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Title: Propaganda of Philip the Arabian's dynastic idea (244-249 a.d.) : numismatic evidence

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Citation style: Kaczanowicz Wiesław. (1996). Propaganda of Philip the Arabian's dynastic idea (244-249 a.d.) : numismatic evidence. "Notae Numismaticae" (T. 1 (1996) s. 82-86).



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PROPAGANDA OF PHILIP THE ARABIAN'S
DYNASTIC IDEA (244–249 A.D.).
NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE

It is notable that the most prominent motif in the coinage of the Roman ruler Philip the Arabian is the emperor's family.¹

Thus, there is the bronze medallion (?) whose obverse bears the legend CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM and the busts of the emperor and his son Philip II facing each other. The reverse of this unique piece features the legend ADVENTVS AVGG accompanied by a rendition of both emperors on horseback. Ahead of them is a personification of Victory among soldiers.²

Another medallion, also in bronze (?), has an identical obverse inscription, CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM, also with images of Philip I and II. The reverse has the legend ADLOCVTIO AVGVSTORVM and shows both emperors and an officer standing together on a platform and speaking to soldiers.³

There is also a gold medallion of Philip the Arabian, dated 248 and signed PONTIFEX MAX. TR. P. V COS III P.P. on the reverse. The design that goes with it shows the emperor being "crowned" by Victory and also an effigy of his son. The composition is complemented by a soldier in a quadriga.⁴

We know of silver antoniniani of Philip the Arabian dated approximately at 244–247 A.D., whose obverses bear the legend M. IVL. PHILIPPVS AVG. M. IVL. PHILIPPVS N.C. and the busts of both rulers being "crowned" by Victory standing between them. The reverses, both of the LIBERALITAS AVG. II type, present a personification of Liberalitas holding an abacus and cornucopia.⁵

Other bronze coins of Philip the Arabian feature both rulers on their reverses only. They are LIBERALITAS AVGG S.C. asses. Both Philips are seen standing on a rostrum accompanied by soldiers, a symbol of Liberalitas, and a civilian.⁶ Sesterces and asses of the type LIBERALITAS AVGG S.C. show the emperors

1 Cf. W. Kaczanowicz, *Aspekty ideologiczne w rzymskim mennictwie lat 235–284 n.e. (Ideological Aspects in Roman Coinage 235–284 A.D.)* (Katowice: 1990), pp. 40–42, 44. For more on this ruler, see esp. L. De Blois, "The Reign of the Emperor Philip the Arabian," *Talanta*, X/XI 1978/79, pp. 11–43.

2 RIC IV/3, p. 92, No. a.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 93, No. b, cf. No. c.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 70, No. 11.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 74, No. 56.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 91, No. 179.

seated in curule chairs. Each is holding a spear and abacus.⁷ Dupondii LIBERALITAS AVGG III repeat the motif of both rulers seated on a rostrum.⁸

Another combination is bronze sesterces, asses, and dupondii of Philip the Arabian featuring on their obverses his likeness and the legend IMP. M. IVL. PHILIPPVS AVG. COS II. Their reverses, by contrast, depict Philip II and the sign IMP. M. IVL. PHILIPPVS AVG.⁹

Moreover, we know aurei, silver antoniniani, and bronze asses whose obverses show Philip I and reverses bear the legend MARCIA OTACIL. SEVERA and an effigy of the empress.¹⁰

Philip the Arabian's coinage is not without pieces depicting the whole imperial family. Thus, extremely original and rare antoniniani were emitted with the emperor's bust on the obverse and, on the reverse, the legend DE PIA MATRE PIVS FILIVS and likenesses of the empress and Philip II facing each other.¹¹ A similar design is found on antoniniani and silver denarii PIETAS AVGG.¹²

By Philip the Arabian's order, coins were also struck on behalf of his wife, Marcia Otacilia Severa. Traditionally, they bore a portrait of the empress on the obverses of individual emissions. In the field of our interest, we should note bronze sesterces and asses of the PIETAS AVGVSTORVM type. Their reverses display facing busts of Philip I and II.¹³

As he did for his empress, Philip the Arabian had coins emitted for his son Philip the Younger.

As a Caesar (244–246 A.D.) he placed his effigy on bronze medallions (?) bearing a reverse legend PIETAS AVGVSTORVM and picturing the heads of father and son turned to each other.¹⁴ There are also silver and bronze (?) medallions propagating the emperor's whole family. The image of the young ruler on the obverses of those emissions together with his name and titulature is complemented by the facing busts of his parents on the reverses of these pieces marked CONCORDIA AVGVSTORVM.¹⁵

As Augustus (246–249), Philip II appears with his father (reverses present both emperors sitting side by side) on bronze LIBERALITAS AVGG II S.C. sesterces,¹⁶ silver LIBERALITAS AVGG III antoniniani,¹⁷ and LIBERALITAS AVGG III S.C. sesterces,¹⁸ as well as on LIBERALITAS AVGG IIII.¹⁹ The whole royal

7 *Ibid.*, p. 91, No. 182.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 91, No. 183.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 92, No. 197 (a, b, c); see also p. 76, No. 68.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 73, No. 39; p. 75, No. 64; p. 92, No. 196 (a, b); see also p. 80, No. 104.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 72, No. 30.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 73, No. 43 (a, b).

13 *Ibid.*, p. 95, No. 212 (a, b).

14 *Ibid.*, p. 101, No. 260.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 96, No. 222; p. 102, No. 261.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 103, No. 266.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 97, No. 230.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 103, No. 267 (a, b).

19 *Ibid.*, p. 99, No. 245.

family was promoted by very original and even then rare antoniniani presenting on their obverses a likeness of Philip II and, on reverses, a legend AVG. PATRI AVG. MATRI and show facing busts of his parents.²⁰

The list of Philip the Arabian's coins presented above provokes some reflection.

First, the range of denominations is remarkable. The emperor's "family" coins were struck in gold, as silver antoniniani and denarii, and bronze sesterces, asses, and dupondii. The emissions that are of our interest were, therefore, meant by the ruler to be used by various social groups.

Philip the Arabian's short-lived coinage concentrated in the capital city of Rome. It is Rome that by far the most types of coins discussed in the present article come from. It therefore seems justified to assume that the emperor's campaign to promote his family was targeted at the inhabitants of the capital, its environs, and Italy.

Secondly, Philip the Arabian's coinage is remarkable for its special pieces in gold, silver, and primarily bronze. They are probably so-called medallions, or emissions beyond standard denominations, struck to commemorate extraordinary events. Picturing the emperor on them together with his wife and – above all – his son was probably meant to create a favorable image of the family and especially of the intended heir to the throne, Philip II.

The impressive, iconographically sophisticated, and carefully crafted medallions were handed out to associates, elites, and those that were worth winning favor with. It is all the more convincing, then, that Philip the Arabian's intention was to condition influential recipients to accept Philip the Younger as successor to the throne. Philip the Arabian's publicity acts complemented his formal dynasty-building measures like making him Caesar early in his father's reign and raising him to the rank of Augustus, co-ruler, in 246 A.D.

Thirdly, the striking thing about Philip the Arabian's "family-series" coins is the highly original and expressive reverse legends. The inscriptions in question are DE PIA MATRE PIVS FILIVS and AVG. PATRI AVG. MATRI. They place particular emphasis on the emperors's esteem for his wife, his son's inherited religiousness, and the young man's respect for his parents. One could almost say that these antoniniani were expressive, in their brief form, of a certain intimacy (at least outwardly directed) of the relationships in the emperor's family.

Another conspicuous thing is how Philip the Arabian accentuates two virtues as superior and permeating his family: piety (*pietas*)²¹ and concord (*concordia*).²² It must have been the ruler's intention to assure the users of his coins of the high morale and unity of the imperial family.

A comment is also in order on the abundant samples of LIBERALITAS coins. Their reverses feature, we remember likenesses of both rulers. Obviously, the

20 *Ibid.*, p. 97, No. 229.

21 For more on this virtue, see esp. M. Manson, "La Pietas et le sentiment de l'enfance à Rome d'après les monnaies," *Revue Belge de Numismatique*, 1975, vol. 121, pp. 21–80.

22 See also B. Levick, "Concordia at Rome" in: R.A.G. Carson, C.M. Kraay, eds., *Scripta Nummaria Romana. Essays Presented to Humprey Sutherland* (London: 1978), pp. 217–233.

coins mark the emperor's handouts (*liberalitas*).²³ There is no reason to suppose that the "heir apparent" was kept away from such events. On the contrary, sensitive about his son's career – as is clear from numismatic sources – Philip the Arabian doubtless used the splendid opportunity of handouts to win popularity not only for himself but for his successor, too. *LIBERALITAS* coins constituted, among other things, a complement of the propaganda for Philip the Younger as he was being prepared for independent rule.

Fourthly and finally, Philip the Arabian's "family series" contains a peculiar trait in its iconography. It consists in a consistent (if not presumptuous) use of portraits (often facing) of:

- a) Father and son,
- b) Philip I and his wife,
- c) Mother and Philip the Younger.

All this conditioning must have been another technique to build confidence in the stable unity of the imperial family and its good prospects for the future.

The "family" coins described above undoubtedly make up a highly original and therefore interesting numismatic series in Philip the Arabian's scant coinage. Moreover, I think that these emissions are much more expressive of dynastic desires than other similar output by Roman emperors at the time of the Empire's crisis (235–284 A.D.). The reasons for this can be sought in two premises.

1. Philip the Arabian's reign (244–249 A.D.) was not too distant from the time of Septimius Severus (193–211 A.D.), when the dynastic idea was vigorously emphasized²⁴ (also using coins). Philip the Arabian's desire to emulate the distinguished and charismatic founder of the Severian dynasty may have considerably influenced him to manifest the idea of starting a dynasty of his own.

2. I suppose that Philip the Arabian's wish to found a dynasty, and, consequently, promote political stability, resulted from the emperor's observation and experience in the times preceding his reign, when Roman Imperial authority suffered from severe instability. Thus, in 235 A.D., Alexander Severus was murdered. In 238 A.D., the state had as many as seven emperors (Maximinus the Thracian with his son Maximianus, Gordian I and II, Balbinus, Pupienus, and Gordian III), of whom the first six were killed struggling with each other. Finally, in 244 A.D., mysterious death overtook Gordian III, the predecessor of Philip the Arabian.²⁵ It was natural, therefore, for Philip the Arabian to fear a similar situation and consequently try to promote his dynastic idea.²⁶

23 Cf. S. Mrozek, *Prix et rémunération dans l'occident romain (31 av.n.è.–250 de n.è.* (Gdańsk: 1975), p. 89. Emperor's charity is comprehensively discussed in: D. van Berchem, *Les distributions de blé et d'argent à la plèbe romaine sous l'empire* (Genève: 1939).

24 See T. Kotula, *Septymiusz Sewerus* (Wrocław: 1987), *passim*, but esp. pp. 54–60.

25 Cf. S.J. Oest, "The Death of the Emperor Gordian III," *Classical Philology*, 1958, vol. 53, pp. 106–107; D. Mac Donald, "The Death of Gordian III – Another Tradition," *Historia*, 1981, vol. 30, pp. 502–508.

26 A general discussion of dynastic ideology at the time of Roman Empire's crisis in the third century can be found in T. Kotula, "Ideologia dynastyczna w pięćdziesięcioleciu 235–284" [Dynastic Ideology in 235–284], in: A. Kunisz, ed., *Studia z dziejów starożytnego Rzymu* [Study in the History of Ancient Rome] (Katowice: 1988), pp. 65–96.

Propaganda idei dynastycznej cesarza Filipa Araba (244–249 n.e.). Świadectwa numizmatyczne

Streszczenie

Autor artykułu zwraca uwagę na to, iż motywem szczególnie wyróżniającym się w mennictwie Filipa Araba jest rodzina cesarska. Monety „rodzinne” tego władcy charakteryzuje: a) nominalowa rozległość emisji, b) okazała reprezentacja monet poza standardami nominalowymi, zapewne tzw. medalionów, c) zastosowanie na rewersach oryginalnych i wymownych legend (DE PIA MATRE PIVS FILIVS oraz AVG. PATRI AVG. MATRI), d) uporczywe zestawianie wizerunków (często zwróconych ku sobie) rodziny panującego.

Przyczyn owej intensywnej propagandy autor upatrywałby w dwóch przesłankach.

1. Panowanie Filipa Araba (244–249 n.e.) było czasowo niezbyt odległe od epoki Septymiusza Sewera (193–211 n.e.), w której silnie akcentowano (m.in. za pośrednictwem monet) ideę dynastyczną. Chęć nawiązania przez Filipa Araba do propagandowych działań wybitnego i charyzmatycznego twórcy dynastii seweriańskiej mogła w istotny sposób zaważyć na wyeksponowaniu przez tego cesarza idei budowy własnej dynastii.

2. Wola Filipa Araba zapoczątkowania dynastii, a w konsekwencji stabilizacji rządów, wynikała przypuszczalnie również z obserwacji i doświadczeń tego cesarza, jeśli idzie o czasy niemal bezpośrednio bądź pośrednio poprzedzające jego panowanie. Notujemy bowiem wówczas w Cesarstwie Rzymskim dużą destabilizację władzy imperialnej. Tak więc w 235 r.n.e. zamordowany został Aleksander Sewer. W 238 r.n.e. państwo rzymskie miało aż 7. cesarzy (Maksymin Trak wraz z synem Maksymem, Gordian I i II, Balbin, Pupien oraz Gordian II), z których 6 pierwszych zginęło w walkach między sobą. Wreszcie w 244 r.n.e. w dość niejasnych okolicznościach stracił życie poprzednik Filipa Araba – wspomniany wyżej Gordian III. Jest więc rzeczą naturalną, iż Filip Arab mógł obawiać się podobnej sytuacji i w konsekwencji m.in. realizował i usilnie propagował ideę dynastyczną.