belief that architectural types develop concurrently with growing interest in the *gens*, it also might have been useful to examine the iconography of Republican seals and gemstones.

In line with Elkins' own expertise, *Monuments* is at its best in its treatment of Roman Imperial coinage in its second and third chapters. Here the catalogues of types are supported by arguments regarding audience and denominations in the second chapter and the development and subsequent fossilization of connotative coin types in the third. The latter forms part of a convincing argument that emphasizes the decentralization of minting and contemporary developments in late Roman art. The material is comprehensively treated and also well situated within its historical context to reveal shifts in imperial policy and to include many references to larger iconographic programs, both within coinage and beyond it. Elkins provides particularly plausible reasoning for the development of "camp gate" types as the product of the decentralization of Roman minting, which he supplements during his discussion of provincial coins in Chapter 4.

This final chapter turns to architectural coin types in the provinces and provides an excellent survey of this extensive and under-studied coinage. Elkins makes a strong case for the dialogue between Roman imperial and provincial types, arguing first for the importation of architectural types into provincial settings, especially in connection to the imperial cult, and then the reception of provincial types back into imperial coinage in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Miniatures* is occasionally hampered by the current state of numismatic research, especially on the issue of circulation. Elkins rightly notes that this kind of study is difficult, time consuming (11) and not yet widely undertaken, but this project requires a detailed consideration of these issues. In the case study of the geographical distribution of architectural types from the Flavians to Trajan in Chapter 2, part of the arguments for audience-targeting, Elkins relies on a set of data with very broad find spots. As a result, his conclusions remain suggestive

rather than definitive. Even a case study of one detailed site would have benefited this argument greatly.

These shortcomings do not undermine Elkins' final conclusions, nor do they detract from the strengths of his methodology, which is this monograph's great contribution to both historical inquiry and numismatic study. Elkins presents a comprehensive catalogue of types (supplemented by four appendices) as he argues and moves seamlessly to a discussion that contextualizes the coins well beyond their numismatic interest alone. The method is one to be emulated and this study will be interesting not only to those examining representations of architecture in Roman art, but also to those looking to use numismatic evidence in historical or iconographic studies.

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